

I would like to begin this morning with verse 6... as we open the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of Judges for our study today. ... We are near the end of our study through the Book of Judges here on Sunday mornings... and the words of this verse will also be the closing words of the entire book in Judges 21:25.

### **Judges 17:6**

The author of Judges describes the situation in Israel as going from Spiritual anarchy and rebellion... to moral anarchy. ... We have seen this through our entire time in Judges... and this statement summarizes for us... what we have been studying from this book.

Is there anyone here... that does not see the last phrase of this verse as very descriptive of our own day...? We began to see Spiritual anarchy and rebellion in the 1960's... and that easily led to a pluralism of religions... pick and choose from any that you like ("because they are all equal... no one is superior to the others...") Today we have moral anarchy.

It has been quite a while since you have heard me preach a "We Are Living In The Last Days" sermon... but given what we are seeing around the World right now... in France... in the Middle East... in Middle America... and in New York... and also considering the passage of Scripture we come to in our study of Judges... I'm thinking that we are due for such a sermon.

An article that I read... published by the Pew Research Center and dated September 22, 2014... said...

*Nearly three-quarters of the public (72%) now thinks religion is losing influence in American life, up 5 percentage points from 2010 to the highest level in Pew Research polling over the past decade.*

I would like to offer a few quotes from nationally syndicated radio talk-show host... Laura\_Ingraham's book... "Of Thee I Zing"...

...Manners define a culture. The higher they are, the more refined - and elevated - are a country's public morals. For centuries, Americans understood this. No longer. In movies, television and music, swearing is rampant. Hours are spent social networking and "texting." Social skills, however, are eroding. Handshakes, politeness, proper greetings, civilized decorum and courteous behavior increasingly are things of the past. Many people are unable to speak proper English. They simply grunt and talk in half-sentences, usually adding adolescent phrases such as "you know" and "like."

Children are spoiled and overindulged. They lack basic respect for parental authority - never mind for neighbors and strangers. They are conditioned that they must have the latest consumer goods - from Juicy Couture to iPads and iPhones to Gucci. Hence, we are raising an illiterate, narcissistic generation who think being rude and coarse is chic - sorry, "cool."

America is sliding slowly into a cultural abyss. This is a betrayal not only of our children and grandchildren, but of our forefathers. Since 1776, Americans have expended precious blood and treasure to sustain our experiment in limited government and individual liberty. We did not make such sacrifices so that Hugh Hefner and MTV morality could triumph. In front of our eyes, a social revolution is taking place - one that threatens to drown us in a moral cesspool.

"Is this what our forefathers fought for? What my parents struggled for? Is this the American culture the Greatest Generation had in mind when they stormed the beaches at Normandy? So we could aspire to be like the Kardashians or land a role on 'The Housewives of Miami?'

No, that isn't why U.S. troops perished in France liberating Europe from Nazi occupation. It also is not why Americans gave up their lives in Korea and Vietnam or continue to bleed in Iraq and Afghanistan. No one is willing to die - nor should he - for the Playboy philosophy. The reason is simple: It leads to cultural suicide.

The result has been a sea of misery. Abortion has slaughtered nearly 50 million unborn babies. Millions have died from AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Out-of-wedlock teenage births have skyrocketed. Divorce has soared. The family has broken down. Drugs, pornography and permissiveness are rampant. Homosexuality and sodomy have been elevated to the sacred status of marriage. In some school districts, such as in New York City, 10- and 11-year-old students are being taught all manner of sexual practices. In short, we have created a culture of death.

I believe that most of you... who are here today... are among those who refuse to surrender to this growing moral darkness. ... And I would like to use today's passage in Judges 17... as an encouragement NOT to surrender... I would also ask that you use today's passage in Judges as an evaluation for how far you may have already come... in yielding to it.

In 2 Thessalonians chapter two... the Apostle Paul is answering a concern that the Thessalonian Believers had. They were fearful that they had missed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Christ. ... So Paul writes and describes what will be happening in the final days. ... He writes about a growing spirit of rebelliousness... and lawlessness. In fact the name that he calls the AntiChrist is "The Man of Lawlessness." The world is going to see rebellion and lawlessness on a very large scale that gets worse and worse.

Did you ever expect to see in your lifetime... that here in our own country there would be the protests that we are right now seeing... that call for the cold-blooded murder of police officers...? ... There is a definite growing sense of rebellion and lawlessness. ... Perhaps some of you are getting tired of hearing me express my dismay... at what I am noticing on our local community college campus. I have been teaching the same course... with basically the same assignments each term. But in the last year... there

have been multiple students after each term... who fire off an email to me demanding an explanation as to why they got a “D” or an “F” in the course. I will look up their records and reply... *“It is because you did not bother to complete this major assignment... this major assignment... this major assignment...”* (It is always many assignments that they just didn’t bother to do.) ... I will also throw into my response the number of classes they did not bother to attend... and sometimes it is 50% of all the classes that they were a complete no-show. The students then go to the administration and file a complaint. ... So far the administration has seen that it is a matter that the students simply don’t want to abide by the course rules. They want to make their own rules. They have their own idea of how to obtain a good grade in the college classroom (and it does not include coming to class or turning in assignments.) ... In talking about this to other professors... they have noticed an increase of this over the past year in their courses... as well.

