Selfishness: A Sign of Our Times

"Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man."
—Psalm 71:4

THE PSALMIST DAVID penned the words of this psalm during the time of his advancing years. (vss. 9,18) He fervently prayed that he might never be disloyal or ashamed of his loving dependence upon the Heavenly Father, nor that he would ever fail to believe and put his total trust in him. His ultimate concern was that God would not forsake nor cast him off as he grew older, and when his physical strength began to fail him, but that he would deliver him from the enemies of righteousness that surrounded him.

INCREASING LAWLESSNESS

David's reflection upon the enemies of righteousness and the social structure of his day may also cause us to reflect in a similar way upon the unruly society in which we are now living. What he referred

to as 'wicked,' 'unrighteous' and 'cruel' men surely has its counterpart in our present world.

To be unruly describes a society that is neither submissive nor conforming to the laws of rule that have been established by God in his Word, or within the accepted standards of conduct set forth under the laws of civilized nations. Lawlessness suggests those who resist authority, and are thus undisciplined and ungovernable. This type of behavior leads inevitably toward increasing violence and anarchy.

APOSTLE PAUL'S REFLECTIONS

In his letter to the brethren at Rome, Apostle Paul showed that God is not responsible for the degradation that has affected his human creation because of his judgment against them as a result of sin. This has been true not only in its outward physical sense, but also as it has surrounded the mental and moral aspects of mankind's rapid deterioration. The fall from original perfection has been proportionate to man's individual alienation from his Creator. In this respect, the apostle wrote, "Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind [a mind void of judgment, *Marginal Translation*], to do those things which are not convenient [not proper]."—Rom. 1:28

The apostle has emphasized God's wrath against the unrighteous behavior of sinful mankind and their total disregard for his laws. He explains that there has developed a greater level of degradation among some whereas a lesser degree is manifest in others. God has established righteous laws that work in harmony with his will. Any who may have

cause that conflicts with these standards of truth and righteousness will reap the penalty of God's wrath as a result of their actions.

A DOWNWARD SPIRAL

In his letter, Paul continues with a lengthy enumeration of the human family's rising and accumulating level of unruliness. They are, he says, "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents."—vss. 29,30

'Being filled with all unrighteousness' perhaps is used as a general term for all that follows. It suggests an intoxication of the spirit of this world in whatever form or manner in which it may manifest itself. The word 'fornication' is not found in any of the earliest manuscripts, and is omitted in modern versions of the Bible. 'Wickedness' has been translated from a word identifying a disposition to work evil. It includes sinful activity in a variety of forms. To be 'covetous' means to have inordinate and wrongful desires, while 'maliciousness' is characterized by having a capability and proclivity towards evil.

Someone being 'full of envy' suggests having a deep sense of discontent at seeing another person's success or superiority. 'Murder' is to take another person's life, and 'debate' as it is used in this scripture means to contend or wrangle over certain matters. Those who possess maliciousness may be very mischievous in their actions, whereas 'whisperers' defines those who may be involved in slander or

gossip. 'Backbiters' describes those who attack the character or reputation of someone who is absent at the time.

Paul's reference to being 'haters of God' marks a very serious heart condition wherever it is found. Those who are described as being 'despiteful' are contemptuous and usually insulting. 'Proud' people generally have a very high opinion of themselves, while 'boasters' speak of themselves in an exaggerated manner. 'Inventors of evil things' describes a contriver whose intentions are predominately evil. Being 'disobedient to parents' marks our day perhaps better than any other of Paul's lengthy list of lawlessness, together with all of the many temptations that are prevalent in our modern world and their effects on the younger generation.

MINDING MANNERS

A poll was conducted recently in the United States to explore some of the main causes for the increasing level of rudeness and lawlessness in our modern society. An analysis of the poll was published by the *Los Angeles Daily News* (Saturday, October 15, 2005) and written by staff writers Beth Barrett and Brent Hopkins. These results appeared in an article under the title "How Rude!" with the subheading "Poll: Americans Getting Worse at Minding their Manners."

The poll's questions were divided into various categories with their percentages in an attempt to arrive at the possible causes of the problem. They included the following: (1) Whether or not parents are teaching good manners to their children. This resulted in 93% of those polled agreeing that this

was a major cause for increasing rudeness in modern American culture. (2) The next question concerned people who are leading busier lives today than they were in the past, and are not taking the necessary time to exercise politeness. The poll indicated that 75% responded with a 'yes' answer. (3) Another question was asked as to whether television and movies that show poor manners and behavior were possible causes, with 73% of the respondents indicating that it was a factor. (4) It was asked whether rude behavior among various celebrities such as athletes and other public figures was a factor, inasmuch as they often appear as major role models in our society. This question received a 69% positive answer.

