

Sunday, August 22, 2021 pm

DRIFTING CHURCHES

Hebrews 2:1

Quite frequently, we talk about the Lord's church. And we should because it is something that is misunderstood by many. We have noted that the word church is descriptive of the body of the saved and a term used in 2 different senses in the New Testament – the church universal (the body of all who are saved – a relationship with God/Christ), and the local church or congregation (a group of the saved who join together in a given location to do the work God has given us collectively).

The church universal is perfect – managed by God with no mistakes. If you are part of that body, you belong. If you are not part of that body, you do not belong there (but you do have control over whether or not you are there).

A local church is likely not perfect. Though we strive to follow God's pattern to the best of our ability, because it is comprised of humans, there will be imperfections – flaws, shortcomings, miscalculations and even failures. But we try to the best of our ability to be as close to perfect as we can. We do this by following God's pattern as exact as possible.

Having said that, are we falling short in some areas? It is certainly possible and hence the need for frequent examination. In this lesson I would like to consider some ways that churches can drift away from God.

I. Drifting

- a. Drifting is to gradually, and often unnoticed and aimlessly, be carried along or away from a certain point.
- b. The Bible uses the term once – Hebrews 2:1 where it warns us as individuals to “give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard lest we drift away.” This is the idea of one who fails to pay attention to what is going on and as a result he drifts away from his salvation. If correction is not made, he will be lost.
- c. Churches can drift as well. While striving to do the right thing, it is possible for a congregation to be neglectful and drift away from God. Revelation 2 & 3

II. Some ways churches drift

- a. To learn how we can drift as a church, all we need to do is examine some of the churches we read about in the Bible. Of course, there is Corinth with its many problems, but there is another list we will focus on.
- b. In the 7 churches of Asia – Revelation 2-3
 - i. By forgetting their first love – Revelation 2:4.
 1. The church at Ephesus had many good things said about it. In many ways it seemed like a strong and vibrant church. But, “I have this against you, that you have left your first love”
 2. What does that mean? Considering the idea of love for God – you have one who strives to obey God because of love – 1 John 5:3 notes that if we love God, we will keep His commandments. One who has lost his first love is one who has let his guard down. He is not as zealous as he used to be. His relationship with the Lord has become routine.
 3. Just like individuals, churches can do the same thing. We start off, “on fire” as we zealously strive to win others, strengthen one another as brethren and fervently stand for truth. But then time wears on and that fervor slowly grows dimmer. If we are not careful, we will begin to drift.

4. Zeal is a quality God wants us to have. Titus 2:14 speaks of a people “zealous for good works.” While this applies to individuals, could it also apply to a congregation of the Lord’s people? Are we zealous for His cause TOGETHER? Think of the church at Philadelphia recorded in Revelation 3:7-8 – they had an open door that no one could shut.
 5. When our zeal starts to cool off, we are in danger of drifting.
 6. The church at Ephesus was warned to repent or they would lose their lampstand (their standing with the Lord) – Revelation 2:5
- ii. By compromising with error – Revelation 2:13-15
1. Here we are introduced to the church Pergamos. Again they were commended for holding fast to the name of the Lord and not denying their faith, even in the face of persecution (including martyrdom).
 2. BUT they had in their midst those teaching error – here 2 are listed – those holding to the doctrine of Balaam – covetousness and immorality; and the Nicolaitans – whose doctrine is not mentioned. Both were holding to false doctrines.
 3. A church can drift by ignoring those in their midst who are teaching error. There are many churches, who while faithful on the fundamental issues, ignore those who teach false doctrines. Sometimes there is the hope that “maybe they will come around” given enough time, but regardless error is there, and it NEEDS to be addressed.
 4. Elders are entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that error does not creep in.
 - a. Acts 20: 28-31- where they are warned of wolves,
 - b. Titus 1:9-11 notes that they must be able to convict those who contradict,
 - c. 2 John 9-11 warns of sharing in the evil deeds of one teaching error
 - d. Ephesians 5:11 tells us to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to expose them.
 5. When a church lets down its guard in this area, it is only a matter of time before trouble will come.
 6. The church at Pergamos was told to repent and overcome, or they would be fighting against the Lord Himself.
- iii. By tolerating evil – Revelation 2:18-21
1. The church at Thyatira was similar to that of Pergamos. They were tolerating sin. But here we have the tolerance of immorality. It was not only practiced by some, but also defended by them. And it was being ignored by the rest.
 2. This is similar to the church at Corinth as recorded in 1 Corinthians 5:1-7 which had one in an adulterous relationship that they tolerated. The message was clear, deal with the immorality.
 3. We have a responsibility to keep the church pure. Ephesians 5:25-27 – Jesus gave Himself for His church to present her as clean, set apart, glorious and without blemish or even a spot. Rather she was to be holy.
 4. Moral issues are a major concern now among many churches – churches that are silent on modesty, immoral relationships (including unscriptural marriages), social drinking, lustful entertainment and numerous other acts of ungodly behavior. You could add to this list churches that ignore covetousness, gossip, and various other sins that will taint the Lord’s body if tolerated.
 5. And it usually begins with just letting someone “slip by” in hopes that they will change, or others will not notice. Rarely does that happen. It is only a matter of time before the “hole in the dam” gets bigger.
 6. They were told to repent, hold fast to what is good, and overcome.

iv. By being overconfident – Revelation 3:1-4.

