

The Three Chairs

The theme of this lesson is based on a lesson presented by Ralph Walker. I liked the format and message and wanted to share the idea. There is a tendency for groups of people to drift away from the truth as years go by. Not necessarily one person leaving the faith, but generations. As generation succeeds generation there is a tendency for children are not to be as faithful as their parents. It shows up as a gradual change, not a sudden departure from the truth. It's been noted that few churches remain faithful to the teachings of God's Word for more than 100 years.

Let me begin our thoughts with a picture of three chairs. Each chair represents a generation of people; thus the three chairs represents three generations. From this illustration I hope to illustrate this drift. It generally works this way; the first generation is fired up, enthusiastic, and dedicated to God. The second generation goes to services. They go through the motions, but the fire and zeal are missing. The third generation doesn't care. They give themselves completely over to sin. This has been a pattern for centuries. We can see it as far back as the patriarchs in the OT time.

For example, consider Abraham, Isaac, Esau. Abraham is known as the father of faith. We'll sit him in chair number 1. As he traveled, he frequently built altars to God - Genesis 12:7, 13:4, 18, 22:9. He was a godly man that, for the most part, put his trust and allegiance in the hands of God almighty.

In chair number 2 we will sit Isaac, Abraham's son. Isaac worshiped God, but his faith was not in the same class as Abraham's. Instead of altars, he is noted for the wells that he built. The one time it is mentioned that he built an altar, he puts a well next to it. **Genesis 26:25 And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.** While it's a small thing, you begin to see a drift. To illustrate this drift towards worldly considerations, Isaac favored one of his sons because of the food he brought to the table. There was disharmony within the family. **Genesis 25:28 And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.**

In the third chair we see Isaac's first born son, Esau. Esau was very worldly. He married local women who did not worship God. In addition to that, he despised his inheritance. **Genesis 25:29-34 And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: (30) And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. (31) And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. (32) And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? (33) And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. (34) Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: THUS ESAU DESPISED HIS BIRTHRIGHT.**

Another example is David, Solomon, Rehoboam. David is described as a man after God's own heart. However, he was not a successful father. His son Amnon raped his half-sister, Tamar. Another son, Absalom, attempted to overthrow David and laid in public with some of his father's concubines. Another son, Adonijah also attempted to overthrow David as king (1 Kings 1:5-6)

IN CHAIR NUMBER 2 we will put Solomon, another son of David, who was better than his brothers. ***1 Kings 11:1-3 But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; (2) Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for***

surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. (3) And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: AND HIS WIVES TURNED AWAY HIS HEART. While David was known as a man after God's own heart, Solomon was known for having his heart turned away from God. He allowed his wives to worship false gods and even joined them (v6)

Solomon spent 7 years building the temple (1 Kings 6:37-38) but he then spent 13 years building his own palace (1 Kings 7:1). Where do you think Solomon's priorities were placed? It seems he was more interested in serving self more than serving the living God in heaven.

IN CHAIR NUMBER 3 we place Solomon's son, Rehoboam. Rehoboam was responsible for splitting the nation of Israel. Under his rule, Judah went after idols. *1 Kings 14:21-24 And Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. ... (22) And Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done. (23) For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree. (24) And there were also sodomites in the land: and they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD cast out before the children of Israel.* They embraced the worship of idols along with homosexuality. Are you surprised?

We see the same pattern with the nation of Israel. Joshua and the people served God during all of Joshua's life and during the lives of the elders who served Joshua. *Judges 2:6-13 And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land. (7) And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua.* But then Joshua dies and the second generation then dies which then brings us to the third generation. This is a generation that did not know God. *(10) ...: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. (11) And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim: (12) And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods... (13) And they forsook the LORD.*

How is it that the first generation raises a weaker second and third generation? Let me suggest that is a difference in their commitment. The First chair folk tends to dwell in today; they see work that needs to be done and they do it. They recognize there are fields white to harvest as Jesus describes in Luke 10:2. First chair people are eager and willing to serve with a commitment.

Second chair people tend to be less committed. They are proud, even arrogant, about the things that happened in the past. "Why, we used to . . ."

The second chair people have a difference in their view of authority. First chair people base everything on what God says. They are always looking towards God. They won't take any man's word. Second chair people obey, but their obedience is often prefaced with "Yes, but . . ." They think they follow God, but when asked for their opinion they will say "I think . . ." instead of "God says . . ."

Paul describes this attitude in his letter to Timothy. *2 Timothy 3:5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.* It looks good; it has a form of godliness, but it doesn't have substance. They deny the power of the Gospel "It won't work" they reason. "You can't get people to study anymore" they might argue. "The Bible is old fashioned and out of date. It must be tailored to today's society" they will claim. They have a zeal, but the wrong kind of zeal. *Romans 10:2-3 For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. (3) For they being ignorant of God's*

righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, ~~have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.~~

There is a difference in their focus in life. First chair people put their emphasis on serving God and recognize the difference between godliness and worldliness whereas second chair people begin a blurring of godliness and worldliness. They tend to offer lip service as Jesus talks about in Matthew 15:8-9. Having succeeded in this world, there is a tendency to drift. Remember Solomon and his many wives.

Once the drifting begins, it is hard to stop. It is hard enough for dedicated people to raise faithful children but when one is only loosely committed, their children will push farther and faster. The drift starts with a desire for this world. *Galatians 4:9 But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?*

But primarily, the drift is caused by incomplete teaching. Teaching is the responsibility of the home (Ephesians 6:4). God warned the Israelites to diligently teach, lest they forget (Deuteronomy 6:7). Effort must be given. It doesn't happen by osmosis. *Hosea 4:6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.*

Too often, we hope that our example will be enough and example is certainly important, but our example leaves much to be desired as far as knowing God's word. A lack of knowledge will destroy a generation.

While example is important, so is discipline. A generation without discipline will become a generation without restraint and will easily be influenced away from God. The OT prophet is a good example of this. Eli was a godly man but failed to correct his sons and they became very vile. *1 Samuel 3:12-13 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. (13) For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.*

All of this results in unfaithful people who don't like to think about God. Paul describes them this way. *Romans 1:21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.* They are willfully ignorant.

How do we stop the drift? If you are a third chair person, you need to get right with God. You are lost without him. You need to seek out someone to teach you the scriptures and learn about obeying the gospel.

If you are a second chair person, you are lukewarm like John described the Laodiceans in Revelation 3:14-19. The solution - turn to God (v18). Be zealous (v19). Repent (v19). Rededicate your life to serve God (v20). Get to work!

If you are a first chair person, hang onto your faith. Now is not the time to give up. Teach your children. If possible, teach them more than you currently know!

Do you need to respond to the Lord's invitation? *Revelation 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: ...*