

Righteousness Exalts a Nation

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Bible Text: Proverbs 14

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Piety and patriotism and I am preaching from that verse of Scripture in Proverbs 14:34,

34 Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.

Perhaps our attention in these days is focused more directly upon the needs in American society than they have been in a long time. Perhaps the issues are more clearly seen and understood in this day than they have in recent times. We need to allow the Bible to speak to the needs in American society.

I have divided my sermon under three headings: first, I want you to see what national righteousness is; second, I want you to see why national righteousness is important; and third, what happens when there is an absence of righteousness in the land.

Now, when I talk about national righteousness, I do not mean that our nation must embrace all of the doctrines and the principles of the Baptist religion. I don't mean that. I must be perfectly honest and tell you however I wouldn't be disappointed if that happened, but it's not necessary in order for there to be righteousness in the land. The word "righteousness" simply means "to be right" as opposed to being wrong.

Now, the question obviously arises: what criteria, what measuring stick does God use in determining what is right and wrong? Let me suggest for you: God doesn't take a public opinion poll and just because it's legal, doesn't mean it's right in the sight of God. This might seem old fashioned, it might seem outdated to many in our society, but we need to be reminded that today God judges our conduct and character on the basis of the moral law revealed in the Ten Commandments when with the finger of God, he wrote on the tables of stone Ten commandments. He gave us a moral constitution from which all moral law is derived and in this sophisticated intellectual libertine society of ours, God is still judging conduct and character on the basis of the moral law.

Now, I want to tell you that God hasn't changed his mind. Now, you and I change our mind, don't we? We vacillate in our opinions. Have you changed your mind lately? We ought to change our mind about some things. There is a Proverb that says, "A wise man changes his mind; a fool never does." I've had to change my mind about some stuff. My wife and I were driving to the next county west from us a few months ago where I was to

speak at an evangelism conference and Glenda said, "David, I've noticed that the Biblical Illustrators are on sale for \$154 this month. I want to buy that set of books for you." She knew that I had wanted them for some time. I said, "Well, Glenda, I appreciate you wanting to do that but the truth is we just don't have the extra money in our checking account this month." She said, "Well, let's buy them on the credit." I said, "No, you know we are trying to get away from that idea." She said, "Let's take the money out of our savings account." And I said, "No, you know how hard it is for us to save money. It's like cutting teeth at our place. Let's protect what little savings we have." Glenda turned to me and in the dark I understood what she meant, she said, "David, you've changed your mind about that sort of thing since we got married."

And I have. When Glenda and I got married, we bought a new car on the credit. We bought new furniture on the credit. We bought china on the credit. I learned that you couldn't get married if you didn't have china. We bought new clothes on the credit. In fact, in the beginning, all things were bought on the credit and without credit was nothing bought that was bought. But I changed my mind about that sort of thing. It dawned on me a while back that it was a lot easier to borrow money than it was to pay it back so I've changed my mind about some stuff. Have you? But I want to tell you something, folks: God has not changed his mind about what's right and wrong.

Now, obviously, national righteousness is in proportion to individual righteousness. I believe whatever is morally wrong can never be politically right in our society. I believe that piety and patriotism ought to be joined in holy wedlock. There shouldn't be any discord between religion and politics. I believe that politicians ought to be engaged in the noble business of suppressing vice and supporting virtue and not the other way around. So when I talk about national righteousness today, I simply mean that our nation ought to embrace those general principles of morality as revealed in the word of God.

Now, may I share with you for a moment why national righteousness is necessary. I'll suggest two things but elaborate only on the second idea. First, national righteousness is imperative because it has divine approval. It is God who establishes nations and it is God who has determined what the standards of conduct and character for nations ought to be. It has divine approval, but number 2, it has some definite advantages. Let me mention three of them. 1. Biblical morality has the public well-being in mind. It establishes the authority of the government and teaches subordination by the citizens. I tell you, it is not the American Civil Liberties Union who is criss-crossing this nation promoting the idea of the authority of the government and teaching that citizens ought to obey the law. In fact, I don't know if we can endure another generation of folks who have no regard for the law of the land. I tell you, folks, the demarcation line between lawlessness and lawfulness is getting thinner and thinner in American society. It has the public well-being in mind, not only because it sanctions the authority of the government, but it establishes the authority of parents and teaches discipline for children. It has the public well-being in mind.

But number 2, it has the public wealth in mind. It teaches that men ought to be honest and men of integrity when it comes to the matter of paying their taxes. It teaches that we

ought to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's. It teaches the work ethic that a man ought to work an hour for an hour's wage, and consequently it eliminates what I call the hand-out syndrome. Are you familiar with the hand-out syndrome? There is a certain element of people in our society, you would think, that when they were born their elbows were fused to their lower rib and their forearm and palm were frozen in a horizontal position and they are absolutely convinced that the government, its agencies and institutions owe them a living, and if the agencies and institutions do not put enough stuff into their hand, they'll organize and march on Washington.

