

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Problems Christians Face, Incivility

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

It seems strange for me to say that I was born in the previous century. I was born as World War 2 was coming to an end. Growing up in the east end of Newcastle upon Tyne where life was certainly different from today. The housing was old, streets were cobbled, and no one owned a car. Tram cars and trolley buses were the mode of transport or you walked. There was no electricity at home until well into the 1950s. Children could play outside safely for hours only returning home at mealtimes. But there were problems: poverty, unemployment, too much money spent on alcohol and cigarettes, and there was abuse.

Incivility is the title of this talk. Incivility can be considered as discourteous, impolite, disrespectful or even intolerance. Scriptures in this talk will be from the English Standard version unless otherwise stated.

When did incivility begin?

Incivility commenced in the ideal situation of the 'Garden of Eden', the paradise that God had prepared for Adam and Eve. We know from Genesis chapter 1 that creation had taken God six days to complete and on the seventh day God rested. God found creation good and when at the end of the six days and surveying all that had been made, God declared that it was very good. I suppose, God looking down upon His creation now, He would not say that it is even good, let alone very good.

What was given to mankind to look after has become progressively damaged until in our generation there are those who recognise the destruction and have a vain idea that they can put the world to rights if only we stop making plastic, stop eating meat and stop using fossil fuels. Mankind has mismanaged creation and it will not be put right in a few decades. God is the only person who will be able to bring back creation into its original pristine condition.

The first incident of incivility occurred the moment Adam and Eve sinned. God challenged them on their guilty behaviour because they were hiding from Him, their Creator and we might even say their friend. Sin caused all the negative attributes to appear in mankind's nature, guilt, incivility, murder, to name but a few. Considering Genesis 3:1-13, we find the first occurrence of incivility.

Verses 7 & 8 bring out guilt, realising that they were naked, so they made clothing out of leaves and then they hid themselves when they heard God coming towards them. Verse 12 is the point where Adam blames God for what has gone wrong – the woman whom you gave me. I find this an amazing verse that Adam could stand and blame God for the most treasured thing in his life, the gift that God gave to him. It was the creature blaming the Creator. In chapter 2 verse 23, Adam recognises that Eve was the same as himself, someone to communicate with and to be his lifelong companion. Adam blames God for giving him the woman and blames Eve for giving him the fruit to eat. So, as far as Adam was concerned, everyone else was to blame but not himself! We also find that sin had affected Eve just as much. Eve was not to blame because it was the serpent, Satan in

disguise. Mankind has a big problem in handling responsibility when things go wrong, it must be the fault of someone else!

Both Adam and Eve had changed dramatically because of sin. Politeness and respect had both gone – incivility had firmly stamped its mark on mankind.

Does the failure that Adam brought upon the whole of mankind mean that God's plans had all come tumbling down? We must emphatically say no. Without going into the many references in the Old Testament concerning the promises relating to a new man, Christ, we will just move to 1 Corinthians 15:45 which states, "Thus also it is written, The first man Adam became a living soul; the last Adam a quickening spirit" (J N Darby).

Here we have clearly stated that the first man Adam was a created person. He did not exist prior to his creation by the hand of God. He did not evolve from some previous animal. Adam was a wonderful creation and among all of creation it was Adam, the first of his race, who became a living soul. Animals, birds, and other creatures, when they die that is the end; they cease to exist. Not so with Adam and all his race; the living soul characteristic means continuous existence. There is no end or extinction. The Adamic race was God's highest creation. Sin, when it entered the race of mankind brought it morally and spiritually crashing down. A solution was needed. Verse 45 gives the solution, it is the 'Last Adam', the One who is a quickening, or life giving, spirit, Christ Himself.

What Adam lost because of sin the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as the 'Last Adam' has more than compensated through His sacrifice at Golgotha. First there is the possibility to reverse the damage to mankind by receiving Christ and the forgiveness of sins. Second, this great salvation through Christ's sacrifice brings in a new kind of life altogether. As the Lord Jesus states in John 10:10, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." The richness and quality of this life springs from a new nature that enables Christians to live both morally and spiritually as God originally intended. The damage that sin brought in can be reversed in the lives of Christians. Civility should now be the norm in Christians, not incivility.

Incivility is inherited!

In my earlier remarks I said that incivility can mean intolerance. Moving to Genesis 4, time has moved on considerably and Adam and Eve now have two adult children. As so often the case, children find employment in different professions. Cain appears to be an arable farmer and Abel is a livestock farmer. As with his parents, we find Cain having a dispute with God over what is and what is not an acceptable sacrifice. Abel offered an animal sacrifice and it was accepted by God. Cain thought he could offer crops and God was not pleased. So we find Cain angry, frustrated and not well pleased with God, but he cannot touch God - so he takes his anger out on Abel, his younger brother. I must admit that I find it incredible that Cain, as a human being, argues with the Almighty God. This seems to be incivility at its worst. Intolerance and violence often go hand in hand, as we see all the time on the news.

