



Preparing Souls To Serve The Lord

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Third Generation Struggles

By

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Introduction

How well do you know the history of our people? Have you known of a congregation of the Lord's people that began with zeal and enthusiasm for His word, labored and sacrificed to have a meeting place that was respectable, growing to the point of being self-sustaining, with elders and deacons and a full time evangelist? Do we recognize that this does not happen over night, and that it takes a generation or perhaps two generations to realize the state of development and maturity here contemplated?

In some situations, toward the close of the second generation, brethren may be observed to be satisfied with what has been realized, and fail to appreciate the struggle and sacrifices necessary to realize the present state. This is especially true of those who may not have been a part of the struggles and sacrifices that make possible any institution. If the second generation is failing to respect what went on, the third generation builds upon this lack of understanding, and it is possible that what began with some faithful and devoted people has now deteriorated into a group that show a great deficiency in their commitment to their God.

Such is the story of the people of God chronicled for our

learning in the Book of Judges. Let us search our souls and know the danger of third generation struggles for faithfulness.

From Faithfulness To Forgetfulness

"And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel ... And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel" (Judg. 2:7-10).

Disobedience

"And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?" (Judg. 2:1-2).

Moral and Civil Chaos

The Oxford University Dictionary defines Chaos as "complete disorder and confusion." The explicit expression from the Bible is, "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that

which was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25, see also Chapter 17:6).

The Process Outlined

The first two chapters of Judges provide an introductory summary. In these chapters the nation is shown to disobey God by their partial conquest of the inhabitants. The nation is also shown to develop close fellowship with the inhabitants in the land (Judg. 2:2). Their covenants with the inhabitants then lead to intermarriage with the people and not converting their mates (3:6).

With the above departures in place, full apostasy follows. The explicit expression is, "And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth" (Judg. 2:13). "The way of the transgressor is hard" (Prov. 13:15), and the rebellious nation are shown the consequence of their disobedience. "And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies" (Judg. 2:14).

The three hundred years (Judg. 11:26) presents a recurring cycle of the departure, compromise, apostasy, cry for help, and a return to disobedience. "And it came to

pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way" (Judg. 2:19).

May History Teaches Us?

The Apostle Paul would have us to learn lessons from these passages (Rom. 15:4). If you were asked to provide the lessons for all to remember from the Book of Judges, what would they be? If you were asked to explain the success of Joshua and his generation, and to show the failure of the third generation presented in the Book of Judges, what would you write? Beyond this, what lessons would you provide people living today for them to have the confident hope that only a faithful God will provide His willing and obedient subjects?

Having preached for more than forty years, and from the calls that come to me as director of the Florida School of Preaching, I suggest the following parallels for serious consideration:

1. Respect for God is lacking.

Even a casual reading of church bulletins, brotherhood publications, topics presented in lectureships, events and ideas promoted by some of our schools shows that there is a lack of respect for God and His word among some in our brotherhood.

As the third generation of Israel in the days of the Book of Judges could not disrespect the will of the Lord and remain faithful to her high and holy calling, neither can we if we follow her example. God is no respecter of persons (Rom. 2:11). His character is unchanging—His word will not return to Him void (Isa. 55:6-11).

2. Lack of emphasis on full obedience

Some would have us believe

that the grace of God will cover willful and flagrant disregard for His will. Like the Denominational world, some have decided what is the "core" gospel to be preached and obeyed. It is no surprise then that the "core" people find close affinity with the various sects of their choosing. The sects usually have a creed or manual that spells out what their "core" doctrine is, while some of our people do not stipulate consistently their "core." This is practical in a way, for it permits them to have a broad fellowship with many divisive factions of religious folk.

Was Joshua reminded of his need to fully obey the will of God? "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Josh. 1:5-9).

Has the Lord demanded that His people be different from their religious neighbors? How do you explain our relationship to His

admonition in these words: "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:19-20).

3. Fellowship with religious error

Are some of our people like the third generation of Israel of the Book of Judges? From what we read and hear from some among our people, there seems to be a closer tie with our religious neighbors than there is with brethren. The covenants Israel made with the people of the land were a fatal step in their downfall (Judg. 2:2).

4. Approve religious compromises

Given the present status of religious confusion in the world and in the brotherhood, it is not surprising that some have chosen to reorganize their congregations with women taking a leading role that in times past was not practiced because of a respect for the principle of authorization expressed in Colossians 3:17 and Second John

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TRAINING PREACHERS SINCE 1969

9-11. We read of churches removing the name of Christ from their titles, and some prefer a community identity rather than a Biblical identification.

