



America!

by Mark Brunner

## *Cutting Corners!* (Jeremiah 14:14)

How often it seems I'm my own worst enemy. Usually it results from cutting corners. I laid some carpeting a number of years ago prior to installing molding around a closet door. When I later cut the molding, I cut it to fit the opening without regard for the height of the carpeting already in place. It really didn't seem to matter at the time since the molding could be easily forced down over the carpeting. The problem, however, was when I decided to remove the carpeting recently. I pulled on the carpet trapped under the molding and it began unraveling. If I hadn't cut corners in the first place, the carpeting would have fared much better in the end.

Many today believe that America is a nation in great trouble. Could it be that cutting corners has put us there?

Here's a story: Thomas Babington Macaulay ranks among the most eloquent of all authors on liberty. Macaulay's essays and History of England had an enormous sale during the nineteenth century. His work was even more popular in America than in England. It was translated into nine languages. In 1857 he wrote these words to an American friend: "Your Republic will be as fearfully plundered and laid waste by barbarians in the twentieth century as the Roman Empire was in the fifth, with this difference, that the Huns and Vandals who ravaged the Roman Empire came from without, and that your Huns and

Vandals will have been engendered within your own country by your own institutions.” (Macartney’s Illustrations, page 18)

Despite having the strongest military in the world and one of the staunchest economies, why are so many Americans today pessimistic about their country? A Gallup Poll taken in 2000 notes that over 78% of Americans polled, were negative about America’s ability to survive in the 21st Century. When asked what they feared was the greatest factor affecting that survival, the vast majority, over 65%, listed internal as opposed to external factors—to put it bluntly, a rot from within and not a force from without. Could it be that, as a country, we’ve been “cutting corners;” trying as we will to prosper without God? If so, it’s only a matter of time until the Piper must be “paid.” God bless America!

*“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)*

## *Patriotism Is Not Enough?* (John 14:3)

Recently, during heavy rains, our basement flooded. The carpeting was saturated and we moved quickly to remove it out- side in an effort to dry it out. We hung pieces of carpet wherever we could and then waited for the sun to do its work and dry things up. After a day or so we checked each one and found them completely dry. But, when we put our noses into the carpets we were greeted with an ugly odor. The carpets were musty. There was no way we were going to put those back in our basement. Finally we decided to mix up a bleach solution and saturate the carpets, disinfecting and deodorizing all at the same time. It worked; the odor disappeared. The sun alone was not enough. To do the job right we needed both sun and bleach.

When it comes to loving our country, is patriotism enough? Or, is something else needed as well?

Here’s a story: When allied soldiers were traced to her house in Brussels, Emma Frieberg was immediately arrested by German authorities and after a court-martial was sentenced to face a firing-squad. Although she had shown

kindness to the German wounded as well, that was forgotten. Her captors considered her a spy and treated her accordingly. Just prior to her execution she made this statement. “I am glad,” she said, “to die for my country. But as I stand here I realize as never before that patriotism is not enough.” Then she went on to give a clear, definite testimony to her personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and her assurance of salvation, not through laying down her life for others, but because He laid down His life for her. (H.A. Ironside, Illustrations of Bible Truth)

Patriotism alone is hollow unless it is firmly rooted in Christ Jesus. Certainly God wants us to love our country. But He also wants us to remember that patriotism is not enough. Patriotism alone can't remove the odor of sin from our lives. It's noble, but is isn't an analgesic for sin. We need to remember that while we have a country here, there is an even better country waiting for us in heaven. A Christian patriot is one who IS willing to lay down his life for his country because Christ has laid down His for us. To die for any other reason will never bleach away the foul odor of that death.

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## *Get Mad—Get In The Fight!* (Proverbs 11:11)

One thing my Dad taught me growing up was this: if it's something that you truly believe in, it's something worth fighting for. I remember as a teenager getting terribly upset about some political issue that really rankled me. I blustered and spouted off at the dinner table one evening while my Dad patiently scraped his peas into his potatoes with his knife and listened. His timing was usually pretty good and he let me go on just long enough. Then he picked up that same knife, pointed it in my direction and told me “Talk is cheap.” Well, that pointed knife prompted my first Letter To The Editor to our local newspaper; one of many over the years. Every time I write one of those letters I can still see my Dad's focused eyes and that challenging knife.

