



## The *Pulpit Exchange*

It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. (Nehemiah 8:8) Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. (Proverbs 27:17)

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Volume 3, No. 12

Issue # 312

### **Why Churches Drift**

The Scripture very vividly points out the great need for us to be guided by the divine light of truth. I suppose the degree to which we are aware of the crisis in our life of needing to be delivered from darkness and guided by light will determine how much attention we will give to that light. The more aware a person is that he is in darkness, the more he appreciates the light. If we are sort of lukewarm about

our Christian experience maybe it is because we do not perceive the darkness as we should. Actually, what we want to do is perceive the light. However, part of understanding the brightness of the light is to understand the prevailing darkness of the human heart outside the illuminating work of God's Spirit. We rejoice that we have that light that has been shining brightly and we can enjoy that light.

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**Why Churches Drift**

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I am planning to speak on the topic of *Why Churches Drift*. This was assigned to me for the Numidia 4<sup>th</sup> of July meetings. I think it is a subject that is important for us to think through. It is not that I feel I necessarily am able to do the best in covering this type of subject. However, I do feel in my heart it is something we ought to ponder and think about. While it is not the type of thing we want to be looking at often, from time to time it

is good for us to evaluate a bit what we can learn from history and see why churches drift, and what we are doing to avoid repeating that cycle.

*In the present day, I believe, the tendency for churches to drift is probably even greater than it was in time past.* There was always a certain tendency for churches to drift. After there would be reviving like eras of time where the church was revived and there was new spiri-

Vol. 3 No. 12, Issue # 312. The Pulpit Exchange is a compilation of written sermons without commentary, published as often as possible, in the interests of promoting sound preaching in our conservative Anabaptist churches. All sermons have been transcribed and printed with permission. Names are removed so that we can focus on the message and content rather than on a certain speaker or style. (Names will be published in the next issue).

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Published by Door of Peace Publications/Les Éditions «Porte-de-Paix» a conservative Amish Mennonite/Anabaptist publisher  
c/o Keith G. White, P.O. Box 104, Blyth, Ontario Canada N0M 1H0

Cost per Issue \$4.95 + \$2.50 p& h Canada/ \$3.50 p& h USA

tual life, vigour, and fervency in the fellowship. Then, after a period of time somehow, some of that would be lost. We will not cover all of the things that will come into focus or cause or contribute that type of deterioration. It is only by thinking about it together that it can get our thinking stirred a little bit and we are able to think this thing through some more.

I certainly will not be exhaustive in what all goes into why churches drift. I feel like I, myself, have not thought it through as well as it should be. However, I hope by looking at it together that it will stir some interests in our minds to think about it more. I suppose you have already. What is it that we are doing, or can do, to avoid having the same thing happening to our fellowship?

One would certainly be very naïve to not be aware that it is the tendency of any church organization. One can see that. We do not need to be very knowledgeable people in Church history to see that is the tendency of the cycle to have an elevating of spirituality because of a revival movement, and then a gradual deterioration of it.

*Now, I believe, the speed with which those cycles are occurring is accelerated as we approach*

*the end time.* Things in general are accelerated. Even in the business world things happen faster either for going up or for going down — either way things happen faster. We have mass communication and transportation and the fast and rapid pace of life makes things happen faster. In the Church it is the same way (maybe not exactly the same as business but it has some similar trends). Things tend to happen faster. We have a more intensified church life than what our fathers and grandfathers did (probably at least for most of us). However, the intensity of the program does not ensure against drift. In fact, if the church becomes sidetracked, the intensity of the program can in fact actually accelerate it, so that the drift can go faster than what churches of even a century ago would have.

