

Sermon preached at Woodbury Community Church, Woodbury, MN on Sunday,  
February 19, 2012, by Rev. Brian D. Schulenburg

### **LEVITICUS 18-20**

1 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God. 3 You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. 4 You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God. 5 You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.

(Leviticus 18:1-5 ESV)

### **THE CHALLENGE #8** **HOW A NATION LOSES GOD’S BLESSING**

Intro: Video (Abraham Lincoln Prayer Proclamation – 1:50)

Text of Video: It is the duty of nations as well as of men, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions, in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.

And, insomuch as we know that, by His divine law, nations like individuals are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world, may we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war, which now desolates the land, may be but a punishment, inflicted upon us, for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole People? We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!

Can there truly be any question that the United States of America has been blessed, enjoyed prosperity, unparalleled success in innovation and technology, freedoms that are the envy of the world and opportunities that are seemingly endless to those who are willing to work hard in achieving their goals? For 236 years, our nation has experienced the blessing of Almighty God. For most of those 236 years, our civic leaders have readily acknowledged our dependence upon the Sovereign. There is no mistaking the fact that in the past 50 years our culture has shifted. We have moved from being one nation under God to one nation under whatever or whoever suits you best. There are

pockets of courageous men and women who are willing to stand in the gap and acknowledge that every good and perfect gift comes from above, but those numbers are waning in a day and age of political correctness.

This is President's Day weekend. It is a weekend in which we celebrate the men who have served our nation as commander in chief. It is a weekend in which we ought to be reminded to pray for our current president and those who serve as elected officials. The presidency is a job that most of us wouldn't want. The pressure that the men who have held the position are under is enormous. Some have said, "You might go into the presidency as an Atheist or Agnostic, but it's difficult to stay that way when you feel the weight of the world on your shoulders."

I believe that God has uniquely blessed the United States of America over the years because we are a nation that has historically placed our allegiance in Him. Listen to these words from some of the men who have served as our nation's Commander in Chief.

1. "Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion." —George Washington
2. "The General hopes and trusts that every officer and man, will endeavor so to live, and act, as becomes a Christian soldier defending the dearest rights and liberties of his country." – George Washington
3. "Let me live according to those holy rules which Thou hast this day prescribed in Thy Holy Word...direct me to the true object, Jesus Christ, the way, the truth, and the life. Bless, O Lord, all the people of this land." – George Washington
4. "The general principles on which the fathers achieved independence were the general principles of Christianity. I will avow that I then believed, and now believe, that those general principles of Christianity are as eternal and immutable as the existence and attributes of God." – John Adams
5. "We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion...Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other." – John Adams
6. "We recognize no sovereign but God, and no King but Jesus!" – John Adams
7. "The reason that Christianity is the best friend of government is because Christianity is the only religion that changes the heart." – Thomas Jefferson
8. "Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of

God? That they are not to be violated but with His wrath? I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever.” – Thomas Jefferson

9. “I have always said and always will say that the studious perusal of the Sacred Volume will make better citizens, better fathers, better husbands... the Bible makes the best people in the world.” – Thomas Jefferson

10. “Before any man can be considered as a member of civil society, he must be considered as a subject of the Governor of the Universe. And to the same Divine Author of every good and perfect gift we are indebted for all those privileges and advantages, religious as well as civil, which are so richly enjoyed in this favored land.” – James Monroe

11. “It is no slight testimonial, both to the merit and worth of Christianity, that in all ages since its promulgation the great mass of those who have risen to eminence by their profound wisdom and integrity have recognized and revered Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of the living God.” – John Quincy Adams

12. “The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: it connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity.” – John Quincy Adams

13. “My custom is to read four or five chapters of the Bible every morning immediately after rising. It seems to me the most suitable manner of beginning the day. It is an invaluable and inexhaustible mine of knowledge and virtue.” – John Quincy Adams

14. “I am profitably engaged in reading the Bible. Take all of this Book upon reason that you can, and the balance by faith, and you will live and die a better man.” – Abraham Lincoln

15. “We have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand, which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us.” – Abraham Lincoln

16. “The only assurance of our nation’s safety is to lay our foundation in morality and religion.” – Abraham Lincoln

17. “All must admit that the reception of the teachings of Christ results in the purest patriotism, in the most scrupulous fidelity to public trust, and in the best type of citizenship.” – Grover Cleveland

18. “A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education.” – Theodore Roosevelt

19. “The foundations of our society and our government rest so much on the teachings of the Bible that it would be difficult to support them if faith in these teachings would cease to be practically universal in our country.” – Calvin Coolidge

20. “The study of the Bible is a post-graduate course in the richest library of human experience.” – Hebert Hoover

