

JUDGES 17:7-13; 18:28-31

WHERE OUR UNCONVERTED CHILDREN ARE HEADED

“There was a young man of Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there. And the man departed from the town of Bethlehem in Judah to sojourn where he could find a place. And as he journeyed, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah. And Micah said to him, ‘Where do you come from?’ And he said to him, ‘I am a Levite of Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to sojourn where I may find a place.’ And Micah said to him, ‘Stay with me, and be to me a father and a priest, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year and a suit of clothes and your living.’ And the Levite went in. And the Levite was content to dwell with the man, and the young man became to him like one of his sons. And Micah ordained the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah. Then Micah said, ‘Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, because I have a Levite as priest’” [JUDGES 17:7-13].

“There was no deliverer because it was far from Sidon, and they had no dealings with anyone. It was in the valley that belongs to Beth-rehob. Then they rebuilt the city and lived in it. And they named the city Dan, after the name of Dan their ancestor, who was born to Israel; but the name of the city was Laish at the first. And the people of Dan set up the carved image for themselves, and Jonathan the son of Gershom, son of Moses, and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land. So, they set up Micah’s carved image that he made, as long as the house of God was at Shiloh” [JUDGES 18:28-31].¹

DOn one occasion, I preached a message in a former congregation that precipitated an exceptionally strong, negative reaction. I observed from the pulpit that despite an active youth ministry over the precious three decades, few of the youth who had passed through the church continued in the Faith beyond seventeen or eighteen years of age. Many of the youth I had observed were children of deacons and other church leaders. Outrage from Christian leaders within that assembly was immediate and palpable.

These good people, and I’m certain they were good people, though not necessarily godly people, were enraged that anyone, especially their pastor, would question whether their efforts had produced any lasting fruit. These were “good kids,” in their estimate. Maybe these young people weren’t serving God now; but these leaders assured one another that they would claim the divine promise—you know, the one that reads:

“Start a youth out on his way;
even when he grows old he will not depart from it.”

[PROVERBS 22:6 CSB]

This was God’s problem now; they had done their part. The attitude of these leaders was defiant; they were angry that anyone would question the outcome of their holy senescence. Though unspoken, the underlying sentiment held by these church goers was that God had somehow failed them. They had done their part; God wasn’t keeping His part of the bargain.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

I confess my deep concern for the youth of the congregation. Young people, our children, need to know that the pastor prays for them. I want our young women and our young men to be men and women of character, living godly, holy lives before the watching world. I know that some of the children of this congregation are yet unsaved. That knowledge plagues me, causes me great sorrow; I pray that this knowledge disturbs you, compelling you to plead for their hearts and lives. How much worse will be the outcome should our children have just enough religion to inoculate them against the Faith. That is the focus of the message this day.

HERITAGE OF HOLINESS — Do you find it strange to see that the priests who served Dan were descendants of Moses? I am especially startled as I read this particular account since the priests serving the Tribe of Dan were not from the lineage of Aaron. Did you notice that the priest is identified as a grandson of Moses? You no doubt noticed that the sons of this priest followed him in this illicit ministry. Jonathan, grandson of the Great Lawgiver, became the priest for Dan. The manner in which this came about is critical to the warning provided in the message today.

The story begins when we remind ourselves of the qualifications for appointment to the priesthood. We will also want to remember the consequences of presumption in approaching the priesthood. Remember that God commanded Moses, “Bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests” [EXODUS 28:1]. Addressing Aaron directly, God commanded, “You and your sons with you shall guard your priesthood for all that concerns the altar and that is within the veil; and you shall serve. I give your priesthood as a gift, and any outsider who comes near shall be put to death” [NUMBERS 18:7]. Take special note of that final sentence.

The descendants of Aaron received the priesthood as a divine gift. It was a calling, to be sure; however, they were to see their appointment as a gift. Moreover, anyone who was not a descendant of Aaron would approach the priesthood under sentence of divine judgement! The LORD God was serious concerning the danger of approaching Him in a presumptuous manner. Recall the account detailing the death of two of Aaron’s sons recorded in Leviticus. “Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the LORD has said: “Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.”” And Aaron held his peace” [LEVITICUS 10:1-3]. That Jonathan and his sons were not killed in the record that serves as our text for this day, is likely due to the fact that they did not meet God. In fact, that they were not killed is powerful evidence that they never met God!

