***Lights in the World - PH39-02

Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 2:14-15***

Please turn with me to Philippians 2:14-16 on the topic of lights in the world. The Christian life, as you know, is designed to win out over sin, and to operate on divine viewpoint thinking. Satan, who controls all the societies of the world, makes a convincing case for sin, and makes a very convincing case for human viewpoint attitudes. Satan creates a world of spiritual darkness by causing people to become morally disoriented. When people are morally disoriented, they lose their freedoms. They lose the privilege of exercising their personal wills and their personal decision-making mechanisms with which God has invested them. Therefore, we are told in this passage that Christians are placed in Satan's world to be lights: lights to guide humanity to divine viewpoint; and, lights to guide humanity to moral understanding, and thus to freedom.

**Morality**

Therefore, part of God's divine viewpoint is what constitutes right and wrong--the issue of morality. We referred last week to the matter of the new morality where right and wrong is determined by the situation of the moment. The rejection of moral principles, as we find them in the Word of God, has been widely popularized by the new morality. History is replete with examples of societies which rose to great power and great prosperity as nations while observing the principles of morality reflected in the Ten Commandments, for example, but collapsed when immorality became rampant in that particular society. The nation, or a people, that does not view absolute moral standards as being applicable at all times is a nation which is inviting the loss of its freedom and its personal destruction.

**The Roman Empire**

So the result is that we have to look at our societies and our nation and say, "How far do we publicly tolerate violation of God's moral code? How far do we tolerate immorality in public; in practice; in entertainment; in education; and, in literature?" That is an indication of how far we are from having lost our freedom. We need only to look at one of the most glorious empires that ever existed in ancient times, the Roman Empire. History fascinates us as we read about the Romans because we discover that the Romans were the United States of America of the ancient world. They were the power nation of the whole universe. They were in the same position that we found ourselves in as a nation following World War II. Without any particular effort on our part, we were the absolute, number one, predominating, overwhelming nation of the world.

Now, that's the kind of people the Romans were. They had huge cities. They had magnificent buildings with the splendid sparkling marble columns. They had paved streets. They had roads that connected the whole empire together, and some of them are still usable and operational today. They were very adept at developing water supplies, aqueducts, and plumbing. They had a victorious army. Law and order was a thing that you could count on. They had a general prosperity. Rome was supreme, and Rome was unconquerable.

The time came when there were some Roman leaders who were standing up and saying, "Hey, people, something has happened to us in the moral fiber of our nation. We are in danger of going down in destruction under the defeat of foreign powers." History tells us that these men were looked upon as kooks, and were laughed to scorn because you couldn't walk down the main thoroughfares of Rome itself and look upon the buildings that existed and all that constituted the Roman Empire, and take anything like that seriously--that our nation can go down into oblivion, and that we should cease to exist as an empire. Most people said, "You're crazy, man. It could never happen to a magnificent nation such as the Roman Empire constituted."

In time, moral decay became so widespread that they began fighting wars that they could not win, or would not win. They began excessive taxation of its citizens. Crime began to mount throughout the empire, and they were hard pressed to squelch it. Race riots broke out. There were internal conspiracies. Political assassinations were the order of the day. There were huge doles for welfare. There was creeping inflation. All of this was matched by a general yawning indifference on the part of the average Roman citizen.

**The Fall of the Roman Empire**

Edward Gibbon, one of several historians, has outlined for us five basic areas, which are the reasons historically that this magnificent Roman Empire went down. Each of these, you will see, is an area of moral breakdown. The reason Rome lost its freedom was because Rome lost its morality. We have this in Gibbon's book, The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire. Other historians have observed the same thing:

1. **The Breakdown of the Family Unit**

The first reason given (the first moral breakdown) is the breakdown of the family unit. This was the ultimate source of influence in the Roman society, and it was the source of the moral fiber which prepared and produced the fantastically capable Roman men who were able to lead and to dominate the world. The home (the family) was the key to Roman society in a fantastically marvelous way. The whole structure of Roman society began on the basic unit of the family, and then it went up from there. That was widespread; that was widely known; and, it was widely recognized as the acceptable pattern.

