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“Departure from God — its cause, character & consequences”



The synopsis of a sermon preached by Rev. Ivan Foster in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church on Lord's Day evening, September 28th, 2003.

“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,” Judges 2:10.

These words make sad reading for anyone, irrespective of their age, who has any regard for God and His honour and His people. A generation has arisen in Israel that knows not God and, in consequence, forsakes His truth and embraces idolatry.

Sadly, such a turn of events is not so uncommon. A generation who knows not God may follow after a generation of the greatest of God's saints. Consider the words of Christ to the church at Ephesus in Rev 2: 1-7. At the time that this letter was written, this church was younger than the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster. What a history it had! It was founded by the apostle Paul amidst scenes reminiscent of the day of Pentecost. (See Acts 19: 1-20.) John the apostle had also ministered there, as did Timothy. The church at Ephesus had therefore the cream of preachers and the richest of blessings, yet the second generation was showing such signs of decay and decline that a special message with a solemn warning was sent to them from the Lord. The same trends are at work today. It can never be any other way and that for a number of reasons.

A. Christians have within them still a nature that hates the truth of God. “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.” Romans 7: 22-25.

B. We live in an environment that is hostile to God. All around us, pressurising us, is a world that detests the ways of God “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” I John 2: 15-16. This is the atmosphere in which we must live.

C. We have a mighty opponent who seeks to hinder our walk with God. The devil is the enemy of righteousness. Consider these verses: “When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away



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that which was sown in his heart," Matthew 13:19. "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat," Luke 22:31. Both these references remind us of the unrelenting opposition of the devil to holiness. It is for these basic reasons that God's people often falter in their obedience and fail to pass on the torch of truth to the next generation. In turning to our text, please note:

I. THE CENTRAL CAUSE OF THIS DEPARTURE

"There arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD." They had not that inward, spiritual knowledge of God. False professions of conversion took the place of the new birth. The rule of man's notions and appetites replaced a reverence and obedience of God's Word. Evidence of this departure may be seen amongst the ranks of God's people today, even within the ranks of our denomination. Hearts unwilling to acknowledge that it is happening may resent such a thing being said, but it is, nevertheless, true. If it was true of the generation that followed Joshua, then what is so special about us that it cannot happen to our offspring? This ignorance indicated that: —

1. This generation had given no heed to the witness of God's truth. So often a witness ceases after the death of a generation because the testimony of their fathers has been rejected. "Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD," 1 Samuel 2: 12. Eli's sons rejected the testimony of their father. Of course, Eli had a portion of blame to bear for the folly of his sons. This was made plain to him by the message of condemnation that God sent to him by a prophet. "Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people? Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house." 1 Samuel 2:29-31. This message was confirmed unto Eli by young Samuel. "In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever." 1 Samuel 3:12-14. In the light of these terrible words, let every father and mother attend to the matters of child discipline with care and prayerful attention to what God says about this vital issue. The adopting of the world's view of discipline by parents has been but the first evidence of a departure from God and it, in turn, has led on to further rebellion on the part of children, thus deprived of proper discipline. How the devil loves to promote a despising of the ways of the fathers amongst their sons and daughters! It was for this reason that the prodigal son left his father's house, Luke 15:11-32.

2. This generation gave no consideration to the benefits they enjoyed. What a display of ingratitude and folly is seen in their rejection of the Lord! They lived in a land that was flourishing with crops they had not planted, cities they had not built, wells they had not dug. Its riches they had inherited from the gracious hand of God. Years before, God



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had warned them of this folly. "And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, and houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (for the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth." Deuteronomy 6:10-15. Even the dumb beast shows more gratitude than those who despise the mercies of God. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward." Isaiah 1:2-4.

3. There was a reverting back to the natural state on the part of this generation.

As the uncared for and uncultivated fields return to the control and dominance of the weed, the briar and the bramble, even so the generation that turns from God's truth returns to the control of natural depravity. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." 2 Timothy 3:1-5. This is the evil crop that we see springing up in the homes, schools, and streets of the nation. The basic dishonesty that permeates all of the nation's activities, the violence, the perversity and depravity — these are the fruits that spring from a departing from God. The knowledge of God had declined in the nation.

II. THE CHARACTER OF THEIR DEPARTURE

The evidence of their ignorance of God was their turning away from Him, unaware of the blessings they were thus forsaking and blind to the wretchedness they were embracing.

1. It was sudden. It did not take decades to bring about this departure, but within a few years the change manifested itself. "There arose another generation." There stood up. As a person comes of age and takes over the affairs of his life, so it was with this generation. That is how quickly it happened.

2. Their departure was complete. They forsook the Lord, verse 12. They stood up and turned away from God. They turned their back upon Him. "Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD," Jeremiah 2:11-12. We have seen this taking place within the ranks of



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evangelical religion here in Ulster. The Bible's teachings on morality and theology have been cast aside as a despised thing by all too many of the rising generation.

3. They did evil. A forsaking of the Lord is an evil thing in itself and can but result in the practice of that which is evil. "And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth," verse 13.

The verses 12-13 show the utter madness of that generation, though doubtless it considered itself very wise in the decisions it had made. "And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger. And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth."

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR DEPARTURE

1. They provoked God. Verse 14. God was angry. He is never more angry than with those who have benefited from His mercy. Men may turn away from God and put Him out of their thoughts, but that does not cause God to cease to be or render them impervious to His judgment. The Lord will have the final say on this matter. The dismissing of God by a generation does not result in His ceasing to deal with them. Jonah may run away, but God's judgments will follow.

2. They brought His judgment upon their heads. "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," Judges 2: 14. What sovereignty of power is possessed by God! He can change our world in a moment. That is what Ulster has basically experienced. Would our fathers recognise the land from which they departed a generation ago? Would they recognise an Ulster in which IRA godfathers and murderers dictate events, controlling everything from the name and nature of our police force to the form of discipline exercised in our schools; from the time and place the Union Jack may be flown to whether or not we may have an election? I think not.

3. He spoiled them. They became the prey of those that had been conquered by their fathers. What revenge their enemies would have sought! That the essence of what our Province has begun to pass through.

4. They were brought low. They were unable to stand. This is the future for our church, our land if there is not a turning back to the Lord. "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land," 2 Chronicles 7: 14.