

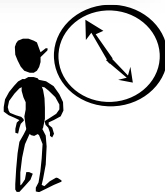
## THE BATTLE CREEK BULLETIN

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### Time of Assembly



#### **Sunday:**

Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.
(every other week)	

#### **Wednesday:**

Bible Study	6:30 p. m.
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## The Whole Duty of Man

By Matthew W. Bassford

The opening chapters of Ecclesiastes are surely among the gloomiest in the entire Bible. In them, Solomon examines life under the sun and concludes that all of the usual human pursuits are futile and vain. Wealth doesn't bring lasting satisfaction. The pursuit of pleasure proves to be pointless. The accumulation of material possessions becomes wearisome.

The same thing is true of goals that seem to be wiser. For example, it seems praiseworthy to lay up treasure that will provide for your heirs even after you have departed. However, Solomon observes that your descendants may well be idiots who will squander everything that you painstakingly stored up.

Even wisdom itself isn't a path to contentment. Sure, you can go through life understanding what it's all about and making wise decisions, but no matter how wise you are, you're still going to die. They will bury you in a cemetery alongside a whole bunch of fools, and your situation will be no better than theirs.

In short, Solomon tells us that life under the sun is meaningless, continually overshadowed by the inevitability of death. No matter how clever we are, no matter how many different avenues we try, we will not be able to solve the problem. The harder we look, the more despairing we will become.

Though it was written thousands of years ago, Ecclesiastes identifies the core problem of modern American society. We have achieved unparalleled longevity, security, and abundance. However, these things have failed to satisfy the deepest needs of the human heart.

Despite affluence and ease, too many among us are so alienated that they become mass murderers, destroying others

along with themselves in a burst of nihilistic fury. Such things did not happen in the America of a hundred years ago, even though the country was much poorer and life was far more uncertain.

The same sense of alienation appears in the trans movement, in which miserable people reject the truth of their own bodies in a desperate search for fulfillment. Though gender dysphoria did not exist in ancient Israel, Solomon would have had no trouble diagnosing its causes or predicting its outcome. With a moment's thought, all of us could identify many other symptoms of the same disease.

Of course, Solomon's conclusion in Ecclesiastes is not the counsel of despair. Instead, in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, he urges his readers to fear God and keep His commandments. Solomon does this for two reasons. First, it is the whole duty of man. A life that is focused on God will find meaning in meaninglessness and hope in hopelessness.

Second, Solomon reminds us that God will bring every act to judgment. Thus, even though earthly life appears futile and vain, it really is anything but. The key question of our existence is not whether we can find rest for our souls under the sun. We can't. Instead, it is whether we will live under the sun in such a way that we can find rest for our souls forever in the presence of God.

Our lives are not meaningless. Rather, they are terrifyingly meaningful. Every day that we live, eternity hangs in the balance. Every day, we take one step closer either to stupendous success or ruinous failure. Every day, we choose whether we will be numbered with the enemies of God or with His friends.

We live in a society that is drifting, aimless, and purposeless. However, we must not allow it to obscure our purpose and our aim. Yes, life under the sun is pointless, but a life devoted to God is not. Let us lay hold of the hope that is set before us, and let us appeal to everyone around us to do the same.

## Our Mixed-Up, Topsy-Turvy Society

By Dennis Abernathy

Our society can be described as running toward chaos. I am 77 years old, and today's society is not the culture I grew up in. We are seeing more and more what the apostle Paul describes as "*perilous times*" (II Timothy 3:1-5). Today's society is described in Isaiah 5. People were greedy, drinking had become a way of life, and enslaved to sin, they confused moral distinctions, to the extent that they could not discern between true and false values. They "*called evil good, put darkness for light, and light for darkness, put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter*" (Isaiah 5:20). Today, drinking is equated with a good time, sexual immorality is considered the gratification of a natural and normal urge, and rebellion against authority is looked upon as normal and right. More and more people are self-deceived and trust in their own fallible wisdom, believ-

ing they are “*wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight*” (Isaiah 5:21). Justice is perverted, and more often than not, the wicked go free, while the innocent are punished (Isaiah 5:23). More and more people can be described as “*Doing that which is right in their own eyes*” (Judges 17:6; 21: 25). Lawlessness and chaos reign. We are seeing this, not only in government but also in private lives and religion.

Why are we heading in the direction we are heading? I believe at the core of immorality is unbelief in God and His Word, and the belief that man is wise enough to “*direct his own steps*” (Jeremiah 10: 23). Modern philosophy, driven by rejection of God and His Word, only has the gratification of self as the standard to guide men. What we are witnessing is described for us in Romans 1:21, and it is not a pretty picture. People are becoming “*futile (confused) in their thinking and their foolish hearts are darkened and professing to be wise, they are rather becoming fools.*” More and more we are becoming a society and culture where people’s desires, ambitions, and personal satisfaction is taking precedence, and a coming judgment of God is seemingly forgotten by a vast majority of people.

My plea is for people to wake up to righteousness, and come to their senses.

## Moral Convulsion in America

“Domestic Convulsion”

By Dave Miller

The Founders of the American Republic were well-informed, educated, intelligent men. When it came to establishing a republic, they did their homework. They familiarized themselves with history and grasped the principles and lessons to be learned from the past. They understood not only how to initiate a new nation, but also recognized what would be necessary to perpetuate and sustain it. What’s more, they articulated very firmly the circumstances that they predicted would lead to the dissolution of the Republic.