**Divorce**

Divorce in time became an acceptable option, and thus a widespread practice. In the early part of the Roman Empire's history, divorce was extremely rare. It was almost unknown because the whole concept of divorce was unthinkable. No one ever stood up to take marriage vows with the slightest thought that there was ever any way out. Divorce and remarriage of the Romans became so extensive that finally, near the end of the empire's history, marriage was simply viewed as legalized adultery. The high class citizens of Rome actually rejected marriage outright, and they detached sex from marriage. Among the upper class, which set the patterns that influenced people of lower classes, they simply did not use marriage at all. They simply followed the pattern of living together, and when they got tired of it, shifting to a new setup. The pattern of family life in this way was totally destroyed.

**Fathers and Husbands**

Along with this was the problem of the husband's authority. The father's authority, in the early Roman history, was fully recognized. It was the important feature of family life. He was the final court of decision in the family.

**Wives**

Roman wives, however, in time, were not content to live their lives besides their husbands and under his decisions as his helper. They began demanding a liberated frame of reference for themselves with careers of their own. Wives, therefore, increasingly carried on another life actually apart from their husbands, and in competition with him. They were the emancipated women of the Roman Empire. I mean that they led a life apart from their husbands in the full sense of the word.

They actually began evading the role of maternity. The Roman historians tell us that their women did not want to bear children because it would spoil their figures. The idea of bearing children was offensive to them from that point alone. This had a marked influence on the population level of the Roman Empire--a marked decrease in population. Women in Imperial Rome then were doing their own thing by the end of the second century, and the results were wretched marriages; divorce; and, unruly delinquent children. All that they had hoped to gain, they had not gained. This is because when you violate God's moral order, all you gain is slavery, and you lose your freedom to enjoy what could have been had you followed God's plan. These wives were cheapened in soul, and they were a misery to themselves and to those near them because they were violating crucial moral principles.

**Children**

The Roman children, as a result of this kind of family breakdown, became idlers and wasters of their fathers' possessions. The parents, the fathers particularly, failed to control and to discipline them. Permissiveness was the keynote of the day. They never punished the children. So the society of Rome was plagued near the end with hostile, rebellious, lawless, long-haired (and I mean long-haired) youth who scoffed at their parents and who scoffed at all authority. They were rebels, and they developed signs to reflect (like wearing long hair) that they were against the authority of their parents. If a child is against the authority of his parents, he has not learned subjection to the authority of the home; he's going to be against the authority of his teacher at school; against the authority of the policeman on the street; against the authority of the central government; and, all the way down the line.

A child in Rome had been trained at one time in the Roman Empire to be a great respecter of constituted authority. That's what made Rome strong Where Rome ruled, there's one thing you could count on: There were going to be fair laws; they were going to be objectively enforced; and, you were going to be protected. That's one thing you could count on where Rome was present. In time, you could no longer count on that. Authority had been undermined in the home, and thus it was undermined throughout the Roman Empire, society, and life.

The same conditions of moral disorientation have been repeated many times in the past. Actually, Israel itself suffered from that. In Isaiah 3, we have a declaration of these two things that we have indicated as moral breakdown of the Roman Empire. The women were no longer subject to the authority of their husbands, and the children ruled their parents. Listen to what Isaiah, writing in 760 B.C., said concerning Judah, who was about ready to go into slavery again--slavery to the Babylonian Empire. Isaiah 3:12 says, "As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O, my people, they who lead you cause to err and destroy the way of my paths. What is God going to do?

