

Adolescent Violence

***“This know also,
that in the last
days perilous
times shall come.”***

—II Timothy 3:1 **IN THE APOSTLE PAUL’S** second letter to his beloved Timothy, he was looking down the long stream of time to a day filled with violence. He told him that it would be ‘the last days,’ and that it would mark the closing features of this present Gospel Age. Paul then explained that there would be a general disrespect for law and order, and that it would be seen in every element of society, including the youth. He further said, “Men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”—vss. 2-5

PERILOUS TIMES

Paul also referred to our day in prophecy as “perilous times.” We are now witnesses of the violent

changes that are taking place in our world, and tragically also among this generation's adolescent population. The problem is worldwide. The apostle indicated that one of the main distinctions would be a decline and challenge to the standards of family life, and to parental discipline and authority. The word 'perilous' as used by Paul, has been translated from the New Testament Greek word which means 'grievous' or 'dangerous.'

The word perilous is thus an apt description of the rising tide of lawlessness that has gripped our society, including the younger generation. Our prophetic day is indeed grievous and is becoming increasingly dangerous. The problem covers a wide range of behavioral issues, such as anger and physical fighting to more severe forms of assault that can result in serious injury or death. Bullying, gang violence, school shootings, and other violent conflicts are a concern for families, school personnel, and communities alike who are seeking ways to control this growing trend.

A TIME OF TROUBLE

In symbolic language, the Prophet Daniel also wrote concerning this end of the age. He prophesied that it would be marked by a great time of trouble over all the earth. "At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book." (Dan. 12:1) At the close of Jesus' earthly ministry, he recalled this prophecy

and gave it even further dimension. He said, “Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” (Matt. 24:21) Jesus also stated that this great trouble coming over the human family would never be repeated.

God then gave the prophet further instructions, and said, “But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.” (Dan. 12:4) In his translation of this scripture, Joseph Rotherham renders this verse, “But thou Daniel close up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end, many will run to and fro, and knowledge [calamities or wickedness—*Marginal Translation*] shall abound.” (vs. 4) This increase of knowledge may be used either for good or for evil. The tendency toward evil doing was shown in the early history of the human creation. “GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”—Gen. 6:5

FRUSTRATION AND AGGRESSION

We are now living during the closing years of this present Gospel Age, and the Scriptures substantiate the fact that it will be associated with a great time of trouble. Today’s youth have been brought up with new technology that has created a generational shift in the ethics of its many various activities. They may realize that a certain action is wrong but are able to justify their actions as being within the new norm.

Today's teenagers are also under more social and parental pressure to excel, that may not have been true even a few decades ago. Therefore, it is not unusual to find our present-day youth unable to cope with the added stress of everyday living. The teenage years are a time of great change and transition in a young person's life. Young adults seek to define who they are and how they will choose to make their mark upon the world, and their young bodies are producing hormones that are often linked to frustration and aggression.

There are positive influences that will help reduce the chances of an adolescent turning to bad behavior. These may include personal intolerance toward violent action and a more positive commitment to the doing of what is right. Other factors may include a supportive relationship with parents or other adults and having friends who disapprove of violence. Analysts point out that family influences are most important before the age of twelve, whereas peer influences become more important during later adolescence.

However, it is suggested that problems may arise when a frustrated, or bored, teen begins to experiment with pushing their boundaries too far, or venting their emotions in unruly ways. Although there is no single reason why a young person may turn to violent behavior, there are certain indications that are believed to be contributing factors. Some of these influences may include a history of early aggression in childhood, being exposed to family or neighborhood violence, drug and alcohol use, gang membership, or residing in a poor neighborhood with few economic opportunities.

STRESS FACTORS

When stress is allowed to pile up and not dealt with in a productive manner, it may cause a young person to experience a physical state of distress. Stress depletes the brain of important chemicals that are needed to regulate emotion, and physical and mental symptoms may begin to disrupt the pattern of a normal life.

Becoming overly stressed can lead to a variety of adverse side effects among teenagers, including being more susceptible to illness. If excessive tiredness is experienced it may lead one to being ill equipped to deal with life's problems. If not dealt with satisfactorily, stress can cause depression, a sense of boredom, emotional upset, and other factors. Learning proper coping techniques early in life is important in our stressful day.

ALCOHOL ABUSE

Those who study alcohol related problems point out that there is a steady increase in alcohol abuse among teenagers in the 11 to 15-year-old group. They also say that there is an increase in the amount of alcohol that is consumed, and that they are concerned about possible negative health effects on our nation's youth.

