

Generational Differences and a Word About Youth “

One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts.”

Psalm 145:4

No matter where I go, I continually hear the importance of reaching out and ministering to the younger generation. In a previous day, there was a concerted effort to do so with accounts of many young people coming to Christ by the hordes. There was Youth for Christ with Billy Graham, Torrey Johnson and Robert Cook. There was Percy Crawford's Youth on the March; Bill Bright's Campus Crusade for Christ, Jack Wyrzten's Word of Life camps, Dawson Trotman and the Navigators and Stacy Woods with Inter-Varsity and the Urbana Missions convention. These were major initiatives aimed at youth and were a major influence in American evangelicalism. Thankfully, there are still viable youth ministries taking place for which we praise the Lord.

But how do we reach the youth culture today with the life-changing message of the Cross – a culture on the skids and fixated on the macabre? If we do reach them, how do we effectively engage them and tap into their talents once they become part of a church fellowship? The opinions vary widely and run from pillar to post, ranging from the plausible to the ridiculous. At the center of the discussion is the music issue – traditional hymns versus contemporary music, a controversial topic indeed! There are generational differences on this and other matters of Church practice that need to be talked out.

The Younger Generation

First, let's look at the young people. They have so much to offer! They possess an abundance of energy, are willing to travel to the uttermost parts of the earth to go on an activity and can change the atmosphere of the meetings simply by being there. For the most part, they are on the cutting edge of technology and provide the technical expertise that can enhance the ministries of any local church. They are also a means for reaching others for Christ. Like Levi who invited his friends to a feast after coming to the Lord (Mark 2), young people are a potential pipeline to others. Young people are a worthwhile ministry focus and a valuable investment that can pay high dividends for any fellowship that makes the effort to reach out and encourage them.

However, this is a hard sell for some. They have a tough time with the youth whose church attendance is inconsistent at best and whose casual dress and giving patterns have something to be desired. Some even feel they exhibit a disrespectful attitude toward the older generation, the result of buying into a secular culture that promulgates a message of “Question Authority”. They often think that the older generation is clueless, especially in the area of technology. That might be the case when working on an IPAD or tablet, or with emails, Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. But to be honest, in the school of God the older generation has a lot more wisdom than youth, who should be actively seeking their advice. It is to their detriment if they do not. Look at the young servant of Elisha. Instead of checking with the prophet before preparing a meal, he went out into a field and collected a lapful of poisonous gourds in a time of famine. After putting them into the stew, “death in the pot” ensued, adversely affecting the sons of the prophets, 2 Kings 4:38-41. It is a spiritual reminder that young people need to seek out godly counsel from the older generation to avoid the harmful

effects of false teaching. It also should speak to the older generation to offer protective counsel in a time of spiritual famine. A similar warning comes from the life of King Rehoboam who rejected the gracious counsel of the older generation and yielded to the shortsighted perspective of the younger men around him. When he did, civil war broke out, 1 Kings 12:1-15. Young people need to know this! As the verse says, there is a generation that is lifted up and pure in their own eyes. Unfortunately, the culture can adversely affect their perspective, thus the reason to regard the godly advice of the older generation. The gray hair of older people speaks for itself - they must have done something right to get this far in life!

The Older Generation

Now all this is not to say that the older generation is not without their faults. They have some issues as well. True, the “builder generation” have clearly proven their dedication to Christ over the years. They represent the faithful core. They have a commitment to the meetings of the church. They have abundantly given of their time, talents, and treasures. What would we do without them! But they also need to realize that the youth today are facing monumental challenges compared to what they went through in their younger days. Youth must be disciplined, nurtured, and trained in the ways of the Lord if a fellowship is to continue to have a vital testimony. It may be difficult for older Christians to let go of ministries they have enjoyed and been doing for years, but it must be done if future generations are to be cared for. They also need to know that in previous centuries some of the movers and shakers were of the younger generation. The life of John Darby and other notables attest to that. Consequently, the older generation must realize that because something “has always been done this way”, does not mean that adjustments cannot be done to make outreach and ministry more effective, if the Word is consulted and not compromised. David learned that lesson quickly when he borrowed the idea of using a Philistine cart to transport the Ark of the Covenant rather than by God’s prescribed way (2 Sam. 6). As he adjusted, obeying the Word, great progress was made, 1 Chron. 15:13-15; 26.

What is the difference? It simply is a matter of perspective. Similarly, some see what they do as beautiful; others see another side of things – not so beautiful. In Ezra’s day, the young people rejoiced when they saw the temple restored, while the older generation wept because, it paled in comparison to the former temple from their perspective, Ezra 3:12. Another difference between the generations, for sure.

To the youth, Paul writes, “Let no man despise thy youth”. He then elaborates, “be an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity”, 1 Tim. 4:12, a challenge for young people to be above reproach. To the older generation, Paul writes “the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also”, 2 Tim. 2:2. There is a duty to invest in the next generation and equip them. For the young, be a model Christian and earn the trust of the older generation so they can confidently “pass the baton” to you. For the older, look for opportunities to invest in a young person today.