Verse 13: "The Lord stands up to plead, and stands to judge the people." That's what our God is doing today. He's standing up and He's pleading. There are voices here and there in the land that are saying the same thing that was being said to the Roman rulers and to the Roman people of ancient Rome in the final years of the empire's existence. They were pleading with the people to turn back to moral principles. In time, God disciplined and judged them. Today, we are hearing pleas for a return to morality. This nation is in a state of shock because of what it has discovered concerning the low level of morality in its public officials. People don't know where to turn. Apathy and indifference is creeping upon the mentality of the average American because he does not understand that the answer is going back to morality. The answer is going back to what is right is right, and what is wrong is wrong. If we do not heed the pleading, then God will judge as he did the Jews and as he did the Romans.

1. **Excessive Taxation**

There was a second problem, and that was the spiraling rise of taxes. That was an immorality which brought the destruction of the Roman Empire. Extravagant government spending required extravagant taxation. There were huge welfare programs which burdened the taxpayer. Multitudes in the Roman Empire were idle, living on the dole. The government entertainment strained the treasury. Coins were debased. They were mixed with cheap metals in order to devalue them. Government spending created monumental inflation. Maintaining world peace, the Pax Romana, became a tremendous, gigantic military burden as the empire had overextended itself, and its people were no longer of a moral character capable of maintaining that law and order. The Roman working class was getting such high wages that they were unable to compete with cheap foreign labor. So the emperors had to resort to millions of slaves in the production line in order to get cheap enough labor to try to compete with labor from other countries and what they were producing. The result was, however, that the government had to subsidize its own workers so that their salaries would remain at the level of living that they were used to.

1. **Obsession with Pleasure**

Thirdly, there was a mounting obsession with pleasure, entertainment, and the brutalization of sports. Rome's superiority led to a national craze for pleasure, and for a brutality in its sports. It was the great thing of a Sunday afternoon to go down to the Coliseum to see two gladiators on the field of battle, one of whom who actually slaughtered the other right before your eyes. That was viewed as a great relaxing Sunday afternoon family outing together. Men enjoyed dissipation. There was great sensuality in the entertainments that were presented. These dissipated citizens were then incapable of fighting the invading barbarians to preserve their freedom.

The Circus Maximus seated 400,000 people. They had so many citizens in Rome who were idle, living off of welfare, that they had nothing else to do but to rush at dawn (the historians tell) to the Circus Maximus (the huge stadium) in order to get the good seats; or, some of them would even line up the night before (if you could imagine somebody lining up the night before in order to be able to buy a ticket to get in). But they didn't have to buy a ticket. All they had to do was get in there and get themselves right down there on the 50-yard-line where they could see good. These entertainments would go on all day long, some of them for several days at a time. The government exhausted its ingenuity in coming up with bigger and better features of entertainment in the Circus Maximus. Along with this, of course, was gambling because there were many races which were run. So gambling heightened the gratification for pleasure. It didn't matter whether you were rich or whether you were some character on the dole who had one penny left. It was your opportunity to have a great time at the races.

In this way, the emperors managed to keep the minds of the people off the things that were happening to their nation. People were obsessed with the trivia of sports. They could tell you all the statistics about the latest gladiator's performance and the games coming up, but they were oblivious to the rats which were eating away at the foundations of their whole nation which was to go down into oblivion. The spectaculars that they viewed preoccupied their minds. The spectaculars, I can tell you, were gory with violence. They were grossly indecent. They were literally public displays of pornography financed by the government.

1. **The Expansion of the Production of Armaments**

Another moral breakdown was expanding production of armaments to fight the rising tide of external attacks. As the society decayed morally, its will to defend freedom diminished. As the will to resist weakened, the barbarians, pushing out on the outer fringes of the empire, were emboldened to push harder. The harder they pressed, the more of the cost of defense rose. Yet, the moral weakness of the Romans invited the daring of the barbarians. They simply, in time, could not be stopped, no matter how much was being spent on military armaments.

