

1 TIMOTHY 1:18-20

THE NEXT GENERATION

“This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.”¹

The Faith is always but one generation from extinction. Should one generation fail to reach succeeding generations, the Faith will cease to exist. This is assuredly borne out in regional situations. At one time, the Faith had permeated North Africa, which became known for vigorous evangelism and the growth of Christian intellectualism. The Faith was vibrant in the Roman provinces of Numidia and Africa. Carthage was home to Tertullian and to Augustine, who had moved from Hippo in Numidia to that great city. Carthage became a centre of Christian thought and a primary centre for Christian ideals. Auxum, an area that is identified today with Ethiopia, was at one time more Christian than was Greece. Where is the Faith in Tunisia, Algeria and Libya today? What influence has Ethiopia on the Faith today?

Antioch was the principal city of Syria in the earliest days of the Faith. From this city, Ignatius ministered and influenced the course of the Faith in the early days of Christianity. Similarly, historians of the Faith will recall that Clement of Alexandria ministered in Egypt. Where are the churches dedicated to the Faith of the Master in Syria and Egypt today?

Of course, the Bible makes it quite plain that Galatia was evangelised by the Apostle Paul, as was the City of Ephesus and the towns lying within the sphere of influence of that city. The first council of Nicaea was in Bithynia, located within modern Turkey. Polycarp, a disciple of John the beloved disciple, served the Faithful in Smyrna, situated in modern day Turkey. Constantinople became a centre for Christianity in the centuries following the apostolic era. Where is the Faith of Christ the Lord today, in the nation we know as Turkey?

The great cathedrals of Italy, France, Spain and Germany testify to the influence of the Faith in those European lands. Great churches found in Switzerland, Holland, Belgium and the Czech Republic testify to the influence of the giants of the Reformation in those lands.

In more recent days, one need but recall the vigorous missionary advance propelled by giants from within the British Empire. George Whitfield, John and Charles Wesley, Hudson Taylor, Charles Spurgeon, Mary Slessor, George Mueller, Henry Martyn and William Carey are Christian luminaries reminding mankind of the bright glow of the Faith that once characterised the British Isles. Today, a few embers glow dimly in that nation while Islam seems prepared to displace the Faith of Christ the Lord as central to British life.

The history of the Faith is a story of advance and retreat. The Faith is the recounting of a cyclic tale. Someone has said of the history of the Faith: “The first generation is holy; the second generation is religious; and the third generation is godless.” There is more truth to this perception than we might like to acknowledge. When a movement within the Faith, or even when a church, is first raised up, it is imbued with ideals that call those about to return to the foundations of the Faith, to hold the Word as precious as did the first disciples of our Lord.

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

Rejected by religious leaders and adherents identified with the establishment, the saints that fight those initial battles are inured to hardship. These hardy souls stand firm against the mundane and mindless recitation of meaningless liturgies that pass for worship, longing instead to be in the presence of the True and Living God. They will not compromise with evil because they are convinced that God is holy and that He is worthy of their best service.

As this first generation passes off the scene, another generation assumes leadership; and though this newer generation superficially espouses the tenets embraced by the founders of the movement, ardor has been replaced by formality. The liturgy becomes ossified, knowledge of the Holy One fades into a dim memory and people begin to go to church rather than being the church. Services become predictable, the routine becomes comfortable and change is seen as a threat. Adherents seek respectability within the communities in which they live; rather than shining light into darkened places, they seek to confirm complacent adherents in their lethargy.

A final generation that maintains the outward symbols of religious practise will arise, but there will be nothing righteous about them. Long years past, these pretenders ceased seeking what pleases God. They will attempt to update their practise in a futile effort to attract people of this dying world to donate money to keep the church or movement alive, but the steadily dwindling congregation composed of aged members will testify to the fact that the Living God has already written “Ichabod” over the doors of the congregation.