*It is something we need to think about very carefully.* I think back in our own experience when we faced a decision in our life of deciding for a fellowship that we felt would be a safe place for ourselves. I sense far more today than I did then the awesome responsibility (and perhaps I still do not perceive it as I should) that we have to try to maintain a fellowship that is safe for our children also. We do not

want to be like king Hezekiah in the Old Testament who was concerned that there would be peace and safety — “peace and truth,” (2 Kings 20:19) in his time. What about our children? What will be for them? We can have fear and concern and anxiety about what communist subversion may be doing to the United States or what it may bring by way of suffering or persecution for our children or even for us yet, which can be a right and legitimate concern. Those are things we should leave in the hand of God. God does not expect us to try and get involved in trying to counteract communism by political efforts. However, when it comes to the church, we do have a responsibility to try to see to it that there is a church that provides our children with a clear voice of truth and in spiritual direction for whatever they may face, or will face. I know you would all agree with this, and no one needs to pretend they are some special prophet to agree that our children, at best, will face very confusing and very difficult times. We sense that already in our experience, do we not, that we face very confusing times? There is such a mixture and a confusion of voices.

*Therefore, to help fortify them*

*and ourselves through such troublesome and confusing times, one thing they need is a place where they can go for sound instruction.* When I say those things I am not trying to minimize or draw away from the need for them to be converted and have the Holy Spirit. They certainly need the individual experience of repentance from sin and salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ and the regenerational work of the Holy Spirit. In order to bring them to that type of salvation experience they need a place where the truth is sounded clearly so that there is a genuine call to salvation. Then, there needs to be a nurturing of their life such that there would be continued spirituality, growth and stability which they will need in facing very confusing times. We need to carefully weigh what is it that the Lord would have us to do (have me to do, have you to do) to help avoid the church from drifting.

*We need to have a balanced view of the tendency of churches to drift.* From what I have said so far, it sounds like it is an inevitable course — that any church which exists must, to some extent, eventually drift. I do not believe it needs to be that way. On the other hand I think we need to admit that will be the

tendency and that the particular church that we are a part of is not some kind of exception to that tendency. The same characteristics of human nature are with us that have been with any previous organization that has declined spiritually. We need to reckon with that. We cannot (may I say) make the same mistakes as others did and not expect the same results. "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34), and those principles are absolute principles. They will always bring the same results regardless in which generation or who the people are.

I would like to define the word drift a bit as I am using it. I am thinking of the word drift to be "a gradual leaving of the right way." In thinking of churches drifting, the word drift, many times, carries the connotation of going from a more conservative to a more worldly way of life. That certainly is a part of drift. *However, I will use the word also to mean a gradual departure from the right way, not only necessarily toward worldliness, but toward dead formalism also.* Either one is a drift or a departure from the right way. While perhaps the word drift is not so often used in that way (we might sooner call it deterioration or something like that) yet this is how I am looking at it. I trust that you

can understand what I am looking at that if we would allow one to happen, either way it is a drift — whether it is drifting toward a more legalistic form or whether it is drifting toward liberal and looseness. We want to endeavour to try to think of some areas that may relate to this.

I think of drifting being similar to a driver on the interstate highway who, due to the routineness of his driving responsibility, does not have the alertness that he should have and he becomes a bit groggy or drowsy. If you were following him, you would see him drift. On the curves he tends to either take one side or the other and he drifts. The highway is clearly marked. The white lines are distinct, and it is obvious the intended course for him to travel but due to a lack of alertness, he is drifting and he may drift to one side or another.

I think that it can work in our spiritual life the same way. It is not that the Scriptures are not clear enough that we can understand the way that God would want us to go, but it is our lack of alertness and diligence in it that we are apt to sort of drift around and find ourselves off the intended course of travel.

Now, I would like to look at two Scriptures that would be examples of both types of drift-

ing. 1) *The drift toward legalism.* In Galatians, the apostle Paul spoke very straight forward about their problem of drifting or falling from the grace of God to a bondage in the law. This was something that I do not believe happened all at once in one day or overnight. It was something where they somehow gradually got their eyes off of Jesus and began to want to wrap into the law again and have the law as a part of the steps to salvation.

Maybe I should clarify that at this point. There is a difference between the law as a means and a method versus law as a standard. When people say that in the New Testament we are not under law but we are under grace that is true. However, sometimes people interpret that, or intend that, to mean that under grace there is no law.