They came, in other words, to the place where they could no longer fight and win. This is the same thing that Winston Churchill had warned his own nation against, concerning the empire of Hitler that had been developed before World War II. He warned Britain that if she does not act, the time will come when she will find herself in a place where victory will become extremely difficult, fighting upon the enemy's ground and upon the enemy's time. That victory will not only be difficult, but perhaps even impossible. That's what happened to Rome. It was no longer that victory was difficult. It was that no matter how much military armaments they had produced, and how much money they were pouring in, victory was now impossible. They were no longer able to stem the tide of the barbarians simply because they did not have the moral fiber as a people to do that. You must understand that it takes a man of character to face an enemy on a field of battle, and to place his very life on the line in behalf of the cause of liberties and freedoms of the nation he represents. Men without moral character are never going to do that. So the Romans quit fighting, and the nation was overrun.

1. **The Decay of Religion**

A fifth moral breakdown was the decay of religion into confusion. The pantheistic Roman religion espoused certain moral principles. It was pagan, but it did stand for certain virtuous qualities which they viewed as being pleasing to the gods. These bound the nation together, and they actually promoted patriotism. When the Romans lost their faith in their religious beliefs and their ideals, they turned to astrology; to sorcery; and, to the mysticism of the East. But the overwhelming result was that there was no more a united guide to virtue. Morals, consequently, went out the window. Roman society became unstable, and past virtues were abandoned. Rome became one big barnyard of immorality in the strictest sense of the word.

This raises a very interesting question to us. We are moving, as you may have suspected, to the Ten Commandments, which is the ultimate expression of the moral principles by which a nation rises and falls. If you want to see how far your nation has gone and where it stands, just review the moral principles of the Ten Commandments, and then evaluate your nation on each one. You will have a perfect scale as to how far your society has gone to where its freedom is about to be ended. What I'm going to establish for you is that the whole purpose of the Ten Commandments was to preserve personal freedom and national freedom. The two are connected. When morality goes, freedom goes.

I'm going to read an article to you. It is an article written a few years ago by a newsman, the editor of the Tulsa Oklahoma Tribune, Mr. Jenkins Lloyd Jones. The reason I'm going to read it to you is because he has put it so aptly. He has reviewed the American scene so exactly. Though this was written a few years ago, it is even more pertinent and applicable in our day such that I couldn't put it better. I'm going to just share this with you. So will you listen?

He is addressing on this occasion the Inland Daily Press Association in Chicago, and he also gave the same address before the American Society of Newspaper Editors at New Orleans. So he's speaking to newspaper professionals. He says:

"This afternoon, I am about to inflict upon you a jeremiad. Long before the prophet Jeremiah uttered his lamentations about the evil behavior of the children of Israel, the world had seen many calamity howlers. We have cuneiform tablets describing the moral decay of Babylon in Chaldea. We have hieroglyphic inscriptions predicting that Osiris and Ra will smite the Egyptians for their wickedness. So when I rise today and make some comments about the moral climate of America, and about our responsibilities, therefore, as temporary custodians of America's press, I speak in a very old tradition.

"The calamity howler: It is customary to dismiss such fogeyism as I am about to display with a tolerant laugh. For while it was freely predicted all through the ages that the world was going to hell, it hasn't gone to hell yet. Who can deny that in practically all the crafts, and certainly all of the sciences, we are further advanced than we have ever been. Why not be cheerfully optimistic? I think I can tell you why. Human progress has never been steady. It has washed back and forth like waves upon a beach. Happily, there has also been an incoming tide, so the waves have washed higher and higher as each great civilization came on.

"But the pathway of history is littered with the bones of dead states and fallen empires. They were not, in most cases, promptly replaced by something better. Nearly 1,000 years elapsed between the fall of western Rome and the rise of the Renaissance. And in between, we had the Dark Ages in which nearly all of man's institutions were inferior to those which had gone before. I don't want my children's children to go through a couple of centuries of dialectic materialism before the sun comes up again.

"So the Jeremiah's haven't been so wrong after all. It is sad to watch the beginning of decay. It is sad to see an age of Pericles replaced by the drunken riots of Alcibiades. There was indeed just cause for gloom when into the policies of the Caesars went Nero and Caligula, and when the once noble Praetorian Guard became a gang of assassins willing to sell the throne to the top bidder.

