

Four corrupt generations

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] Proverbs 30, 11 to 14. There is a generation that curses their father and does not bless their mother.

There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes and yet is not washed from their filthiness. There is a generation, oh how lofty are their eyes, and their eyelids are lifted up. There is a generation whose teeth are as swords and their jaw teeth as knives to devour the poor from off the earth and the needy from among men. Now here in these words we see a reference to four generations. Let me say a word about the writer of these things.

The book of Proverbs was written mainly by King Solomon, the son of David.

[1 : 21] You remember God gave Solomon exceptional wisdom. And it was Solomon who wrote three books of the Old Testament.

He wrote the Song of Solomon. He wrote Proverbs. And he wrote Ecclesiastes. Probably in that order.

The probability is that he wrote the Song of Solomon in his youth. And Proverbs in the middle years of life. And Ecclesiastes at the end of life.

I haven't time to give the reasons for thinking that, but there are reasons why that seems to be correct. Now Solomon faded out in a spiritual way at the end of his life.

Very sadly, we know from the historical books of Kings and Chronicles that Solomon was not so spiritual at the end of his life as he had been when he was younger.

[2 : 36] One of the reasons for this, backsliding once, his wives, of whom he had so many, turned his heart away from God. And he drifted into idolatry for which his dynasty or his loyal household was punished in the next generation.

For the book of Ecclesiastes appears to have been written by Solomon when he came to repent of his sin.

Now I'm not going to go into that aspect anymore. But I mention that because it helps us to understand about this book of Proverbs and how it came to be in the Bible.

However, the chapter that we have our text in tonight, in chapter 30, was not one of the chapters written by Solomon. You will notice by glancing at the beginning of the chapter that this chapter 30 was written by somebody else.

The words of Agur, the son of Jachy, even the property. So chapter 30 is an exception. It was not written by Solomon, but by this man whose name appears in verse 1, Agur.

[3 : 59] Similarly, if you want to complete the record and turn over the page to chapter 31, you will notice that chapter 31 was again not written by Solomon, but written by a certain king, the prophecy which his mother taught him.

And it's very famous because there, of course, at the end of chapter 31, you have a description of the virtuous woman, a wonderful passage, which is of great value to Christian women and Christian mothers.

So, our text tonight was written by this man of whom we know next to nothing called Agur, the son of Jachy.

And he is talking, as I said, about four generations. I want to look at these in a minute, these four generations.

But first of all, we must ask the question, what is meant by a generation? Clearly, we cannot understand these words unless we know what a generation means.

[5 : 12] Now, the word generation is used in the Bible in different senses, in different ways. Particularly in three ways.

Let me explain. Sometimes the word generation means what it means with us. It means people belonging to a certain age group.

For instance, in Matthew at the beginning, you have a long list of the generations of the ancestry of Christ.

Fourteen generations between Abraham and David. Fourteen between David and the captivity.

Fourteen between David and the captivity and Christ. These generations.

Now, that means, of course, people who lived at the same period. Fathers and sons, fathers and sons coming down from Abraham to Christ. Now, that's the sense in which we use the word generation in modern speech.

[6 : 15] Now, another sense in which the word generation is used in the Bible is that it sometimes means a nation or a tribe or a national grouping of some sort.

For instance, on one occasion, Jesus Christ said, this generation shall not pass away until all things are fulfilled.

And he was referring there not at all to the people who were living at that moment but to the Jewish race. The Jews as a nation would never pass away.

There would never be a time, in other words, when in human history Jews would cease to exist.

And of course, that is perfectly true. There are Jews in the world today as there were then.

They shall not pass away until the second coming at the end of the world, says Christ. Well, what does the word generation mean then right here in this passage?

[7 : 21] Here it is used to mean a type of character, a type of person. Now that's quite a common way in which the Bible uses this term generation.

Let me remind you how John the Baptist spoke to those who were listening to him. You remember he said, O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

He meant that they were a class of persons and in their character they resembled the viper. They were poisonous. They were dangerous characters because of their evil and hypocritical nature.

For again Jesus Christ on one occasion said, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you?