1. The church at Sardis has very little good said about it. We have here a church that had a reputation of being “alive”, but to God they were dead (or on their deathbed).
2. Exactly where they stood is not known. There is no error being taught as far as we know. This is a church that likely WAS a strong and thriving church, perhaps not too long ago, but now they are “just holding their own”. Perhaps we have here a church that was prideful and overconfident – blind to their dilapidated state. There are many churches that are living in the past and refuse to adapt to their current society (and I am NOT talking about compromise ANY truth). They won’t try anything new or again (because we tried it once and it didn’t work).
3. And as described, they are dying. Like the others, they were told to hold fast, and remember. They were told to repent and watch – you might say WAKE UP! (Romans 13:11).
4. It is worthy of note that even in this congregation there were some who were godly who had not been caught up in the ungodly fray (3:4). They were the hope of that congregation.
5. When we are satisfied where we are at, we are going to begin drifting unless something changes.

v. By being lukewarm - Revelation 3:15-18

1. The church at Laodicea. A church about which nothing good is said. They were described as lukewarm – neither hot nor cold. The Lord would “spit them” out of His mouth (or vomit). This is the Lord saying, “You make me sick.”
In many ways this church is like the one at Sardis (dead or dying). I can see similar attitudes. But here we have a congregation that is going along and simply does not care. There are blatant problems, but they did not care. They were simply “going through the motions” or as one might say, “playing church”.
I see in this church similarities to Ephesus (having left their first love – lost zeal) and Sardis (dead – overconfident, resting on its past, holding their own), BUT Laodicea is worse because THEY DON’T CARE! At least with Sardis, some expressed their concerns. Here we don’t even have that.
Had there been immorality in their midst, they would act like Corinth and not care about it.
2. We cannot be apathetic and pleasing to God.
 - a. A study of Israel/Judah show complacency and God is NOT pleased. Amos 6:1 speaks of how they were at ease in Zion. In spite of their corruptions and the warning, they assumed everything would be ok.
 - b. Titus 2:14, we have already noted that God wants a people zealous for good works.
 - c. Everything in the NT, both as individuals and churches, shows God wants us to care and act based upon that caring.
 - d. We also find that He does NOT want us to ignore our problems – like Laodicea
 - e. The very idea of Christian love (agape) involves this caring attitude.
3. When churches become indifferent and apathetic there is real danger of drifting.

vi. NOTE about these 5 churches – specifically, only 2 of them are recorded as tolerating error and compromising (in teaching and morality). The other 3 had attitude problems that stifled their growth – Ephesus, Sardis and Laodicea. IF we were to examine ourselves and find problems, where would we fit in this?

III. How do we avoid drifting?

- a. Beware of the possibility – 1 Corinthians 10:12. With this realize where it starts – it starts will allowing just a little (the very idea of drifting). Notice our text, Hebrews 2:1 – give the more earnest heed!
- b. Continued examination – are we allowing a little compromise here and there? 2 Corinthians 13:5. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 describes us (as the church) as the temple of God – holy, offering spiritual sacrifices. We need to remain that way – which calls for examination.
- c. Be grounded in the truth – well rounded studies of God’s word is a way to keep from drifting. We need timely and sometimes uncomfortable lessons. Hosea 4:6 – destroyed for lack of knowledge; Ephesians 4:18 – don’t walk in ignorance like the world.
Resolve that you are going to plant yourself firmly where you need to be – 1 Corinthians 15:58
- d. IF we find that we have drifted, recenter and get back on course. In Biblical terms this means we need to repent. In each of the above churches, a solution was given that included repentance.
 - i. Ephesus was told – Remember, Repent and Return (do the first works) – Revelation 2:5
 - ii. Pergamos was told – to repent and overcome – Revelation 2:16-17.
 - iii. Thyatira was told to repent, hold fast what they still had (don’t go any further), to overcome and keep His works – Revelation 2:21-25
 - iv. Sardis was told – remember what they had heard, to hold fast and repent – Revelation 3:3.
 - v. Laodicea was told – to take measures to restore their beauty and do what they needed to do to heal themselves. Revelation 2:19 – be zealous and repent. Open the door to the Lord and let Him come in and rule.
 - vi. IF We find that we are drifting we need to do the same thing.

Drifting is a very real concern. In fact, it is as great a concern for many church as compromise with error. Both are equally wrong, and we can do neither and be pleasing to God. And while many churches are drifting away from Him, let us resolve that such is not going to be us. Brethren, are we drifting? Think about it!