We would say the Old Testament was perhaps more the era of law, yet the Old Testament law was not without grace and the New Testament grace was not without law, but we are not saved by the law. “No man is justified by the [works of the] law” (Galatians 3:11). We are saved by grace through faith, but that grace is not a lawless grace. It is not an unprincipled grace. It is according to absolute principles that man appropriates the grace

of God.

Therefore, the standards of the New Testament, while we generally would not call them law, they become, to the child of God, the governing principles of his life. It is not that he is saved by law or by those standards, but because of the grace of God in his heart, his desire is to live to the glory of God. These standards become his directives in his life how to do that. If he does not love the Lord and has not been born again, he can ever so carefully try to follow the teachings of the New Testament and it is mere law to him. It is nothing else. However, to the child of God it becomes the communication that he desires from God, whom he loves, to know what pleases Him. That is living above law. That is not merely doing because I must, and he said “I must” and so on. It is because of the desire to please God that these are directives to us.

The Galatians were confused — that somehow circumcision would have a part yet in the salvation of their souls. In Galatians 5:1–8 we see how the apostle is pointing out how they have fallen from grace. It is a faith that works, but it is working by love not by law. We might say they actually had a new type of disobedience. While they were

seeking to come under the regulation of the Old Testament law, Paul was saying that actually was falling from grace. “You are gravitating back into the form of the Old Testament law rather than rising up and walking in the grace of God, which is a more lofty calling than the Old Testament law. It is not more lawless but more lofty and it is of a higher and nobler position.”

2) *The drift toward worldliness.* We have an example of this in 1 Corinthians 5. We may say, “This is an extreme example of worldliness.” Really, the steps to worldliness will bring a church to this place faster than what we may think. I have been appalled to see that in some situations. Probably it took only about ten or fifteen years to come to the place where things were tolerated that are right in this category. They have nicer titles for it, but it is the same category and it is the same type of sins. People are tolerating them and seem to be very pleased with their ability to tolerate such things. That is exactly what 1 Corinthians 5:1–5 is describing.

Here was a situation where the church at Corinth had drifted toward such worldliness that they were pleased with themselves in the great toleration they had. They were puffed up about it

instead of mourning. That is the other type of situation to which a church could drift.

A) Looking more directly now, *what causes churches to drift?* I will borrow an illustration from someone else that spoke on this subject. The brother said that before he was a Christian he used to do drift fishing. He described the way he would drift fish. They would go out into the bay a distance with a motor boat. He said, “All you had to do was cut the power and lift the anchor and you would drift.”

That very aptly fits the illustration of spiritual life. If we cut the power (which would be like falling from grace, where the power of the grace of God is not working in our life) and lift the anchor (which would be the Word of God that which anchors us), that is somewhat a paradox is it not? In the Christian life there is movement and yet there is an anchor. These are illustrations and they have their limitations. I think we can understand that in the Christian life it is called a walk, and it is called a race. Yet, there is the anchor for stability — “stand fast” (1 Corinthians 16:13). We are not standing at one place but we are on the Rock.

He said that they would cut the power on their motor boat and be sure the anchor was up and it

would drift. I think that is exactly what happens in an individual's life or in a group when the drift comes in. It is the cutting of power and the lifting of the anchor. He went on to illustrate something which I think is also what is very apt to happen. There was a comparative effect that it had when they were out in the boat. It is the law of comparison. He said that if others were in the same bay or water body who were doing the same kind of fishing, you would get the sensation that you are not drifting because the other boats went out there and did the same thing. They cut the power, had their anchors lifted and they would drift.

