

The Fumbled Baton

Why the decline of Evangelicalism?

"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." Deuteronomy 6:6-7, KJV

The Word of God suggests there exists an intergenerational spiritual legacy which surpasses any other in value and importance. God chose Abraham because, **"I know him,"** said the Lord, **"that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord . . ."** (Genesis 18:19, KJV). For Abraham the faith was a trust to be passed on to his children for their spiritual blessing (Genesis 12:2). Fathers often begin businesses with the expectation that one day the sign on the front of the building might read, *Father and Son*. Family fortunes also pass from generation to generation as the names Kennedy, Rockefeller and Rothschild attest. Kings too create legacies for their descendents, for princes and princesses.

Like a baton handed-off between runners in a relay race, at least once the Christian faith was passed from a grandmother, to a mother, and to a son. Wrote Paul to Timothy, **"For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well"** (2 Timothy 1:5, NASB). However, with such a trust there is a danger.

We may take the trust too much for granted, and in doing so, fumble the baton. As she surveyed the spiritual carnage and wreckage within the biblical record, Ruth Graham once stated: "Christianity is but one generation away from extinction." Part of the problem with today's Woodstock generation is that somewhere the "baby boomers" lost or dropped the spiritual legacy of their fathers and mothers, and this failure, as the condition of our nation attests, has affected (or should I say infected?) our entire society.

An interesting illustration once appeared in the *Phi Delta Kappa Journal*. In it two authors stated: "A dangerous loss of information occurs where the elders cannot pass on to the young convincing goals that make living worth while." [1] Then the authors continued:

If there is such a thing as 'America,' it is because generation after generation of fathers and mothers have passed on to their sons and daughters the distinctive information that makes these offspring think and behave differently from youngsters growing up elsewhere. If this information were no longer transmitted successfully, "America" as we know it would no longer exist. Neither words carved in stone, nor constitutions and laws written on paper can preserve a way of life, unless the consciousness of the people supports their meaning. [2]

The *Phi Delta Kappa* authors illustrate their point by referencing Appalachia, a region synonymous with poverty and under-privilege in our minds. Yet the authors state that the area once had "a vigorous and complex material culture."^[3] So why did the region decline? Because they answer, "the young no longer felt it worthwhile to learn what their parents had known."^[4] The authors then conclude by saying that many of the negative "changes that have befallen the human race had as their source an erosion of belief . . ."^[5]

Seemingly, American society no longer values its spiritual, constitutional, and free enterprise legacy, and along with that devaluing and like Appalachia, evangelicals have to become "**wretched and miserable and poor**" (Revelation 3:17, NASB). We should not wonder that the children's teeth are set on edge when the fathers and mothers have eaten the sour grapes (See Jeremiah 31:29-30; Ezekiel 18:2.).

ENDNOTES

[1] Mihaly Csikszentmihaly and Jane McCormack, "The Influence of Teachers," *Phi Delta Kappan*, February 1986, Volume 67, Number 6, 416.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.