21. “The fundamental basis of this nation’s law was given to Moses on the Mount. The fundamental basis of our Bill of Rights comes from the teaching we get from Exodus and St. Matthew, from Isaiah and St. Paul. I don’t think we emphasize that enough these days. If we don’t have the proper fundamental moral background, we will finally end up with a totalitarian government which does not believe in the right for anybody except the state.” – Harry Truman

22. “The rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God.” – John F. Kennedy

23. “Of the many influences that have shaped the United States into a distinctive nation and people, none may be said to be more fundamental and enduring than the Bible.” – Ronald Reagan

24. “Within the covers of the Bible are the answers for all the problems men face” – Ronald Reagan

25. “Without God, there is no virtue, because there’s no prompting of the conscience. Without God, we’re mired in the material, that flat world that tells us only what the senses perceive. Without God, there is a coarsening of the society. And without God, democracy will not and cannot long endure.” – Ronald Reagan<sup>1</sup>

Revisionist historians will try to tell you that America was never a Christian nation. That could not be farther from the truth. This nation was founded as a unique country, under God, with liberty and justice for all. When a nation honors God that nation prospers. It’s always been that way.

In our journey through the Bible, we find ourselves in a section of Scripture that is often times ignored by those who say that the Bible matters. The law, we saw last week, often times seems archaic and irrelevant, but there are gifts that we find when we study the law. We see the problem of sin and the power of God to forgive sin. We see the beauty of sacrifice and the power of the priesthood. We see the great principle of holiness and the precious gift of the presence of God.

Today, we see the great folly of the nation that thinks they no longer need God. Remember, in Leviticus, God is giving Moses law for how the Children of Israel are to

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.christiancollegesanduniversities.com/blog/2010/30-religious-quotes-from-us-presidents>

live as God's covenant people. He gives this law to Moses for a period of about one month, after the construction of the tabernacle.

There are laws that we no longer follow today. Why? Because, some of these laws were specific to the Jewish nation. Some of these laws were in effect before the coming of Jesus, but after Christ's coming the rules changed. For instance, we no longer needed a priest to atone for our sins. Jesus, as our High Priest and Advocate and the Holy Spirit intercede to the Father on our behalf. But not all of the laws in Leviticus are arcane. We are still called to live as a holy people, for God is holy. We are still to live sexually pure lives. We are still to love our neighbor as ourselves, etc.

Leviticus 18-20 is God's specific teaching on how the Jewish nation could lose His blessing. But, it's not just true for the Jewish nation, it's true for us too. So often, when we talk about holiness, we think about individual holiness. And that's good! We are held accountable for our individual lives. We are held accountable for the way in which we represent Christ to the world around us. But, we are also held accountable for the sins of the nation. When God chose the Children of Israel as His people, He was calling a nation unto himself. In Leviticus 18-20, God gave the Children of Israel stern warnings not to adopt the pagan practices of their neighboring countries, or the countries that they would drive out of the Promised Land.

Listen to Leviticus 18:1-5.

1 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God. 3 You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. 4 You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God. 5 You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.

I can just see the minds of the people running. "Hey God, we don't want to be like the Egyptians! They did terrible things to us. They said terrible things about you! You have blessed us. You have been merciful to us. I know we messed up with the golden calf thing, but you gave us another shot. We'll follow you. And as far as the Canaanites are concerned, we can't imagine that there is anything that they are doing that we would fall for."

God knew the challenges that lay ahead for the Jewish nation. He knew how easy it would be to adopt the pagan practices of other nations. So, he spelled out for them in Leviticus 18-20 just what types of practices that He was forbidding.

### **1. Embrace Sexual Immorality (Leviticus 18)**

If Satan has a tool in his arsenal of weapons that can destroy a country faster than any other it is the weapon of sexual perversion. It's no mistake that when God began his instruction to the nation of Israel about sins that would cause them to lose His blessing

that God began with a list of sexual sins. Beginning with verse six of chapter 18 and continuing through the end of the chapter, God gives example after example of the type of sexual behavior that would not be tolerated by the children of Israel. Verses 6-20 deal with unlawful heterosexual behavior. Some have said that the church of Jesus Christ in America today is known more for what we are against than what we are for. Many churches in our nation spend a great deal of time preaching against homosexuality. In just a moment we'll see that God forbids homosexual behavior, but he begins with heterosexual sin.

Any extramarital sexual behavior is forbidden in Scripture. You never have to ask if it is okay to have sex with someone other than your spouse. In the Ten Commandments, in Exodus 20:14, God forbade any extramarital affair. In the ancient near east world, having sex with family members was a common thing. God forbade it, and talked extensively about it in Exodus 20:6-20.

Then God shifts to other types of sexual sin that was forbidden including the Ammonite and Canaanite practice of child-sacrifice, which often times accompanied sexual rituals to the gods. He forbade homosexual activity in Leviticus 18:22. He forbade sex with animals.