### **1 Timothy 3:1-5**

Please look again with me at the first part of verse 5... here. This is what I would like to key-in on... as we turn our attention to our text in Judges 17... to evaluate our own lives. It says... *“having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power...”*

If you and I are going to resist the onslaught of our immoral, rebellious, and lawless age... this is our key. You and I need to have more than the appearance of godliness... and we cannot deny the power God has entrusted to us... as a believer...

Part of what 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 teaches... is that God is using you and I to restrain the growth of lawlessness... until God's appointed time... for the second coming of Christ.

### **2 Thessalonians 2:3 (ESV)**

*Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the *αποστασια* comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.*

I purposely left the word of the New Testament's original language in there... because I think the word used by the ESV translation is a poor choice. *αποστασια* means "departure"... Some translations (such as the ESV) take this Greek word for "departure"... and they ask "Departure from what?" ... Their answer is: "Paul must mean 'departure from truth'... so in their effort to help the English reader to understand... they simply translate *αποστασια* as "rebellion" (which is what a departure from truth is.) ...

But the clearest meaning of this word *αποστασια* is "departure" ... and there is no need to add the words or thought "*from truth.*" By making this word into "rebellion"... Instead of leaving the word which means "departure" alone... (just exactly what it says)... we do not see the point that I think Paul is making. Believers are going to depart from the earth... when the rapture occurs.

Once we are removed... when we are taken out at the rapture/departure... (which looks very soon to me...) total lawlessness will break out all over the world... and the AntiChrist will be revealed.

### **2 Thessalonians 2:5-7 (ESV)**

*Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at*

*work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.*

God restrains it... by leaving you and I on this earth... as we stand against this growing tide. We are living in the last days... and we have a call of God to live. ... So let's go now to our passage in Judges... and see just how we are doing... as God's restrainers.

Judges chapter 17 gives us two stories that demonstrate what it looks like when we no longer stand against the evil tide. The first story depicts those who make a profession of their faith in the Lord... but their walk contradicts their talk. They use all the right words... but their life does not match it.

### **Judges 17:1**

Nothing is given here that distinguishes this man. ... He is a typical Israelite who happens to be living in Mount Ephraim in the land.

His name consists of the elements mî + kâ + yahu... which means "Who is like Yahweh?" ... This (of course) is a rhetorical question. It anticipates the answer... "No one!" ... So here is a man with a name that looks like he ought to be a worshipper of Yahweh. ... But "Mr. Who-is-like-the-Lord"... (we are about to see)... lived a life that was a contradiction to the character of his name. His philosophy was "who is like Micah." ... Micah's life was a depiction of disobedience... a contradiction in his claim... an example of a full-participant in an evil culture that he should have been restraining.

### **Judges 17:2**

Somebody stole 1,100 shekels of silver from Micah's mom... and she pronounced a curse on the thief... not knowing that she was cursing her own son. ... It was the fear of the curse... not the fear of the Lord that motivated the son to confess his crime and restore the money. ... It is significant that he does not return it... until he hears his mother pronounce a curse upon the criminal. ... Since there appears to have been no remorse... this act should not be interpreted as particularly pious. ... It was motivated by fear of the curse. ... *"having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power..."*

(LISTEN) When you go to the Lord and ask Him to forgive you for something you did... and you know it was wrong... what is primary in your heart...? Do you fear the punishment you may receive... ? Or is it a sense of loss in your relationship with the Lord...? ... Are you driven to ask God's forgiveness... because you want to avoid the unpleasantness of His discipline... or is it the fact that you have grieved the Holy Spirit Who lives inside of you...? ...Is it a quick *"Sorry, God now let's move on..."* ... Or do you add repentance to your confession... by making serious effort to not go down that road again...? Sometimes we confess our wrong-doing... only for the sake of convenience... don't we...? It is not because we are truly sorry for our sin.

Micah sure seems like a spoiled child that we see far too much of in our day. ... Too many are growing up with a sense of entitlement. They expect to win all the time... and if they lose... they pitch a fit. ... You know... the nightmare scenario for any kindergarten teacher... must be to have a roomful of "special snowflakes" – who have never lost.

Do you ever come to God... like a special snowflake in a kindergarten class...? Is a sense of entitlement...? Do you expect to win all the time... and if you don't... you are quick to pitch a fit...?

