

Why Churches Drift

From a message by James Burkholder.

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I am going to be sharing a message which was assigned to the Bible school, Winter Bible School this winter. My assignment was *Why Churches Drift*. It is possible that there are a few individuals here that have heard it before and I guess then to hear it the second time. But, we thought it would maybe be well to share it here. This was also given at Crystal Light (if any of you have been up there for that) that was with one of the other brethren. So, we are going to pick up the subject and I am going to start with a story. This story is of special interest to the children perhaps, but there are certainly some adult applications with the statement/subject in focus — why churches drift.

“On a beautiful summer morning about fifty years ago, a man who was familiar with water stepped into his small fourteen foot boat for a ride on relatively calm waters five miles upstream from the mighty Niagara Falls. Two children were with the man, seven-year-old Roger and his teenage sister. While the unsuspecting trio were enjoying the calm waters the boat was slowly drifting, drifting toward a catastrophe. But even the man in charge of the boat seemed to sense no danger. They drifted past the hydro control and were soon in more swift waters only one mile from the brink of the mighty falls.

Before long the little boat was at the point of no return and the battle for survival ensued. Roger’s sister was plucked from the rapids by two strong men just fifteen foot from the brink of the roaring falls. At the same time the man in the boat went over the brink and was immediately dashed to death. Little Roger with his life jacket still secured around him, was thrown clear of the enormous rocks and fell, quickly fell one hundred sixty-seven feet into the raging waters below.

As he floated away from the main falls the captain of the “Maid of the Mist” spotted him and manoeuvred the ship so that his crew could rescue the frightened boy.” End of story.

Well, you can imagine and you can see all that happening, especially if you have been in Niagara, and perhaps most of you have been, and you can certainly understand such a story and the dangers that are there. The emphasis of the story is that drifting is dangerous. Drifting is dangerous. The problem here with this story is the fact that this boat was drifting and it was like many times the case, the drift is unperceivable, it happens so gradually. And that is what was taking place here.

Just for a few summary principles here at the beginning,

1) Drifting is dangerous because of the swirling rapids that are below us. And that is true in the Christian life. The drift toward danger is something we should definitely want to stay away from. Drifting is dangerous.

2) Drifting is also subtle because it is usually not observed by those who are drifting. If you are moving with the waters around you things seem to be calm but actually there is a drifting taking place.

3) Thirdly, drifting is much sooner realized by those who are not drifting like those standing on the shore can tell if the boat is drifting easier than the ones in the boat. It makes sense.

4) Drifting, number four, can become so pleasurable that the drifters reject all warnings. Maybe that is what was taking place in this story where it was so easy, so comfortable and almost like a planned carelessness. But finally that catches up.

5) Also, drifting is especially dangerous when the boats around us are drifting. I think we can understand that in church life. And it reminds us what the apostle Paul said that “For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves” (2 Corinthians 10:12). To do so is “not wise,” he says. And that is what happens when you compare churches and congregations and so on. We should be going back to the standard is the idea, we should go back to the Rock — Jesus Christ — the “anchor of the soul” (Hebrews 6:19) and compare with that.

6) Finally, drifting is dangerous because to lose ground it is almost impossible to regain it. I think we can understand that. Once the boat got to a certain point there was no backing up. And that is often true in church life that it is hard to make an adjustment. It is hard to go backwards and to go upstream when everything is pushing you downstream.

Now, go with me over to Hebrews 2. This will be the text for the message. The word drift, I do not think you will find it in the Bible, but the idea is certainly there a number of times. And there is a word here in the margin. (We do not put a lot of emphasis on the words in the margin in the Bible. Some of you might have it, some might not have it. And this is from the Revised Version. We do not have much time for other versions but sometimes if you use them as a commentary you can gain some understanding of what the word might be). So, I am in Hebrews 2:1, “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.” The marginal reading is that “we drift away from them.”

This idea of letting them slip. That is fine, but another broader idea is that we drift away from the truth and that is what is so dangerous about it because drifting is like these other six points I gave. It is so deceptive. So, to let them slip is to drift away like you see the boat in the harbour, but if it is not tied in it can drift away and before you know it the boat is downstream. That is the idea there. So, even though the Bible does not use the word “drift,” we certainly have the concept here.

