

An Age of Lawlessness

by James Ormiston

Introduction

It is a proven fact that the ascendancy of man in world affairs usually means lawlessness towards God. Our own contemporary society, in seeking to exalt man, has done so only at the expense of the claims of God. Just think of the restlessness, the impatience with restraint, the callous trampling on the God-given rights of others, the deceitful and violent methods used by people to get their own way, the sheer lawlessness, and the proud hostility to the Christian Faith that characterize our society, and we need look no further for proof.

Yet the Word of God, as in everything else, has gone before us in describing such a society and in informing us how God regards it. In the apostle Paul's Second Letter to Timothy, Chapter 3, Verses 1-5, we are given a mirror image of a violent, lawless society such as our own. Let us note very carefully the things that are said about those who defy God and His holy laws, and see if they refer to us.

We are told that 'in the last days perilous [or grievous and difficult] times shall come.' How shall we know such times?

First, the men of such times shall be 'lovers of their own selves.' That is, they are characterized by self-conceit, self-interest, self-love. Every newspaper and news bulletin blazens this fact before our very eyes, whether the topic be politics, industry, commerce, social services, sport or finance. 'All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.' (Phil 2:21).

Second, they are described as 'covetous', or 'money-lovers.' Our love of money is proverbial. Why do people enter the National Lottery; gamble on horses, dogs, football teams and much else; invest in major enterprises and crave a luxurious life-style except from the love of money?

Then again, they are called 'boasters.' This covers ostentatious homes, cars, dress, eating and holidays, as well as bragging language. In almost every hotel restaurant, railway carriage or holiday coach, we may hear such empty boasters glorying in what should make them ashamed.

Fourth, they are said to be 'proud.' That is, they set themselves above others. What a description of our age! In every aspect of society there are those who regard themselves as superior to others. Status - whether social status, or intellectual status, or cultural status, or financial status, or popular status, or religious status - is all that some seem to pursue in their foolish self-ignorance. An old Christian once warned us of four kinds of pride: pride of race, pride of place, pride of face and pride of grace! How apt!

Furthermore, they are called 'blasphemers.' What is more common in our day than to hear people of all ranks blaspheming the name of God? And they show no sense of shame! University men and television presenters are as guilty as others, while ordinary people and even little children can hardly speak a sentence without taking God's name in vain! And who has not heard the Bible ridiculed, the Lord Jesus Christ vilified, Christians scorned and hope in a resurrection mocked?

They are also described as 'disobedient to parents.' The evil nature of our times is even stamped on the conduct of our children. Who has not seen and heard them defying parental authority, disobeying

their school-teachers and selfishly throwing off all restraint? Even as adults, some completely ignore the needs of their parents, seeking to get as much out of them as they can. The command, "Honour thy father and thy mother" might never have been written, for all they care!

Coupled with this is another mark of the godless: they are 'unthankful.' How many families now thank God for their daily food, their life, their health or their strength and mobility? How many have no other approach to life but "Gimme! Gimme! Gimme!?" Their number is legion. They think the world owes them everything, yet they are thankful for nothing!

Not surprisingly, they are also described as 'unholy.' Today we enjoy a period of unprecedented material prosperity. Yet what is our national tendency? To indulge our natural, sinful tastes and desires.

Let our criminal and divorce courts, our prisons, our hospitals, our overworked and costly police services, our excessive taxes and rates all bear witness to the profanity, drunkenness, domestic violence, murders, fraud, sexual promiscuity and drug abuse that fill our towns and cities. Do not the columns of the tabloid press daily bombard us with the names and lurid details of adulterers, their partners and 'love (or rather 'lust') children'?

What is even more shameful, the immoral and lazy and dishonest are encouraged to enjoy the social benefits paid for by the upright and hard-working and honest. This habitual and official condoning of sheer wickedness has already led to a nation rife with the vile practices reprobated in Romans chapter one.

And what is the popular literature of the day? Novels, detective thrillers, 'love' stories and the like. Our shop and kiosk bookstalls are full of glossy trash and outrages on public decency. Ask any young offender what influenced him most in committing crime, and the certain answer will be some video 'nasty', glossy magazine or violent television programme.

We need hardly enquire as to the influence of secular education on the habits of our young. The absence of Bible readings, daily acts of worship, loving Biblical discipline, and the following of Darwinian and humanistically-based curricula account for so much vandalism, disrespect for authority and sheer selfishness among them. When did we last hear of Psalm 119:9 -- 'Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word,' and Proverbs 22:6,15 and 23:13,14 - 'Train up a child in the way he should go,' 'Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him,' 'With-hold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell,' being applied at home, in school and at young offenders' institutions?

We read further that the ungodly are 'without natural affection.' The rapid decay of natural feeling and sympathy in families, among neighbours, in hospitals and towards strangers is alarming, while the increase in the sexual abuse and murder of young children horrifies every decent member of society. And what has happened to our nation's natural affection when thousands of children and aged parents are selfishly abandoned to 'social care'?