"Alaric's Goths poured over the walls of Rome. But it was not that the walls were low. It was that Rome itself was low. The sensual life of Pompeii, the orgies on Lake Trasimene, the gradually weakened fiber of a once self-disciplined people that reduced them at last to seeking safety in mercenaries, and the payment of tribute--all these brought Rome down. She went down too early. She had much to teach the world.

"And so, ladies and gentlemen, I look upon our own country and much that I see disturbs me. But we are a great people. We have a noble tradition. We have much to teach the world, and if America should go down soon, it would be too early. One thing is certain: we shall be given no centuries for a leisurely and comfortable decay.

"We have an enemy now, remorseless, crude, brutal, and cocky. However much the leaders of the communist conspiracy may lie to their subjects about our motives, about our conditions of prosperity, about our policies, and about our aims, one thing they believe themselves implicitly, and that is that we are in an advanced state of moral decline. When Nikita Khrushchev visited Hollywood, he was shown only one movie set--that of a wild dancing and "Can-can." He said it represented decadence, and I am sure he really thought so. It is a dogma of current communist faith that America is Sodom and Gomorrah ripening for the kill.

"Do you know what scares me about the communists? It is not the political system which is primitive and savage. It is not their economic system which works so badly that progress in a few directions is purchased at the price of progress and all the rest. It is their puritanism. It is their dedication and self-sacrifice. It does no good to comfort ourselves with the reflection that these are products of endless brainwashing, of incessant propaganda, of deprivation by censorship, of jamming and counter-information and contrary arguments. The dedication is there. The confidence that they are morally superior is there.

"The naive questions of your intourist guide reveal only too quickly that she thinks she is talking to a self-indulgent fop from the court of some latter-day Louis XIV. In the school, the children rush up to show you not their yo-yos, but their scholarship medals. And when you offer them new Lincoln pennies as souvenirs, they rip off their little Young Pioneer buttons and hand them to you, proud that they are not taking gifts but are making a fair exchange.

"The Russian stage is as austere as the Victorian stage. Russian literature may be corny, but it is clean and it glorifies the Russian people and exudes optimism and promise. Russian art is strictly representational, but the paintings and the sculptures strive to depict beauty and heroism--Russian beauty, of course, and Russian heroism.

"And what of us?

"Well, ladies and gentlemen, let's take them one at a time.

"We are now at the end of the third decade of the national insanity known as progressive education. This was the education where everybody passes, where report cards were noncommittal, lest the failure be faced with the fact of his failure. We're all moved at a snail pace like a transatlantic convoy, so the slightest need not be left behind. All proceed toward adulthood in the lockstep of togetherness. Thus, the competition that breeds excellence was to be sacrificed for the benefit of something called life adjustment.

"With what results? We have watched juvenile delinquency climb steadily. We have produced tens of thousands of high school graduates who move their lips as they read and cannot write a coherent paragraph. While our Russian contemporaries, who were supposed to be dedicated to the mass man, have been busy constructing an elite, we have been engaged in the wholesale production of mediocrity. What a switch!

"When was the last time you, as editors and publishers, examined the curricula of your local schools? How did your schools rank on the standardized Iowa tests? When have you looked at your school's report card and the philosophy behind their grading system? Have you asked to examine senior English themes? Have you offered any recognition to your school's best scholars to compare to the recognition you accord your school's best football players?

"For the funny thing about progressive educators is that theory vanishes when the referee's whistle blows for the kickoff. In the classroom, they pretend to grade subjectively against the student's supposed capacity, lest he be humiliated by a natural inadequacy. But on a football field, they never put in a one legged halfback, under the theory that considering his disability, he's a great halfback. They put in the best halfback they've got, period. The ungifted sit on the bench or back in the stands, even though they, too, might thirst for glory. If our schools were as anxious to turn out brains as they are to turn out winning football teams, this strange contradiction wouldn't exist.