He said "Therefore, the position between their boat and the boats around them remained the same. You could watch the boat ahead of you and you stayed about the same distance in relation to that one and the one behind you is about the same distance and the one on each side, it simply seemed that everyone's position remained intact." That is exactly what churches can do. Individuals can do that. They may have someone whom they consider a little more spiritual than themselves. They sort of keep measuring themselves by that person or someone they con-

sider less spiritual than themselves or maybe a little more liberal than themselves or whatever. Then, there are those whom they consider about their equal and they tend to compare themselves with that. Church groups tend to do that too. They watch the other group that is a little more conservative than themselves maybe or has a little spiritual fervency, and others that have a little less. They sort of are keeping their own because their relative position is the same.

As long as the shoreline is ignored, there is really no awareness that there is any movement. The shoreline would also be similar to the Word of God. It is that fixed, absolute standard by which we can measure ourselves. We need to see that this is the tendency with us of "comparing [ourselves] among [ourselves]" (2 Corinthians 10:12) or to compare ourselves with other groups. In so doing we feel satisfied as long as we believe the spiritual fervour in our group is a little better than that other one and about equal to another. Through that we feel satisfied, but actually all around we could be losing ground.

One of the primary reasons why churches drift is the loss of the power of God and not being aware of it because of the tenden-



cy to compare among ourselves using comparative reasoning. Then, also with that cutting of power certain pressures come within the group. In Galatians 5:4 Paul said, "ye are fallen from grace." We fall from grace. We are not cast out from grace, if we fall. It is not that God's provision is cut off, as far as His providing it, but we fall from grace by failing to stay where the grace of God is available and the principles in which and within which it will work.

Denying that there are certain principles associated with the grace of God is as fatal as denying the grace of God itself. There are certain principles that one needs to recognize, respond to and respect in order to have the power of God's grace working in our life. The Galatians, they fell from grace because they set their eyes on something else and their relationship with the Lord no longer had the personal fervency of spirit where they were really enjoying the power of the grace of God.

An individual can drift in his own life within a group, but we are looking at why churches drift rather than individuals. If there is a decrease (we will say) of the general level of spiritual power and strength in a group, there are certain things that tend to hap-

pen. You will have certain ones who will tend to express more carnality in (shall we say) the liberal side, where they want to allow themselves more liberties. They will tend to hanker after the world. They will find the world becoming more appealing and there will be more worldly concepts and appreciations on the part of some.

Usually, within that same group there will be some who have some staunch convictions and do not appreciate that and want to save the church from taking that course. Therefore, naturally there will be a certain amount of tension about what must be done about this. The thing that can happen (and it is not that it needs to happen this way) is that we can have some who are drifting toward a more worldly way of life, and worldly appreciations. Those who would like to avoid that happening may become more standard conscious in the sense that they will try to save the thing from going that way by maybe more than ever trying to emphasize that the standards are maintained.

The liberals become more standard conscious too because it becomes a conscience problem to them. The whole thing can develop a tension that both groups can be losing some power

through it. The persons who are conservative and would like to save the group from this world-ward trend may have a certain tendency to depend more and more on the standards to keep it from going that way. Again, I say it does not need to be that way but that is what I see can happen. We can have people within the same group maybe somewhat going opposite directions but the whole thing is losing ground and losing power.

When there is a loss of that spiritual power there comes that kind of tension. Now, maybe to clarify a bit what I am thinking of. B) *I want to mention how I am picturing church standards should function and what their purpose is.* There may be different illustrations of how church standards should function in a fellowship and what purpose they should serve. I would understand *church standards have primarily three functions.* i) *One is preventive.* The church together decides on certain guidelines for certain areas of life in order to give some sense of direction on what is a Scriptural application of this particular Bible principle. The Christian woman's veiling is one of those. The church has a united position as to how 1 Corinthians 11 will be applied. This is not deciding that a certain

application is the only right application or that is the only way it could be Scriptural but that is the way we have agreed to follow that principle. So in that sense it is like warning indicators. The lines and signs on the road are all signs that are to prevent loss, damage, or injury. That is how a church standard should serve. It is to prevent someone from going astray spiritually and injuring themselves spiritually.

ii) *Church standards also have a corrective dimension.* They are similar to the guard rails along the highway. If one is too indifferent toward the preventive signs along the highway one may find himself coming in contact with the guard rails. Usually it is because we have ignored too much the preventive signs and were too careless. That is why we came in contact with the guard rails. That may have been because of other unusual circumstances but that becomes a corrective factor. The person who is hitting the guard rails is quite far from the intended course of travel. He has left it by a good measure and he comes in contact with the guard rails. They are to help bring him back on course and should arrest his attention and alert him how far he is from the intended course of travel.