Now, I don't have the academic background nor expertise to make great prognostications regarding the American economy, but I've got a down-home suspicion about what halve our economy. I don't think we have one problem with the economy, inflation, interest rates notwithstanding, that could not be improved if not solved if we could have a revival of honesty and integrity in the matter of paying taxes and if we could have a revival and a renewal regarding the work ethic, that we ought to work an hour for an hour's wage. And I want to tell you something, brethren, I don't know of anyone who needs to learn that lesson any more desperately than Baptist preachers, I tell you because very seldom do we have someone looking over our shoulder and supervising or administering our time and our energies, and we need a revival in the churches as well as in the society regarding the work ethic. I tell you, we ought to work whether we have to or not. We ought to work because it's godly and it's right.

I tell you, national righteousness has the public wealth in mind, but number 3, it has the public welfare in mind. It teaches that we ought to be concerned and caring for those who are truly needy. It's necessary.

And I want to show you a third item, I want you to see what happens when there is an absence of righteousness in the land. This text says that, "sin is a reproach to any people." When a nation denies, defies, and disregards God's standards of morality, it leads to alcohol, adultery and abortion. What do you suppose would happen if Fidel Castro and the Cuban Army were to travel the 90 miles up to Key West, Florida and kill 25,000 American citizens? The President of our country would declare a national emergency, the armed services would be called into battle, the National Guard would be called out and our citizens would arise to defend this democracy, wouldn't they? But when's the last time you heard your Senator or your Representative or your favorite politician talking about the fact that 25,000 American citizens die annually on American highways as a direct result of consuming alcoholic beverages and driving automobiles?

In our nation's capital, there are more abortions than there are births, 15 million of them since 1973. In Arkansas, we have tried to get on the ballot what has been called the Unborn Child Amendment which would eliminate state tax dollars being used to fund abortions directly or indirectly except in a case where the mother's life is in danger. The Heber Springs Ministerial Alliance made a public statement in our county paper a few days ago regarding the Unborn Child Amendment. Here's what they said,

"Some view a fetus as a person, alive from conception; they would urge you to vote for this amendment. Others, Christians, just as sincere, believe the term 'unborn child' is ambiguous and they would urge you to vote against it, believing that it would deny them a privilege that is both legal and moral. We urge you to do what's right in your own eyes."

I wrote them a letter and I wrote it to the paper and I said,

"I'd like to ask you men a question: are you for abortion or against it? Do you think it's a moral issue? Then why didn't you say so. I am amazed at how skillfully you men avoided making a statement. You men remind me of a fellow that didn't want to offend anyone during the Civil War, so he put on a gray coat and blue trousers and they shot at him from both sides."

And, brother, I want to tell you those men have been shot at from both sides and I hope the firing won't cease anytime soon.

I tell you, I am amazed at Baptist people who haven't settled on this issue yet. And I'll tell you what I'm appalled at, I'm appalled at those who have settled on the issue and they're for abortion. I tell you, I was appalled, I was grieved in my soul when a Baptist seminary professor came to the city of Little Rock a few days ago and on our television station, he said that a child in the womb is a human being because it is conceived of human parents, and it is alive but it is not a person, and consequently it is theologically, philosophically and morally feasible to abort a fetus in its mother's womb. I tell you, it grieved my soul that part of my tithes and offerings has to pay his salary. It grieves me in my soul.

I tell you, beloved, it is high time that Baptist preachers like you and me quit buying that bill of goods that we are not to be overtly political. We have been so afraid that we were going to offend the Democrats or offend the Republicans that we haven't been willing to stand up in front of the people of God and have a word from God on what is a national disgrace in American society. I tell you, my friend, you can't be afraid of the Democrats and serve God, and you can't party with the Republicans on immoral issues and please God. You just can't do it.

I tell you, when our nation disregards God's standards of morality, it leads to cigarettes and cocaine and crime. It leads to a loss of credibility, conscience and character. It leads to excess, extortion and euthanasia. It leads to degradation, despair and demoralization of the society. It leads to iniquity, to incest, and insanity. My wife and I sat in a motel here in your city a few months ago and listened to the Public Broadcast Station as they declared that the number one social problem in the metropolitan area of Memphis, Tennessee is the problem of incest and sexual child abuse. Literally thousands of cases.

That's what happens when we think we can live apart from God's standards of morality and I tell you, brethren, I am amazed at how many Baptist preachers are afraid to be identified with the Bible and with what God has said regarding morality. I tell you, we've watched these people come along with this idea that you can't legislate morality and you

can't impose your religion on folks for so long and we have been brow-beaten and we have been intimidated and we are literally embarrassed on occasions to really speak out and say, "This is what God says on the matter."

I tell you, it leads to meanness and madness and murder. It leads to pot and pornography and prostitution. It leads to sickness and sorrow and shamelessness and suicide. It leads to vice and vandalism and violence.

Sin is a reproach to any people but our text says that righteousness exalteth, that is, it lifts, it raises a nation up out of the abortion and the crime and the madness and the suicide and it establishes it on the solid rock of God's standards and of God's approval. I tell you, brethren, I wouldn't tell you what to preach unless I had a chance, but I'll tell you: the best thing you and I can do, the most patriotic thing you and I can do in these days is to tell our people what the issues are. You don't have to tell them who to vote for, tell them what the issues are, and then, my friend, the most patriotic thing you and I can do is to live our own individual lives in accord with God's standards of morality.