

A Look at Three Generations

“Save yourselves from this generation that has gone astray!” (Acts 2:40, *NLT*).

Bruce Wilkinson teaches on “The Three Chairs,” representing a three-generation principle. This concept is expanded in his book, *First Hand Faith*, and has deep implications for Christians. Wilkinson believes these generational insights from Scripture are universal truths. They exist for all time and all people. His teachings serve as the basis for this lesson and a strong warning against becoming a generation that has gone astray.

It is possible for dynamic churches to shift from godliness to godlessness, from vibrant faith to empty faith. When a church moves toward the first generation, it is called a red-hot, on fire for God, revival church. But as a church moves into the third generation, it becomes a liberal lukewarm, cold church. Worse yet—*Ichabod*—“the glory of the Lord has departed” could be written over its door.

First Generation **The Life of Joshua** ***Commitment***

- They knew God.
- They had first-hand faith.
- They had the works of God in their midst and saw tremendous miracles.
- They knew what they believed and understood why they believed it.
- They served God.
- They did what was right in God’s eyes.

“Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:14-15).

Second Generation **The Elders that Outlived Joshua** ***Compromise***

- They knew about God.
- They had second-hand faith.
- They did not have the works of God, but they had seen and heard about them.

- They knew what they believed, but did not understand why they believed it. They were not committed to it and wanted to try other things.
- They served the God of their fathers, but lacked a personal relationship.

“And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel” (Judges 2:7). (See also see Joshua 24:31.)

Arnold Cook said, “The second generation holds its convictions less fervently than pioneers...With each succeeding generation, isolation from the world becomes more difficult.”

Curtis Young in the *Apostolic World Report* (August-September 2001) wrote, “History is replete with evidence that people and churches change. Sometimes those changes remove the heart and soul of the church so that the church is actually dead even though the social machinery continues to operate. The church in Sardis is a good example. Sardis existed on past glory, while claiming to be alive. The verdict of God was that it was dead.” (See Revelation 3:1.)

He continues, “It is possible to predict the future of a movement by its direction. Many are therefore concerned because they see men of influence who appear to be moving or drifting toward compromise where the Oneness of God is a non-issue, and where matters of holiness and separation are dismissed as bondage...To lose any part of the Apostolic message or any of its distinguishing characteristics would be the ultimate compromise. The greater tragedy for the church is not death but compromise. In fact, death is preferable to compromise. But we do not have to chose between a dead church and a compromising church...Instead of giving heed to the voice of compromise that beckons us...let us follow the admonition of the scripture which tells us to, ‘earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints’” (Jude 3).

The second generation failed. They knew the landmarks were there, but had forgotten their purpose.

<p><i>Third Generation</i> The Generation that Did Not Know <i>Confusion</i></p>

- They did not know God. (Wilkinson calls this the “Conflict” or “Chaos” generation.)
- They did not know the works and wonders of God.
- They had no faith—a faithless, godless generation.
- They grew up in an environment where the people had moved away from God.
- They did not know what to believe.
- They did evil in the sight of the Lord.
- They served other gods.

Why do you think there arose a generation that did not know the Lord? Parents never instilled truth in them or worse, never told them.

Albert Outler (as quoted in *Evangelism for a Changing World*) said, “It is as if, once upon a time, an earlier generation understood it all and then forgot to tell their children—who never asked.”

“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).

“(For in those days Israel had no king, so everyone did whatever he wanted to-whatever seemed right in his own eyes)” (Judges 17:6, *TLB*).

Richard Wilke in his book *And Are We Yet Alive?* said, “Our sickness is more serious than we first suspected. We are in trouble, you and I...We thought we were just drifting, like a sailboat on a dreamy day. Instead we are wasting away...Once we were a...revival...fired by the Spirit, running the race set before us like a sprinter trying to win the prize...Now we are tired, listless, fueled only by the nostalgia of former days, walking with a droop, eyes on the ground, discouraged, putting one foot ahead of the other like a tired old man who remembers, but who can no longer perform.”

Let these words never be written about us and the churches we represent.

“(Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:10-13).

Where Do You Stand?

Which generation are you a part of? Are you closer to God today than you were last year?

Compare where your church was five or ten years ago to where it is today. Are you moving toward commitment, compromise, or worst of all, confusion?

“As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15).

I have chosen whom I am going to serve. Have you? I am going to be committed.

“I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name” (Revelation 3:8).

The following was found among a young African pastor’s papers after he was martyred for the cause of Christ.

"I am part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I am a disciple of His and I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still.

"My past is redeemed. My present makes sense. My future is secure. I am done and finished with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap living, and dwarfed goals.

"I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, or first, tops, recognized, praised, or rewarded. I live by faith, lean on His presence, walk by patience, lift by prayer, and labor by Holy Spirit power.

"My face is set. My gait is fast. My goal is heaven. My road may be narrow, my way rough, my companions few, but my guide is reliable and my mission is clear.

"I will not be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded or delayed.

"I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice or hesitate in the presence of the adversary. I will not negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

"I won't give up, shut up, or let up until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, and preached up for the cause of Christ.

"I am a disciple of Jesus. I must give until I drop, preach until all know, and work until He comes. And when He does come for His own, He'll have no problem recognizing me. My colors will be clear!"

"Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them" (Deuteronomy 4:9, *NIV*).

Study Questions

1. What word describes the first generation? _____

2. What word describes the second generation? _____

3. What word describes the third generation? _____

4. According to Curtis Young what is the ultimate compromise? _____

5. Why did a generation arise that did not know the Lord? _____

6. What are the characteristics of the first generation? _____

7. What are the characteristics of the second generation? _____

8. What are the characteristics of the third generation? _____

9. How did Richard Wilke describe the generation that has drifted? _____

10. List three things you personally learned from the writings found in the martyred African pastor's papers. _____

11. Describe the spiritual status of the church at Sardis. _____