If we are going to be God's participants to retrain the tide of evil in our society... we need to stop "*having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power...*"

The mother's response is confusing and amusing. There is no discipline, correction, or inquiry. Instead, she blesses her son. Out of her mouth came blessing and cursing... which is not to be...

**James 3:10 (ESV)**

*From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.*

Micah's mother... realizing that she had been swindled out of eleven hundred shekels of silver... responded with an oath. ... The effect of such an oath was not taken lightly in that culture... for once the word was uttered... it was as if it were an accomplished fact. ... It was not... as it often is in our culture... where someone might say something off the cuff and then quickly... or even later... retrieve it: "*Aw, forget I said that; I didn't mean anything by it.*" ... The Israelites of Old Testament times believed that God monitored all speech... and saw to it that vows... oaths... and even idle words... fulfilled their mission. ... They did not have a magical view of words... but they did know that talk is not cheap... and words often carry consequences.

But how can a mother curse a thief and then turn around and bless him when she finds out the culprit was her own son? ... Isn't thievery still wrong

by what Scripture says...? ... And how can God suddenly bless what was just cursed? ... What did the woman expect to happen?

Once the mother found out that it was her son... she immediately tried to joyfully neutralize the curse... ... First she tries to evoke God's help through a curse... to solve her problem. ... But then recognizes a greater problem has just been created... so she then tries to employ God again... to offset what she had previously asked Him to do... ... She was worried about what she had invoked on her son's head. ... *"...Now I want You to do this... it will counterbalance what I originally commissioned You to do for me..."*

You and I will not be effective restrainers of evil... when we try to treat God as though He can be commissioned by us... The mother was so bad... she tries to jerk God around... like she has Him on a string... that she can merely yank. ... (LISTEN) Prayer is not our trying to manipulate God. ... We don't use God... He uses us! That is one of the worst forms of *"having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power..."*

*"I went to church this week... Lord... I even put a little money in the offering plate... Now that You owe me... here is what I want You to do for me..."*

The airwaves are filled with men like Joel Olsteen – who want to teach you how to pull God's string... to give you what you want. The stadiums that he fills... and the number of books that he sells... could hardly be a better indicator... that these are indeed the last days... we are living in.

### **Judges 17:3**

Now if this were not so sad... it would be comical! The money is dedicated to Yahweh... and the words of her dedication seem so spiritual. *"...Wow! Way to go lady! You are going to give it all to the Lord! What a gal!"*

But then she announces that she will spend it in a way that God explicitly forbids... by making an idol! This clearly runs counter to the second commandment found in Exodus 20:4. ... How dull their theological senses must have been! They are mixing the worship of Yahweh... with the worship of idols.

That is exactly what the pluralism and political correctness of our 21<sup>st</sup> century does. It says... *“Let’s just bring everyone together... doctrine does not matter. Ignore what you know about Islam... that it is a false religion. Pretend that the Koran really does not encourage murdering anyone who does not submit to it... and that Mohammed did not advocate Jihad... nor did he viciously... violently... and murderously spread his religion throughout the Middle East and Northern Africa... until he was finally stopped by Charles Martel in 732 A.D. at the Battle of Tours. ... Accommodate all religions... none are vile... all are just as good and equal to Christianity...!”*

### **Judges 17:4**

Now... wait a minute! She only spent 200 pieces on the idol... but there was originally 1,100 pieces... of which she said she was dedicating it all. What happened to the other 900 pieces...? ... We don’t know. Nothing is said about the missing 900.

Have you ever made a vow to the Lord... and only partially fulfilled it...? *“Lord, I promise you that I will read Your Word every day throughout 2014...” “Lord... even though my debt keeps piling up... I’m going to tithe regularly...” ... “God... I am going to forgive my family member fr what they did to me...” “God... I am going to completely trust You with my future...”*

*and not worry so much anymore...” Are you - “having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power...”*

### **Judges 17:5**

When a person gets away from God, one sin leads to another. It is a chain reaction... Micah not only had these gods... he had a whole collection. ... And he made an ephod... which was a special robe or garment... that the priest wore.

Micah claimed to know the Lord... but was guilty of the sin of idolatry. Many Christians are in the same boat. ... Anything in our lives to which we attach worth and importance that ONLY belongs to God becomes an idol in our lives. ... It could be money... possessions... a person... popularity... a job or hobby... a career... even ourselves. ... How do I know if I have an idol in my life? ... Is there anything that keeps you from spending time with the Lord or crowds the Lord out of your schedule? ... Is there anything more important than your walk with God? ... Is there anything that keeps you from serving the Lord? ... Is there anything that is a hindrance or stumblingblock to your spiritual growth? ... If so... that particular thing in essence becomes an idol.

