

**“And this Gospel ,”
shall be preached...”**
Matthew 24:14

Sermon Summaries from Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God

God's Interest in Young People

By Randy Schreiber

When I was preparing for this sermon for the youths I began reminiscing about my own past. It's interesting looking back.

I was 10 years old when I first came to Worldwide Church of God services. You're very impressionable at that age; a 10-year-old has a special way of thinking.

When our family first began reading the Worldwide Church of God's literature, the messages stuck in my mind, and they stuck in my mind so firmly that I have always believed I was a part of God's true Church. I still believe that with all my being. That's why I'm here. That's why I endured a lot of trials from age 10 on through my teenage years—I've been through a lot of things that you as youths are going through today.

Some people may think it's a waste of time talking to the kids, but Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong is very concerned with youths. Look at the growing segment of our population that is made up of small children, adolescents and teenagers. Mr. Armstrong wants to do all he can to see that they are brought up in the way they should go, as the Bible instructs (Prov. 22:6).

Outstanding Youths in the Bible

God is concerned with youths, too—just as concerned, in a special way, as He is with adults. Let's take a look in the Bible to see what God thinks of

youths and how much He notices young people.

We can go to several examples, such as that of David.

God took very special interest in David. He was a young man—a boy of approximately 14—when Samuel was commanded by God to go anoint one of the sons of Jesse as the next king of Israel. David was nearly overlooked to begin with, and even after he became Saul's armorbearer he wasn't respected very much. For example, look what happened when David visited the army of Israel, which was encamped against the Philistines:

“And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness?” David was just a kid, and God couldn't care about him—so thought Eliab. “I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle. And David said, What have I now done?” (I Sam. 17:28-29).

Don't you say the same thing a lot of times when your parents get on your case for something? You didn't really do anything but they think you did. You say, “What did I do now?” David said the same thing. He wondered why they were picking on him.

But you know the story of how later on David

slew Goliath, the Philistine champion. He as a youth trusted God. He knew God would protect him. He followed through on his belief in his Creator.

Let's go on to another example of what God thinks about youths. He very much involved Himself with another young man.

"The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests . . . Then the word of the Lord came unto me [Jeremiah], saying, Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jer. 1:1, 4).

What would you do as a youth about 17 years old if God came to you and said, "I want YOU to preach to the people of the United States and tell them what is going to happen to them for breaking My laws"? What would you say? Well, you might reply the same way Jeremiah did. He was not unlike any other young man. He said, "I cannot speak: for I am a child" (verse 6). Jeremiah told God He had the wrong boy.

But God knew what He was doing. "But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee . . . Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee . . ." (verses 7-8). Jeremiah was very special to God. And Jeremiah realized he was being called for a special purpose, and he stuck with it.

Another group of children is described in the book of Daniel.

"And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes [these children were between the ages of 10 and 15]; Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans" (Dan. 1:3-4).

All these children were "appointed . . . a daily provision of the king's meat" (verse 5), which no doubt included all kinds of unclean food (Lev. 11). But in this group of young people were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. You as youths may think you've got a lot of peer pressure, but these four *really* had peer pressure, not only from

other individuals in their court but from the king himself and the king's servants.

They knew God's laws. They knew that God's way was the right way to go, and that if they ate the garbage that had been set before them, they would be dishonoring God as well as harming their own bodies. So they decided to do what God wanted them to do.

"And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat" (verse 15).

If you follow God's laws you're going to have health and wisdom. These four youths didn't eat the food and drink the booze that would destroy their bodies and minds, as other people did. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego knew better.

So God involved Himself with these four youths who strove to do what they knew was right. "As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom" (verse 17). God paid attention to them. God involved Himself with youths. He does the same thing today.

Josiah became king of Judah at eight years of age (II Chr. 34:1-3). Imagine an eight-year-old king. But at 16 years of age Josiah began to seek the laws of God and the ways of David, and he began to change the entire nation! A 16-year-old can keep God's laws. A 16-year-old *should* keep God's laws!

Young people are very special to God. He looked to these individuals in the past, and God is the same yesterday, today and forever. When a young person, no matter how old, follows God's laws, God is going to involve Himself with that youth.

What God Expects of Youths

What does God expect of youths?

Notice Exodus 20:10: ". . . the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, *nor thy son, nor thy daughter . . .*" The Ten Commandments don't apply only to converted adults. For one thing, the Ten Commandments were not given to converted adults—they were given to unconverted adults!

"Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (verse 12). Here is a law specifically for children.

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” (Eccl. 12:1). People miss out on life when they don’t obey God’s commandments. If you break the laws of God they’re going to break you.

“My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: for length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man” (Prov. 3:1-2, 4).

If you keep God’s laws, you’re not only going to find grace in God’s eyes but also with man: “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones” (Prov. 3:6-8). God will intervene in your life just as He did with David, Daniel and Josiah.

Listen and apply these things in your lives, so you don’t have to look back and be sorry you didn’t: “And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof” (Prov. 5:11-12). Don’t despise the “preacher” getting up here and “telling you what to do.” You can avoid the suffering a lot of people have gone through because they didn’t heed God’s commands.

“Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well . . . Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love. And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?” (verses 15, 18-20).

What does that mean? There is a time to rejoice in sexual love, but not before. Having sex before marriage will ruin the enjoyment you could experience later when you are married.

Solomon tells youths to enjoy life and have a good time (Eccl. 11:9). You can do anything you want to do as long as it fits in with the laws of God. Just wait!

“Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?” (Prov. 6:27). A lot of parents encourage steady dating. But parents,

when you let your 17-year-old go out alone with a member of the opposite sex, you’re holding some coals. I’m not a prude. I’m not just off somewhere in the distance, not knowing what I’m talking about. When teenagers go steady, somebody’s going to get burned. Maybe some get away with it—but very few.

Scripture tells us and experience has proven that parents who encourage steady dating are making a terrible mistake. Many pregnancies result from steady dating. It’s just not necessary for a young person. There are so many other things with which to be involved. There are many other girls and boys with whom you can enjoy activities.

“Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long. For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off” (Prov. 23:17-18). Don’t give in to destructive peer pressure. There is more to life than fleeting pleasures of the moment. Life has a purpose, and there is a reward ahead for those who serve that purpose.

“Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way. Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh . . . The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice” (verses 19-20, 24-25). Parents, if your children love you, that love will keep them from going in the wrong direction. They won’t want to hurt you.

“My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways” (verse 26). Do you have your child’s heart? Your children are observing your ways. What kind of an example are you parents setting for your children?

What’s In It for Young People?

What’s in it for you, then? If you do things right, if you don’t yield to peer pressure, if you’re the only one on the block who hasn’t necked in the back seat of a car, if everyone thinks you’re weird—well, what’s in it for you? Is it worth it?

Let’s look at it from two standpoints. The first shows us the bad aspect. God says if you obey Him you will be blessed, and if you disobey Him you will be cursed.

You can avoid—if you obey God—the fear of

getting caught. If you're not heading in the wrong direction, you won't be doing anything to be caught at. You can also avoid the aimlessness—the “no-future” feeling—that people get into. You have a future of which you can be sure.

The suicide rate among youths from 15-19 years old has increased 124 percent since 1961. Imagine a 15-year-old committing suicide, getting rid of his life because he has nothing to live for. The wrong way doesn't bring happiness. Suicide is the third-leading cause of death in that age group.

If you go your own way, God is going to let you. And you will very possibly end up like the children in Genesis 19.

“And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it. And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law . . . and said . . . get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked to his sons in law. And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city” (Gen. 19:12-15). Those who rebelled and did not obey—those who did not respect the wisdom of the parents—were not going to escape.

“There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother. . . . The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it” (Prov. 30:11, 17).

That describes your future if you choose to rebel.

Now what about the blessings? What about the good you will enjoy if you go the right way? What is your future if you decide not to rebel? You've got a tremendous goal in life that the rest of the world does not have. You have real happiness and peace of mind. You have a fantastic future. You're going to be in the world tomorrow, where you'll really have the opportunity to rejoice. You will be the leaders of that world tomorrow when God's government is set up on earth. You will have the experience to begin ruling the earth. You'll be teaching people. You'll be able to raise a family in a perfect environment. You'll plan tomorrow's cities.

“And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations. And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers” (Isa. 61:4-5).

“Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people” (Isa. 62:10). You'll be building highways and planning mass transit. You can enjoy abundant life forever. You don't stop living—you start.

“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and fatling together; and a little child shall lead them” (Isa. 11:6). Can you imagine taking your pet lion to a 4-H club meeting and showing him off? Life is not going to end. Your obedience to God now will point you to something much greater than you have ever imagined—eternal life and happiness in God's Kingdom.