The priesthood is a permanent appointment, as evidenced by the words written in the Letter to Hebrew Christians. “Every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was” [HEBREWS 5:1-4].

We no longer have a formal priesthood among the assemblies of the Lord. Peter says of the Congregation of the Righteous, “*You* are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” [1 PETER 2:9]. We no longer have priests—we *are* priests! Each Christian is a priest, representing God to man and representing man to God.

I am amazed at the heritage of holiness that seems to reveal itself in time among God's people. While each Christian is a priest of God, it does seem at times that God works within families to appoint those who will serve Him through providing oversight of the churches or through some full-time endeavour among the faithful. Lynda has become an accomplished genealogist; she is constantly pushing back the obscuring overburden of time to reveal who we are through discovering who our ancestors are. I am amazed to discover that in both my paternal and maternal lineage is a continuous trail of Baptist preachers over the centuries. Is it possible that without my knowledge, God worked throughout the centuries to work into my moral/ethical DNA a holy calling to prepare me for this service that has occupied my attention for these years?

When I was about eight years of age, I attended a Christian encampment with my granddad, a bi-vocational pastor. As I wandered up to my granddad as he spoke with an aged evangelist, the old evangelist turned to recognise my presence, and then he loudly exclaimed, "God has shown me that this lad will be a preacher. He will declare the glory of the Lord." Nothing could have been more improbable then that I should be a preacher. However, God was at work, and He had been working through my fathers for centuries, laying a groundwork.

I am not saying that one must be descendant from a lineage filled with preachers in order to occupy the sacred desk, I'm simply observing that it is not all that unusual that God appears to work in this manner through family influence. I'm speaking to some young men who may well be called to serve God through a full-time ministry. Listening to me at any given service may be an evangelist who will spread light into darkened corners of the nation, a missionary who will penetrate the darkness with the light of the Risen Saviour, or a teacher of the Word who will build up the faithful and guide them toward holiness. I pray that is the case.

What I do say, and what is directly related to the text today, is that God appoints to divine service. No one becomes a preacher because he has a seminary education, though those who will serve well will benefit from study of the original languages and from intense study of theology. What every young preacher must know, and what every Christian who sits under the preaching of the Word must remember, is that God appoints to divine service. No one can presume on God, no one can appropriate the honour of serving the Living God for himself. A brief moment ago, I cited the words an unknown writer had penned to Hebrew Christians: "No one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was" [**HEBREWS 5:4**].

There is a grave danger in knowing one's heritage when that heritage has involved a lineage related to divine service. It is akin to the danger of someone who depends on a degree from a theological school, or from a religious act that allows that individual to be called "Reverend," or from simply deciding that one wants to be a teacher. You may recall the warning James penned, "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, because you know that we will be judged more strictly" [**JAMES 3:1 NET BIBLE**]. Wise advice, that.

As a young preacher, I made the acquaintance of a Methodist preacher. On one occasion, I stood in a cold, November rain speaking with Roland while he was seated in his car with the heater running at full blast. He didn't believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God. He didn't believe Jesus was divine. He didn't believe there was either a heaven or a hell. Consequently, he never called people to salvation, since he didn't believe there was anything to be saved to, much less any destiny to be saved from. Speaking with him, I was aghast. "Why did you become a preacher?" I asked. His answer was perhaps closer to the view of a majority of religious workers in this day than I would wish to believe. Roland said, "I became a preacher because it is a good job. The job isn't particularly demanding, and people respect me." Roland must one day give an answer to the God whom he defied and whom he blasphemed with his life.

How different from the godly men whom I admired, God's spokesmen standing behind the sacred desk. All of the men whom I knew had experienced opposition—sometimes severe opposition, both from the world and from among the churches—at different points throughout their service. Most of these men had attained positions of prominence, but none had done so without opposition. They didn't dwell on the past; their faces were fixed as they looked for the smile of Heaven as they led their congregations toward the New Jerusalem.