Though God may raise up some valiant soul determined to reinvigorate past devotion to the His will, the absence of churches dedicated to His service in the regions previously mentioned demonstrate that we dare not presume against Him. God is sovereign; He does whatever He pleases. The state of the Faith in our own nation is in serious decline. Despite numerous churches, the devotion of the populace does not indicate that the professed people of God are making much of an impact. What is required is nothing less than revival. Whether God revives His people or permits them to fall into quiescence lies within the imponderables of the divine will. Regardless of what He may do, we are responsible to “wage the good warfare.”

THE CALL TO CONFLICT — “This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience.” Paul has been focused on the rise of false prophets; and in our text he names a couple of these individuals. This places Paul squarely within the camp of “Fighting Fundamentalists.”

Many years ago I chaired a community based Victims Assistance Association in a city of the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Three Christians representing some larger religious organisations and three non-Christians comprised the board of that association. Interestingly, the non-Christians acted more christianly than did the Christians in many instances. On one occasion, one of the professed Christians, the wife of the Executive Director of a Baptist denomination, remonstrated with me because she was quite pragmatic in promoting the idea that we should host a casino night to raise money for the victim assistance association.

The issue had already been presented and voted down, three non-Christians voting against the idea and three professing Christians voting for the idea. My vote was the tie breaker ensuring that the idea died. Now, this woman was upset because I had argued against generating funding through gambling. Thinking that perhaps she was simply untaught, I commented that as a Fundamental Baptist, I could not violate the teachings of the Word, victimising victims in order to fund victim services. She was aghast at my stance. “Oh,” she exclaimed, “that is just wrong to call yourself a ‘Fundamentalist.’ I would never call myself such a dreadful name.”

I acknowledge that the term “fundamentalism” has received a bad rap in recent days. Muslim fundamentalists, to say nothing of Hindu fundamentalists and Mormon fundamentalists have ensured that in the popular mind the term “fundamentalist” is associated with violence and with weird extremes. However, historically in Christian life, fundamentalists were people committed to the Word of God as authoritative for faith and practise. To Christians conversant with the term as first employed, fundamentalism was associated with refusal to compromise with the world and with a determination to love the lost as Christ had loved them.

You need but recall the charge that Paul delivered to Timothy. He is not telling Timothy that conflict *may* come—Timothy was already engaged in conflict! “As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions” [1 TIMOTHY 1:3-7].

False teachers were already infiltrating the churches, and the elder of the congregation in Ephesus was receiving a charge to fight. However, he would be required to engage in spiritual combat without permitting himself or his charges to grow bitter or to resort to the techniques of this fallen world. That charge yet remains for the elder who will please God.

Many years ago, a liberal scholar wrote, “It is a mistake, often made by educated persons who happen to have but little knowledge of historical theology, to suppose that Fundamentalism is a new and strange form of thought. It is nothing of the kind: it is the partial and uneducated survival of a theology which was once universally held by all Christians. How many were there, for instance, in Christian churches in the eighteenth century who doubted the infallible inspiration of all Scripture? A few, perhaps, but very few. No, the Fundamentalist may be wrong. I think that he is. But it is we who have departed from the tradition, not he, and I am sorry for the fate of anyone who tries to argue with a Fundamentalist on the basis of authority. The Bible and the corpus theologicum of the Church is [sic] on the Fundamentalist side.”²

Whenever one aligns himself or herself with the Word of God, that individual stands with the Apostles and with Christ Himself. In the early part of the previous century, because many churches in various denominations were departing from the Faith, individuals were raised up from within those several denominations that opposed the rush to embrace that which was opposed to God and to His Word. These valiant men were convinced that if they would please Christ there could be no accommodation with evil and they would not compromise for the sake of denominational loyalty; therefore, they were called “Fighting Fundamentalists.”

