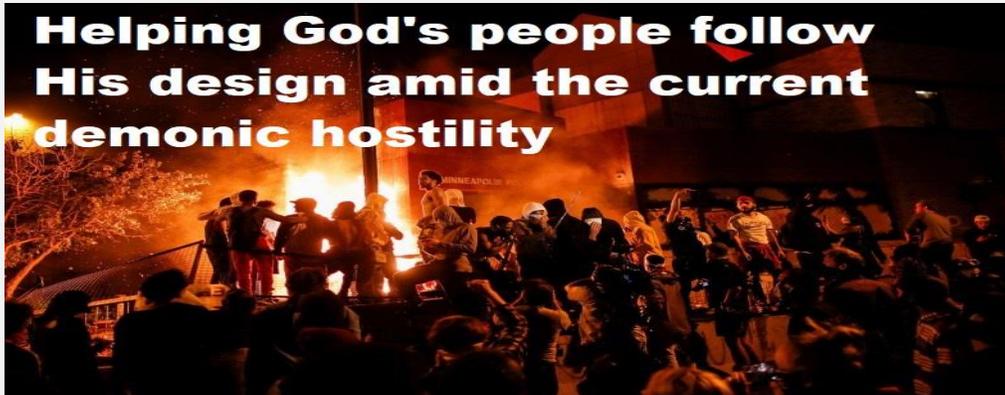


Equipping Thoughts for Leaders



July 2, 2020

Unfortunately, many of God's people today are following the schemes of the enemy working in the culture around us instead of following God.

These are certainly what Paul referred to as “Perilous Times” (2 Timothy 3:1-7). The word *Perilous* means “violent, difficult, dangerous, and furious.” Paul goes on to describe it as times in which people will be “proud, scoffing, lawless, ungrateful, unloving, unforgiving, slandering, betraying friends, reckless, riotous, and irreconcilable.” Doesn’t this sound like our daily news feeds and social media sites? Is it the last days...? All we know for sure is that the Bible refers to the last days like “birth pangs” (Matthew 24:8, Mark 13:8) and this current contraction is very intense.

I lived through the 60s with the sexual revolution, the civil rights movement with all the injustices and assassinations, an unpopular war and shootings of protestors at Kent State, the hippie rebellion, the spread of the drug culture, and anarchy and riots surrounding a variety of issues. In many ways this current contraction is worse. Why, because we did not have 24-hour news updates (from partisan political perspectives) or social media constantly putting before us spun reports in order to stir up hostility on both sides.

All this affects God’s people. Remember that in difficult times both the enemy and God are at work. The enemy promotes hatred, revenge, separation, and destruction while God promotes life, healing, and unity. Unfortunately, many of God’s people today are following the schemes of the enemy working in the culture around us instead of following

God. This has a negative impact on our calling to be the “light of the world... a city set on a hill that displays God’s ways to a fallen world” (Matthew 5: 13-16).

As leaders we are called to help God’s people avoid the devil’s schemes (Ephesians 4:14, 6:11 2 Corinthians 2:11, 4:4, 11:3, 13-15, 1 Peter 5:8 etc.). To do so it is important to remember four truths.

- **Satan’s main objective:** To pollute and scatter people in order to perpetuate his kingdom which is full of hatred and darkness.
- **God’s strategy:** To cleanse and unite people in Jesus in order to perpetuate His Kingdom which is full of righteousness and life.
- **The main vehicle the enemy uses against people today:** Unresolved offenses, bitterness, unforgiveness, hatred, and revenge.
- **Most of the issues that cause bitterness, hostility and separation among God’s people are not theological but relational.** Even if theology or style is in the conflict, usually the dividing factors are things like bitterness, hurt feelings, unforgiveness, pride, and hostility.

The writer of Hebrews hits the nail on the head regarding the scheme of the devil working among God’s people.

