

## R12.2 November 2021 Blog

### BEWARE OF THE DRIFT: Destination Apostasy

*“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.” – Acts 20:28-30 (NASB95)*

The risk of drifting away from Truth has never been a more clear and present danger for the Church (the body of believers). Jesus warned the Apostles, and He warns us even today.

“Danger, Will Robinson!” – this oft quoted catchphrase from the 1960s television series *Lost in Space* offers great application for us today. If you remember the show, whenever Robot sensed a threat to young Will Robinson, who was often in his charge, Robot would sound this clarion call to warn the boy of impending danger.

In a similar vein, Charles Hadden Spurgeon issued a warning to Christian leaders in the late 1800s in what was characterized as the “Downgrade”. In his attempt to wake up the Christian leaders of his day, Spurgeon’s warning was received as an affront by many. In fact, the reactions were so strong the whole situation became known as the “Downgrade Controversy”. Spurgeon was accusing the Church of apostasy.

What is apostasy and why is it not a desirable destination? Merriam-Webster defines apostasy as an act of refusing to continue to follow, obey, or recognize a religious faith. The second definition defines it as abandonment of a previous loyalty; in effect, it is defection. Assuming your first pursuit was the correct choice (i.e. Jesus Christ), then abandoning or defecting leads to a place the believer does not want to go.

Is the church drifting into apostasy? I titled this writing “Beware of the Drift...” to serve as check, a warning to continuously keep our eyes (and hearts) on our first love, Jesus Christ. The flesh that remains in us is just enough for the devil to work with to easily distract us and get us off track. In other words, left unchecked, our bent is to drift away. This happens within churches, parachurches, movements as well as individuals.

Read chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation. These two chapters include the letters God instructed the apostle John to write to the seven churches in Asia. While these letters were written to actual churches within the first century of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, they could easily be written to churches of every age since. And because the church is made up of individual believers, these letters apply to personal souls throughout the ages.

Consider Revelation 2:4-5 (NKJV): “Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will

come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent.” Imagine receiving this convicting charge directly from Jesus. It is a sobering thought.

In Paul’s second letter to Timothy (chapters 3 & 4) he outlines very clearly some warning signs that difficult times will come. In the second chapter of Hebrews we read, “For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.” (Heb 2:1 NASB95)

In the late 1800s, Spurgeon warned his contemporaries that the church was drifting from the pure gospel message.

Rather than preaching God’s Word with boldness, Christians were carefully “managing” scripture so as not to offend people. Sound familiar? Just think how we have renamed sexual deviants so as not to hurt feelings and eliminated the fear of God.

These were serious implications for the people of that time and the generations to follow. As a result of the Downgrade, Christianity’s influence in nineteenth century England was severely weakened. Anytime the gospel is compromised there are devastating consequences. In the early 1960s, A.W. Tozer sounded the alarm as he witnessed more American Christians drift away from purity of the gospel. We are reaping the consequences of that defection today. And, another 30 years after Tozer, John MacArthur wrote and preached on the same topic. In his book, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, MacArthur sounds the same warning very clearly. If Christ tarries, I trust He will continue to provide other faithful followers to sound the alarm: *Danger, fellow Christians!*

### **So, what is happening and what is our responsibility?**

Paul told the believers in Thessalonica, *“Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?”* (2Th 2:3 NASB95)

In Jeremiah we read, *“Why then has this people, Jerusalem, Turned away in continual apostasy? They hold fast to deceit, They refuse to return.”* (Jer 8:5 NASB95)

And in Hosea we see hope, *“I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, For My anger has turned away from them.”* (Hos 14:4 NASB95)

### **Application Points**

- ⇒ Ask yourself, is my first love Jesus Christ or the world or me?
  - Does my thought life confirm that He is, or not? If not, why not?
  - What do my actions reflect as being my first love?
  - Do I need to repent?
  - Am I accountable to anyone?

- ⇒ John Stott said, “Just when the world is becoming more aware of its need, the church is becoming less sure of its mission. And the major reason for the diminishing Christian mission is the diminishing confidence in the Christian message.”
  - Do I have a solid understanding of the gospel, of the Word of God? If not, what will I do?
  - Do I live by faith, knowing in Whom I have placed my trust?
    - In the temporal as well as the eternal?
  - Considering current events (e.g. COVID-19, civil unrest, etc.), do I recognize and act on opportunities the Lord provides to share His good news? If not, why?
  - Today, the church includes you! Be sure of the mission to which God has called you.
- ⇒ Am I drifting away from the faith and participating in a modern day “Downgrade”?
  - The destination is apostasy.
- ⇒ Follow Paul’s instructions:
  - “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil men and impostors will proceed *from bad to worse*, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*,...” (2Tim 3:12-14 NASB95)
  - “I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” (2Tim 4:1-5 NASB95)
  - “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.” (Heb 13:7)

**DANGER, Will Robinson!**