And there you get a little bit of this idea coming into it.

The type of people they were. The kind of spiritual weaknesses from which they suffered. Now that is the sense in which Agur uses this word generation.

[8 : 35] a type of person. A type of character. A sort of individual you might meet with in life.

Well I want to look at these four tonight. And you'll see the first one is in verse 11. There is a generation, he says, that curseth their father and doth not bless their mother.

Now there is a description of a sort of person that you will meet with in life. There are some people, says this writer here, and they do not bless their mother and they curse their father.

They curse their parents and they do not bless them. Now the particular sin that he is talking about here clearly is that of being disrespectful.

And he is informing us that this is the kind of person you will meet with sometimes in this life.

Children and young people who are disrespectful.

[9 : 53] He gives us the positive and the negative. They do not bless but they curse. Now God is wanting us to realize in his word that he requires of us to be obedient to his law.

And that's why I read from that passage in Deuteronomy 27. You see, the message of the Bible is the same from end to end.

It's one message telling us that we are all evil and that we all need to be saved from sin by Christ. That's the message of the Bible from end to end.

It's all one message, all the same. But God tells us that message in different ways. And he takes different methods to bring us to realize the truth of that central message.

And you would have noticed in the reading there in Deuteronomy that God chose a most unusual thing or method to teach the people of Israel his law.

[11 : 05] He said to them when you come to the promised land you must get some plaster and go to a certain place where there was a mountain on the one side and a mountain on the other side and there was a valley in between.

It's still there incidentally. It hasn't disappeared. You can go to that place as Mount Ebal on one side and Mount Gerizim on the other. And then said God this is what you're to do.

Take the commandments the Ten Commandments and plaster them up on the mountain side and put an altar there of stone to remind you of my law so that it's visible for all the people to read.

And on a certain occasion all Israel must assemble in the valley and six out of the twelve tribes will go to one mountain top and six of the tribes will go to the other mountain top and the priests the Levites will then read out these words Cursed be the man who sins in this way and cursed be the man that sins in that way and cursed be the man that sins in some other way and after every utterance of the priests all the whole assembled mass of the people have to shout in unison Amen Amen Amen and in this way God as it were was teaching them the holiness and the sanctity and the purity of his law and one of the things that God taught them in the ten commandments and by these plaster words on the mountainside was the great importance of obeying and loving and caring for our parents

Cursed be the man that setteth light by his father or by his mother says the word of God Cursed be the man who does not respect his father Cursed be the one who thinks ill of his mother Cursed be the one who is disrespectful towards his parents Now that is what we find in this passage of scripture here in the text at verse 11 God is taking here another method to tell us the same thing There is a generation There is a kind of person that you will meet with in this life says God and they have no respect for the commandment that tells us to honour our father and our mother When I was a young child at the primary school I had a friend well he was a sort of friend a young boy came to the school and he once asked me to go to his house

[14:11] He was quite a well to do boy His father was a trades person with a shop and they had more money certainly than my parents had and I remember going into that house and listen to this that young child about the age of nine turned to his mother and he addressed her by her first name Audrey or something Hello Audrey he said His mother Now I certainly wasn't a Christian nor had I read much of the Bible if anything but I knew in my heart that was a terrible thing to do it would never occur to us to turn to our mother and address her or our father and address him by their first name in that sort of way not even when you're 40 or 50 years of age but you see there is a kind of person and you will meet with it says God in life and they do not bless their father but they rather curse them and they do not love and honour their mother but they curse them their own father their own mother

