

A Bed Too Short (Part 1)

Righteousness

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Mark Helprin (an Israeli soldier) wrote some words which knocked the socks off me when I first read them a few months ago. It was shocking that words reflecting such right thinking would appear in the popular press.

Now what he is doing in this particular essay is addressing the American military's overdependence on technology, for instance their use of "smart" bombs and their dependence on this kind of thing, rather than upon strategy. That certainly is not my topic today. Please do not misunderstand me. Helprin's comments do have a far broader application, a magnificent cadence, brethren! He writes:

At certain points on the course of an airplane flying in rolling parabolas, everything seems to lose its gravity. What the old regime left behind and the passengers afloat, the careless among them may think that weightlessness will persist forever, that in a world that has advanced beyond consequences what lies ahead will not conform to the laws of history but to the shape of their dreams. If someone says the Navy need not control the seas, or that the primary threat to American national security is environmental degradation, why not? It doesn't matter that such wishful declarations are forcefully contradicted by recent history. The people who make them don't know recent history. And, for them, history is no longer something from which to draw lessons but rather an object upon which to impress instructions.

That is a remarkably insightful understanding of American leadership, and I think, the American people today. You see, these are people who are so connected with the present that they assert that their affluent lifestyle is not going to end—"that their weightlessness will persist forever."

They are people so impressed with their knowledge that they claim that their enlightened policies will change the mold of six millennia of history. These are people so arrogant that they deny they can learn from history, and people so impressed with themselves that they think that their sophisticated actions and policies will not reap the consequences normally determined by the laws of cause and effect.

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Brethren, these people are amoral and they are ascientific. In the context of John's comments at this Feast, we will see that they refuse to fear the results of godlessness in two ways. One, we will see that they deny the existence of a God and, secondly, they say that they have "advanced beyond consequences."

The lifestyle of your neighbor out there in the world, Joe Israelite, testifies loud and clear that he feels that he has advanced beyond consequences. Now please be aware he is not going to admit that at all, but as we will see his actions speak louder than his words.

We in God's church are so much in the cosmos (hopefully we are *not* of it), but we are in it and we can so easily and imperceptibly come to live as if we, too, have advanced beyond consequences, just like these people feel around us. We will not admit it at all, of course not. Because if we were to be questioned, every one of us in this room would unrelentingly say, we would assert that we understand and that we believe that:

What you sow you shall also reap. The wages of sin is death. The soul that sins, it shall die.

These are all statements of cause and effect. The effect of sin is death. We know Satan's first lie to our parents, "You will not surely die." When they disobeyed we know that they reaped the consequences. All of us can be sure, brethren, that our sins will find us out.

Now what I have done in the last few seconds is I have quoted a number of scriptures. I have not given you the references because I have not needed to give you their references. You know them. You know where they are. You could turn to them in a minute. This is the church of God type of thing, 101. This is basic. We all understand that. We all believe it, brethren. After all, was it not Mr. Armstrong who taught us about the law? If you break them, they will break you, he said. He was speaking of God's natural laws as well as His moral laws.

But you see, brethren, there can be a vast, vast disconnect between what we say and what we do. Thank you Mark [Helprin] very much. We are not what we say we are; we are what we *do*. That is what he said.

Today I want to address the question: Does our walk in this Babylonish society, does the way that we conduct our lives in national Israel, the Israel around us, betray an underlying belief on our part that we too have advanced beyond consequences?

Turn to Isaiah 56. We will be spending awhile in Isaiah 56 today. Here in just four short

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verses God addresses the nature of Israel's leaders, a passage that is for us today. God begins by calling the beasts of the field (symbolically these are Israel's enemies, the gentile nations that we find in the book of Daniel) to a feast.

Isaiah 56:9-10 All you beasts of the field, come to devour, yes, all you beasts in the forest. His [that is Israel's] watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.

Nationally of course, in a national context, these watchmen are Israel's false prophets. They are political pundits. I guess we could even say worldly religionists. Of course in the church they can represent the ministry, false ministers, misled ministers. Now Isaiah compares these to blind, dumb, and lazy dogs, worthless and useless dogs. They cannot see trouble coming. If they did perceive it coming, they cannot bark because they are dumb, and more than this they do not even try to find out trouble because they rather love to sleep. They rather love a life of ease.

An effective watchman cannot be blind. He cannot be dumb. He cannot be lazy. He cannot be any of those. He has to be alert and he has to be able, once he sees the trouble, to announce it. The reference to "sleeping," by the way, I think is reminiscent, is it not, of the years that we spent in the church slumbering and sleeping to various extents.