Adolescence is a transition time when the body is undergoing many significant changes, such as hormonal alterations and brain development. It is also a time when young people start to associate more with friends and others beyond their childhood peers. They thus feel an increased pressure to 'fit in' or to go along with the crowd in order for them to be accepted socially. These new circumstances may be

confusing and difficult for the youth to understand and deal with. Often their ability to make correct, or safe, decisions is also at a stage of immaturity. Exposing the brain to alcohol during this period may interrupt key processes of brain development, possibly leading to mild cognitive impairment as well as to a further escalation of drinking.

Alcohol is absorbed very rapidly into the blood stream from the stomach lining in as short a time as 5 to 10 minutes, but its effects can last for several hours depending on the amount ingested and how quickly it is consumed. Females absorb alcohol faster than males because their bodies contain less water. The water dilutes the alcohol and so the same amount of alcohol will produce a higher concentration in the blood. After consuming only 2 to 3 normal strength beers or 4 to 5 standard glasses of wine, most people will feel less inhibited and more relaxed. Anything that is consumed after this may cause a person to become less coordinated and clumsy, and in some cases there may be emotional reactions.

Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death among youth ages 15 to 20. The rate of fatal crashes among alcohol-involved drivers in this age group is more than twice the rate for alcohol-involved drivers 21 years and older. Alcohol use also interacts with conditions such as depression and stress that may contribute to suicide, which is the third leading cause of death among people between the ages of 14 and 25.

DRUG ABUSE

A drug is a substance that modifies one or more of the human body's functions when it is consumed.

Various medicines and other substances are produced under patent by pharmaceutical companies and are made available for the general public. Within a controlled environment these medicinal drugs are used by doctors to treat various illnesses and disease. The dispensing of these products is regulated by the government, and may be purchased over the counter from licensed pharmacies without restrictions.

The use of illegal drugs, on the other hand, has widespread serious implications for violence and evil. It is one of the profound evils that mark the closing features of this present Gospel Age. It is becoming an increasingly dangerous threat to the well-being of mankind. Unfortunately, it is often aimed at our nation's youth, and has caused untold distress among those who have been affected by it. Many have become addicted to the use of these illegal drugs. Surveys show that cocaine, marijuana, heroin, and inhalants are the most commonly used drugs among teenagers age 13 through 18. Juveniles take drugs for many different reasons including peer pressure and family problems, such as a broken home. Others may perceive taking drugs as a new, interesting, or exciting experience.

Adolescents may abuse substances such as drugs, alcohol, and tobacco for a variety of reasons, but it is clear that our society pays a significant cost to deal with this problem. The toll for this may be seen in our hospitals and emergency facilities in every part of this nation through direct damage to the health of the individuals concerned. It is also noted that there is a direct and serious connection between substance abuse and crime of all sorts.

Although the use of some drugs, such as cocaine, has declined, use of other drugs, such as heroin and others, has increased.

Therefore, it is essential that there be an increased awareness and knowledge among families with teenage children concerning the terrible risks of substance abuse, its causes and manifestation. It is absolutely essential to reach our young people during the crucial years when drug use may become an unfortunate and serious issue.

Evaluation studies show that schools which have implemented some form of awareness programs have had fewer children partaking of drugs than those schools that did not have these types of programs. The findings also indicate that the target population needs to have more schools to implement educational programs such as Planned Parenthood and the Drug Abuse Resistance Education programs. Making known the risks of drug use and abuse among juveniles thus makes them more aware of the consequences they are facing in the future. Children who are made aware of the risks of drug use tend to draw away from these substances, as opposed to those who have not been informed about the risks involved in taking drugs.

TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES

Statistics show that in 1998, homicides in the United States claimed the lives of 2,573 children between the ages of 11 and 19. It was the second leading cause of death for adolescents that year. When compared to other industrialized nations, adolescent violence in the United States is greater, more likely to involve firearms, and has more lethal

consequences. From 1990 to 1995, the rate of fire-arm-related homicide in this country for youth under the age of fifteen years was substantially higher than that of several other countries combined.

INTOLERABLE BEHAVIOR

An incident occurred recently that reveals a serious behavioral problem that is taking place on America's school grounds. Police were called to the scene in which a 14 year-old school boy had been severely attacked and beaten by more than a dozen of his classmates. The police reported that the boy had red hair, and they believed the attack originated with a Face-book group who carried out the attack in observance of "Kick a Ginger Day." They further explained that 'Ginger' is an old-fashioned term for a person who has red hair, and was the reason why the boy was targeted. They also noted that other redhead students had been attacked as well.

This level of intolerance is a serious symptom of a growing trend in our ever-increasing violent society. It is a seed that generates hatred and makes it grow, and it was manufactured as a new and different reason for victimizing fellow students.