All the men that I knew as God's servants laboured in the Word, studied the Word and carefully provided sound exegesis to ensure that the people of God would be instructed in truth. All the preachers I knew were students of theology, seeking to honour God in all things. Their lives revealed that they loved the Risen Son of God. Had there been among that august number charlatans who denied the cardinal truths of the Word or should there have been any who would not accept the authority and veracity of the Word among the preachers in those early churches, they would have been removed from the pulpit forthwith! These were the men after whom I endeavoured to model my life. These were the men whom I sought to emulate. I never anticipated an easy life in service before the Lord, and God didn't disappoint.

Tragically, Roland was not unlike many of the church people of this day and like many of the children of good church people. He had enough religion to be informed but not enough to be transformed. I am deeply concerned that among modern churches, the children whom we endeavour to reach have been inoculated against the Faith through our puerile efforts to make church services "fun." We wanted children to "like" church, so we invented Bible games and told them simple stories that would entertain, but we never warned them of the danger of failing to know the grace of God. We told them to be nice and taught them how to be pleasant with people; but we didn't watch to ensure that they gave evidence of a transformed heart. To be sure, our children liked church, much as people thoughtlessly like some post on Facebook. However, I've noticed that what can be liked so casually, can be unliked just as casually.

The churches, and the families who comprised those churches, felt they had to compete with television. They agitated for the sermons to be shorter because people's attention spans weren't long enough to endure a thorough exposition. I have heard people say that the sermon shouldn't be longer than the seat can endure. Well, you manage to endure several hours at a hockey game, and it's pretty chilly in those arenas. I know that some will say, "Yes, but we jump up every now and then to shout." Who said you couldn't shout in church? Who said you couldn't lift your hands and jump up now and then in the services of the church? We failed to calculate the harm we were inflicting on our children because we wanted to segregate them from what was taking place in the assembly.

I had in one church I pastored a godly couple whom I loved dearly. I performed their wedding and dedicated their children when God graced the home with two lively boys. I was stunned on one occasion when that good man said, "I won't come to this church if my boys are in the service with me. I want to worship." I couldn't help but recall the instruction God provided through Moses that children were to be part of the services of the people.

When Israel would observe the Passover Meal, their children would naturally ask about what was going on. God said, "When you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses'" [EXODUS 12:25-27].

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The instruction concerning that observance of the Passover was iterated again. Note that God again emphasised the importance of including children in the observance, encouraging their natural curiosity. “When in time to come your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall say to him, ‘By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery’” [EXODUS 13:14]. The natural curiosity of the children provided the perfect opportunity to teach them of God and of His mercy.

It is important to see that God stressed this truth again as He spoke of all the observances. “When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. And the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us’” [DEUTERONOMY 6:20-25].

When we shut our children out of the services, we stifled their natural curiosity and ensured that they would never learn of God’s might and power. We made certain that our children would never see a drunkard converted, a prostitute set free from her past, a drug addict redeemed and set on the road to recovery. By the choices of well-meaning church people, we set our children on a path leading to naturalistic understanding of life rather than knowing that there is a God who can redeem and transform the most sullied individual.

I would pray that every child would have opportunity to grow to adulthood having witnessed their father and their mother hold hands and pray before meals. Every child should have opportunity to witness their dad and mom read the Word of God as part of family devotions, gathering the family for prayer at the start of the day or at the close of the day. Every child should know that father and mother, unless providentially hindered, will be in the House of God on Sunday morning. Because we focused on our comfort, I fear that we too often sacrificed our children.

I need to state for the encouragement of Christian men and women, that we are not perfect—far from it. We all fail, miserably so at times. As James has said, “We all stumble in many ways” [JAMES 3:2a]. Though you are a follower of the Christ, you will make grievous mistakes in your judgement and in your actions. Your children will see you when you stumble. If you attempt to hide your sin, they will see and conclude that they can cover over their own sin. However, if they witness you humbly confess you sin, asking forgiveness of those you have offended, they will witness that. Which action do you think will have the more lasting impact in the life of your children? Your sin? Or your humble confession and the fact that you sought forgiveness? Our children will remember our righteous ownership and our turning to God.

