

## Introduction

Independence Day is a day for celebrating this great nation of ours, America. But it should also be a day for reflecting, even soul searching, about the condition of that nation.

In his controversial book *Losing Ground*, renowned author and social commentator Charles Murray contends that America is descending into dystopia. A dystopia is the opposite of a utopia. It's a place in which the conditions and the quality of life are dreadful. America, in Murray's view, is becoming just that.

Since this is a day of reflecting, let's seriously consider whether or not Murray is right. The text that was just read 2 Chronicles 7:11-14, helps us do just that.

## The Sickness

According to verse 11, Solomon had just completed building God's temple in Jerusalem. That temple was a visible sign that God's hand of blessing was on Solomon and the nation of Israel. He desired and planned on making both great.

But He warned Solomon in verses 12-14 that He wouldn't automatically do so. He appeared and posed a hypothetical situation to him. Notice the metaphorical phrase in verse 14, "**will heal their land.**" That language implies that Israel has become sick like a human body does. Verse 13 reveals two of the ways that its hypothetical sickness manifested itself. Drought and locust caused the fields and crops to fail and plagues made masses of people ill or dead.

Now, using this metaphor in verse 14, let's reflect on our own nation's condition. Is America healthy or sick? Let me give you a sampling of social indicators and let you decide.

**#1 – Debt:** America has gone from being the world's largest creditor nation to being its largest debtor nation. The federal government is now

in debt a staggering \$14.5 trillion dollars and growing. Exacerbating the problem, America's industrial production as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product has been cut in half the past 30 years. Today, America's Gross Domestic Product is only 22% industry and 77% service as opposed to China's, which is 49% industry and only 40% service.

**#2 - Disease:** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there are over 15 million cases of sexually transmitted diseases reported annually in America. Approximately 19 million new infections occur each year, half of them among people ages 15 to 24.

**#3 – Drug Use:** Since 1996, the number of current drug users in America has risen from 13 million to 20.4 million. Over 6 million children live with at least one parent who has a drug addiction. Each year, drug abuse and addiction cost employers over \$122 billion in lost productivity time and another \$15 billion in health insurance costs.

**#4 – Divorce:** The divorce rate in America is 41% for first marriages, 60% for second marriages, and 73% for third marriages. As a result, only 63% of American children grow up with both biological parents, which is the lowest figure in the Western world.

Those are just four of at least 19 social indicators that give us a statistical portrait of America's health. Analyzing those indicators, William Bennett concludes: **"Today the forces of social decomposition are challenging – and in some instances, overtaking – the forces of social composition."** That's a penetrating insight. The forces that destroy society are effectively competing with and even overwhelming those that build it. America is sick, in other words.

But is its sickness terminal? That's the issue we face today.

Some think it is. Charles Murray, for instance, says with regard to America's future, **"I have an apocalyptic vision."** Then there's the great Malcolm Muggeridge who vividly declared: **"Having educated himself into imbecility and polluted and drugged himself into stupefaction, western man keeled over, a weary battered old Brontosaurus, and became extinct."** Those aren't the rantings and

ravings of doomsayers. They're the thoughtful and informed reasonings of highly respected leaders instead.

But I disagree with them. In his book *Against the Night*, Chuck Colson says that America is experiencing the new dark ages and may well be approaching midnight. That is precisely my point of view as well. Yes, America is in a new dark age. And yes, it is approaching midnight. But it isn't there yet. It's sick but not terminal in other words. There's a cure and verse 14 tells us what it is.

### The Cause

The first obvious step in curing any sickness is to diagnose it. It's to discover what is causing it.

Verse 14 helps us do just that. In His hypothetical situation, God identified what it was that made Israel sick. It was its **"wicked ways."** The word **"wicked"** there refers to attitudes and behaviors that are contrary to the word and will of God. Notice the vital link that this verse reveals between Israel's spiritual and national health. Its spiritual health determined its national health.

The interpretive issue is whether or not that same link exists for other nations. Israel was God's chosen nation and a theocracy, a nation in which the sacred and secular were one. But that isn't true of other nations or ours. So, does that link in verse 14 exist for them and us as well? Based on God's message to and dealings with other nations in the prophetic books, I believe it does.

Verse 14, therefore, reveals a profound insight. Nations rising or declining is primarily a spiritual not a sociological phenomenon. The celebrated historian, Arnold Toynbee made an astute observation in that regard: **"All history, once you strip the rind off the kernel, is really spiritual."** He was right. It's spiritual factors and forces, far more than sociological ones, that determine the rise and decline of nations.

Those nations include America. Why is it sick? Why is it in the new dark ages? Why is it descending to dystopia. Verse 14 answers plainly.