Genesis 4:1-10 gives the full account of Cain's problem. Why was an animal sacrifice acceptable with God and vegetables were not? First, we cannot work for our salvation; this was Cain's approach. Second, Abel obviously knew what God had done to make his parents acceptable in His sight, see Genesis 3:21. So, the whole approach had to be God's way. This has always been the case and it is still the same today. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

From the early chapters of Genesis, we have seen how sin brought in all kinds of problems including incivility with its associated anger and violence. This is in stark contrast with "the God of all grace" (1 Peter 5:10) who has brought in amazing blessings to Christians. This was first observed by the Apostle John and recorded in his Gospel when he wrote, "And the Word became

flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Here John is considering the Lord Jesus Christ who was full of grace and truth. This is further emphasised in verse 17 where John contrasts the Mosaic law with grace and truth coming by Jesus Christ.

As we read through the divine record, in the Gospels about the Lord Jesus we see that civility was a hallmark of Jesus in contrast to the way in which He was treated by others, especially the ruling members of society. This comes out graphically at the Lord’s mistreatment in Luke 23:10-11: “The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate.” Let us conclude this section by saying that when the Lord Jesus was here, He fulfilled the prophetic word from Isaiah 61:1 “to bind up the brokenhearted”, the distressed and anxious.

Let us move on a few hundred years from the days of Genesis and consider God’s instructions to the nation of Israel.

What do the ten commandments say?

The ten commandments, or the law given to Moses by God, are documented in Exodus 20. The first four commands set out very simply what God wants from mankind: to be in a right obedient relationship with Himself. The following six commands outline how we should relate to each other. This applies to everyone; there are no exceptions and God will not tolerate excuses. In the 21st century, mankind has lots of excuses and, at some point, God will require a reckoning for mankind’s rebellion. The law was specifically given to the nation of Israel at mount Sinai but has universal application. One God to worship and a simple set of guidelines as to how mankind behaves towards one another.

Let us look at the command which deals with parents.

“Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you” (Ex 20:12).

Honour can be expressed in a variety of ways, such as being polite, respectful, courteous, civil. Now if children or indeed people behave in the negative to these adjectives then they are acting with incivility. Among the nation of Israel, in the days of Moses, parents had a serious and last resort course of action that they could take in relation to a rebellious son. This is graphically brought to the attention of the nation as recorded in Deuteronomy 21:18-21. Here we have the problem outlined and the penalty prescribed. The negative attributes of this son are stubbornness, rebellion, gluttony, and drunkenness. Ultimately it is God who instructs Moses on how to deal with the person who persists to dishonour his parents in such a way. It is a most severe punishment, a death sentence. Why? Because stubbornness, rebellion, gluttony, and drunkenness are considered by God as being evil characteristics and are inconsistent features to be associated with His people.

For the nation of Israel, there was a great incentive to rightly honour parents. God links this command with a promise; “that your days may be long in the land.” Therefore, not honouring parents is not honouring God. So we can understand how God thought this kind of attitude was seriously wrong. In Proverbs 15:20 we have the right and wrong contrasted: “A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish man despises his mother.”

Throughout the Old Testament God expected the nation of Israel to obey the divine law given at Sinai. At the inauguration of the law, the people of Israel had said, “all that the LORD has spoken we will do” (Exodus 19:8). So God kept them to their word. It would be fair to say that the people probably did not realise what a holy God required. Considering John 1:17, we see how the law has

been superseded by grace and truth which is found in Jesus Christ. Grace points to what Jesus has done to bring blessing to those who trust Him.

The Lord confirms honouring parents

In Mark chapter 7:6-13, the Lord Jesus challenged the Pharisees and scribes on this very point of not honouring parents. With their inventive minds, they had devised a scheme to enable people to disregard the needs of their parents. The sad situation in these verses, the children are adults wanting to avoid responsibility and treating their elderly parents in a most despicable way.

Now the problem outlined in Deuteronomy 21 was different to Mark 7, but at the heart of the matter was an entirely wrong attitude towards parents. The law was inflexible; there were no mitigating circumstances allowed. So it is not surprising that the ruling class in the Jewish society had applied their minds to find a way to escape supporting parents which, after all, was their lawful duty. When the Lord Jesus was here, He upheld the commandments because it was the word of God and the moral teaching was right.

Thousands of years ago the nation of Israel was governed by God's law, which was strict and inflexible. Although Christians are not governed by the law for our blessing or salvation the teaching of the commandments, 5 to 10, are excellent principles to govern conduct towards one another. Those that are not Christians may not see the value of these commandments, but Christians are expected to live in a different way. We are not expected to have the four evil characteristics mentioned earlier as they are still abhorrent to God. Why do we say that? Because God does not change His standards regarding evil even though society may change their standards. This is a sobering consideration. As we have just observed in the Gospel of Mark, the Lord Jesus thought the teaching of the fifth commandment was relevant, so it would be right to assume it is still relevant for us.