HARVEST OF HELL — One of the hardest truths any of us must ever speak is when we are compelled to acknowledge that an unconverted child stands condemned before God. I don’t make this statement lightly; I fully understand the pain, the grief that accompanies such an admission. Parents love their children—each one. When a child is honoured, no one is prouder than that child’s parents. In the same vein, when a child stands condemned, no one is more grieved than the parents of that child. The heart of a parent is intimately entwined with the life of the child. The thought of eternal separation from a child is devastating for a parent.

It is humbling to admit, but the words of the Master yet stand. We need to hear Jesus when He warns, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” [MATTHEW 10:34-37].

Jesus’ final challenge addresses the position I’ve just advocated. Focus on the Master’s words: “Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” It is not that we do not love the wayward child—we love them dearly! It is that if we are put in the position of choosing child over Christ, there can be no question of where our loyalty lies. In fact, it is only because we love Christ supremely that we are enabled to love our children fully and as we ought.

It is devastating for a parent when a child proves the reality of the fallen nature that contaminates all of mankind. No individual is saved because he or she had a godly father or a godly mother. No individual is set free of condemnation before the Living God because a grandfather sided firmly with the Lord God. A colloquial saying once bruited about, averred, “Every tub sits on its own bottom.” Applying that saying directly to the current issue, we are assured that every individual must choose for himself, for herself, whether or not Christ will reign over the life of that individual. Few things illustrate mankind’s fallen nature more than the obstinate choice to refuse Christ’s gracious offer of salvation despite seeing the grace of God revealed through family.

To be certain, failure to teach our children may contribute to their damnation. Allowing children to “have it all” without teaching them to accept responsibility may contribute to their eternal judgement. Though there are many things that can contribute to a child’s condemnation before the Living God, ultimately, judgement rests on the child herself or himself. Ultimately, each of us make our own choices, and we must bear responsibility for what we choose.

This is especially true in light of what John has written concerning belief in the Son of God. You will remember that John wrote, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God” [JOHN 3:16-21].

Children, especially as they grow toward adulthood, must be taught that they bear responsibility for the choices they make. I understand that they are not likely to hear this from the education cartel that presides over most public schools. Children will be taught how to be tolerant of everything except that which is holy and good. Children will be taught that they are the centre of their universe. In too many instances, children graduate from school unable to read, without writing skills, incapable of performing simple mathematical procedures and ignorant of how the world runs. Nevertheless, they feel good about themselves. That utopian condition will persist until they are about eighteen years of age. About then, they will need to look for a job and they will suddenly be confronted with the hard realities of life to which each of us is held accountable. Even then, tragically, many will continue to deny any need to turn to the Living God, because they have been assured that everything is fine as it is!

What a sobering warning is penned in the Letter to Hebrew Christians when the writer writes, “If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven” [HEBREWS 12:25b]. “They” refers to the people of Israel who were delivered from slavery. The people had witnessed God’s power displayed on their behalf. They had seen the impact of God’s power in their lives. Despite God’s power and might exercised on their behalf, they wanted to turn back and return to slavery. Having their needs provided by another was preferable to the rigours imposed by freedom. These newly freed slaves were much like many contemporary children. The fear that attends fending for oneself is to be avoided as moderns demand safe-spaces, cry closets and deliverance from ever hearing disagreement with their own opinion.

The writer’s sober warning echoes an earlier warning penned in this same missive. There, the writer warned had warned those who would read the words, “We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation” [HEBREWS 2:1-3a]? The question must be asked of children who were raised in the church and who yet failed to take the step of personal faith in the Risen Saviour. “How shall [our children] escape if [they] neglect such a great salvation?” How, indeed!

Early in the history of the New World, the Congregationalist Churches, heirs of the Puritans who had fled to the New World for refuge from persecution by the state church, implemented what became known as the “Half-way Covenant.” The Congregationalists accepted into church fellowship children who had been baptised as infants though they had no confession of faith in the Risen Saviour. The plea of parents for their children to believe was silenced so that children would not be made uncomfortable and families could go to church together. Powerful spokesmen, such as Jonathan Edwards, opposed this “Half-way Covenant,” arguing powerfully for the necessity of personal Christian experience.² Alas, in the final analysis, the movement insinuated itself into the life of the churches, ensuring that religious fervour in New England was enervated for generations that would follow. The Puritans had fled from one establishment, only to set up another; now, the church rolls were filled with unconverted people, men and women who were strangers to godliness.