Church standards have that dimension where they are corrective. They bring a person, shall we say, somewhat under arrest for a moment for him to consider where he really is. Of course, this is all on a voluntary basis in church life.

iii) *Church standards become a testing characteristic.* They test spirits. The fact that there is a standard that is Biblical, and directed by the Spirit of God, it becomes that which tests spirits. Wrong spirits will surface when they are in a situation that is regulated by the Word and the Spirit of God. The Bible warns about wolves in sheep's clothing. A wolf's nature will be manifest soon if we put him in the confinements of a sheep's pen or the confinement of a sheep lifestyle. The wolf nature will soon surface. It will be known that he is a wolf instead of a sheep. Church standards have that value.

While all of those things are very valuable and necessary, if a church begins to depend only on its standards to prevent spiritual casualties, to correct spiritual problems, or to reveal wrong spirits, then I say we are losing something. I am trying to illustrate this by a church losing its power, some may want to go more liberal, while the other

group may also lose some power by trying to simply work the standards harder. Who is to blame then? The "liberals" may blame the "conservatives" for being too hard nosed on standards and the conservatives say, "The liberals will, after all, destroy the thing. There is a sense in which we have to be very careful or both sides can be losing power.

The answer then is not to decide that we will simply let the thing take its course and nobody will resist it. The answer is to have the power of God and the anchor. One thing I would like to say is that when church administrators need to at times do some administrative work in relation to the church standards, sometimes they are accused of only using the standards when actually they have used many other efforts and have attempted many other things to try to help that person. I have seen it happen a number of times where there was a spiritual problem and the ministry tried to work with it. They had various meetings and tried to meet with this individual, for whatever reason. We may say, "Well, yes this should have been done differently." Or, "This person should have done this differently and so on." Finally, the problem is not corrected because we can say, "Back

here something should have been done differently, and something here should have been done differently.” We still cannot allow that to cause us to not do what finally must be done in order to save the church.

It is like in the world today. The principles of justice are in great confusion because Freud’s theory of psychology has so warped the thinking of politicians, judges, and jurors that they cannot think clearly anymore about personal responsibility for crime. Therefore, they say, “This young man that is on the stand for this crime did this because his father was mean to him, or this or that and the other thing.” Through the whole thing everyone is made to feel that the reason this crime occurred is the fault of society. Therefore, society has no right to punish the criminal. That is fallacy. People are distorted in their thinking, and that kind of thinking has gravitated into the church, where people say, “After all, it was this and this and this.” That may be the case. Finally, if we come to that point, we will solve nothing by deciding that because of all these factors nothing can be done.

Ideally, we want to try to take the measures by all means that can be taken to avoid a coming to

such a crisis. Finally, something must be done. I know many of you have good staunch convictions and you do not want to see the church ever going liberal and drifting toward liberalism. I would also like to challenge us in this that in trying to save the church from that let us not only depend on standards to do it. Let us recognize the need of spiritual fervency among us and do what we can to cultivate that and stimulate it in each another. That will mean some really intimate relationships with our Lord Jesus Christ in our personal experience. We will spend time on our knees praying for the brethren and sisters, study the Word, and allow its power to grip our heart. The fervency of spirit that would flow from our own life will then ignite others more and inflame them. We cannot expect to do it by the standards.

