

July, 2007

Pause Ponder Profit

**Things That Bring
A Departure From The Faith**
by Donald Townsley

We believe this subject needs to be studied because, as we look at the pages of history, it seems there has never been a reformation or restoration among men where the people as a whole remained faithful to the principles of that reformation/restoration for even one hundred years! Generally, it seems, the descendants of the reformers/restorers do not remain faithful to the principles of their fathers throughout many generations!

During the lifetime of the Lord's apostles "the mystery of lawlessness" was already at work (2 Thess. 2:7) — the "man of sin" was on his way! The restoration which made such great strides in this country in the first half of the nineteenth century had, by the middle of the century, begun to drift into "societism" with the great majority finally departing from the faith. Tolbert Fanning, David Lipscomb, along with some others, were the "salt" that kept a few churches from going with the departure — they worked hard to keep a few from leaving the New Testament pattern. Then, it was not long before

brethren would begin drifting from the truth again. During the lifetime of brother J. D. Tant (who died in 1941) another drift had begun. Brother Tant, seeing the drift, warned over and over: "Brethren, we are drifting!" The warnings were not heeded and the drifting gained momentum. By the early 1950s churches were surging into a complete apostasy from the faith! A few strong voices were heard pleading for a return to Bible authority, and we thank God that there were those who heeded the admonition and stood against the harsh wave of digression! Now, as we stand thirty years this side of the last major departure, I feel the need to sound brother Tant's warning — "Brethren, we are drifting!"

Many who espouse the truth and run well for a while have allowed the force of their fleshly appetites to lead them into error — or to drift from their love for the truth to such an extent that they no longer have the taste to do battle with our adversary, the devil (1 Pet. 5:8) — and when the devil is not resisted, he is going to gain a greater foothold (Jas. 4:7; Eph. 4:27)! Let us look at some things that bring a departure from the faith.

When Preachers Quit Preaching The Gospel

When preachers quit preaching the gospel a departure from the faith is not long in coming. Simple, distinctive gospel preaching is the only thing that will save the church from error and set it apart from all other religious institutions in the world! Gospel preaching not only sets forth the truth, it refutes sin and error wherever it is found — in the church or in the world. Gospel preaching is not like denominational sermonizing and the telling of personal experiences and stories (which appeals to most religious people); gospel preaching has its basis in God's word. Time

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cannot change the nature of true gospel preaching; it is the same in every generation because its basis, the word of God, is the same!

The New Testament reveals some distinctive characteristics of gospel preaching. Inspired preachers did not deal in generalities; sin, whether in the church or out, was pin-pointed and condemned! This is the way Peter preached on Pentecost (Acts 2:22,23), and the way Stephen preached in the seventh chapter of the book of Acts. Paul preached this way when he rebuked Bar-Jesus (Acts 13:6-12) and Peter (Gal. 2:11) for their sins. Religious error was always refuted by inspired preachers (Gal. 2:4,5).

Tolerance And Compromise Toward Sin And Error

The disposition of tolerance and compromise that is found toward sin and error will ruin and destroy the church of our Lord! There can be no compromise with worldliness, modernism, institutionalism, denominationalism, Calvinism, or any other "ism" without traveling the road of digression! Brother Foy E. Wallace made a statement many years ago that we had better take to heart. He said: "The strength of the church is found in the truth, and the defense of it." All error must be met with the full force of the gospel, and with the determination to put it down (2 Cor. 10:4,5).

We are being told today to preach "positive" sermons; to leave error alone because someone might be offended and never come back to our services. Brethren, positive preaching only — that which never exposes any error — will fill the church with unconverted people who stand for nothing and will follow every wind of doctrine! A solid diet of positive, ethical sermons — sermons that are not rooted in the redemptive system and are undergirded by no doctrinal base — will restructure the church into a denomination!

The late B.C. Goodpasture (who was a leader in the departure from the faith thirty years ago) became very disturbed in his dying days of February 1977 because of the type preaching that was being done in many liberal churches. He made the following observation to his friend, Ralph T. Henley: "Some preachers are apparently trying to restructure the church of our Lord by resorting to preaching only positive sermons." Henley said that brother Goodpasture "was visibly disturbed over statements, from many quarters, making fun of quoting the Bible to prove the validity of a sermon" (Gospel Advocate, Sept. 15, 1977). Brother Goodpasture was soberly viewing the work of his own promotions, and he knew that this kind of preaching would completely restructure the church. Ralph Henley goes on to say: "Can the church be restructured by a solid diet of positive ethical sermons, undergirded by no doctrinal base? The answer is a resounding 'yes'" (Gospel Advocate, Sept. 15, 1977).