While we must not permit ourselves to be bitter or combative merely for the sake of being combative, when we hold fundamental truths as presented in the Word, we will discover that we, like those men, are in a battle. Candidly, if you are not a “Fighting Fundamentalist,” you are not a Fundamentalist. Jude has urged believers “to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” [JUDE 3]. The translation presented in many Bibles tends to be insipid. Some recent translations have attempted to capture the ardent urgency of Jude’s words.

² Kirsopp Lake, *The Religion of Yesterday and Tomorrow* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, MA 1926), 61, cited in Daniel L. Akin, “Sermon: What Did Jesus Believe About the Bible? Matthew 5:17-18,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* (2001), Vol. 5, No. 2, Pp. 75-87; also cited in James T. Draper, Jr., **Authority: The Critical Issue for Southern Baptists** (Fleming H. Revell, Old Tappan, NJ 1984) 65-6

“Dear friends, I’ve dropped everything to write you about this life of salvation that we have in common. I have to write insisting—begging!—that you fight with everything you have in you for this faith entrusted to us as a gift to guard and cherish” [JUDE 3].³

“Dear friends, I had intended to write to you about the salvation we share. But something has come up. It demands that I write to you and encourage you to continue your fight for the Christian faith that was entrusted to God’s holy people once for all time” [JUDE 3].⁴

Whenever one stands firm on biblical truth, fellow Christians will often label that one as a “Fighting Fundamentalist.” Though we must stand firm in the Faith, we dare not permit ourselves to be embittered. Nevertheless, there would be no battle if professed Christians—and especially if religious leaders—remained true to the Word. The Christian who stands firmly on revealed truth can anticipate opposition, especially from the religious people of this darkened world. Undoubtedly, many who oppose us will call themselves by the Name of Christ the Lord!

This requirement to prepare for battle is taught repeatedly in the Apostle’s writings. “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” [1 TIMOTHY 6:12].

In a later letter to Timothy, Paul urges him to inure himself to hardship, serving as a soldier at war. “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him” [2 TIMOTHY 2:3, 4].

Whether one wishes to do so or not, if the individual stands with Christ, he will be at war; however, it is not war as this world thinks of war! We engage in spiritual battles for the souls of lost men and women. The Apostle writes, “Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” [2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5].

At one point, Jesus spoke of the opposition that His followers would face. Preparing His disciples for His exodus from this life, Jesus said, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also” [JOHN 15:18-23].

Too many of the professed saints live as though the Millennium has already arrived. They are convinced that no Christian should ever be challenged by the denizens of this darkened world. They don’t want to be disturbed from the lethargic narcosis induced by errant teaching. Have they never read the stunning words spoken by the Master? “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. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” [MATTHEW 10:34-39].

³ Eugene H. Peterson, **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2005)

⁴ **God’s Word Translation** (Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, MI 1995)

Jesus is not seeking to make peace with the world; He is seeking to rescue all who are willing to be saved. He is not endeavouring to make our lives more pleasant and more comfortable; He is seeking to deliver us from the coming wrath. Christ the Lord does not seek accommodation with the world; He offers Himself as Master over those who would be saved. This is also the apostolic message that is repeated throughout Paul's writings. For instance, recall this commendation of the saints in Thessalonica which the Apostle delivered in his first letter to that particular assembly. "You [Thessalonians] became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" [1 THESSALONIANS 1:6-10].

Paul gives a similar commendation in the second letter that he penned to that church. "We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

"This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" [2 THESSALONIANS 1:3-8].

I will take one moment further on this matter to remind you of Peter's view of the relationship between believers and the world in which they live. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls" [1 PETER 1:3-9].

Before one can anticipate victory, one must prepare for the conflict. The Christian must prepare mentally for battle. We speak of spiritual warfare, and our conflict is indeed spiritual. We equip ourselves through learning to use the weapons of prayer, faith, righteousness, truth and the Word of God [see EPHESIANS 6:10-18]. We preachers spend far less time speaking of the mental preparation required for successful battle than we do speaking of the benefits of faith. Acknowledging that we are in battle, refusing to be deterred from the pursuit of righteousness by the assaults of false brothers, affirmation that even friends and family may assail the truth are all necessary if we will stand in the day of battle. Make no mistake, we are at war and the battle will be intense, requiring our most valiant effort and necessitating persistence in the fray.