A MORAL VOID

A very timely article appeared in the *Los Angeles Daily News* recently that emphasizes the increasing lack of respect for the common standards of law and order in our modern world. It was submitted by Paul D. White, and reports a vicious attack that took place against a young girl on a school campus, from which we quote in part. "The refusal by dozens of students and adults to intervene in a horrible scene involving a young school girl being

molested by several boys should not surprise anyone. Every recent White House, including the present one, has said our schools' sole goal is to raise academic achievement. The mantra of every President and Secretary of Education in recent memory has been 'higher scores.' And ever so slightly, our children's ability to memorize and recite relatively meaningless academic factoids has increased.

"But this proclaimed improvement in our education system has come at a price. It was accomplished by gutting school curricula of time spent teaching children about character, integrity, compassion, unselfishness, and moral courage. Also marginalized or eliminated from the school day has been the inspiration to care about fellow humans that comes from studying music and art.

"We've taught our children that school is not about 'us,' or the good of the group, but about 'you' and making sure your test scores go up. By extension of this reasoning, who should care about someone being molested? We've taught students that the most important thing is keeping 'your' future safe by securing your test scores. With no moral exceptions to this directive being taught, of course no student risked personal damage to rescue the victim.

"The damage of this no-values approach to education has spread further than the children. School employees, too, allegedly observed and ignored the young girl's urgent need for help. Why? Because the same amoral approach to learning that staff promote with their students has poisoned their souls as well. Fearful, apathetic responses like this one occur because schools do not educate children's

hearts as well as their minds. This has resulted in a moral illiteracy that could annihilate our civilization.”

BRUTAL BEHAVIOR

Another article concerning the same incident, and from which we quote in part, was published at about the same time by the *Los Angeles Times* (October 31, 2009) under the title “Brutality Hard to Fathom” and was submitted by Sandy Banks. She wrote, “School officials wished to emphasize the fact that the homecoming dance that was taking place that evening where party-goers danced in the gym, was indeed a success in terms of safety because nothing happened at the event. Banks pointed out that the police report stated that while the 10 participants and 20 onlookers stood by, they were jeering, taking photos, and messaging friends to join them.”

Banks was unable to explain the level of brutality that took place that evening on the school campus. She said, “They blamed music and video games that glamorize violence; desensitized men who treat women like pieces of meat, the disengagement of young people in a world ruled by technology, where real life is what’s on You Tube. Or, the powerlessness these disenfranchised kids feel in their violent neighborhood and fractured families.”

WHOLESALE MASSACRE

Although school shootings are not an entirely new event in the United States, a new level of violent behavior among teenagers was achieved and brought suddenly to America’s attention on April 20, 1999. It happened at Columbine High School in

Littleton, Colorado. On that day, two high school seniors, 18 year-old Eric Harris and 17 year-old Dylan Klebold, carried out a vicious attack inside the school building during the middle of the day. When the massacre ended 12 students and 1 teacher had been killed, more than 20 others were injured and the two youths had both taken their own lives.

The two murderers were both intelligent, came from solid homes with two parents, and had older brothers who were three years their senior. In elementary school, Klebold and Harris had both played in sports such as baseball and soccer. Both enjoyed working with their computers. However, when the two boys entered the school they were carrying guns, knives, and a multitude of explosive devices. Apparently they had been planning to kill hundreds of their fellow students.

The incident has sparked a lively debate that is centered on the increasing availability of firearms, and the need for more gun control in the United States. Discussion related to gun violence involving youths was focused on the nature of high school clique, subcultures, and bullying. In addition, the role of violent movies and video games in American society was considered. The shooting also resulted in an increased emphasis on school security.

COUNSEL AND UNDERSTANDING

The Scriptures present standard laws of righteousness and common respect for our fellow man. However, as one of the signs of our times, these laws are being set aside in favor of a new found sense of liberty that suggests that we have the right to do whatever feels good at the time. Solomon was

a very wise man and is the author of valuable counsel. His writings are based on the principles from above, and his supernatural wisdom prefigures our Lord Jesus—the greater Solomon. (Matt. 12:42) Thus we read, “The Proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels.” (Prov. 1:1-5) We must have love and reverence for God. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”—vs. 7

DISCIPLINE AND CORRECTION

Discipline and correction are a means to teach our youth what is acceptable behavior and that which is not. In this connection, Solomon wrote, “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.” (Prov. 13:24) He further emphasized, “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.” (Prov. 22:15) Correction given in the proper spirit of love is beneficial to a child. To profit from discipline is evidence of wisdom. “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame. When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth: but the righteous shall see their fall. Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.”—Prov. 29:15-17

THE DAYS OF YOUTH

Thus is the wonderful counsel of a loving Heavenly Father toward his human creation, and especially for the perilous times in which we now live. “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain.”—Eccles. 12:1,2