These dogs are more than dumb and blind and lazy. They are also greedy and they are also without understanding.

Isaiah 56:11 Yes, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.

That term "from his quarter" means "from his own environment," "from his own line of work," and whether these people are lawyers, doctors, scientists, ministers, businessmen, or the guy next door, it does not matter. They all direct their efforts to themselves.

Continuing in verse 12, and this is the keynote of my comments today:

Isaiah 56:12 Come you, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves

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with strong drink; and tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.

Weightlessness will persist forever. What is the connection between a people who fill themselves with wine, strong drink, and then they prophesy, "Tomorrow shall be as this day"? What is the connection between that drinking and that prophesying? Let us spend just a few minutes looking at that issue.

A few weeks back Darryl mentioned that there was a connection between intoxication and false doctrine, or in general between wine and doctrine. Let us take a look at what the Scriptures say about the effects of alcohol and we will begin in a passage that we have come to know very well, Leviticus 10. John Ritenbaugh has pointed it out to us. This is the Nadab and Abihu passage, and immediately after the record of this particular incident was this command. God is now speaking to the high priest, Aaron.

Leviticus 10:9 Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of the meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations.

This command, therefore, has effect for us today, brethren. Why does God state this? What are His reasons? Verse 10 gives a strong indication.

Leviticus 10:10 That you may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean.

This is what Herbert W. Armstrong (you remember very well) taught us—that there was a spirit in man and that it works with his physical brain. It was not a separate entity or a separate personality, but rather an intangible essence which works with his human brain. The two of them worked together to produce the mind in man. You need the spirit in man. You need the physical brain.

Alcohol in excess has a physically detrimental effect on the brain and that, in turn, impedes the functioning of the spirit in man. Now that is well documented. We all know the effects of alcohol not only on the eyes when we drive, but on the decision-making processes when we, for instance, drive a car. We know that very well. We have been told that and taught that even in schools.

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God understands this reality and He outlaws drinking when in His service because alcohol hinders our ability to distinguish differences between right and wrong, or between holy and unholy. We will see in just a minute that it does hinder our ability to distinguish right and wrong as well.

Alcohol's effect goes beyond the mere physical. It goes into the matter of making moral judgments, making moral decisions. If it is dangerous to drink and drive, how much more dangerous is it to make moral judgments when we are under the influence of alcohol?

Make no mistake about it, brethren. Having God's Spirit does not in and of itself block this detrimental, physiological effect of alcohol on the brain. God's Spirit works with the spirit in man and if the spirit in man is messed up and cannot really function properly because of intoxication, then the quality of moral and ethical decisions, even in a converted person who has God's Spirit, is going to be a little bit suspect.

There are several verses on this. I am not going to have time to go through them all. We will drop down a few books to Proverbs. Here God stresses the moral effects of intoxication.

Proverbs 31:4-5 It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink; lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the justice of all the afflicted.

Verse 5 does not say, "lest they drink, and somehow become susceptible to" forgetting the law or such verbiage. The connection between drinking and forgetting is much stronger. It is almost a cause and effect relationship as if to say that when they drink, leaders will inevitably come to the point where they forget God's law and pervert judgment. It is a given. It will happen down the line.

I will not ask you to turn to Hosea 4:11, but it makes much the same point. I am going to read it from the *New American Standard Version*.

Hosea 4:11 Harlotry, wine, and new wine take away the understanding.

The rest of that chapter goes ahead and describes the idolatry into which Israel at the time had fallen. It was the result of not being able to distinguish between right and wrong, between idolatry and God's way of life.

That is simply a background so let us back up to Isaiah 56. There remember the inebriated prophets, and those priests drew a faulty conclusion. In their drunkenness they said that:

Isaiah 56:12 Tomorrow will be as today, and much more abundant.

That was their faulty conclusion. Brethren, do you understand that is the bottom-line message of almost all of America's civil leaders and church leaders today? These people cannot determine what is right and wrong. They are intoxicated. They are drugged. They are caught in false doctrine, drugged by it.

They say that everything is fine and tomorrow is going to be like today, only better. History is progress. Through technology and knowledge, everything is going to get better. There is no need for a Millennium whatsoever because the good times are already here and the good times are going to get better. Implicit in all this is the idea that we do not need to change, and we do not need to repent. If we progress economically and technologically, everything else will just follow along.