THE COMMAND FOR COMBAT — “This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith.” In war, there are multiple dangers that threaten the warrior. Enemy combatants may be secreted at various locations. Ambush is always a danger as the warrior moves toward the objective of securing the high ground. There is the potential that mines and IEDs will be planted along every road, and especially situated to wound should the warrior step off the marked path. The warrior must always be alert, watching for attack; he also bears responsibility to watch for those who walk the warrior’s path with him.

Timothy had received a command. He was not alone in combat. The Apostle shared in the battle, and others from within the congregation were looking to Timothy for steadiness facing the foe. The One who had appointed Timothy had every right to expect him to obey and to keep watch over his command. Perhaps you have seen the movie, *Gladiator*. It is the story of General Maximus, a man who goes from a celebrated warrior and favourite of one Emperor, to a despised traitor and nemesis of another. In the story as presented, Maximus becomes a fugitive, then a caged slave and finally an unvanquished gladiator. His fame in the arena brings him to the pinnacle of the sport—Rome’s Coliseum to face elite warriors in gladiatorial combat.

The games open with a re-enactment of the battle of Carthage. The gladiators, all on foot, are cast as the hapless Carthaginians. It is the stage for slaughter. The gladiators are marched out of a dark passageway into brilliant sunlight where they are met with roars from the spectators anticipating being entertained with a bloody spectacle.

Maximus, assuming the role of leader, shouts to the small knot of men, “Stay together.” He assembles the men in tight circle in the centre of the arena: back-to-back, shields aloft, spears outward. Again, Maximus shouts, “Whatever comes out that gate, stay together.”

What comes out of the gate is chariot upon chariot, thundering toward the circled men. The chariots circle, drawing closer, ever closer to what appears to be doomed gladiators. War horses, guided by master charioteers, strain against the harnesses, pulling the chariots with deadly agility and earth shaking strength. Amazonian warrior princesses ride behind, hurling spears with deadly precision and volleying arrows. One gladiator, ignoring Maximus’ orders, attempts to run, only to be cut down. Maximus shouts once more, “Stay together!”

The instinct to run is strong, but the general exerts his authority and the gladiators, held by the resolve and experience of Maximus, resist their natural impulse. As the chariots circle closer, spears and arrows rain down on the men’s wooden shields. Just as the chariots are about to cinch the knot, Maximus shouts, “Now!” The gladiators attack and decimate the Romans.

Commodus, the wicked emperor, caustically remarks to the games’ organiser, “My memory of Roman history is rusty; but didn’t we beat Carthage the first time?”

“Whatever comes out that gate, stay together.”

The instinct among the faithful is to act as individuals; the call of the Master is to follow those whom He has appointed to lead. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels, Paul charged Timothy [see **2 TIMOTHY 4:1, 2**]. Timothy’s obedience was not merely to Paul, a mortal himself, but to the True and Living God. Those whom God had assigned to the congregation in Ephesus were likewise responsible to align themselves behind those whom God had appointed. Timothy would answer to God for his ministry—he had a duty to the congregation. Duty is a quality that our self-indulgent culture seldom considers. We speak of freedom, success, joy and peace among the churches of this day; but we speak little of duty.

The elder is appointed by God; and he bears responsibility to Him who has appointed him to service. The congregation is likewise appointed by God to receive the one whom God has given to lead them. No board, no elected group, has authority to remove the one whom God has appointed. The congregation can either obey, accepting whom God has appointed, or they can act in disobedience and reject God's gift. They cannot presume to dictate to God what He must do in order to accommodate their desires. To disobey the divine command is to expose the assembly to danger; the Apostle compares that extreme danger to disaster resulting when the hull of the ship of faith is torn open on a hidden reef lying just beneath the waves.