One such political prophet was Gouverneur Morris (1752-1816). Having graduated from King’s College (now Columbia University) in New York, Morris was admitted to the colonial bar in 1771 and became a member of the New York provincial congress from 1775-1777. He served as a Lieutenant Colonel in the New York State militia in 1776. He was a member of the Continental Congress in 1778-1779, and signed the *Articles of Confederation*. He was a delegate to the convention that framed the *Constitution of the United States*, speaking more than any other delegate, and serving as the head of the Committee on Style that was responsible for the final wording of the *Constitution*—which he signed in 1787. He then served as America’s Minister Plenipotentiary to France (1792-1794) and also served in the U.S. Senate from 1800-1803. He is buried in St. Anne’s Episcopal Churchyard in the Bronx in New York (“Morris...,” n.d.).

On September 4, 1816, just two months before his death, Gouverneur Morris delivered a speech to the New York Historical Society on the occasion of the 206th anniversary of the discovery of his home state of New York by English explorer Henry Hudson (Morris, 1816). In that oration, Morris made several insightful, eerily descriptive observations of current American culture. First, he insisted that the Bible is the key to making sense of history and learning from the mistakes of the past: “The reflection and experience of many years have led me to consider the holy writings, not only as most authentic and instructive in themselves, but as the clue to all other history. They tell us what man is, and they, alone, tell us why he is what he is” (pp. 7-8). Making brief allusion to the biblical characters Joseph, Moses, and David, Morris explained:

From the same pure Fountain of Wisdom [i.e., the Bible—DM] we learn that **vice destroys freedom**; that arbitrary power is founded on **public immorality**, and that misconduct in those who rule a republic, necessary consequence of general licentiousness, so **disgusts and degrades the nation**, that, dead to generous sentiment, they become willing slaves.... Then laws to protect the weak against the strong, the innocent against the wicked, become **instruments of oppression and torture** (pp. 8-9, emp. added).

One would have difficulty finding a more applicable description of what has happened to America in the last 50 years—from the widespread surge of crime and immorality, to the governmental encroachments on personal freedom, and the use of those legions of laws to favor the lawbreaker over the victim, as well as promote hedonism.

Second, Morris insisted that the “profound lesson of political wisdom” to be learned from 1 Samuel 8, acknowledged by such authors as Machiavelli and Montesquieu, is that “virtue is the principle of republics” (p. 10). Even the government that God Himself set up (i.e., for the Israelites) “became intolerable from the prevalence of vice and impiety” (p. 10). Here, again, is an uncanny anticipation of America’s present spiritual condition. Vice, impiety, immorality, and crime are rampant and continue to increase. What can be done?

Morris noted that man is governed by hope and fear. People are motivated by hope when their desires for pleasure, wealth, and power are achieved. They are motivated by fear when they are able to avoid poverty, pain, and death. They are likewise governed by “prompt generous reward” and “speedy severe punishment.” These “are the human means to invigorate duty, stimulate zeal, correct perversity, and restrain guilt” (p. 10). However, these tools are insufficient. After all, is not America the wealthiest nation in human history, having provided for a larger percentage of her citizenry a higher standard of living than any previous civilization? And is it not the case that Americans experience more pleasure, wealth, and power, and have surpassed all previous human progress in reducing poverty, masking pain, and postponing death? Yet, despite these incredible advancements, America is experiencing widespread social chaos and moral

decline—in the government, school, workplace, and home. As Morris foreshadowed: “criminals escape punishment, by the perpetration of new and more atrocious crimes” (p. 10).

So something more is needed. Morris pinpointed that “something”:

Something more, then, is required to encourage virtue, suppress vice, preserve public peace, and secure national independence. There must be something more to hope than pleasure, wealth, and power. Something more to fear than poverty and pain. Something after death more terrible than death. **There must be religion.** When that ligament is torn, society is disjointed and its members perish. The nation is exposed to **foreign violence and domestic convulsion.** Vicious rulers, chosen by vicious people, turn back the current of corruption to its source. Placed in a situation where they can exercise authority for their own emolument, they **betray their trust.** They **take bribes.** They **sell statutes and decrees.** They **sell honor and office.** They **sell their conscience.** They **sell their country.** By this vile traffic they become odious and contemptible.... But the most important of all lessons is **the denunciation of ruin to every State that rejects the precepts of religion** (pp. 10-11,13, emp. added).

The religion to which Founder Morris referred is the Christian religion—to the exclusion of all others.

According to Founders like Morris, the general doctrines and moral principles of the Christian religion must thoroughly permeate our civilization if our nation is to avoid “the denunciation of ruin.” Otherwise, America will be subjected to violence inflicted by foreign enemies (terrorists?). And the nation will find itself in the throes of “domestic convulsion.” Domestic convulsion? What better epithet to identify America’s current national condition?

The key to securing America’s future is simple and definitive: “May it be secured by a **pious obedience to that divine will**, which prescribes the moral orbit of empire with the same precision that his wisdom and power have displayed, in whirling millions of planets round millions of suns through the vastness of infinite space” (p. 24, emp. added). In the words of the inspired writers: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34). “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord” (Psalm 33:12).

## REFERENCES

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“Morris, Gouverneur, (1752-1816)” (no date), *Biographical Dictionary of the United States*, [On-line], URL: <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=M000976>.