Jim Slusher mentioned this concerning the Generation X'ers. Morals are ridiculous. Morals are unimportant. Righteousness is only a religious buzz word, something you hear on a religious talk show. We see this at the very top office of the land, brethren.

The Hebrew word rendered "much more abundant" has a force of super abundance, just extraordinary abundance. A present day example of this kind of thinking about the abundance is an economist who described the Clinton economy as "a happy-go-lucky Clinton economy in which continued growth is taken as a given."

There is some sanity out there. Not everyone would agree that our affluence is endless. Jeffrey Madrick, a Harvard economist, makes an interesting assessment of our economic condition in a book entitled, *The End of Affluence: The Causes and Consequences of America's Economic Dilemma*. He published that book in 1993. Madrick writes concerning what he suggests is a permanent change or decline in our economy beginning in about 1973, which interestingly enough it is about the time that many of us more or less date the beginning of the Laodicean church. Let me quote the first paragraph very briefly of Madrick's book.

Like a clock that loses a second an hour, the American economy has lost ground so gradually over the past twenty years (1973-1993) that we don't realize how far behind we have fallen. . . .The main reason for this decline

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[is] a sharp slowdown in the economic growth from our historical average of about 3.4% per year, or even higher since the Civil War, to a little more than 2% since 1973.

It does not sound like a big percentage drop. He points out that it has cost the American economy in those twenty years twelve trillion dollars. Madrick wrote about five years ago, and he wrote before the economic resurgence we had in 1996 and 1997 when the economy performed so very well. What I need to do is bring this down into 1998 framework to see if we can put his thoughts into our framework.

I found an article dated September 4, 1998, just about a month ago, buried in the back somewhere of the business section of the Los Angeles Times. It reported the second quarter productivity gain, 1998, for this country: 0.1%—far from the national average of 3.4% over many, many years of American history. In the first quarter of this year the productivity rate of this country was 3.5%. In the second quarter it was 0.1%. It fell 3.4 percentage points, a dramatic fall from one quarter to the very next.

Now this is not the only measure of productivity. I understand that economic trends tend to go in stylized sine curves, so there may be an increase, but the general idea, brethren, is that we are not going to live more abundantly every day. We are on the decline. Our present prosperity, just like our present peace, is not going to last forever. Tomorrow is not going to be like today, only more abundant. The national flower, as we will talk about later on, is already fading. It is going to fall.

So what is it that makes scientists, doctors, lawyers, politicians, ministers, the man on the street, and most dangerously, brethren, you and me, act like (not necessarily say) today's relative affluence is endless and indeed is growing? Just before I left for here I noticed an article dated September 19th in the Los Angeles Times. 67% of the California voters believe the American economy is robust. They think they have no problems economically.

I read an article that said many, many people who are entering retirement age are spending a lot of money to buy a boat or go on vacation. They do not even want to save money for retirement because they think everything is so good, so great. Why do people believe that weightlessness will persist forever, that things are not going to change?

There are a number of external forces—I call them "drivers"—and these things deceive people, especially those people who do not know God's truth and who do not live God's truth. These drivers lead careless people to believe that tomorrow will be brighter than

today. Now I am only going to talk about four such forces, and then only discuss one of them in any detail. You may be able to think of some more.

1. Health

We appear to be healthier, more robust today than ever before. Remember, this is what carnal people look at. They look at physical appearances. We live longer and we can cite cold statistics to prove that, brethren. We witness fourteen year olds, some right in this room, who seem to sprout up higher than their parents; twenty year olds who are stronger, and this in spite of the fact that they fill themselves with junk food. They almost have advanced beyond consequences. They eat all this stuff and continue to thrive. Well, I am not going to debunk this. This is one of the drivers that people look at and see this and they think times are great and they are getting better.

2. Entertainment

It is a force that makes us think that things are better than they really are. It is glitzy, it mesmerizes one, we forget reality. What people do is they tend to believe what they see on the silver screen. The rich sip incessantly and they get richer. Well, why cannot everybody do that? The adulterer on the Edge of Night (and by the way, Mr. Herbert Armstrong referred to the Edge of Night as "ready-made daydreams") faces no difficulties which are directly attributable (in the script) to his illicit affairs.

We come too easily to the point where we can just implant these various images in our mind. These are dreams and we put them into our mind. We believe the lie and after we have watched them awhile, we come to live the lie. Entertainment is like a sedative, an opiate, making people forget reality, misleading them to think what lies ahead will conform not to the laws of history, but to the shape of our dreams, as Mark Helprin said.