- *Heb 12:14-15 Pursue peace with people, and the sanctification...(15) See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.*

In our culture right now, all kinds of sin is being stirred up that promotes bitterness, unforgiveness, hostilities, and revenge, (Galatians 5:13-6:8). We have a “cancel culture” at work that is driving people to look for sin and imperfections in others (especially those we don’t like or agree with) so we can catch them, expose them, and punish them. Embracing this mentality causes us to become *guardians of gotcha*. It is demonic because it is both the opposite of God’s love which “expects the best, is patient, and overlooks wrongs suffered” (1 Corinthians 13), and it is full of accusations which comes from the “accuser of the brethren” (Revelation 12:10).

Jesus’ instruction in Matthew that promotes His alternative

If God's people are going to live the gospel and demonstrate His alternative, we need to diligently follow Jesus' direction for us when it comes to handling relational challenges.

Some of the clearest examples Jesus gives us are from the book of Matthew. Matthew is the only gospel that records Jesus saying, "I will build my Church and the gates of hell will not overpower it" (Matthew 16:18). In light of Jesus building His church Matthew is the only gospel writer that records the concrete steps to walk through relational difficulties (Matthew 5 and 18). If we are going to be the church that demonstrates God's gospel life then we have to follow His instruction amid relational challenges.

- *Matthew 5:23-24 MSG If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a brother has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God.*
- *Matthew 18:18-21 MSG If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him—work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you've made a friend. If he won't listen, take one or two others along so that the presence of witnesses will keep things honest, and try again. If he still won't listen, tell the church. If he won't listen to the church... At that point Peter got up the nerve to ask, "Master, how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?" 22 Jesus replied, "Seven! Hardly. Try seventy times seven.*

These are the tangible steps Jesus gives us to avoid the schemes of the devil through which He tries to pollute and scatter God's people. It covers both perspectives of relational challenges. One is that you find out someone has a problem with you and the other is that you have a problem with someone else. This eliminates any excuse like... "well this is their problem so they will have to deal with it!" There is no getting off the hook here. Whether you find out someone has a problem with you, or you have a problem with someone else... IT IS OUR PROBLEM! In either case you are obligated to Jesus to take steps for reconciliation.

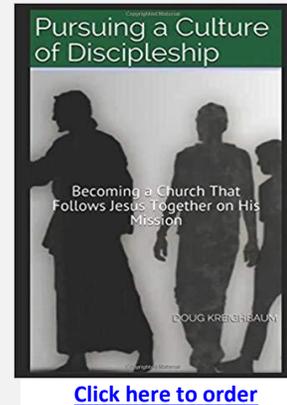
Three clear steps of Matthew 5 and 18

Go personally and directly to the person to resolve the issue. If you go to someone else first, the Bible calls it gossip and it plays into the enemies' hands to scatter people. Nothing promotes bitterness and offenses more than going to someone else with your issues. It further pollutes you and the person you speak to because you are spreading your offense and bitterness to them. Now not only are you polluted but you have polluted and promoted a scattering of others with the "root of bitterness which defiles many."

Proverbs 17:9 If you handle issues personally and privately it promotes love but if you spread it to others you separate even the best of friends.

If you cannot resolve the issue between the two of you then bring someone else into the situation to help. Sometimes another perspective from someone who is not caught up in the relational whirlpool can bring His life and healing.

Forgiveness must be pursued and embraced so that complete healing comes, and the issue is cleared. Forgiveness is not optional, and it is not a one-time thing (“seventy times seven”). Nothing is more damaging than unforgiveness. It will pollute both you and other people. It is the nature of the devil and what he uses to divide and perpetuate his darkness in the earth. Jesus demonstrated this type of forgiveness on the cross by forgiving the people who tortured Him even though they didn’t ask for it or deserve it (Luke 23:34). Jesus also said something that is an important motivation in forgiveness “If you don’t forgive others your Father won’t forgive you” (Matthew 6:12, 14, 18:21-23, Mark 11:25-26, Colossians 3:13-14).



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If we are going to demonstrate gospel lives which show God’s alternative to the hostile world around us, we must follow and help others follow Jesus’ direction for our lives. It is a hypersensitive time in which the enemy is working both in the culture and among God’s people to perpetuate darkness. May God’s people follow Jesus and demonstrate His better way of living from which we declare His gospel to a world who desperately needs Him.

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