3) *The cutting off of power and then the lifting of the anchor.* I am not quite sure which should come when and so on. I want to say the lifting of the anchor is when we then no longer operate by the Word of God. We have noticed this in church groups where somewhere there was the losing of the power of God. It did not go too long until after a while there were study committees to decide what the Bible

teaches about this and that. These were things that a sincere believer could read and understand very comfortably. It was not that he understood everything about it, but he could understand the basic principles, and yet they were assigning study committees. That is lifting the anchor. That is departing from anything absolute. Some will say, "It is relative. Maybe in that society it was wrong, but today it is not. Maybe it was a shame for the woman to have cut hair back in Paul's time but today it is not a shame," and so on. It is a lifting of the anchor.

That is moving the lines out. It is losing faith in the Word of God, and departing from that faith in the Word. *The absolutes are abandoned.* Through that it disarms anyone from doing anything to keep the group from drifting. Once you decide that there are no absolutes of that nature anymore then no one has the right to challenge anyone anymore. While that is not the only thing that should keep a group from drifting, I must say that my life has benefited tremendously by those who were ready to challenge me and to give me challenges in direct brotherly address. Many times it was only in the challenges of seeing their example and their faith. Home

values will deteriorate when there is the lifting of the anchor.

The cutting off of power leads to comparative reasoning, the lifting of the anchor, and then the law of gradualness. *The law of gradualness* is such a subtle thing. It is like those boats drifting on the bay. If suddenly a storm would have arisen and they would have started being tossed about, and the wind would have begun to blow them either direction, suddenly they would have been aware they are moving. The law of gradualness can bring a person to the same fatal end but ever so gradually.

I suppose you have heard the illustration already about how they can put a frog in a pan of hot water and would jump out immediately. However, if they put him in water that is comfortable for him and warm it a little bit ever so gradually, they say they can actually cook a frog to death. He will not jump out because it comes on him so gradually, he actually does not realize it is happening. I have not tried that experiment, but I think it illustrates what can happen with the law of gradualism. There is not one point where the thing seems to be a crisis situation, and we gradually become accustomed to things. That gradualness, I found, is a real subtle thing.

I had the benefit already of a brother from another congregation ask me about something that was in my home congregation. It was something he observed and he asked me about it. I had to admit it had not struck me that way. After he brought it to my attention, I had to admit he was exactly right. The thing was far out of hand, but it had come so gradually. Maybe it had in that person's life too. Thus, we see the law of gradualness takes churches astray. They gradually become accustomed to things where there is the lack of power and the lack of the anchor.

4) *What measures shall we take to prevent this type of drift? What measures shall we take in order to correct whatever degree of drift that we may have among us?* In Galatians, Paul said that they had "fallen from grace." I would like to notice what he points out as the remedy in Galatians 2:16, 17. I believe these are the preventive and corrective measures that we need in our own fellowship to guard against drift. "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the

law shall no flesh be justified. (17) But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid."

A few things to glean from these verses. What are the preventive and corrective measures that we need to be employing? A) *We need a sound emphasis on the doctrine of salvation.* As a group we need sound emphasis on the doctrine of salvation. Our people need to be aware and understand the principles of justification and the atonement. This is what he speaks of here, "by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." No flesh will be justified by the works of the law. We need to understand the doctrine of salvation, how a man is saved by grace through faith.

It is important that we understand some of those things. It is good that we understand the difference between our state and our standing in Christ and before God. It is important that we understand that it is only because of the continued active work of God's grace that you and I can stand totally approved and accepted before God. It is not because of some attainment of our own, or some degree of level of spirituality that now we are so spiritual that we are saved

because we are that righteous. We understand that it is never the known sin in a Christian's life where we simply tolerate sin. From God's viewpoint there is always an enormous gap between the perfection which He is versus what we are. Having that awareness should certainly stimulate in our hearts a love and a warmth for Jesus Christ, for all that He has done to save our souls, and is still doing to save our souls and keep us saved. We need to appreciate the goodness of God's grace in bringing us unto Himself. It is that which should draw from us the warmest of love.