Something similar has happened to Evangelical churches in this day as parents excuse the unbelief of their children, arguing that they are really good kids who just need to find their way. Parents have at times accused the churches I pastored of failing their children, though those same parents did not have family devotions, did not pray with their children and did not read the Word with their children. The children were permitted to chart their own course through life, and that course was more concerned with being popular with the world than with honouring the Lord. Parents have taken umbrage at other times because they felt their children could not simply be accepted as righteous, though they gave no evidence of loving God or loving His Word. Still, it was vital to many of those same parents that the names of their children be included among the members of the church. One must wonder if this is what happened in the life of Moses’ family.

² See Edwin S. Gaustad, “Quest for Pure Christianity,” *Christian History Magazine*-Issue 41: The American Puritans (Christianity Today, Carol Stream, IL 1994); George W. Harper, “New England Dynasty,” *Christian History Magazine*-Issue 41: The American Puritans (Christianity Today, Carol Stream, IL 1994); Sharon Rusten with E. Michael, **The Complete Book of When & Where in the Bible and throughout History** (Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 2005), 280; Joseph Bellamy, **The Half-Way Covenant. A Dialogue**, Early American Imprints, 1639-1800, no. 11172 (Re-printed and sold by Kneeland and Adams, next to the treasurer’s office in Milk Street, Boston, 1769)

HOW IT HAPPENS — Children raised in the Faith do not suddenly one day awaken with some novel understanding that denies the truth with which they were raised. If our children reject the Faith, it is because they were never committed to the truth! If our children have ceased walking with the Lord, it is because they never did walk with the Lord. They may have been polite because they did not want to offend us or disappoint us, but they were never saved. If an individual walks away from the Faith, what evidence do we have that they were ever in the Faith? The Apostle of love has written, “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore, we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us” [1 JOHN 2:18, 19].

It is easy for us to apply these words to people who have angered us. Because we are angry, because we are disgusted or perhaps irritated with some individual, we may say of them, “They chose to walk away; let them find out what it is like to face the Lord without the support and love of the church.” It is easy to dismiss people when we don’t anticipate that we will encounter them again. Let them go! They deserve whatever they receive! That is the way we feel, and we will justify our feelings about those “deserters.” However, when it is our own children who turn from pursuing the Living God, it becomes much harder for us to accept what is written. How can we just let our children go? We love them and we secretly hope—against all hope—that things will somehow work out and our children will be safe in the final analysis.

The Bible doesn’t tell us how Moses’ grandson arrived at this point so far removed from the truth in which Moses had stood. How could a grandson of the Great Lawgiver become a promoter of idolatry? Though the Word is silent, we can apply some sanctified imagination, but we need to be careful to confess that we are engaging in speculation, at best. We do know that when he first arrived at Micah’s house, he didn’t object to the proposal Micah made. In fact, Jonathan appears to have been looking for a job when he hired out.

The story relates how Micah had stolen silver from his mother. She pronounced a curse on whoever stole her silver, and her curse frightened Micah so that he confessed and brought back the silver. Immediately, his mother blessed him and dedicated the silver to craft a household god. Micah made a shrine, together with an ephod, and then ordained one of his sons to serve as his priest. The writer of Judges observed, “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” [JUDGES 17:6].

It is at this point that we are introduced to “a young man in Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite” [JUDGES 17:7]. Later, we will learn that this young man is Jonathan, grandson of Moses. When Micah learned that this young man was a Levite, he proposed that the young man become a priest for Micah. They struck an agreement that Jonathan would work for Micah, receiving for his service “ten pieces of silver a year and a suit of clothes and his living” [JUDGES 17:10]. Moses’ grandson has chosen evil instead of godliness.

I explored this account and the ramifications for preachers in this day in a message presented a little over a year ago.³ At that time, I made several observations concerning this account of the disobedience of Jonathan. One of the first observations I made in that message holds true throughout all history—*God has no grandchildren*. Each individual must make the decision for himself, or for herself, to believe the message of life and trust the Lord Christ.