3. Credit

What a curse! It makes people think that they are more prosperous than they really are. Like the Laodiceans of Asia Minor, people think they are rich when in fact they are poor. Reliable stats indicate that Americans are in fact growing poorer in real terms, in terms of their spendable money (disposable incomes) that they have.

I do not know whether you realize it, but the current generation of young adults is the very first generation in American history, as far as I understand it, which has little hope of enjoying a higher standard of living than the generation before it. We have always been on the upswing before. Not this generation, brethren.

But you see we have plastic in our pockets. We have credit. We have a big line of credit and we are not afraid to use it. Why should we? Because, after all, our leaders tell us that we can pay it. We have advanced beyond consequences. What lies ahead will not conform to the laws of history. What lies ahead will not conform to the natural laws of economics in our history of booms and busts, but simply to the shape of our dreams, those same dreams, those images that we see on the big screen. So why worry about repayment?

In this world of illusion we appear to live well. Our poverty is not apparent to us and the spreading and the deferment of payment makes us think that our standard of living is higher than it is. See, the effects of our lifestyle have been delayed by credit—that is what credit by definition does. It is man's instrument to delay the curses of consumerism, materialism, and covetousness. That is exactly what credit is.

So people not taught by God, not understanding God, not living His way, not fearing the consequences, do not really perceive the down-the-line results of their lifestyle. They forget the results. I was going to talk to some extent here about Ecclesiastes 8, but John has already done that on this particular topic.

Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

The sentence, the ultimate result, of our lifestyle is deferred by creative financing. It is postponed by credit buying, by refinancing, and by debt restructuring. All of these have simply been devised as ways to delay consequences. You see if the truth be told we have not advanced at all beyond consequences. We have just *postponed* consequences. But until it is time to pay the piper, and that time will come, Americans will continue to believe that tomorrow will be like yesterday, only richer.

4. Technology

Technology pulls us to think that everything is okay; it is getting better, when it really is not. Please do not misunderstand me. Technology is a wonderful thing. It does all kinds of nice things for us. This sound amplification system saves a lot of speakers' voices up here. It does some wonderful things for us. With all the sickness that is going on I am sure that whoever owns the field around here is very happy that we have running water in this hotel.

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The technologists' spin is: We can fix anything through the application of technology. We do not need morals. We do not need to be concerned with right and wrong. Technology can solve all of our problems in and of itself. This is the "living better through chemistry" philosophy. I have a few examples of where this has led people to think. I will just give you a few of these from the literature.

Ralph Nader questions why we should spend any time or any money at all teaching our young people to be responsible on the road. He says, "Why should we try to teach them to drive with concern for the other guy, or to avoid driving when drunk." You see he believes that building a safer car is a more effective way to save lives on the highway than actually driving safely. He made that comment, unbelievable as it is. His is a technological solution to what we recognize as a moral and ethical problem, driving with the other guy in mind, driving with love in mind. He wants to solve the problem by building a safer car.

What about teenage sex? This is the second example about what technologists believe. Do not teach adolescents with their active and imaginative minds about moral responsibility. Certainly do not teach them God's law. Do not teach them about marriage, about the God-plane relationship, because we can solve it through technology. And so wholesale in our schools, the elders pass out false knowledge accompanied by appropriate instrumentalities, do they not? The effect, of course, is to teach our young people that they have advanced beyond consequences, to do what they want and no ill will come of it.

Brethren, I am just going to digress a moment in my notes here. Are we thankful to God for the work He has done among us here? Many of our young people have more right knowledge about this whole area of life than do the fathers of national Israel, and that in applying that knowledge, many of our young people show more rectitude than the leaders of national Israel. It is a real blessing.

What about inner city riots? A meteorologist discovered that there was a correlation between these riots and the weather. It seems that the riots generally take place in what a Bostonian would call the "skunk hour"—hot, humid weather. So a man called Huntington, a scientist, came up with the answer: Provide "air conditioners and free electricity to operate them for every black family in Watts." No comment.

There are other examples. I will skip down to the classic one. How do we resolve the long-standing Arab/Jew conflict? How could we miss such an easy solution? The technologists tell us the answer is easy. The whole problem is a lack of water in the desert. So we locate nuclear-powered desalting plants in the Mediterranean and Red

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Seas and in the areas around there. We pump the desalted water into the desert area. Then we just sit back and watch them bloom, and at the same time we watch the Jews and we watch the Arabs embrace each other in a new spirit of cooperation and peace. They say it absolutely seriously. They are enamored with technology.