God takes great notice of the way we treat our parents because they are the ones who gave us our life and everything that we possess comes from them every morsel of food that we enjoyed as young children and infants our parents put it in our mouth now that is why scripture tells us we should obey our fathers and our mothers this is the first commandment with promise that it may be well with you and that you may live long upon the land there is a promise attached to loving and obeying our parents that if we do this as God we will enjoy long life health and blessing and prosperity on the other hand there is implied a curse if you do not honor your mother and your father then God's curse will come upon your life and even in the older years when we are grown up and mature and adults we must always treat our parents with a special respect and when they come to be frail and old if we possibly can it becomes our duty to care for them in their frailty as they also cared for us in our infancy and in our childish frailty now the same is true in a measure not only as natural parents but of all people who have authority delegated to them by God because you see the idea of parenthood of fatherhood and motherhood runs throughout society all authority is given by God and it is therefore our duty to respect everybody to whom God has given authority in the state to look after us as members of parliament in the police force to look after the law and order of our land and in the church those that have authority as elders and spiritual leaders now then you will discover that there is a certain kind of person who does not respect anybody they treat everybody like dirt and that spirit is abroad today it is very common to find this sort of generation today now the Beatles and the popular songwriters and those who promote entertainment for youth have done a great deal to increase the generation of those that curse their fathers and their mothers and I want every one of us here especially the young to realize that God has a special regard for the way we treat our parents he notices our mentality he notices the way we speak to our parents he notices the way we even think about our parents and the question comes then to us how do you treat your parents cursed says God is the man that thinketh light of his father or of his mother there is a generation that does this let's make sure that you're not in that generation let us pray

God we may not belong to the generation that curses father or mother and brings down the judgment of God upon ourselves now we turn to the second generation here at verse 12 there is a generation that are pure in their own eyes and yet is not washed from their filthiness now this is a

very different type of person mentioned here you realize that when we use the word generation as I tried to say it means a class of person a type of character now the second one is very different from the first one what is this second generation mentioned here well in a word it is the hypocrite it is the person who is interested in religion but is not saved truly and brought to faith in

God now we all realize that there are persons who are interested in religion and yet who aren't truly converted to God there are many of these persons now the reason why the churches of this country are in the poor condition that many of them are is because going back to the 1920s and 30s there was a whole mass of church going which was not accompanied by true conversion and faith there was a whole mass of outward religion people went in their multitudes to church in those days by and large but they were content to go to church and nothing more now there is still plenty of that going on in the world today let me draw a picture like this you will come across some men who go to church very often they are in church on

[21 : 18] Sunday morning and church on Sunday night and that is a good thing of course and they go to the men's fellowship mid week or something but they don't read the word of God for themselves they don't read the Bible and they are not interested in personally coming to know God in Christ they may say their prayer now and again but they don't really have fellowship with God they don't understand that the blood of Jesus Christ is the thing that makes us clean from our sins they would be very offended if you or I were to say to them that they nearly have a form of religion but that they're not truly Christians at all they have the husk of religion but not the kernel and the heart of it similarly there are many women who go to church in the morning of the Lord's day and in the evening and that's a very good thing and then they go to the women's guild or some other sort of thing during the week no harm in that perhaps but alas of hundreds and thousands of these people in our country it can be said they simply go to the house of God but they don't know God for themselves now this is the kind of person being described here there is a generation that are pure in their own eyes and yet says God it is not washed from their filthiness that is to say they have this outward attachment to the things of

God and of the church they pay lip service to worship and bibles and prayer and the things of the spirit of God and yet they themselves have never been cleansed from their inner sins and you can tell that when you meet them but they're not inwardly cleansed they're not inwardly holy they're what we call nominal Christians the problem of nominalism whereas what you and I know I trust that we need is more than simply the outward shape of religion we need to know the Lord Jesus Christ as our personal saviour and redeemer by faith in his blood shed upon the cross we need to know him as he comes into our own hearts by the holy spirit and witnesses with our spirit that we're the children of God and are adopted into the family of God and that is an experience so let's ask ourselves how we stand in the light of this are you belonging to this generation tonight that are pure in their own eyes and yet they're not washed from their filthiness notice how blunt God is in his word he doesn't beat about the bush he doesn't use long sounding words that have no proper understanding in our minds he talks about our filthiness that's what we are by nature we're a filthy sinful evil people until ever