³ Michael Stark, “Ten Pieces of Silver and a Suit,” (sermon), March 26, 2017, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Judges-17.7-13-Ten-Pieces-of-Silver-and-a-Suit.pdf>

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One of the saddest verses in the Old Testament is found near the opening verses of this Book of Judges. Early in the book, we read this dismal assessment of the professed people of God, “All that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel” [JUDGES 2:10]. This verse sets the stage for the passage we have been looking at today. In a similar manner, this verse speaks of the failure of a generation that preceded that which has been raised up in this day. We have failed to reach the youth our of nation, and that includes many of our own children. We have not pleaded with them to believe the message of life. We have not brought them to the cross. We have allowed them to slip away from following the Saviour we profess to love. I’m not discounting our children’s personal responsibility to believe the LORD God, but too often, our children are lost because we became blasé about our Faith.

Underscore what the writer pointed out; an entire generation had been judged before Israel ever arrived at the borders of the land God promised to the people. That generation died because of their refusal to act on God’s command. They did not trust God’s power despite the fact that He had brought them out of slavery and coalesced that crowd into a nation. How frightful the divine sentence, “The LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, ‘How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me? I have heard the grumbings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against me. Say to them, “As I live, declares the LORD, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected. But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years and shall suffer for your faithlessness, until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness. According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, a year for each day, you shall bear your iniquity forty years, and you shall know my displeasure.”’ I, the LORD, have spoken. Surely this will I do to all this wicked congregation who are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall come to a full end, and there they shall die” [NUMBERS 14:26-35]. Thus, an entire generation had been removed because of unbelief—unbelief that arose because they grumbled!

Though their parents were excluded, their children entered the land, conquering the inhabitants under the leadership of Joshua, encouraged by the brave example of Caleb. Though that second generation was following the LORD, though not perfectly, the succeeding generation never captured the vision of a transcendent God. This new generation did not turn to the LORD who had given them freedom and rich blessings. When a generation is consumed with their own interest, even the children of the righteous are susceptible to contamination with the thinking of the fallen. It would be several generations before the nation would again look to the LORD God.

Becoming consumed with our own interests to the exclusion of pursuing the LORD God exposes our children to falling away from walking with the LORD. Our children are not saved because they were raised in a Christian home, but they do have a great advantage if the Christianity in that home is more than a shallow façade. If our Faith is superficial, do not imagine that our children will not know that. And if they see that we are not serious about the Faith, we should not be surprised if they are not serious about the Faith. When our retirement plan, our pleasant past-times, our material possessions consume our attention, pushing out service to the Saviour, we must be warned that our children will shortly follow suit.

JUDGES 17:7-13; 18:27-31
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God had warned Israel, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

“And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear” [DEUTERONOMY 6:4-13].

Instructing the children was essential if there was to be continued blessing for the nation. Just so, whenever we neglect instructing our children, the consequences will be disastrous for them, and ultimately for society. I have thought about God’s admonition to Israel through Malachi, when He said, “This second thing you do. You cover the LORD’s altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. But you say, ‘Why does he not?’ Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union?” God charged the people with focusing on their own desires rather than godliness. The example used at this point was the faithless manner in which people treated marriage. Then, God adds this zinger. “And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring” [MALACHI 2:13-15a].

The Living God sought, and now seeks, godly offspring. Godly offspring don’t just happen—they must be taught. We know that,

“One generation shall commend your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.”

[PSALM 145:4]

In the same way, should one generation fail to commend the mighty works of the LORD to another, what hope is there that the society can long endure. Without revival, I fear that there is not much hope of continuation of this society. Our culture is already riddled with moral corruption, and like frogs in the kettle, we are cozy and warm as we watch the world as we know it die, rotting from within.

Allow me opportunity to speak to any who are spiritually single—these are those dear souls who love God though they are married to an unbelieving spouse. The Master has provided wisdom for your special situation through the Apostle. Paul has written, “To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy” [1 CORINTHIANS 7:12-14].

Paul writes, “Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

“But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore, do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says,

‘Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.’

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” [EPHESIANS 5:1-17].

Parents, determine to change your lives so that you do not sacrifice your children to the god of this age. Let each parent determine to provide a godly model for their children, praying that God will use your life to turn your children to righteousness and faith in the Son of God. Do it now.