But, like credit cards, technology causes problems, more problems than it actually solves, and most dangerously, technology hides those problems. It masks those problems from us for a very long time. You see it is the Ecclesiastes 8:11 principle all over again. Deferred consequences make those who do not trust God's message and those who do not obey Him think that evil actions will not spawn an ultimate curse.

Let the cod answer this unbelief. Here is a fish story I found. It is not so much, however, a fish story as an alarming story of a technology which has led us to think in terms of more and more and more abundance over the years, when in fact what we faced all that time, and what we continue to face, is desperately shrinking resources. Let the cod speak:

For about three hundred years, fishermen working just off the New England and Newfoundland coasts harvested about two hundred thousand tons of cod every year. This was with hook and line. After about 1870 they started using what's called a cod trap. It is basically a net. Then with rapid "advances" in technology involving sonar, and global positioning systems, distant-water cod fleets appeared going further and further out. These fleets discovered hitherto unknown cod fisheries. More than this, the technology finally allowed them to discover what has long been a mystery—the cod's spawning ground.

It was about this time that scientists came along and determined that the best meat of the cod was just before the cod's spawning time. You've figured out all of this, have you not? Against the common sense that a child would have, fishermen used newly developed dragging technology to drag the spawning grounds. They harvested an incredible eight hundred thousand tons per year, four times what had been the old yield.

That went on for some years. It went on for quite a few years. Let the good times roll. There is no end to the abundance, they thought. To cod fishermen, it must have appeared that the Millennium had come—until 1992. Then there were no cod. In commercial numbers, brethren, there were no more cod.

If you have had cod at this Feast, it has probably been farmed. Most of our cod is farmed now which is very expensive to do in terms of the food chain. You see, what had happened is that each year there was in fact less and less fish, but electronic sounding

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and dragging technology permitted fishermen to go further and further and to go deeper and deeper for this fish. Like Captain Kirk, brethren, to go places where no man had gone before.

We are not talking about some cheap science fiction here. We are not talking about when Mr. Spock dies of some radiation burns, then by some amazing grace regenerates on Genesis. You see that is not the fiction, that is not the story that the cod has to tell. Not at all. What was really happening was the commercial fishermen were literally scraping the bottom of the barrel. They were dragging the bottom. They were taking the last of the cod. What we see happening, as one author wrote, is "the end of abundance, the end of growth."

The coming scarcity in cod was hidden by a blooming technology for so many years and finally it caught up with us. Finally it happened and the change came quickly and dramatically. Technology does not resolve problems in the long run. Technology does a very good job, however, of masking problems. There are literally hundreds of other examples. Some more wait to be manifest, and manifest they will be!

Experts, by the way, who study these things, think that the cod may not return in commercial numbers for generations, so great was the damage that was done to the dragged spawning grounds. What really has happened is that there are less valuable fish which are now eating the food that the cod once ate, so whatever cod that is there is having a more difficult time becoming ascendant.

It may probably be, you see, for God and for the cleansing waters that flow out from His temple to bring the cod back from virtual extinction. If there is any amazing grace for the cod it will be because of God's work, and ours, in the Millennium.

We will conclude this afternoon in Isaiah 30. This is a prophecy that addresses the rebels among national and spiritual Israel today, those who refuse to hear, those who refuse to heed God's Word.

Isaiah 30:8-11 Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and note it in a scroll, that for time to come forever and ever: [This is a prophecy, brethren, which is for us.] That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of the Lord: Who say to the seers, Do not see; and to the prophets, do not prophesy to us right things, speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits. Get out of the way, turn aside from the path

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Why, brethren? It seems so irrational. Why would people ask their prophets to tell them to speak lies to them? Just continue here in verse 11. It tells you.

Isaiah 8:11 . . . cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.

That is what they want, brethren—God has ceased. "Proclaim to us the dream that God does not exist. That is what we choose to believe." It is what national Israel has come to believe. God is dead. It is the modern version.

The result is that people can live the way that they want to live without fear of the consequences of their lawlessness. By proclaiming God dead, they proclaim that they have "advanced beyond consequences." By signing His death warrant, they free human nature to live as it wants, to live with impunity, loosening at the same time their responsibility before God.

At least that is what they think, brethren. God willing, early next week we will take a look in some detail at Isaiah 28 and there we will see what it tells us about how dead God really is and about whether we have really advanced beyond consequences.