God comes and washes us by the blood of his own dear son shed upon the cross for us well have you had that experience was there a day in your life when God became real to you do you know what it is to enjoy the fellowship of God you can never do that until you're washed God has no communion with evil people who are not yet washed from their filthiness it's one thing to go to church one thing to sit in church and that's an excellent thing and I say not a syllable against going to church let all the people go to church as often as they will of course but there's more to life than going to church you must know God for yourself through faith in his dear son you must have the experience of the new birth granting you to be washed by water and by the spirit of God new birth faith in Christ justification in the blood of the Redeemer these are the things that wash away a sinner's filthiness you see therefore how

God warns us of the possibility that we could belong to this generation well are you in this generation are you one of these who belong to this generation oh yes you think you're so good in your own eyes you have a high opinion of yourself and yet God's opinion of you is so different what a difference between what God thinks of some of these and what they think of themselves they think they're clean God says they're yet in their sins you remember there was a certain man in the Acts of the Apostles Simon the sorcerer Simon Magus if you will in Acts chapter 8 and he made some sort of religious profession of faith claimed to be interested in salvation listened very carefully

to what the apostles were preaching was actually baptized and then he said something which proved that he was no Christian at all what did he say but he gave himself away he was watching how the apostles have the power to give the

Holy Spirit to the early church believers and the way they had this miraculous power the apostles had it others didn't have it but the apostles had it and he was watching at the wonderful power the way the Holy Spirit came upon the early converts and they began to speak in tongues and praise God and worship God speaking in tongues they had never learned before languages that they had learned only by the Spirit of God and when Simon the sorcerer saw this power given by the laying on of the hands of the apostles this is what he said and gave himself away he said to Peter oh give me this power of the Holy Spirit I'll pay you money he said if you give me this power of the Holy Spirit I'll give you money and do you remember how Peter said to him your money perish with you you are still in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity you're a stranger to the Spirit of God and to the grace of the Holy Ghost pray God the thought of your heart may be pardoned you he said you're a stranger to these things now it's all too possible for us to be strangers to the things of

[27 : 54] God while at the same time imagining that we have been cleansed from our filthiness and that's the generation mentioned there in the second place in verse 12 now let's go on to verse 13 where we meet this third generation there is a generation oh how lofty are their eyes and their eyelids are lifted up now this is the generation of the pride of man proud people it's a very powerful illustration surely oh how lifted up are their eyes and their eyelids now come along you've met these people we've all met these people we've all met people who as soon as you look at them they don't look you in the eye oh no not they they don't look you in the face oh no you're not important enough to be looked at in the eye or in the face they look through you they look over you they look down at you as though you were some bit of dirt under their feet oh how lofty are their eyes and their eyelids lifted up they can hardly bear to look at the sort of creature you are they're so self-important and proud and haughty and high-minded they can't look at other people without feeling a sense of disparagement and contempt now there's a description of this third generation isn't it vivid isn't it graphic isn't it picturesque isn't it true to life

I think there are two kinds that I can think of who fit into this class you and I don't meet the first class very often but we'll mention them the lordly aristocracy the high and mighty of this world those who boast of their blue blood and of their upper crust and of their high lineage and great birth their ancestor was a duke and a marquis and going back far enough he was king of england once upon a time or king of scotland or king of the both of them put together some great and lordly man who has come down over the years and inherited a bit of money what we used to call the upper class I remember reading about the titanic when it went down sinking in the atlantic ocean in 1912 I remember reading about this that as the ship was going down the light boats were gradually very slowly launched the first class passengers must go in first pretty well all the first class passengers in 1912 were safe they had paid more for their tickets so they went safely into the life boats then the second class passengers who hadn't paid quite so much they got in next if they could many of them didn't poor things and then as we say devil take the hindmost the third class passengers one here and one there managed to get in the rest drowned the lordly spirit of this evil world thankfully that's over we don't see so much of these high and mighty kinds but we do see another kind of high and mighty individual and generation where do we get this have you come across the teenagers so many of not all of them but so many of them you go down the street and you're able to recognize them from the way they dress and the way they talk have you noticed they won't look at you if you're over 25 and you dress in a way which you recognize as something similar to normality they just won't look at you they treat you as contempt they might even spit at the pavement after you've passed by and not there are a few scowling words now that's exactly the mentality of so many today oh how lofty are their eyes and their eyelids lifted up why to look down at the likes of you and me mere ordinary mortals and not the kind of wonderful individual they think of themselves as being it would be too piteous for words for them to stoop to your level you see the pride of the human heart they may not have two grains of wisdom to rub together they may not be capable of getting even half an