Every great empire that the world has witnessed has seen its fall preceded by an acceptance of immoral sexual behavior. In a world where all sorts of sexual perversion and promiscuity is available at the click of a computer mouse, we face perilous times.

“Sociologist and historian Carle Zimmerman, in his 1947 book Family and Civilization, recorded his keen observations as he compared the disintegration of various cultures with the parallel decline of family life in those cultures. Eight specific patterns of domestic behavior typified the downward spiral of each culture Zimmerman studied.

- Marriage loses its sacredness...is frequently broken by divorce.
- Traditional meaning of the marriage ceremony is lost.
- Feminist movements abound.
- Increased public disrespect for parents and authority in general.
- Acceleration of juvenile delinquency, promiscuity, and rebellion.
- Refusal of people with traditional marriages to accept family responsibilities.
- Growing desire for and acceptance of adultery.
- Increasing interest in and spread of sexual perversions and sex-related crimes.”<sup>2</sup>

## **2. Fail to Teach Your Children to Honor God (Leviticus 19:1-8)**

There is a second warning that God gives the nation of Israel concerning losing His blessing. In Leviticus 19:1-8 the Lord preaches a mini-sermon on three of the Ten Commandments. In God's teaching, He reminds the people that holiness begins at

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<sup>2</sup> Chuck Swindoll, *The Quest For Character*, (Portland: Multnomah, 1993), p. 90.

home, instructing even the youngest generation to live a holy life. God wants parents to model what it means to live a holy life to their children. He wants the next generation of Israelites to know His commands. He wants them to follow Him too.

In suburban St. Paul, there is a tendency to become child centered parents. We want what is best for our kids. We want to keep up with the Joneses. We enroll our kids in multiple activities in hopes that they will find something that they can truly excel in. We don't want our kids to miss out on anything that could possibly benefit them later in life. This generation of children is the busiest generation of kids that we have ever produced in our country. They are also the least evangelized. We are now on the third generation of children growing up in our nation without prayer in school. It makes a difference.

It was on June 25, 1962 that the United States Supreme Court voted to remove prayer for public schools. The case was *Engler vs. Vitale*.

The prayer in question was this one, which was recited in most school classrooms around the nation, "Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers, and our Country."

"The 22 word prayer was declared to be unconstitutional and led to the removal of all prayer from public schools in the case *Engel v. Vitale*. This little prayer acknowledges God only one time. The Declaration of Independence itself acknowledges God 4 times.

Within 12 months of *Engel v. Vitale*, in two more cases called *Abington v. Schempp* and *Murray v. Curlett*, the court had completely removed Bible reading, religious classes/instruction. This was a radical reversal of law - and all without precedential justification or Constitutional basis. The Court's justification for removing Bible reading from public schools. The Court at this time declared that only 3% of the nation professed no belief in religion, no belief in God. Although this prayer was consistent with 97% of the beliefs of the people of the United States, the Court decided for the 3% against the majority."<sup>3</sup>

In a rather prophetic speech delivered at the Heritage Foundation in December of 1993, Bill Bennett, our former Secretary of Education said the following:

"Last year I compiled the Index of Leading Cultural Indicators, a statistical portrait of American behavioral trends of the past three decades. Among the findings: Since 1960, while the gross domestic product has nearly tripled, violent crime has increased at least 560%. Divorces have more than doubled. The percentage of children in single-parent homes had tripled. And by the end of the decade 40% of all American births and 80% of minority births will occur out of wedlock. These are not good things to get used to.

In 1940 teachers identified the top problems in America's schools as: Talking out of turn, chewing gum, making noise and running in the hall. In 1990, teachers listed drugs,

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/f/fourth\\_of\\_july.htm](http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/f/fourth_of_july.htm)

alcohol, pregnancy, suicide, rape and assault. These are not good things to get used to, either.

There is a coarseness, a callousness and a cynicism to our era. The worst of it has to do with our children. Our culture seems almost dedicated to the corruption of the young. We have become inured to the cultural rot that is setting in. People are losing their capacity for shock, disgust and outrage...

The ancients called our problem *acedia*, an aversion to spiritual things and an undue concern for the external and the worldly. *Acedia* also is the seventh capital sin--sloth--but it does not mean mere laziness. The slothful heart is steeped in the worldly and carnal, hates the spiritual and wants to be free of its demands.

When the novelist Walker Percy was asked what concerned him most about America's future, he answered, "Probably the fear of seeing America, with all its great strength and beauty and freedom...gradually subside into decay through default and be defeated, not by the communist movement, but from within, from weariness, boredom, cynicism, greed and in the end helplessness before its great problems."

I realize this is a tough indictment. If my diagnosis is wrong, then why, amid our economic prosperity and military security, do almost 70% of the public say we are off track? I submit that only when we turn to the right things--enduring, noble, spiritual things--will life get better.