Young preachers today who think they have found something new in this positive method with the Dale Carnegie approach need to understand that this style of preaching is not new — it was around thirty (or more) years ago — and that the preachers and churches who went for that kind of preaching were the leaders in the disgressive movement! Many of these same preachers are now trying to unite with the Christian Church. Older men among us today who seem to think they are going to "lead us out of the wilderness" and "put us back on the road" with this positive type of preaching are only hastening the day of a departure from the faith! The word of God, and history, will bear this out.

A Lack Of Bible Knowledge

A lack of Bible study, resulting in a lack of Bible knowledge, will bring about a departure from the faith. God said through Hosea: "My

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people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6). The Hebrew Christians were rebuked for a failure to study (Heb. 5:11-14). Paul told the Ephesians to “understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17); and Peter said that we are to be able to give a reason for our hope (1 Pet. 3:15). This requires study of God’s word! Every member of the church needs to be informed on the church and its organization; the work of the church; the plan of salvation; the second law of pardon; worship; Bible authority; marriage, divorce, and remarriage; worldliness; what is wrong with denominationalism, Calvinism, institutionalism, instrumental music and premillennialism. When the people of God lack Bible knowledge on these vital subjects, we are in danger of a departure from the faith!

A Lowering Of Morals And A Breakdown Of Home Life

The lowering of morals and a breakdown of home life will help bring about a departure from the faith. The morals in this country are at an all-time low! We are told that more than fifty percent of married women and more than seventy percent of married men have been (or will be) unfaithful to their companions; that forty-nine percent of girls seventeen years old have had sexual relations; that 23,000 people have already died with AIDS, and that one-quarter of a million will be dead (or dying) within the next five years. Immodesty and vulgarity are the common things of the day! Men and women make no effort to flee fornication (1 Cor. 6:18) — many seem to make opportunity to engage in it! People don’t seem to care what they say, what they wear, or what they do! And the saddest thing about all this is that many who call themselves children of God get caught up in this worldliness! We see marriage, divorce and remarriage for any cause (Matt. 19:9); married couples who are unfaithful to the marriage bed (Heb. 13:4); worldly, lascivious dress (Gal. 5:19) even among those who call

themselves “Christians”! Also a factor contributing to the breakdown of home life is the working mother — mothers who are out of the home working so they can have more “things” while their children are not receiving proper guidance (Tit. 2:4-5; 1 Tim. 5:14).

A lesson we all need to learn is that immorality and departing from the faith go hand-in-hand! A people who are weak morally will not long be strong in the faith!

Cowardice

Cowardice among God’s people will help to bring about a departure from the faith. God has never had any use for a coward. When Israel went to battle, God did not want them to be afraid (Deut. 20:1). Those who were fearful or fainthearted were allowed to return to their homes lest they cause others to become fainthearted (Deut. 20:8). God told Gideon, as he prepared to fight against the Midianites, to let those who were fearful and afraid go home (Judg. 7:5-7). John said the fearful would be lost (Rev. 21:8). Peter said we are to add virtue (courage) to our lives (2 Pet. 1:5).

Many are too fearful to “stand and be counted” when error is taught. They say: “Let us have unity. If you teach the truth on that you will stir up trouble.” Let us all be reminded that unity is to be based upon the word of God (John 17:20-21). Truth is what we must have at all cost (Prov. 23:23; John 8:32; 2 Jn. 9)! Unity will come, without fail, to all who walk in truth (2 Jn. 4; Eph. 4:1-6). Unity in compromise with error is not New Testament unity! Those who are too fearful to stand always play a role in every departure from the faith! The departure over institutionalism and the sponsoring church is filled with examples of men who were too fearful to stand, and who thus lost the Cause to error!

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Those Who Have No Real Desire To Be Christians

Those in the church who have no real desire to be New Testament Christians help to bring about a departure from the faith. These people don't want all the truth (Jn. 8:32)! They don't want all the truth on the church and its work; all the truth on how Christians are to live and dress; all the truth on how Christians are to worship; all the truth on how Christians are to be forgiven of their sins; nor all the truth on what the Bible teaches about unity, fellowship, and the plan of salvation! Yes, those in the church who have no real desire to be dedicated New Testament Christians are the leaders in every departure from the faith!

Yes, brethren, we are drifting! If this article disturbs you, it may be a sign that you have already drifted farther than you realize! Let us stop the drift before it results in another departure!

Guardian of Truth XXXI: 9, pp. 272-273
May 7, 1987

Gospel Meeting

Speaker: Donald Townsley

**Sunday, July 22nd
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**Monday — Friday
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Pause — Ponder — Profit is a monthly publication of the Second and Walnut Church Of Christ, Paragould, Arkansas.

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