THE POLL'S REPORT

The report says that the new national poll on changing social (or in this case antisocial) behavior concludes that harried and stressed-out Americans are indeed becoming more hostile in their everyday behavior patterns. Barrett and Hopkins write, "From horn-honking road ragers who turn daily commutes into gantlets, to cell phone abusers who transform tranquil coffee shops into noisy forums for their private lives, nearly 70% of Americans say we are ruder than we were 20 years ago, according to an Associated Press-Ipsos poll."

The article "How Rude!" continues by quoting a licensed clinical psychologist and professor of psychology who responded by saying, "It's very common for people not to see their own behavior as problematic now, attributing it, at least in part, to a culture of entitlement in which parents spoil their kids and don't teach them accountability and manners.

If manners are an increasingly endangered commodity, it's also partly because self-interest, high-tech gadgetry, and a fast-paced lifestyle increasingly are placed ahead of respect for the feelings of others, according to the poll and interviews conducted by the *Daily News*. And then there are the clogged freeways, fortress-like walls around homes, and the fact that hardly anyone knows his or her neighbors anymore."

One of the people who responded to an interview concerning the poll—a marriage and family therapist—said, "In our time-crazed society, people care only about rushing to keep up with their own lives, not reflecting on what might be best for the community. No one's taught to relax and take your time anymore, so it's not a priority to be courteous, say 'thank you,' say 'please.' It comes from impatience—slow down, take a deep breath, get some perspective."

Barrett and Hopkins quote a retired chief lifeguard in their report who said, "There's such a clouded line between right and wrong. There's no longer respect for parents and institutions. If you're a jerk at home, you're going to be a jerk in public. There was, for example, the woman who insisted on bringing her little dog into the pool area while she watched her child—engaged in a game of water polo between two high schools—despite prominent signs saying animals were prohibited. When asked to leave, she said, "You're being rude."

GRAPHIC VIOLENCE

For many Americans and many others, encounters with obnoxious people and their selfish behavior

have become an annoying fact of everyday life. This behavior may take many different forms and in many different circumstances. This is believed by many to be a result of more on-screen episodes of violence now than ever before, and that the portrayals of violent crimes are more explicit and far more graphic than television viewers have ever seen before.

A recent report entitled "Dying to Entertain" found that the number of violent instances on television had tripled in the past few years, citing the fact that nearly half of all programming episodes contained at least one instance of some sort of violence. The study found 26 instances of violence in a one-hour episode of one certain program. Violence has shifted from being incidental to the subject matter of the program, to being an integral part of it. It was further noted that this has now become prevalent in all six major broadcasting networks—ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, UPN and WB.

RUDENESS AND SELFISHNESS

It has been observed that rudeness involves the serving of one's own selfish interests without any concern for the interests or well-being of others. One analyst commented recently that this sort of behavior indicates the selfish attitude that is not willing to give, even a little. Furthermore, the modern culture of rudeness and lack of common manners has crept into even what used to be the most wholesome areas of our society. This is seen as a lack of refinement in the moral values of our young people who receive their accepted values from watching their role models on television instead of receiving them from their own parent's home.

CAMPUS MANNERS

In the article "Rude: College Students Lack of Manners Reflect Global Trend," The *Daily News* (Sunday, October 22, 2006), staff writer Susan Abram said, "If you look around campus, you have students who have iPods, cell phones, Blackberries; and they are in their own world. There isn't any interaction or that community component found 20 years ago. It would certainly behoove the faculty to take on more of an active role. The notion that American youths aren't minding their "p's and q's" is continuously debated in editorial pages across the nation. And it's not just the young who are rude.

"We have lost respect for our politicians, our religious leaders, our sports figures, so that they do not set standards for the generation coming up. We no longer have this tradition of a society. Everyone now is striving to be the same; therefore, we don't look up to anyone. Now we're seeing movie actors and others in society that are so crass, that people are emulating them. Professors have little leverage when they encounter a student without manners. The administration (on college campuses) is so paranoid that the students are going to rebel, but the administrators are the problem. The parents are the problem; they've got to set the example. The instructor should be entitled to say, 'I don't want you in my class.'"