We know who is head of the church we read about in the Bible, it is the Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23). We know who purchased the church of Christ, He did, and with His own blood (Eph. 5:25; Acts 20:28). Who purchased the community churches?
5. Deviating from Bible based worship

Departures from the will of the Lord often manifest themselves in unauthorized acts of worship. It happened to Israel (Matt. 15:8-9), Cain (Gen. 4), Jeroboam (1 Kings 12-13), the Samaritans (John 4:22), and was manifesting itself in the first generation of some New Testament churches (Col. 2).

In earlier generations there were debates that opposed unauthorized acts of worship. Some still living who debated the subject of worship have now joined in unauthorized acts of worship with various factions of religious people.

May we expect the favor of God when we leave His will for our desires in religious celebrations directed by the traditions of men? That which was opposed two generations back, ignored in the past and in present generation is now becoming the common practice among some.

6. Institutions sympathetic toward religious error

Informed members of our history know that in the past many of our college presidents were defenders of the truth, debating false teachers both from within and without the church. One only need to have a casual familiarity with David Lipscomb and N. B. Hardeman to know that this is true. Many sought education at their feet because they realized they would be better prepared to stay the course of

faithfulness if they could draw from their wisdom.

How many men who head up the colleges among us today would oppose the doctrine of once saved always saved? How many would debate the subject of baptism for the remission of sins? Would our leaders publically debate and oppose the sin of worshiping with mechanical instruments of music? If you are informed, you know these are current issues that must be addressed.

The main thrust seems to be for our school leaders today to be proficient in public relations and how to raise funds in order to keep the institution going. Is it possible that under such training that some of the graduates feel their greatest contribution is to promote goodwill and/or "positive" moral values to the neglect of religious truth?

7. Chaos in the churches

Is there chaos in some congregations of the Lord's people? If you are familiar with them, is it the case that some are not as dedicated to the truth as were past generations? Have we ignored what some might label as "small deviations" until the larger ones have arisen that have made us realize how much things have changed? There is a cry for help from many quarters with a few (a remnant) who are trying to stay faithful, but there are many who no longer want to stay the course. The Old Paths are not sufficient for some (Jer. 6:16-17).

The status of Judah in the days of Jeremiah is expressed in these words: "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" (Jer. 5:30-31).

If we used these same expressions from Jeremiah, and

substituted the influential people of our day, would we be misrepresenting the truth as reflected by the chaos in the churches today?

"A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the **church**; The **professors profess** falsely, and the **preachers and elders** bear rule by their means; **and my people love to have it so**: and what will ye do in the end thereof?"

Conclusion

If we are to escape the same fate as did Israel of old and for the same reasons, these as well as other parallels, could be drawn from the Book of Judges that need to be carefully considered by our people. If churches and schools among us are to survive faithful to God, will they not have to do as Judah was admonished by Jeremiah and Ezekiel? "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it" (Jer. 5:1). May this not be us, "And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none" (Ezek. 22:30).

We must not depart from truth that our forefathers fought for and taught us. We must not assume that there is no battle for us. Every generation must fight to keep the teaching pure and true to the Bible. "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (1Tim. 6:12). Many of the battles fought in former generations must be fought in every generation. If we do not know the past battles and victories, how will

we be prepared to face the same type battles today?

The third generation of God's people has always had to fight for survival. Some will betray their trust by forsaking the doctrine of Christ. As Joshua, let us exert an influence in the world that will make it easier for the next generation to be faithful to God. Let it not be said of us, "in that day, among those people, every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Let it be said of us what was stated in the Song of Barak and Deborah, "For that the leaders took the lead in Israel, for that the people offered themselves willingly, bless ye Jehovah" (Judg. 5:2, ASV).

This is an abbreviated version of a chapter in the Appendix of the 2005 Florida School of Preaching Lectureship Book, Do You Understand Church Growth? Edited by Brian Kenyon.

Did You Miss It?

I have reference to the **2005 Florida School of Preaching Lectureship**. I know some of you stated you planned to be here and were unable to make it.

However, all is not lost. If you have a computer and internet connection, you may connect with the Web Page, check out the lecture you wish to hear and listen as many did during the broadcast.

You may also order a book with a CD that will enable you to read the content of the written articles (including the appendix).

An audio CD is available for each speaker, and an MP3 CD is available for most of the oral presentations. However, you will need an MP3 player for this.

In the near future we plan to have available CD formats that combines both the video and audio for DVD players. The DVD editing

and formatting will take more time to produce. If you are interested in these, check with the office. When they are available, we will make you aware of these through this publication.

We hope you will plan to be with us next year for the 2006 Florida School of Preaching Lectures. The dates will be January 16-19, 2006.

We are proposing the theme for next year's lectures to be: "Do You Understand Restoration?"

The production of the books, CDs, videos, speaker expenses, etc. is costly. You can assist the church and the school by helping us circulate these lecture formats. We will always need assistance in our efforts to train preachers and to encourage faithfulness in the Lord. Will you Assist us in this noble cause? (3 John 8).

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