In John 8:1-11 we have the account of a woman taken in adultery and with hypocritical incivility, the Pharisees and scribes brought her to Jesus. They hoped to use the situation to trap the Lord Jesus, but He reverses the situation and challenges them as to their sinful state and whether they were fit to exercise judgement upon the woman. When they all slunk away feeling their own guilt, the Lord treats the woman with civility and shows grace to her instead of the law that would condemn.

The same attitude is shown by the Lord Jesus in John 4 when He encountered the Samaritan woman who came for water at the well of Sychar. It is a very instructive story of the Lord's conversation with this woman. But the Lord's kindness and civility brought the woman into the joy of salvation as she came to know Him as the promised Christ.

Commandment principles still relevant

Looking at Romans chapter 13, we find Paul writing to believers in Rome touching upon some real problems that were current then and we see the same issues today. In verses 1 – 6, Paul emphasises the need to obey authorities, the various governing bodies that are established by God, for all aspects concerning the safe running of the country. In verse 7 there is a reminder to pay our various taxes. Verses 8 – 10 are a reminder that the driving force in a Christian's life is love. In verse 9 we have the last five commandments which basically regulate our lives as to how we are to treat other people. One alternative meaning of civility is respect, and these five commandments teach us to rightly respect other people's relationships: do not commit adultery; have respect for life; do not kill; respect for other people's property; do not steal. Be truthful; do not give a false witness (see note 1). Finally, do not lust or covet after what is not yours. Paul summarises the five commandments by stating, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

Paul is following the Lord's answer to a scribe who asked a question about which is the greatest commandment.

In Mark 12:28-31 we read,

“And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Sadly, today we see in our country incivility in its many guises, towards authorities, regarding taxes and towards other people.

Subject to authorities

In Romans chapter 13 Paul writes about very practical issues that were relevant 2000 years ago and are still relevant today. The chapter outlines some of the basic issues that make for a good society and Christians are expected to be law abiding and good citizens in general.

I remember the days of the poll tax brought in by Margaret Thatcher and many people were up in arms about how it was an unfair tax. Even those who claimed to be Christians openly advocated civil disobedience in their protest about this new tax. Just another form of incivility. The government eventually backed down and removed the tax, reverting to the previous system. However, considering Romans chapter 13:7 would indicate that it is not the place of Christians to rebel but to accept. Now this might be a hard thing to do but it is God’s way. Let us just read the relevant section in verses 6-8.

“For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honour to whom honour is owed. Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.”

Being civil to God the Son and God the Father

Now God is the highest authority for a Christian. We have already mentioned how Cain cared little for God and his incivility manifested itself in open rebellion and the murder of his brother. So, we find in the Gospel of John chapter 5 the Lord Jesus making it clear that both the Son and the Father must be honoured. It is discourteous to only honour one divine person and not the other. Verse 23 of this chapter makes it very plain. Let us read the verse.

“That all may honour the Son, just as they honour the Father. Whoever does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him.”

Being civil in our Christian fellowships

Paul, when writing to a fellow Christian in 1 Timothy chapter 5 refers to normal behaviour in a Christian fellowship. Let us read verses 1-3.

“Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father. Treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity. Honour widows who are truly widows.”

The good advice that Paul gave to Timothy is still valid today. Respect, civility, courtesy, and politeness are all similar words and the negatives to these are not to be found as characteristics of Christians. By extension we are not to use such negative attitudes even with those who are not Christians. Christian attitudes are to be such as that which would attract people to Christ and not drive them away.

In a similar way Peter writes in 1 Peter 5:5.

“Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.””

Both chapters, 1 Timothy 5 and 1 Peter 5, are well worth reading when this broadcast is finished. The encouraging words of both Paul and Peter are just as relevant today. The application of these helps to strengthen Christian fellowships.

Symptoms of incivility

Incivility is often accompanied with shouting and abusive language when verbally attacking people. In 1 Corinthians 5:11, we have a catalogue of people that a Christian must not keep company or fellowship with. We will read the verse as it is most illuminating.

“But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.”

Paul is talking about someone who is supposed to be a Christian and yet is characterised by ungodly features and behaviour. Although this is a problem for the Christian fellowship to deal with but, by extension, it would be unwise to have close non-Christian friends who have the same lifestyle. Now where is the incivility in this verse? It is the reviler, or railer in some translations, who has the characteristics of someone behaving with incivility towards others often combined with abusive language and threatening behaviour.

To conclude

In looking at the attitude of incivility we have looked at the origin of incivility and how it became an inherited defect on mankind. We briefly considered the moral impact of the commandments. Civility and incivility will impact on all areas of our lives.

I trust that this talk on incivility has been both a challenge and helpful as we have traced it from its origin and shown its relevance to our lifestyle today.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on “Problems Christians Face, Incivility”, talk number T1186.

Note

1. [Bearing false witness, verse 9, is not shown in every translation. It is found in the King James authorised version and Young’s Literal translation.](#)

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