EFFECTS OF TELEVISION

It is acknowledged that one of the main factors affecting the younger generation today is the influence that television has, whether for good or bad. As an indication of this dilemma we note an article

published by *The Los Angeles Times* (Thursday, January 11, 2007), and submitted by *Times* staff writer Jim Puzzanghera under the title "TV Violence is Surging Group Says."

In the report, Puzzanghera wrote, "Violence on broadcast TV is approaching epidemic proportions, surging 75% over the last six years while posing a threat to children that parents and government officials need to address, according to a major media watchdog study unveiled Wednesday. The study by the Parents Television Council, titled 'Dying to Entertain,' said the 2005-06 season was the most violent since the group began tracking the issue in 1998. There were an average of 4.41 violent incidents each prime-time hour last season, based on the group's analysis of the first two weeks of the ratings sweeps periods. Overall, violent incidents increased in every time slot and across all broadcast networks, according to the study. Violence jumped by 45% from 8 to 9 P.M., by 92% from 9 to 10 P.M. and by 167% from 10 to 11 P.M.

"Broadcasters have noted there are more violent programs on cable TV and stress the use of blocking technology, such as the V-chip. Broadcasters and cable firms are in the midst of a $300 million campaign to educate parents about the technology. 'We're surprised that cable TV programming was not included in the PTC study, since broadcast TV is far less violent than Sopranos-like programming found on cable,' the National Association of Broadcasters said in a written statement. Parents Television Council President Timothy Winter said the V-chip was not the solution, calling TV ratings inconsistent. He added, 'We're not calling for a ban

on anything. We're calling for some responsibility and restraint from the broadcasters.'"

RUDENESS INCREASING

An interesting survey was conducted in the United States recently by The Pew Charitable Trusts. It was called "Aggravating Circumstances: A Status Report on Rudeness in America." The general format of the study concerned what counts as rudeness in today's society, and whether Americans have a shared definition of what rudeness really is? Basic questions were asked that focused on encounters with people who are rude and disrespectful, and how often this type of behavior is seen. Participants in the study were also asked how often they too may have acted rudely toward others. A detailed look at the situation was taken that concerned courtesy, manners, rudeness, and respect.

Results of the survey indicated that from the minor slights of sales clerks that may have been encountered in the local supermarket, to the worst cases of road rage, it is clear that most Americans are intensely frustrated by an increasing level of disrespect that they encounter on a daily basis. Eighty percent of those who participated in the survey said that a lack of common courtesy and respect is a serious problem, and sixty percent said the problem has become worse in recent years.

The study also surprisingly showed that more than forty percent admitted that they too had behaved badly on occasion. This included driving aggressively, and by using cell phones in a loud and annoying manner. Three quarters of those surveyed

said they had often seen customers treat sales staff in a rude manner.

The Pew Charitable Trusts Public Agenda intends to host a new series of discussions in the near future asking key decision makers in various industries to discuss the research, and to consider what actions may be done to address the public's call for a more considerate and respectful society.

THE APOSTLE'S ADMONITIONS

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to Titus said, "To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed." (Tit. 1:15,16, *New American Standard Bible*) Mounting evidence of the fulfilling of the signs of the times is increasing on every hand in our society. The hearts and consciences of the unbelieving world are becoming more perverted as foretold long ago in the Scriptures. The actions of some surely conflict with the ways of truth and righteousness, and they are being spoiled by the spirit of pride, selfishness, malice, and envy. The Lord's people are cautioned to maintain pure hearts and minds in an evil world, and to keep their consciences tender. "We also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another."—Titus 3:3, *NASB*

As further strengthening to the Lord's people in an unfriendly world, the apostle said to the brethren

at Thessalonica, "Encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing. But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction [admonition, *Marginal Translation*], and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly [undisciplined, *MT*], encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men."—I Thess. 5:11-14, *NASB*

To the brethren at Corinth Paul wrote, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."—I Cor. 6:9-11

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to Timothy, wrote concerning the ultimate signs of our times in connection with the level of lawlessness and corruption among mankind. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For 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."—II Tim. 3:1-5

We are living in the final years of the harvest period during the present Gospel Age. It was long ago foretold that it would be a time of great turmoil and violence in the world. The Lord's people are thus admonished to remain faithful to our High Calling in him. ■