Christian ministry is more than providing instruction—it is combat. Let me modify that, for some imagine this is a battle that is fought once and then peace ensues; however, Christian ministry is a campaign. The elder will discover that the whole of life and service will require constant combat, confronting error and resisting evil people. Knowledgeable men shrink from appointment to divine service. One must wonder whether Timothy shrank from this combat because he had witnessed both the conflict and the toll of battle on his mentor. In effect, Paul is saying to Timothy, “You are a man who has been appointed; you cannot refuse your task.”

Something like that happened to John Knox. Knox had been teaching in St. Andrews. His teaching was supposed to be private, but many attended his teaching because he was a man with a message. So, the people urged him to preach. However, he refused, saying that he would not run where God had not called him; whereupon, some among his hearers concluded that they would deliver a charge to Knox by the mouth of their preacher.

On Sunday, Knox was in church and John Rough was preaching. Rough directed his words to Knox, saying: “Brother, ye shall not be offended, albeit that I speak unto you that which I have in charge, even from all those that are here present, which is this: In the name of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ, and in the name of these that presently call you by my mouth, I charge you that you refuse not this holy vocation, but . . . that you take upon you the public office and charge of preaching, even as you look to avoid God's heavy displeasure, and desire that he shall multiply his graces with you.” At the conclusion of his message, Rough said to those that were present, “Was not this your charge to me? And do ye not approve this vocation?” The congregation answered, “It was; and we approve it.” With that, Knox, abashed, burst into tears and left the church building. It was said that his demeanour and behaviour, from that day “until the day that he was compelled to present himself to the public place of preaching, did sufficiently declare the grief and trouble of his heart; for no man saw any sign of mirth in him, neither yet had he pleasure to accompany any man, many days together.”

John Knox was chosen. He resisted the call, but he was compelled to accept it, for the choice had been made by God. Years afterwards the Regent Morton uttered his famous epitaph by Knox's graveside: “In respect that he bore God's message, to whom he must make account for the same, he (albeit he was weak and an unworthy creature, and a fearful man) feared not the faces of men.” The consciousness of being chosen gave him courage.⁵

In the opening verse of the text, Paul has written, “This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare” [1 TIMOTHY 1:18]. What prophecies? We read of prophecy associated with Timothy's appointment to divine service. “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you” [1 TIMOTHY 4:14]. The gift is not identified, but it is obviously associated with prophecy and the laying on of hands.

⁵ The account is found in, William Barclay (ed.), **The Daily Study Bible: The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon** (Westminster John Knox Press, Philadelphia, PA 1975) 49-50

I suggest that the gift Timothy received was associated with the role as a spiritual warrior. Clearly, the prophecies in view were given for the purpose of fighting well; so that gift is likely not a gift specifically for ministry as such, but rather of the means to carry out his ministry. Since the ministry to which Timothy had been appointed involved confrontation and conflict while he provided corrective teaching, perhaps the gift included “power, love and self-control” [see 2 TIMOTHY 1:7].⁶

Years ago, an old Texas divine insisted that an undefined quality is conferred upon the man of God when he is set apart to holy office. I have come to believe his assessment to be accurate; when a congregation sets a man apart to serve at the sacred desk, that man is given a holy gift. Though the gift may be—and often is—stifled, suppressed or squandered, it is a real gift nevertheless. Moreover, as the man of God walks in the light of the Risen Master, immersing himself in the Word, that man will discover that his life and service is infused with “power, love and self-control.”

The author of the Letter to Hebrew Christians spoke of the appointment of the man of God. To be certain, he spoke of the appointment of the one whom God chose to be high priest; however, the principle that is taught is applicable to the elder who God appoints. He concludes with this observation, “No one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God” [HEBREWS 5:4]. One does not decide to be an elder, though one may desire appointment to eldership. One is not paid to accept the office of elder, though support may be offered to permit the man to fulfil the responsibilities of the office. The elder is appointed by God and is to be received by the congregation. Entering into eldership, the man of God enters into a life-long campaign in which he will be engaged in battle for the remainder of his days on earth.