Micah is an example of people today who claim to love God... but will not submit to Him and obey His Word.

### **John 14:21 (ESV)**

*Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”*

Micah not only had a private shrine, but also he ordained his own son to serve as priest. Certainly Micah knew that the Lord had appointed the

family of Aaron to be the only priests in Israel; and if anybody outside Aaron's family served as priests, they were to be killed (Num. 3:10).

Warren Wiersbe writes...

*Because Micah and his family didn't submit to the authority of God's Word, their home was a place of religious and moral confusion. But their home was a good deal like many homes today where money is the god the family worships, where children steal from their parents and lie about what they do, where family honor is unknown, and where the true God is unwanted. Television provides all the "images" the family will ever want to "worship," and few worry about "thus saith the Lord."*

### **Judges 17:6**

Nothing much has changed because the truth is still rejected today in our time. Prayer and Scripture have been removed from our public schools. Teachers are telling their students there are no absolutes. Schools have replaced creation with evolution... teaching our kids they came from apes. Why do they act so surprised and shocked when some of those students behave like apes or animals as murder, crime, assault, rape, pregnancy, immorality, rebellion, drunkenness are rampant in our schools?

### **Judges 17:7-10**

Micah can't believe his luck. He has turned his house into his own personal temple... but he had to install his son as his priest. Now along comes a man with a priestly pedigree... so he offers him a job... even though the Levite... being "young"... has presumably not yet reached the priestly age of thirty (Number 4:3, 30). It's the wrong place (a house, not the tabernacle) and the

Levite is the wrong person (he's not a descendant of Aaron and presumably not yet thirty)... but who can be bothered with details?

As soon as he has a chance to get a better priest... he throws his son out and installs this other man. ... He would use his mother... his son... the Levite from Judah... It is just... whomever... and whatever he can get his hands on... all to advance himself... his own agenda.

There are those who try to use Christianity... and go to church with the same heart. ... They do not come to church to invest themselves in the lives of other believers. ... They are not looking for ways to use their spiritual gifts that God has given to the church to be built up in the faith. ... They are here mainly to get something... attention... affection... a boyfriend or girlfriend... self-esteem... appreciation... If you are here... primarily to get something... rather than to give... than you are *“having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power...”*

### **Judges 17:11-13**

Every one of these people is a user on the make in this story. There's nothing healthy about the way they relate to each other. The greatest tragedy in this, perhaps, is that every one of them invokes God to help them use the other people. Everybody is talking about God all the time. The mother is calling on God to curse and to bless, and she builds an idol in God's name. Micah gets his shrine and wants to make God happy with him, installs priests and takes out priests, and makes ephods and more household gods. He's got a molten image and a graven image. He's really interested in God and talks about God all the time. There are prophecies, priests, and shrines throughout the story. The Levite is a God-person and

he's supposed to do God-things. And they are all serving themselves in the name of the Lord. They're not just using each other, but in the process they're trying to use God.

Perhaps most sadly of all... every one of them is doing what is right in their own eyes. ... None of them set out to be a "sleaze" ... They didn't wake up and say... "*I'm going to do something terrible today.*" ... Every one of them was trying to do what occurred to them was the best thing to do. ... You can imagine Micah... for example... thinking of his mother. ... Micah is old enough to have grown children... and his mother is probably much older. He thinks, "*Ah, she's going to die pretty soon, and I'm going to inherit the money anyway. I can use it. She's a tightwad of an old bag, and she hasn't treated me very well. I might as well just steal the money and make off with it now. She'll never miss it. It's going to be mine and I deserve it.*" ... You can hear him running this whole argument through his mind... as he takes the money. ... He's a thief... but presumably he's doing it because it's right in his eyes... it makes sense for him to do it. ... If you faced each of these people with their actions... and told them that what they were doing was sinful and antagonistic to the purposes of God... they would just give you a blank look.

(You See) ... The tragedy in this story is that these people think what they are doing is right... but it is filled with unrighteousness. ... Our predicament apart from Christ is so great... that we will only have the appearance of godliness... while thinking we have it all. But even when we do our best... it falls far too short.. ... You see... Our noblest accomplishments are riddled

with self-service. ...The kindest thing we'll ever do has huge measures of wanting to be appreciated... or approved of... or something else. ... .. Perhaps it's only when we encounter it in accounts like this in the book of Judges... that we're able to see it in ourselves. ... It serves as a mirror for us.

**(LISTEN)** God wants you and I to be His restrainers of evil... until he calls us out. I think the rapture is coming very soon... do you...?

What are the areas that God is laying His finger on... for you to do a better job as a restrainer to the growing tide of evil...? Confess those areas as sin... and repent. With Christ's enabling power... in full dependence on Christ to do so... turn and start stemming the tide as you have been called to do.

Do not merely have the appearance of godliness... while denying it's power.