"Having neglected disciplines in education, it was quite logical that we should reject disciplines in art. The great painters and sculptors of the past studied anatomy so diligently that they often indulged in their own body snatching. Today, after many centuries, we stare at the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, or at the walls of the Reichsmusee, and marvel at their works.

"But this self-discipline is of little concern to the modern non-objective painter. All he needs is pigment and press agent. He can throw colors at a canvas, and the art world will discover him. He can stick bits of glass, old rags, and quids of used chewing tobacco on a board, and he is a social critic. He can drive a car back and forth in pools of paint, and Life magazine will write him up.

"Talent is for squares. What you need is vast effrontery. If you undertake to paint a cow, it must look something like a cow. That takes at least a sign painter's ability. But you can claim to paint a picture of your psyche, and no matter what the result, who's to say what your psyche looks like? So our museums are filled with daubs being stared at by confused citizens who haven't got the guts to admit they're confused.

"But the Age-of-Fakery in art is a mild cross that American civilization bears. Much more serious is our collapse of moral standards and the blunting of our capacity for righteous indignation.

"Our puritan ancestors were preoccupied with sin. They were too preoccupied with it. They were hag-ridden and guilt-ridden, and theirs was a repressed and neurotic society. But they had horsepower. They wrestled livings from rocky lands, built our earliest colleges, started our literature, caused our industrial revolution, and found time in between to fight the Indians, the French, and the British, to bawl for abolition, women's suffrage, and prison reform, and to experiment with graham crackers and bloomers. They were a tremendous people.

"And for all their exaggerated attention to sin, their philosophy rested on a great granite rock. Man was the master of his soul. You didn't have to be bad. You could and should be better. If you want to escape eternal fires, you'd better be.

"In recent years, all this has changed in America. We have decided that sin is largely imaginary. We have become enamored with behavioristic psychology. This holds that a man is a product of his heredity and his environment, and his behavior to a large degree is foreordained by both. He is either a product of a happy combination of genes and chromosomes, or an unhappy combination. He moves in an environment that will tend to make him good, or that will tend to make him evil. He is just a chip tossed helplessly by forces beyond his control, and therefore not responsible.

"Well the theory that misbehavior can be cured by pulling down tenements and erecting in their places elaborate public housing is not holding water. The crime rates continue to rise along with our outlays for social services. We speak of underprivileged, yet the young men who swagger up and down the streets, boldly flaunting their gang symbols on their black jackets, are far more blessed in creature comforts, opportunities for advancement, and freedom from drudgery than 90% of the children of the world. We have sown the dragon's teeth of pseudo-scientific sentimentality, and out of the ground has sprung the legion bearing the switchblade knives and bicycle chains.

"Clearly something is missing. Could it be what the rest of the world's children have been given--the doctrine of individual responsibility?

"Welfare is gradually becoming an honorable career in America. It is a pretty fair life, if you have neither conscience nor pride. The politician will weep over you. The state will give a mother a bonus for her illegitimate children, and if she neglects them sufficiently, she can save enough out of her ADC (Aid to Dependent Children) payment to keep herself and her boyfriend in wine and gin. Nothing is your fault. When the city fathers who harass a community like Newbrourgh suggest that able-bodied welfare clients might sweep the streets, the liberal editorialists arise as one man and denounce them for their medieval cruelty.

"I don't know how long America can stand this erosion of principle, but I believe that some of my starry-eyed friends are kidding themselves when they pretend that every planeload of Puerto Ricans that puts down at Idlewild is equivalent in potential to every shipload of pilgrims that put into old Plymouth. Nations are built by people capable of great energy and self-discipline. I never heard of one put together by cha-cha-cha.

"The welfare state that taxes away the rewards for responsible behavior so that it can remove the age-old penalties for irresponsible behavior is building on a foundation of jelly. It is time we stopped this elaborate pretense that there is no difference between the genuinely unfortunate and the mobs of reliefers who start throwing bottles every time the cops try to make a legitimate arrest.