THE CHALLENGE OF CONTINUITY — “This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.” When false brothers inveighed against the faithful, Paul did not hesitate—immediately, he consigned them to Satan.

I began by noting that a church, or a denomination, always stands but one generation from extinction. Our tendency as mere mortals is to place our hope in institutions and physical structures. ***We will never face divine disavowal because of this great building!*** How many large church buildings do you see in any community where a great congregation once worshipped, yet today that building is nearly empty? I’ve witnessed more than a few churches that chose to die rather than move from “dear old first church.” The people were focused on the building—the product of their own labours, and could not permit God to move in their midst.

We will always have a witness because of our vast mission programme! Our denomination is great and does so many great things for God! Though a missionary programme of prior generations may have provided a powerful witness to Christ the Lord, how many of those same programmes are dissipated and powerless today! Few denominations persist unchanged beyond a generation of two; most decay into a means of turning the lost from the Faith with the passing of years. It is almost impossible to find a school more than one hundred years old that has not moved significantly from the vision of the founders. Similarly, denominations and movements seldom hold to the founding vision more than a few decades.

⁶ This is suggested by Walter L. Liefeld, **The NIV Application Commentary: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus** (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1975) 78

A well-written constitution will preserve us. Our precisely crafted doctrinal statement will insure that we will continue without interruption. I'll guarantee that almost every congregation that is dying had a solid constitution at one time. Almost always these dying congregations had at one time a precise doctrinal statement. I've come to realise that every church has two constitutions—the one that is on file with the CRA and the Registrar of Societies, and the one that they use. Likewise, every congregation has two doctrinal statements—the one they publicly proclaim and the one they live by. We tend to live in the moment, imagining that we can prevent drift through what we write or through what we say.

It is an axiom worthy of remembering: ***Anything touched by the hand of man is tainted.*** One of the founders of a major Baptist movement was interviewed by a denominational newspaper. He was asked, "What is the future of this movement?" His terse answer was incisive and startlingly accurate, "Apostasy!" ***Anything touched by the hand of man tends toward apostasy.*** Spurgeon was asked on one occasion what would happen at the Tabernacle after his death. His response showed restraint and insight, for he answered, "It all depends on who follows me." Our preaching and out teaching is to this generation. Each succeeding generation is responsible to recapture the ardour of the past while addressing the present.

How shocking the Word of the Lord through Jeremiah must have been to those who heard him say, "Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'"

"For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever" [JEREMIAH 7:2-7].

Paul realised that he was passing from the scene. The aged saint had reason to be pleased with the manner in which God had used his service. In a reflective mood as he wrote the Roman saints, Paul wrote, "On some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation" [ROMANS 15:15-20].

However, now the old man was now passing the torch. Timothy was encouraged to enter the fray and not give up the fight. We are engaged in a battle worth fighting; we are called to a war from which there will be no discharge. As was true for Paul, so it is true for us; we must pass the torch to a generation that follows. Each succeeding generation is responsible to be energised by the same Spirit of God, impelled by the same love for lost humanity and imbued with the same conviction as those who stood in the conflict. What must not be overlooked is that the conflict continues and each generation must accept that they are engaged in a lifelong campaign that shall not end until Christ Himself returns.

There will be a conclusion to the extended rebellion. John writes of the end of rebellion. “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

“Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, ‘Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.’ And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh” **[REVELATION 19:11-21]**.

You who are fellow believers, come join in this grand advance of righteousness. Christ the Master is coming soon and we shall receive our commendation from Him at that time. All who stand outside this holy Faith, give up your rebellion and receive the forgiveness of sin through faith in this Risen, Living Son of God. Amen.