America is a great country. And, when you think of it, isn't it worth an angry letter on our part every now and then?

Here's a thought from William Bennett: "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 . . . from within, from weariness, boredom, cynicism, greed and in the end helplessness before its great problems.' Bennett continues: 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. 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. (William J. Bennett.)

Proverbs 11:11 states: "Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed." A nation benefits from the prayers and actions of good men. But, the deceit of the wicked will serve to destroy it. Does that bother you? If you get riled up by the behavior of those who don't care any more about the character and goodness of America, remember—talk is cheap and God is holding out the challenge to you and I. Get in the fight.

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## *Ceasing To Be Good?* (Romans 15:14)

When I was a little boy I wasn't always good. Perhaps we'd broken something through our foolishness or hurt someone in our carelessness. That's when the scolding would happen. "You need to be good. What's wrong with you any way?" "You need to be good." I heard that often in the course of my boyhood. The reason being I was often bad. Life was simple growing up. Each day was a careful balance of little boy's good and bad behavior. And, there was no

reluctance on the part of my Mom or Dad to say so. I don't think they once thought of the possibility of wounding our little egos by calling us "bad." They called them as they saw them—basing their judgment on their knowledge of right and wrong.

Unfortunately, times have changed as the America we live in today teeters on the brink of moral destruction.

It hasn't always been that way, though. The French writer Alexis de Tocqueville, after visiting America in 1831, said, "I sought for the greatness of the United States in her commodious harbors, her ample rivers, her fertile fields, and bound- less forests—and it was not there. I sought for it in her rich mines, her vast world commerce, her public school system, and in her institutions of higher learning—and it was not there. I looked for it in her democratic Congress and her match- less Constitution—and it was not there. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great!" (Alexis de Tocqueville.)

When was the last time that you saw the "flames of righteousness" leaping from the pulpit of your church? In too many American churches today the flame has dulled to a flicker. Where is the zeal to be a good people in a good nation? It was there in de Tocqueville's time 170 years ago. But, there was something different then. Americans believed that good behavior was essential in a good society and bad behavior must not be tolerated. All too often the message today is one of tolerance despite the behavior. How can a nation remain good when it espouses what is bad? Sadly, unless our pulpits raise the alarm, what once was a consuming fire may soon become only a smoldering wick.

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## *Harmony or Disharmony?* (Acts 16:37-39)

Summer; growing up, that meant two things to me: freedom from school and the freedom to play baseball whenever I wanted to. There were enough kids on my block to field two teams even though we might be short an outfielder or some- one from the opposing team had to catch. It was all about the team, though. The nature of the game was boys relying on one another to field and throw, bat and run. That took a group effort. You couldn't play the game alone. I can still remember the harmonic sound of cracking bat, yelling fielders and the stacatto of tennis shoes racing to first base. It was a symphony of orchestrated noise that only a dusty old vacant lot could offer on a summer day.

When it comes to being an American, is there an innate harmony to our citizenship or has teamwork gone by the board?

Here's a thought from Georgia Anne Geyer: I have come to the conclusion that it's impossible to have a moral community or nation without faith in God, because without it everything rapidly comes down to "me," and "me" alone is meaningless. Today Americans have stopped acting on what they knew was right – and the "me" has become the measure of everything. However, moral societies are the only ones that work. If anyone thinks there is not a direct and invaluable relationship between personal integrity in a society and that society's prosperity, that person has simply not studied history. And this should not surprise us. Great moral societies, built upon faith in God, honor, trust, and the law blossom because they are harmonious; because people have a common belief in something beyond themselves. (Georgia Anne Geyer)

As Christians, you and I always need to be ready to work with others for the common good. That means we need to put our own personal political beliefs aside and focus our abilities working within community, for community. That means working well with others even when their political beliefs aren't necessarily ours. When it comes to making this a better nation, the key to change isn't in what we personally believe. Rather, the key is what we do with others as directed by God's Word. Building a better America has everything to do with the harmony of "us" and not our own personal comfort; an effort none of us can do alone.

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