Most important, we must return religion to its proper place. Religion provides us with moral bearings, and the solution to our chief problem of spiritual impoverishment depends on spiritual renewal. The surrendering of strong beliefs, in our private and public lives, has demoralized society.

Today, much of society ridicules and mocks those who are serious about their faith. America's only respectable form of bigotry is bigotry against religious people. And the only reason for hatred of religion is that it forces us to confront matters many would prefer to ignore.

Today we must carry on a new struggle for the country we love. We must push hard against an age that is pushing hard against us. If we have full employment and greater economic growth--if we have cities of gold and alabaster--but our children have not learned how to walk in goodness, justice and mercy, then the American experiment, no matter how gilded, will have failed.

Do not surrender. Get mad. Get in the fight."<sup>4</sup>

God cares about how we teach the next generation.

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<sup>4</sup> Excerpts from *What Really Ails America*, condensed from a speech by William J. Bennett, delivered December 7, 1993 at the Heritage Foundation, Washington, D.C., reprinted in *Reader's Digest*, April, 1994.

### **3. Don't Treat Others with Dignity, Love, and Respect (Leviticus 19:9-18, 32-37)**

God moves beyond just giving instruction on how to train our children to how we should treat others in our lives. Chapter 19 of Leviticus is this impassioned plea by God for us to love others as ourselves.

Listen to just verses 17-18.

17 "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. 18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

This chapter deals with how we should treat our neighbors, the needy, the stranger, the employee, our elders and those with disabilities. Other cultures treated people like property. The Israelites were well aware of this as they had gone from slavery to freedom. The people of God were to treat all with dignity, including those that other cultures thought worthless. God has a heart for the underdog! He has a heart for the poor, the oppressed, the refugee, and for those who cannot speak up for themselves.

He also has a heart for the unborn. Since abortion was legalized in 1973, we have seen over 54,000,000 babies aborted. God values all life. To give you some perspective imagine that in some science fiction disaster film bombs came and destroyed the entire populations of New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Philadelphia, Phoenix, San Antonio, San Diego, Dallas, San Jose, Jacksonville, Indianapolis and San Francisco. Those are the fourteen largest cities in America. And the sum total of those populations is less than ½ of the number of the babies that have been aborted since Roe v. Wade. When we cease treating the youngest amongst us with dignity, we are in trouble.

### **4. Embrace Witchcraft, Sorcery and Other False Religions (Leviticus 19:26-31)**

In verses 26-31 the Lord warns Israel not to embrace the witchcraft, sorcery and other false religions that they will encounter in the land of Canaan. They would see all sorts of pagan ritual. They would encounter people who could seemingly tell the future. They would see people who would claim to have the ability to speak to the dead. Embracing such people would lead to their downfall. It's one of the things that would lead to the downfall of Israel's first king, Saul, who at a place called Endor seeks the advice of a witch and faces the wrath of God.

In America today, some of our top selling books, top grossing movies, and top selling video games have to do with witchcraft, sorcery, or occult activity. In the name of entertainment we have embraced one of the very things that God says will lead to the withdrawing of His blessing. It's the same way with sexual perversion. Ad executives will tell you that sex sells. A 2007 study shows that

- 89% of porn is created in the U.S.
- \$2.84 billion in revenue was generated from U.S. porn sites in 2006
- \$89/second is spent on porn
- 72% of porn viewers are men
- 260 new porn sites go online daily<sup>5</sup>

## 5. Ignore God's Call To Holy Living (Leviticus 20)

Listen, God isn't playing games. In Leviticus 20 God reiterates that if the children of Israel want to lose his blessing then they can embrace pagan religion and sexual perversion. As if Leviticus 18-19 weren't specific enough, God spells out even more for them how serious He is about living holy lives that look different than the world around them.

There are many today who question whether America has gone too far. Are we beyond the point where we can experience God's forgiveness? After all, when you look at the statistics we are the leading purveyor of all types of smut around the world. American and western European men are the leading customers in the sex slave trade around the world. We are in deep trouble and the only solution is Christ. Church, we have an opportunity to be a bright light in a very dark place.

In 2 Chronicles 7:13-16 God told Solomon and the Jewish people the following:

13 When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, 14 if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. 15 Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. 16 For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time.

I think Bill Bennett, who is a brother in Christ, said it well.

Church, we do not surrender. We get mad. We get in the fight. But, it begins with fighting on our knees. Fight the battle that rages within you to live a holy life! Fight with everything you have! We gain God's blessing when we live for Him!

I want to close this President's Day Weekend message with this clip from President Ronald Reagan. (Video: Ronald Regan – Day of Prayer 2:02)

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<sup>5</sup> <http://techcrunch.com/2007/05/12/internet-pornography-stats/>