Going on to verses 2-3 “For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward;” (he is referring to old times — the Old Testament times) “(3) How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him,” and it goes on to explain that thought a little bit further.

Now, there is a tendency for all of us to drift, and I think that is why verse 1 is in the plural — “Therefore we . . .” Even the writer is referring to himself. “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should . . .” drift away from them is the idea. So, the tendency to drift is right there in verse 1. The seriousness of drifting is in verse 2. “the word spoken by angels was

stedfast.” That is the Old Testament Word, the Old Testament Law. “every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward.” And we can think of a number like that — Korah, Dathan, and Abiram they rose up against Moses and they said, “We want to help with this leadership work,” (see Numbers 16:3) is basically what they said. And God had to deal with that and so quickly the earth opened up and they were gone. And there are illustrations like Nadab and Abihu. Apparently they were drunk and they had (at least it refers to that in that context) that they took the fire in but it was “strange fire” (Leviticus 10:1), it was not fire from the altar where they should have taken it. And the fire reached out and slew them. It was the end of them.

Or Uzziah, I always pity him when I think of it how he just did the natural thing to steady the Ark. He was concerned that it did not fall off the cart. But the whole concept was wrong and he paid with his life. So, verse 2 gives us the seriousness of drifting. And many other illustrations could be referred to. “Every transgression and disobedience receives a just recompense of reward.” God was very strict back there to level off issues quickly. There are some exceptions to that too where the mercy of God shone through.

Now, verse 3 tells us the cause of drifting. “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” That is the whole problem. That is what happening when the boat is drifting, right? Someone is neglecting. Someone is not doing their duty. “How shall we escape” those things like in verse 2 “if we neglect so great salvation.”

There is a little tract, it still might be available from Rod and Staff — *Neglected, Rejected, Forgotten Truths*. It is a very good one to read. And it does emphasize how that you begin neglecting and after a while you are down the road and you forget and you do not even know what God is saying. “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” So, verse 3 shows the cause here of drifting and the word “neglect” and “drift” is pretty much the same idea.

In the gospel of Luke chapter 16 we have Jesus explaining about not being able to serve two masters at the same time and then after the Pharisees derided Him for His teachings Jesus tells them that they justify themselves before men but God knows that their heart is not right and then He says,

“every man presseth into [the kingdom]” I am always impressed with that thought. Jesus talking about this subject. (Luke 16:16)

The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. [the kingdom].” It takes effort. It is like trying to get through the door and get into heaven. Well, we know that Jesus provides salvation. We cannot do anything about that but when it comes to experiencing it then we can and must something. We cannot drift into heaven we said.

Another one of Jesus’ [sayings] says, “the violent take it by force” (Matthew 11:12) as if it is a soldier-like thing (which it is). The Scriptures use that analogy quite a bit. So, no man, now underscore it again, no one is going to drift into heaven. Getting to heaven is something that takes tremendous effort and daily application, not something that we look at occasionally.

Now, there are many Scriptures that tell us “that in the last days perilous times shall come” (2 Timothy 3:1). And it tells us about the danger of people “being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:13). This whole drifting idea is a deception and people think that everything is all right when it obviously is not. Even the experience in our illustration they did not face it squarely. So, it is like the New Testament emphasizes that there is going to be a lot of drift, a lot of deception and the answer is to stay close to God. “Keep yourselves in the love of God” he says in Jude 21, And that is something we must do.

And He says in 1 Timothy 4:1 that “the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to . . .” various things “and doctrines of devils” and so on. So, we need to keep pressing ahead and as I said, we will never drift into heaven.

Drift is just a natural occurrence. It is something that happens in the world that we live in but it is also something that happens in our own experience and in our collective experience in our churches. It happens unless there is some force to reverse it and push it back.

Now, after that somewhat lengthy introduction, I want to go to the first part of the two part message and that is:

I) Churches do drift. That is what we are looking at now, churches do drift. It is a fact. It is something that we could look at history and I want

to look at three illustrations from history just to point this out — churches do drift.