"Finally, there is the status of our entertainment and our literature. Can anyone deny that movies are dirtier than ever? But they don't call it dirt. They call it realism. Why do we let them fool us? Why do we not look owlishly when they tell us that filth is merely a daring art form, and that licentiousness is really social comment? Isn't it time we recognize Hollywood's quest for the fast buck for what it is? Isn't it plain that the financially harassed movie industry is putting gobs of sex in the darkened drive-ins in an effort to lure curious teenagers away from their TV sets? Recently, the screen industry solemnly announced that henceforth perversion and homosexuality would no longer be barred from the screen, provided the subjects were handled with delicacy and taste. Good Lord!

"And we of the press are a party to the crime. Last year, the movie ads in our newspapers got so salacious and suggestive that the advertising manager and I decided to throw out the worst, and to set up some standards. We thought that due to our ukase, there might be some interruption in advertising some shows. But no. Within a couple of hours, the exhibitors were down with much milder ads. How was this miracle accomplished?

"Well, it seems that the exhibitors are supplied with several different ads for each movie. If the publishers are dumb enough to accept the most suggestive ones, these are what they get. But if publishers squawk, the cleaner ads are sent down. Isn't it time that we all squawked?

"I think it's time we quit giving page 1 play to the extramarital junkets of crooners. I think it is time we stopped treating as glamorous and exciting the brazen shakeups of screen tramps. I think it is time we ask our Broadway and Hollywood columnists if they can't find something decent and inspiring going on along their beats.

"And the stage? Well, rather they raided Minsky's, so Minsky's has spread all over town. Bawdiness has put on a dinner jacket, and seats in the orchestra that used to go for six-bits at the Old Howard and Nichols' Gayety are now scaled at $8.80. Oh yes. And we have lots of 'realism.' Incestuous Americans, perverted Americans, degenerate Americans, and murderous Americans.

"How many of these realistic Americans do you know? Two months ago, an American touring company sponsored by the State Department and paid for by your tax dollars presented one of Tennessee Williams' more depraved offerings to an audience in Rio de Janeiro. The audience muted in disgust and walked out. Where did it walk to? Right across the street where a Russian ballet company was putting on a beautiful performance of the glory of Russia. How dumb can we get?

"We are drowning our youngsters in violence, cynicism, and sadism piped into the living room and even the nursery. The grandchildren of the kids who used to weep because the little match girl froze to death now feel cheated if she isn't slugged, raped, and thrown into a Bessemer converter.

"And there's our literature. The old eye poppers of the past, which tourists used to smuggle back from Paris under their dirty shirts are now tame stuff compared to some of our modern slush. Ulysses reads like the minutes of the Epworth League. Lady Chatterley's Lover has been draped with the mantle of art and is now on sale in the corner drugstore to your high-school-aged son or daughter for 50 cents. Henry Miller's Tropic of Cancer, which resembles a collection of inscriptions, taken from privvy walls, is about to join Lady Chatterley. The quick-buck boys have apparently convinced our bumfuzzled judges that there is no difference between a peep show and a moral lecture.

"And, of course, we have our latter-day historical novels in which the romance of man's upward movements from savagery is lost in a confused welter of bundlings and tumblings. The foreign reader of one of these epics on the development of the American West must marvel how our forefathers found time to quell the Comanches, plow up Kansas, and build a transcontinental railroad while spending practically all their time in the hay.

"Don Maxwell of the Chicago Tribune has recently asked his book Department to quit advertising scatological literature by including it in a list of bestsellers. The critics and the book publishers have denounced him for tampering with the facts. I would like to raise a somewhat larger question. Who is tampering with the soul of America?

"For nations do have souls. They have collective personalities. People who think well of themselves collectively exhibit elan and enthusiasm and morale. When nations cease believing in themselves, when they regard their institutions with cynicism and their traditions with flippancy, they will not long remain great nations. When they seek learning without effort and wages without work, they are beginning to stagger. Where they become hedonistic and pleasure-oriented, when their Boy Scouts, on their 14-mile hike start to hitch, there's trouble ahead. Where payola becomes a way of life, expense account cheating common, and union goonery a fiercely defended right, that nation is in danger. And where police departments attempt to control burglary by the novel method of making it a department monopoly, then the chasm yawns.

