

The bramble and the olive trees

This article is from the "Edifying the Body" section of the Church of God Big Sandy's Web site, churchofgodbigandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of Nov. 6-7, 2010.

By Lenny Cacchio

LEE'S SUMMIT, Mo.—"Once the trees went forth to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us!' But the olive tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my fatness with which God and men are honored, and go to wave over the trees?' Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come, reign over us!' But the fig tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to wave over the trees?' Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come, reign over us!' But the vine said to them, 'Shall I leave my new wine, which cheers God and men, and go to wave over the trees?' Finally all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come, reign over us!' And the bramble said to the trees, 'If in truth you are anointing me as king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, may fire come out from the bramble and consume the cedars of Lebanon' " (Judges 9:8-15, NAS).

That little parable told by Jotham, son of Gideon, should remind us of our responsibilities on the one hand and warn us on the other against craving to be ruled.

The people of Israel had experienced the wise and brave leadership of Gideon, but at his death they seemed to be incapable of living without someone around to tell them what to do. Just like the trees in the parable, they seemed to go from one honorable candidate to another offering to place themselves under rulership. But all the honorable ones refused.

So the big, mighty trees submitted to the rule of the basest bramble. By doing so, they gave up their dignity, for, to take refuge in the shade of the bramble, one must stoop to the bramble's level.

"But if not," the bramble said, "may fire come out from the bramble and consume the cedars of Lebanon."

Their rulership would be one based on coercion.

Israel was born a free nation. The Israelites had escaped from slavery, and it was God's intent that they remain so. He was to be their only King, and they themselves were to be a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6).

But the history as recorded in the book of Judges shows the sorry result of a people who had freedom without character, for time and time again their freedom led to license, which led to moral laxity, which led to social disorder. Eventually the nation found itself in bondage to its enemies, or calling for a strong man to restore order. Freedom has its costs, and they seemed unwilling or unable to pay the price.

The lesson of Jotham's parable is twofold. If good men are too content with their own lives to provide leadership, then the bramble will fill the vacuum. Good men are enjoined to do their civic duty.

But, more than that, it is uncomely for the majestic trees of the forest to beg someone to rule over them. Such is the road to serfdom.

As the American Republic goes through its renewal this election year, a renewal that the framers of the Constitution mandated, let us reflect on the freedoms we have lost because of our desire for security. To quote Benjamin Franklin: "They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."