O grade at an E level stage they may not know anything about anything but they know this they're very important and they know that you're nothing especially if they think you go to church oh how lofty are their eyes and their eyelids lifted up why God himself is contemptible to people with that mentality my dear friends pride is the ruination of this world pride brought Satan down from heaven

to hell pride lost our parents paradise you remember some of the stories about pride that the Bible gives to us let me mention one or two because they're well worth recalling the famous case of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon who lived in the great golden age of Babylon's progress and history and rise and advancement what an amazing story the way he was one day on his palace roof surveying this great

Babylon and the thought crossed his mind you remember he began to say the words to himself this is great Babylon which I have built with the might of my power and of my hand great Babylon which I have built and he surveyed all these houses and the streets and the canals it was a huge city great Babylon which I have built and you remember how God immediately struck him down with this strange disease the sort of madness of the mind in which he imagined himself to be an ox and he was incapable of ruling for seven years or something and they put him into the palace grounds like an ox on all fours and he was eating the grass like an ox until his hair grew long and matted like feathers and his nails like claws of a beast and seven times passed over him until God having finished his punishment gave him his sanity again one day he sat up and realized what he'd done and he said

God has done this to me to humble me for my pride and he got back to his throne what a lesson do you remember that other story in Acts 12 about Herod Antipas or perhaps it was one of the other Herods doesn't matter just now but one of the Herods anyway was making a great oration to the people of one of the coastal towns of Palestine he was speaking to them because they had come to seek a favor from him they had fallen under his frown and displeasure and he wanted mercy and kindness and money of course which went with those things from the king and the king was making his great speech full of pomposity and full of rhetorical roundness and great phraseology making a great splash with his mouth as we would say these people were showing him undue adulation and they said this is the voice not of a man this is the voice of a

[35 : 38] God and he believed it and he loved it he loved the praise of men more than the praise of God and you remember how that story finishes the angel of the Lord smote him and he was eaten of worms to show men that the pride of our heart is hateful to the almighty set us up generation oh how lofty other eyes my friend do you belong to that generation can you look people in the eye and in the face can you talk to people like ordinary human beings or have you got to make yourself to be great and important have you got to puff yourself out like some huge balloon of a person ten thousand times bigger than an average human being is that the kind of mind you have there's plenty of that mentality and plenty of young people today go around our streets and oh how lofty and oh how pompous and oh how stupid because they're just sinful worms like the rest of us who will have to die and face almighty

God and yet does that generation well the bible tells us something which is very relevant and very up to date and let's come finally to this fourth generation in verse fourteen there is a generation whose teeth are as swords and their jaw teeth as knives to devour the poor from off the earth and the needy from among men now we've looked at these three generations before types of individual types of character what's this fourth one well this one of course is cruelty their teeth are like knives and their jaw teeth I'm sure that must mean the difference between the front teeth and the back teeth you know the wonderful way God has made our teeth our front teeth are sharp suitable for biting off a piece we didn't have that sort of teeth it was very difficult the front teeth are different from the back teeth as we know the front teeth are sharp like a knife and they close on the piece of bread and you can then pull it into your mouth and begin to chew it into bits and swallow it but the back teeth are different they're like grinders or molars we call them they're good for grinding what you've got in your mouth small and then you can swallow it down very wonderful the way God has thought about even the details of what's under our tongue and in our mouth no evolution there all wonderfully divine and thought out well says this writer there's a kind of person and their front teeth are like knives and their back teeth like swords and their back teeth like knives they're so cruel so savage no again we have this kind of person very much with us in the world today did you hear not so many days ago that the police in this country in England and I think in Scotland they have called for an amnesty on all weapons what's that well it means that if you have a dangerous weapon that you shouldn't possess the police have given you a few days or weeks in which you can take that weapon or those weapons to any police station and no questions will be asked now if you keep those things and you're caught with them you might land up in prison you're not allowed to have some serious weapons like that as you know but there's an amnesty that is to