It's because of its "**wicked ways.**" The cause of its sickness is spiritual failure. It is, as a society, thinking and acting contrary to the word and will of God. It is doing so in two basic ways, both of which I want to briefly explain.

The first way is separation. Our Constitution's first amendment prescribes, "**Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.**" Many of our nation's most powerful leaders and groups misinterpret that. They take it to mean the complete separation of church and state. They believe and vigorously promote that God and His word must be shut out of the public arena – that they must not be permitted to influence public affairs in any way.

A host of United State Supreme Court decisions during the last 50 years illustrate that point of view. One of those was a 1987 case, *Edwards v. Aguillard*. That case was about a Louisiana statute that mandated a balanced presentation of *creation-science* and *evolution-science* in the public schools. The Supreme Court struck it down as unconstitutional. It held that the idea that a supernatural being created human beings is religious. The statute, therefore, violated the establishment clause of the first amendment. That case is typical. It is now widely accepted that belief in God and His word is a purely personal matter. It can't impinge on public activities and issues of any kind.

Our nation is acting contrary to the word and will of God in a second way – secularization. Secularization refers to the process by which God and His word have lost their social significance. They have become irrelevant to the discourse and behavior of the masses. The masses function without any deference or even reference to them at all.

Last week, I preached about Colossians 3 and what it teaches about work. The truth is the Bible gives us the best information about business and work that we can get. Yet, how many of our colleges and universities make that information part of their business curriculum? Almost none of them do, including Christian colleges and universities. Why is that? It's because our institutions of higher learning consider

what God says in the Bible to be irrelevant to real life.

Let me ask you a question. What is the busiest shopping day of the week? It's Saturday. What is the second busiest? It's Sunday. Consider grocery shopping. In 1957, only 16% of grocery stores and supermarkets were open on Sunday. In 2010, almost all of them are. In 1957, keeping the Sabbath Day holy was America's cultural consensus. In 2010, it's something to which American's don't even give a second thought.

Those are just two of countless examples that demonstrate the secularization of America. We are becoming a nation in which the masses don't take God and His word into account in the way they think, feel, and act. On the contrary, they live in practice as if He and it don't exist.

That then is the cause of America's sickness, its wicked ways of separation and secularization.

### The Cure

But there's a cure for the sickness and verse 14 tells us what it is. A nation's people, in mass, must humble themselves, pray, seek God's face, and turn from their wicked ways. The word "**turn**" helps us define generally the first three actions – humble, pray, and seek. Those three actions refer to turning to God. So, a nation's people must do two things. Turn *from* a life that is *devoid* of God and His word *to* one that is *devoted* to God. Notice something here. The cure for our nation's sickness isn't political or social action. It's spiritual action.

Listen carefully to a dramatic statement: "**Human life isn't about humans. It's about God.**" That reveals the spiritual action that will cure our nation's sickness. It's Americans, in mass, making human life, their real life, about God. It's Americans, in mass, arranging all of their affairs around Him; always taking Him into account in the way they think, feel and act; functioning with complete and utter deference to Him.

Now, I'm not naïve. I know that there's no way naturally that the masses of Americans will do that. The only way they will do that is supernaturally. The Holy Spirit must fall upon the American church as He

did at Pentecost and empower it to revive the nation. But we, as individual Christians, have a part to play in that. It's to do three things.

First, pray. Specifically ask the Holy Spirit to fall upon the American church generally and our church specifically as He did at Pentecost. Pray for that not only individually but corporately as well. That is the express purpose of our 6:00 pm prayer time on Wednesday. We gather in oneness of mind and together ask the Holy Spirit for another Pentecost.

Second, witness. Learn how to tell others about the triune God and His kingdom. Then purpose to do that whenever natural or Holy Spirit created opportunities arise. Be ambassadors for God and His kingdom wherever and with whom ever we are. I have written materials that will assist you in doing that.

And third, make life about God. Relate whatever we're doing or experiencing to Him. Seriously consider what the effects of our actions or experiences are on Him and make that our primary concern. Seek to please and honor Him in all things. Sunday comes. My mother-in-law rejects me. My spouse dies. I get a promotion at work. I go to college. I take vacation. My car is stolen. I get married. I'm diagnosed with cancer. I must make those and all activities and experiences of my life primarily about God. I must view them and act in them in light of His presence and word.

You or I are only one person of course and one person doing those three things won't cure America's sickness. But the cure has to start with someone and that someone might as well be each of you and me.

## **Conclusion**

After his legislative agenda was defeated several years ago, a Christian congressman declared: "**The only way to have a genuine revival is to have legislative reform.**" That is false. The key to revival isn't legislative reform, it's spiritual reform. Americans must turn *from* their wicked ways and *to* God. He'll heal their land if they do.