"Ladies and gentlemen. Do not let me overdraw the picture. This is still a great, powerful, vibrant, able, optimistic nation. Americans, our readers, do believe in themselves and in their country. But there is rot and there is blight and there is crowding out and filling to be done if we as the leader of free men, are to survive the hammer blows which quite plainly are in store for us all.

"We have reached the stomach-turning point. We have reached the point where we should reexamine the debilitating philosophy of permissiveness. Let this not be confused with the philosophy of liberty. The school system that permits our children to develop a quarter of their natural talents is not a champion of our liberties. The healthy man who chooses to loaf on unemployment compensation is not a defender of human freedom. The playwright who would degrade us, and the author who would profit from pandering to the worst that's in us, are no friends of ours.

"It is time we hit the sawdust trail. It is time we revived the idea that there is such a thing as sin--just plain old willful sin. It is time we brought self-discipline back into style. Who has a greater responsibility at this hour than we, the gentlemen of the press?

"So I suggest:

"Let's look to our educational institutions at the local level, and if Johnny can't read by the time he's ready to get married, let's find out why.

"Let's look at the distribution of public largesse and if, far from alleviating human misery, it is producing the sloth and irresponsibility that intensifies irresponsibility, let's get it fixed.

"Let's quit being bulldozed and bedazzled by the self-appointed long hairs. Let's have the guts to say that a book is dirt if that's what we think it is, or that a painting may well be a daub if you can't figure out which way to hang it. And if some beatnik welds together a collection of rusty cog wheels and old corset stays and claims it's a greater sculpture than Michelangelo's David, let's have courage to say that it looks like junk and probably is. Let's blow the whistle on plays that would bring blushes to an American Legion stag party. Let's not be awed by movie characters with barnyard morals even if some of them have been photographed climbing aboard the presidential yacht. Let us pay more attention in our news columns to the decent people everywhere who are trying to do something for the good of others.

"In short, gentlemen, let's cover up the cesspool and start planting some flowers.

"Well, that's the jeremiad. I never thought I'd deliver one of these. I never dreamed I'd go around sounding like an advance man for the Watch-Word society. I used to consider myself quite a liberal young man. I still think that on some people bikinis look fine.

"But I am fed up to here with the educationists and pseudo social scientists who have underrated our potential as a people. I'm fed up to here with the medicine men who try to pass off pretense for art and prurience for literature. I am tired of seeing America debased and low-rated in the eyes of foreigners. And I am genuinely disturbed that to idealistic youth in many countries, the fraud of communism appears synonymous with morality, while we, the chief repository of real freedom, are regarded as being in the last stages of decay.

"We can learn a lesson from history. Twice before our British cousins appeared headed into a collapse of principle, and twice they drew themselves back. The British court reached an advanced stage of corruption under the Stuarts, but the people resolved. And in the wild days of George IV and William IV, it looked as though Britain were rotting out again. But the people banded through the reform laws, and under Victoria went on to the peak of their power.

"In this hour of fear, confusion, and self-doubt, let this be the story of America. Unless I misread the signs, a great number of our people are ready. Let there be a fresh breeze, a breeze of new honesty, new idealism, and new integrity. And there, gentlemen, is where you come in. You have typewriters, the presses, and a huge audience."

To that I can only add a hearty "Amen," for it represents that which is indeed true of our nation, and it reflects that which the Word of God says should not be true of it. We will go into details concerning this moral ground that should be true of us so that I think you will have increasingly a better perspective on how freedom and morality are tied together and thus why this is the greatest hour of danger our nation has ever faced. When the nation faces it, you as individual believers, face it along with it.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

[**Back to the Advanced Bible Doctrine (Philippians) index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/philippiansdanish.htm)

[**Back to the Bible Questions index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/allarticles.htm)