

There Arose Another Generation

Judges 2:6-15

Introduction:

1. A few weeks ago I read an article entitled "The Desperate Need of This Generation." It was written by Tim Jennings and published in FocusMagazine.org. (While I am not personally acquainted with brother Jennings I am with many of the other writers and know they are men who love the Lord.)
2. He began his article like this. He said, "I'm in real trouble. I need immediate help. You see, my grandparents and parents trusted in Jesus, and now I do too."
3. You might not see his problem. You might even say, "I wish my parents and grandparents had been Christians. Jennings doesn't know how well he's got it!"
4. But he went on to speak of a disturbing pattern evidenced in Scripture. He said, "The conviction that blazes brightly in one generation becomes a torch. In the next generation it is only an ember and then in the next generations it becomes cold ash."
5. The passage we have just read reminds us of this occurrence in the generations after Joshua. Are we doomed to repeat this pattern? What do we need to do to keep the fire burning bright in second, third and fourth generation Christians?

Discussion:

- I. A cyclical pattern of deterioration is evident in the history of Israel.
 - A. The Book of Judges is explicit.
 1. After Joshua, "there arose another generation who did not know the Lord" (2:10).
 2. The pattern is summarized in 2:16-19.
 3. The rest of the book describes the details.
 - a. After Othniel (3:11-12). 40 years.
 - b. After Ehud and Shamgar (3:30-4:1). 80 years.
 - c. After Deborah (5:31). 40 years.
 - d. After Gideon (8:28). 40 years.
 - e. Abimelech, Tola and Jair, Jephthah Ibzan, Elon, Abdon (13:1, 40 years), Samson.
 - f. The book ends with the tragic story of a group of Benjaminite men in Gibeah wanting to have sexual relations with a Levite traveler. They end up raping his concubine to death. This resulted in a civil war that cost the lives of 65,000 people.
 - B. This cyclical pattern may be evidenced in the ten commandments (Ex. 20:5-6; Deut. 5:9-10).
 - C. 1 Kings 11 cites Solomon as one "whose heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been."
- II. Those old enough to have witnessed multiple generations have observed similar generational deterioration today.
 - A. The sacrificial and passionate faith of the first generation is accepted as only an

important set of doctrines by the second. The third generation continues the traditions of the faith, but they have little inner conviction or practical expression of it. The fourth generation brings the charade to an end and abandons the faith.

- B. In four generations faith goes from passionate, to important, to cold, to dead.
- C. With first generation Christians, their faith is a matter of their identity. It is who they perceive themselves to be. They are the people of God. In the second generation faith practices are a matter of inconvenience. They worship on occasion as if to maintain the family tradition, but their focus is elsewhere. In the third such practices are an annoyance.
- D. As the process unfolds a relationship to a personal God gives way to a relationship with an institution. The third and fourth generations are uninterested in maintaining the institution.
- E. It would be my observation that this is probably what historians have noted in the tendency of independent religious groups to develop into denominations. It is a move from personal relationship to a relationship with an institution.

III. The history of the nation of Israel gives us insight into the causes of this process and what to do to prevent it in our generation.

- A. The Book of Judges observes that Israel did not drive out all the Canaanites from the land. Instead they formulated covenants with them even though they were in a covenant with God that prohibited their involvement with other cultures (2:1-4).
 - 1. The people of God tend to allow the culture of the world to seep in and destroy the culture of God.
 - 2. Actually we are supposed to be working in the other direction. While Israel was supposed to eliminate the other cultures by force and influence. We are supposed to transform the other culture into the family of God.
 - a. This is our salt and light influence (Matt. 5:14-16).
 - b. This is evangelism as evidenced in the Book of Acts. It occurs not by military force or the exercise of power, but through the art and work of persuading individuals to accept Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.
 - c. In some churches today evangelism seems to receive little attention as we turn attention internally (to ourselves). Are we less interested in cultural transformation?
- B. The nation of Israel became interested in other things.
 - 1. They forgot the Lord and served the Baals and the Asheroth (Judges 7). These were gods associated with fertility in agriculture, animals and man. In effect, these were the gods of agricultural production in Canaan.
 - 2. God had warned against such a shift (Deut 6:10-15).
 - 3. But people tend to shift from a culture based on relationship to God to a culture based on economics, politics and religion. (I am distinguishing the worship of God from "religion," that is associated with institutions and other man-made forms of devotion.)
 - 4. Israel did the very thing God commanded them not to do. They covenanted with the Canaanites (Deut. 7:1-6).
 - 5. King Solomon is illustrative of the failure (1 Kings 10-11). Even though his father had

admonished him to walk in the ways of the Lord (1 Kings 2:1ff). The king was not supposed to multiply possessions and wives. He was supposed to write a copy of the law and carefully observe it (Deut. 17:14ff).

- C. Are we doing different than they? Are we focused on our relationship with God or economics, politics, religion? "Politics?" you say. See 1 Sam. 8:4ff. Note the intergenerational motivation in 1 Sam. 8:1-3.
- D. What are we supposed to do to prevent this deterioration?
 - 1. There was a difference between those having seen the work of the Lord and those not knowing the Lord, nor the work which He had done for Israel (Judges 2:7, 10).
 - 2. Moses warned of this problem (Deut. 11:1-7).
 - 3. The solution (Deut. 11:18-22).
 - 4. A three-fold solution is given in Deut. 6 and 7.
 - a. Intergenerational teaching (6:1-9). Reminders of God's work (6:20-24). Parents bear responsibility, but children do too.
 - b. Care in not focusing on economics (6:10-15). Cf. James 4:1-5. Have we moved from worshiping the Creator to worshiping the things He has given us?
 - c. Care in not making covenant with the world, but remembering their unique covenant relationship with God (7:7-11). Cf. Judges 2:1-2. They needed to remember who they were.
 - 1) But they wanted to be like the nations politically (1 Sam. 8:7).
 - 2) They became like the nations religiously (Judges 2:11; 1 Kings 11:4-8).
 - 5. They needed to have a personal relationship with a personal God. Do you know the Lord or do you know about the Lord? We are moving in the wrong direction when we exchange the intimacy of the family of God for an institutional concept. Ex. Institutionalizing the church.
 - 6. We need to serve the Lord's purposes instead of our own (Judges 2:7; Acts 13:36).

Conclusion:

- 1. Brothers and sisters, I have seen these problems unfolding in families among us.
- 2. Are we oblivious?
- 3. We have a choice.
- 4. Joshua's appeal is fitting and earnest. Serve the Lord. Put away the gods of the world! And his commitment: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!"