say if you hand them over within the short period of time no questions will be asked might be a machine gun it might be a bomb it might be knives it might be machetes it might be axes or all sorts of dangerous weapons well did you hear that the police are telling us that they have got some extraordinary weapons handed in to them sharpened sticks with knives concealed inside them you take the top off and you stab it into people all sorts of guns rounds of ammunition dangerous implements methods of chopping methods of stabbing now all that goes to add up to one thing that there is very much living in the world and in our land today a generation of people described here like this cruel cruel to the back jaw and to the backbone jaw teeth as knives and as swords they wanted to harm one another they put razor blades inside their shoes at the front and kick people they sharpen their umbrellas and poke people and they harm people innocent people all women who can hardly walk because of age from the shops to their own home and they stab them and kick them and trample on them it's happening in our society well says the bible we know about this there is that kind of generation but it's possible to be like that in a slightly different way maybe you don't sharpen literally a sword but what about your tongue now the bible recognises that our very tongue can be used as a dagger listen to this word of scripture there is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword now that's true isn't it you've met people like that when you talk to them their very words are barbed as soon as you hold a conversation with them you feel that they're speaking words that have been sharpened and go right stabbing into your very mind now gossip and backbiting are similarly dangerous things we can be so cruel we're all guilty at times every one of us we've done it and we should be ashamed of having done it it's not fitting for a Christian it's not fitting for anybody God made us to be kind one to another thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself but as I close today I want to remind you that Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour lived amongst all four of these generations he realised that he came into the world when all four of these generations were alive oh yes very much so he lived amongst a generation that hated and cursed their father and their mother he had to tell them this they were church people and they had made their own law called Corban by which if a person gave their things their money to the church they wouldn't need to do any kindness to their own parents and Christ had to rebuke them and put them right there was that generation living in his time too and then also there was this generation that were pure in their own eyes he was forever telling some of the people who went to church in his day the synagogue people and the temple people these Pharisees and such he was forever telling them that they thought that they were clean but inside their hearts were full of dead men's bones and rotteness and he compared them to whited sepulchres or whitewashed graves full of dead men's bones they were alive in his day and also these proud people were alive in his day he was forever warning them against pride he spoke about the Pharisee praying at the street corner thanking God that he was not like other men and not like this publican at his side you see the pride of men's hearts and oh I have to say with great sorrow our blessed

Jesus lived in an age and in a generation where there was terrible cruelty how they treated Christ can you imagine it the very son of God almighty who came into this world and took our human nature who lived a perfect life and taught and did miracles and showed the ways of God to men healing the sick and raising the dead and speaking peace to everybody but they were not content with him as he was they nailed him to the tree of Calvary they hammered his beloved hands and feet into the woods of the cross on Calvary and they did that to him not sorrowfully but gladly away with him they said away with him crucify him he is not fit to live they said oh the cruelty of our lord they left not a particle of his body or scarcely a part of his body without blood and wounds and sorrow but our lord died to save us all so that if we believe in him our sins will be forgiven and that's how I want to close tonight my friends the sins mentioned in these they're in your hearts every single sin is in your heart you could be like this and you are like this unless god has taught you better but we're all capable of it we're all like these four generations pride is in our hearts cruelty is in our hearts barbarism is in our hearts indiscipline to our parents is in our hearts we need to be saved we're sinners we need a saviour from our sin our blessed

[45 : 51] Jesus is that saviour and if you don't know him tonight then I would ask you to pray in your heart to the lord and ask him oh blessed god there is only one generation going to go to heaven it is the generation of those who fear the lord a chosen generation a royal priesthood a holy nation a peculiar people god's people will you belong to them pray god that you may be given a nature and a heart to belong to them and if you do so thank god you and i will escape the curse and judgment of god which must inevitably fall upon these four generations of wickedness which have been there in the world from the beginning and will be there until christ comes again to close the

curtain upon this sinful world amen anh and