B) *With that we also need sound teaching on discipleship.* Actually, I ended at the end of verse 17. Now, I would like to read to the end of verse 20. Galatians 2:18–21, “For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. (19) For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. (20) I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (21) I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”

It is very interesting how the apostle Paul gives the balance here. He says in verse 16, “by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” No flesh. Then, he immediately points out that we should not assume that grace is without government, because he says in verse 17, “But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ.” While we are seeking to appropriate the grace of God in personal salvation, “we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.” Then, he goes on to say, “now if he does again what was destroyed in his life,” and it speaks about being crucified. He points out that a man cannot continue to live in sin and be justified by grace. It was a new way in which I saw these verses here in Galatians 2.

These are verses that help us to understand the grace of God. Salvation is a free gift but it is a gift through the grace of God that is not without government, because it says, that while we seek to be justified by faith and we yet be found sinners, “is . . . Christ the minister of sin?” He is saying, “God forbid,” there is no way that we can be drawing from the grace of God in personal salvation and continue in sin. He said, “God forbid,” it will not work. How can we build again

that which we have destroyed if we have been crucified with Christ?

Therefore, we need sound teaching on the doctrine of salvation and we need sound teaching on discipleship. We need sound teaching on personal crucifying of the old man — the old nature. We need sound teaching on a lot of other things too, but I see these as very foundational in order to avoid drift.

Another area of sound teaching that is very essential to avoid the church from drifting and that is C) *a sound concept of the New Testament church, the body of Christ*. This includes how we need to relate to the various members in the body of Christ. It is not left to me to decide, “This is the way I like to do it and without the counsel of my brethren this is how I will do it regardless what they think. After all, salvation is a personal experience is it not?” That is right. But it is also an experience with every other believer because they are part of the body of Christ and we need to have a sound concept of that.

D) *We need to have a sound concept and sound teaching on law and love, or law and grace*. I would like to use the illustration of marriage to illustrate what I believe about how a person can fall from grace to a legal law type

of Christian life or life that is supposedly Christian like the Galatians did. Those of us who are married, we are legally bound to another. We have a marriage license which indicates that we promise loyalty and allegiance to that other person for as long as we both live. I am sure when you wake up in the morning, if you have a marriage as it should be, you do not spend much time thinking about the legal responsibility you have to be true to your partner that day. Brethren you do not feel that you must get up to work because I married this wife and I am responsible to take care of her and of the children, and so on. That is what I must do and that is what needs to be done and so I do it.

I doubt if any of us really operate that way (I certainly hope not). If you do seek some counsel because something is radically wrong. That is how people sometimes approach their Christian life. “This is what I must do. The Bible says so. Therefore, that is what I must do.” If we love Jesus, it is like what it is in our marriages. We love our wives, and we love our children and we are glad to do this for them. We are hardly conscious of the fact that there is some legality about this that this is how it must be done. We sim-



ply want to do it because of our love. We do it out of love.

Some would say, “Well then that is fine we can forget about the marriage bond and the commitments that we made. We will totally discard that. It has nothing to do with it.” Well, it does because even though we are motivated by love, we must recognize that if there is not the bound then it opens the door for the Devil to suggest other possibilities, and that is the very thing that can destroy love. It is one of those mysteries that law and love are not opposites. They actually protect each other. My wife and I believe in the divine authority of God in that marriage commitment which God has, in His divine authority so decreed that we are responsible to each other for life. Knowing that, in the back of our minds, we may not spend much time thinking about that fact in itself, it is a protection to our love. It helps to protect that love from the Devil being able to suggest any other possibilities, so that if there would be a moment of weakness in our love that awareness will immediately cancel out anything else the devil might suggest.

Where churches have drifted, marriages have deteriorated. I have seen that in the congregations in our own neighbourhood,

where churches drifted in the last fifteen to twenty years or whatever time period you want to put to it. It is more than that, but especially in the last fifteen years the amount of homes that have broken up has accelerated tremendously. Someone might say, “Does that mean in conservative circles the only thing that is keeping the home together is the law of their marriage bound?” No, maybe it is that way in some homes (and it should not be) but what happens when we lose that faith in the divine authority of God in the marriage bond is that we open the door for the devil to suggest other possibilities. That is exactly how it is in our walk with Christ. We serve Him, not because we must, but because we love Him. It is good that the “musts” are there too such that, in that moment of weakness, when the devil would suggest doing something wrong, we yet remember the Word of God. We are aware that could not do that. It would be wrong.

