

# THE CHURCH OF THE NEXT GENERATION

By Donald Townsley

It is a well-known fact that a generation of people often inherit the good deeds and mistakes of a previous generation. This being true, each generation needs to be keenly aware of its responsibility. This is also true in the church. What the church of tomorrow will be and accomplish depends, to a great degree, upon what we do and teach in this generation. We all need to realize that just because **we** are sound in the faith is no guarantee that **our children** will be! If we fail to properly teach in our generation, our children may forsake the Lord!

My generation in the church inherited the failures of the generation before to properly teach concerning the mission of the church and the church working through human organizations. As a result of this failure to teach, a great percentage of the church has gone into digression. For forty years now many of us have fought the tide of digression on the one hand, and on the other we have had to work hard to convert people to Christ that the church might continue to grow and reach the world with the pure gospel. The Lord has been with us and our number has increased many-fold.

What does the future hold for churches of Christ that are striving to preach the gospel without addition or subtraction -- churches that are striving to follow the New Testament pattern in all things? That future depends upon the kind of teaching that we are **now** giving our children. If we take too much for granted and fail to teach and warn, the churches we have worked so hard to build may be lost to digression in the next generation!

Israel, in the days of Joshua, is a good example of this kind of failure. (Read Judges 2: 7 - 13). After the death of Joshua and the elders who outlived him "*there arose another generation who knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.*" (Judges 2:10) We wonder how this could be! The answer is that the succeeding generation had **failed to teach**. The next logical question is, "Who was responsible for teaching them?" The Bible reveals that the **priests** bore part of the responsibility; they were to read the Law to the people every seven years (Deut. 31: 9 - 13). This would mean that a boy of seven would hear the Law again at age 14, 21, 28, 35, etc. It is hard to conceive of these people being ignorant of God's law if this had been done. The **elders** of the people should have demanded that the Law be read and observed as God commanded (Num. 11: 16-17). The **parents** were to teach their children at home (Deut. 4:9; 6: 7 - 12). A failure on the part of parents would produce ignorance. The **people** themselves should have desired that the law of God be read. **All these had failed** in their responsibilities. As a result, Israel was ignorant of God's ways ( Judges 2: 10) and had gone after the gods of those round about them (Judges 2: 16 - 17). They did that which was right in their own eyes (Judges 17: 6; 21:25). They forsook the God who had saved them (Judges 2:13), and were inappreciative of His mercy. They did that which was evil in God's sight and cause His wrath to be upon them (Judges 2: 11 - 14).

Who has the responsibility, under Christ's authority, to teach in our generation? **Preachers** and **teachers** of the word of God have responsibility. They are to be loyal to God, not men-pleasers ( Acts 20: 26 - 27; Gal. 1:10). They have a responsibility to warn about departures from the faith (I Tim. 4: 1 - 6). They are to preach the word "in season" and "out of season" ( II Tim. 4:2). **Elders** of the church are watchmen; they are to teach and to warn ( Acts 20: 28-31). Woe to the shepherds in Israel who fail in their duty to teach and to warn! **Parents** must teach their children the word of God and warn them about

departures from the faith (Eph. 6: 1 - 4). **Christians** as a whole should **demand** that the truth be taught. They should shun evil and all that might bring apostasy.

Brethren, if we fail to properly teach and warn, the next generation will have to drink from the same bitter cup of sorrow that we have in our generation! My hope and prayer is that the little boys and girls who are all around me when the saints assemble to worship will **never** have to know the sorrow and see the bitterness that I have seen and known in spiritual Israel in my generation. I have seen churches divide, families split apart, friendships broken, and sinners confused because of an untaught generation.

What will the church be in the next generation? A lot of what it will be, brethren, is in our hands today! If preachers, teachers, elders, and parents will fulfill their responsibilities **today** the church will be sound **tomorrow**.