This leads to the next mark of the godless society -- they are 'truce-breakers.' Not only do people brazenly break their marriage and ordination vows, some have no intention of keeping political, commercial and personal promises. Selfish licentiousness, paraded as liberty, rules the promise-making of thousands who clearly indicate that they have no intention of fulfilling their obligations. This is especially true of certain employers, to whom their workers are little more than slave-labourers. Can a society survive which fosters mistrust, and so undermines the very basis of social order?

'False accusers' is the next characteristic of the ungodly. The nature of such slanderers and calumniators is such that the very Greek word beneath our English translation means 'devils' or 'demons.' Anyone who has overheard a violent domestic argument or seen one of the current popular 'soaps' will understand.

One insidious form of this sin is its religious version. Even some who call themselves Christian ministers or 'bishops' are ever ready to scorn the Scriptures, calumniate the character of Christ, falsely accuse their 'brethren' and harass the church with heresies, schisms and public statements condoning sodomy and such reprehensible sins.

And does not the number of libel cases in the High Court point to the virulence of this sin of slandering? Our land should be in perpetual mourning for such vile character assassination.

The godless are next described as 'incontinent.' This means 'intemperate', or 'completely lacking in self-control.' Self-indulgence and inordinate spending form only two aspects of this evil. Both our lavishly-furnished homes and our sumptuously-decked cathedrals and churches testify blatantly to our love of the gaudy, the sensuous and the ostentatious.

'Fierce' is the Holy Spirit's next description of the godless. The reference is to the inhuman outbursts of passion or brutal attacks made by fiendish men and women on those they should love, cherish and protect. It also covers the malicious bombing of innocent people by paramilitary groups and anarchists.

They are next called 'despisers of those that are good', or 'no lovers of good.' The supercilious scorn of those who devote the Lord's Day to public and private worship falls under this heading. With what amused pity do they watch faithful church-goers attend their local assemblies, while they prepare for their visit to some theme-park or zoo or country house or gardens or sports stadium.

The godless are next depicted as 'traitors.' This term has particular relevance for what is often called 'the church.' Every year there are men (and women too) who claim to be called by God to the Christian ministry whose allegiance to our most holy faith is nothing less than treacherous. They have neither the manliness nor the honesty to resign their charges, yet they continue to tarnish and profane the public worship of Almighty God with the grossest lies. How many, in both Established and Non-conformist churches, now pray for the dead, neglect the cure of souls, teach the unreliability of the Gospels, encourage experiential delusions or waste God's time 'administrating', to mention nothing else, when they are simply telling all and sundry that they neither know God nor what it is to have a true sense of vocation!

The spirit of our time is seen too in the next characteristic: 'heady.' This means 'precipitate' or 'headlong.' Who cannot see that with all the energy put into financial and business speculation, there is a vast amount of rashness? There is even a television programme called 'Blind Date', which arranges for men and women to go on holiday together after the slightest acquaintance! This tendency to blind ventures is bound to accelerate when 'bookies' make every trifling event the opportunity for a 'bet.'

Neither are we surprised to discover 'high-minded' on this list. The word means 'puffed up', 'arrogant', 'blinded by pride.' The haughty spirit that now characterizes so many is bound to lead to their fall.

As the list draws to a close, we notice the summary statement, 'lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.' Millions of our fellow countrymen fall into this category. Their addiction to alcohol, or the opera, the theatre, the race-course, the soccer match, the amusement arcade, the casino or gambling

arcade and the Mediterranean holiday resort where they can abuse their bodies at will is tragic proof of their hedonism. O how carelessly they live, with no time at all for God!

And what shall we say of those who, 'having a form of godliness, deny the power thereof'? Some put their trust in Baptism, some in their attendance at the Lord's Table. Others place their confidence in Church membership and activities. Still others see no discrepancy at all between naming the name of Christ on the Lord's Day and living thoroughly worldly lives the rest of the week. How easily can some put on a religious profession! The mask may be respectable, but the reality is abominable!

The foregoing is a mere sketch of the lawlessness of our times. What lies beneath the surface is known only to God. If we could see all the sin being committed in only one of our cities in one day, we might be horrified by it. How much sin, then, does God see at all times?

But why are these things lawless? Because they defy the requirements of God as expressed in His law.

What are these requirements?

To love God with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind, and our neighbour as ourselves.

To do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

To seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.

To turn from sin to the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour.

These things are pleasing to God. These things are commanded by God. Whoever neglects them is by the very nature of the case lawless.

Before long, God will bring all this lawlessness to an end. But the lawless shall not escape. They must be called to account for their lawlessness. They must be punished for their rejection of God's authority. Their lawless deeds will then be the cause of their torment for ever and ever.

What must the lawless do to be forgiven and delivered from their dreadful state?

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. He came into this sinful world to keep the law for such wretched lawbreakers as we are. He lovingly offered Himself up to bear the punishment that we deserve. He willingly suffered death at the hands of God our Judge so that the lawless might go free. This is good news for the guilty.

Therefore cry to God in His name for mercy on your poor sinful soul. Beg His forgiveness for the way you have despised His holy law. Look to the law-keeping of Christ as your only hope. And for His sake God may pardon and save you.

Indeed, He has expressly promised to pardon and save all who sincerely confess and forsake their sin. 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' (1 John 1:9). 'The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.' (1 John 1:7).

(Modernised and adapted)