Walking in the liberty of the life in Christ Jesus is to walk in love and not primarily because this is what I must do. As a church, one of the preventive measures from drifting is to keep that kind of spiritual warmth and fervency alive among us. I appreciate the brethren and sis-

ters among us who I sense have a real warmth for Christ and a real love for the Word of God. We must keep that alive or do what else you will, it will drift. May

we, in a new way, humble our hearts before the Lord Jesus and praise Him. May our love in our hearts swell with new gratitude and appreciation for Him.

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Sunday, February 12, 1995

Valley View Mennonite Church

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From a sermon by Stanley Wine

Sunday, September 19, 2004

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“We Study Mennonite church history to develop our own convictions so we can continue in the faith. We receive encouragement from those of the past, we

see the principles they used to maintain the faith, and we can now see the end results of their decisions and choices.”

### FIFTY FUNDAMENTAL FACTS

24. **Christian ordinances should be literally observed by all Christians.**

In the first place, the general teachings of the Bible on the subject of obedience should be enough to convince us with reference to this matter. Then there is not a single ordinance that does

not stand for some vital Christian principle or principles. This baptism, besides the thoughts presented in the preceding paragraph, is “the answer of a good conscience toward God” (1 Peter 3:21); the communion is symbolical of the unity among believers, the body commemorating the

suffering and death of our Lord; the washing of the saints' feet symbolizes the humility and brotherly equality of those having part in it — and so on with all the rest of the ordinances taught in the New Testament. It is not for man to say which of these ordinances are to be observed and which to be ignored. Neither is it necessary for us to comprehend all the details connected with the whys and wherefores of all these ordinances before we are willing to observe them. All that is necessary for us to know is whether they are commanded and, if they are, to observe them. Our whole obligation is summed up in these words by our Saviour: "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17).

**25. Church membership is designed for all Christian people.**

Hear the testimony of John: "If, we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another" (1 John 1:7). Notice, this does not say, we may

have fellowship, but we have. In other words, if we are what we ought to be, we will belong to the Church of believers. It is idle for any man to say, "I am a Christian," and deliberately refuse to join in fellowship with other Christians of like faith. Christian people should belong to the church which they feel convinced comes nearer the standards of the Gospel than any other church they know of, for the following reasons:

1. Obedience to God requires it. John 14:15; 15:14; 1 John 2:3-5.
2. Christian fellowship is the natural result of walking in the light.
3. The strongest of Christians need the help of their fellow believers.
4. The Church needs their help.
5. Union of forces means multiplication of power for God.
6. It is God's will that His people work unitedly for the common Cause.

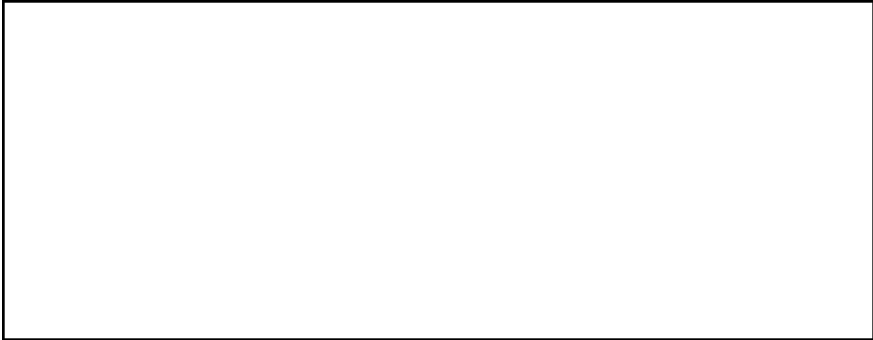
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