1) The first one is the Holland [Dutch] Mennonites. This would have been taking place, much of it in Europe, but there is a lesson we can learn from it. The Holland Mennonites were very, very Scriptural and very spiritual in their beginning. They were part of the persecution as well back in the early days. And it is interesting how when the persecution stopped (I suppose that was true of other Anabaptist groups too) when the persecution stopped then there was a worldward drift that took place quite quickly and quite obviously and faster than you can realize.

I was doing a little reading in *Mennonites in Europe* by John Horsch on this subject. And he points out about eight or ten reasons why the Holland Mennonites lost out and some of the steps that they did take in drifting. And the first one he lists is that the brethren would refuse ordination. The brethren were at a place where they thought in terms of the salaried ministry and an educated ministry into the colleges and so on. So, it was so that when they went to have an ordination in the local setting, the brethren just would not allow themselves to be ordained. They did not have a burden for it. And that was a sure step toward drifting when we get to that place.

There could be a few examples where individuals may not feel they should be ordained. That could happen. But basically we expect that when the nominations are given that we go right through with it and even though no doubt everybody feels unable for the task.

Another point is a salaried ministry. And a third one is, it says that church discipline was discarded, no longer did they use any church discipline. I suppose they took the opinion that others do today, you hear about where you know they will preach it, preachers will preach it and it is up to the individuals, the members to make it applicable. Well, we believe the leaders have more responsibility than just that. So, they discarded their church discipline.

Musical instruments such as organs were brought into it. We are now maybe a hundred or more years down the road from the time of their persecution that these were happening. There was neutrality on all doctrinal questions. I thought that was interesting. Some of the things that we enjoy thinking through and finding out God's will about doctrinally they were, these Holland Mennonites throwing that aside and were not discussing

doctrinal questions. No wonder they were drifting.

They had seminary graduates for ministers. I referred to that and the most incomprehensible one is the closing thought one here and that is around 1800 a Mennonite deacon from the Holland Mennonites held the public office of Secretary of War in the Holland government. So, you see how far it had gone from the teaching on non-resistance to church members actually serving in the military arm of the government. So, this is what was taking place. It is an example of churches drifting. Churches do drift.

An interesting little sidelight here is about forty years ago as young man I worked on a farm of a man of the world (not Mennonite) but he came from Holland directly himself after World War II. And we had good times visiting. Early when I learned to know him I asked a question, "Oh, I am interested in knowing more about Holland. That is where Menno Simons came from" I said, "And you perhaps have seen the Mennonites when you lived over there?" He said, "Menno Simons, I never heard of that name and Mennonites," he said "He never heard of that nor ever saw a Mennonite until he saw Edwin Gehman who was in contact with him there." And I was impressed with that.

And I suppose that Holland is a very big area and there might be various reasons that he did not know it but I think what had happened these points that I gave here from Horsch what actually happened as they laid those things aside they were also laying aside their identity and consequently people did not know the Mennonites because they were worldly. The same thing happens to us in our time today. So, I was impressed with that and we need to continue to maintain our identity so that does not happen. And we will pick up on that shortly.

2) The second illustration from history that churches do drift is the Conference Mennonite mission work in Africa. Again, this is a story that is perhaps often told and you can read it quickly in a condensed form in the little booklet, *Mennonite Safari*. And the mission work in the Lancaster Conference began in 1934. And there was a lot of emphasis on the fact that they wanted to maintain the home congregation standards and they were not influenced by the people around them. They had a goal of zero drift and zero apostasy which is good and right. And you look through his little booklet and you see that in the beginning the workers were very plain

and they just fitted into the Lancaster County emphasis of plainness. And that continued for a little while but it was not too long until drift began to take place in this work.

Change did come and Paul Graybill who was the bishop that baptized me just for reference here, worked hard to divert the drift on the mission field and the drift back home. And the big question on the mission field eventually was who is converting whom? Were the Mennonites converting the Africans as was intended, or were the Africans actually converting the Mennonites into their type of religion? That was a good question. And Paul Graybill and many others tried hard to maintain a standard so that this would not happen. But as time went on there was a lot of drifting and after a while you came to that point.

Reading this from the closing emphasis of the book he said, “Sending missionaries to Africa helped establish a church in Tanzania but it also changed the Mennonites in unexpected ways. Lancaster Mennonites who set out to convert the heathen of dark Africa were themselves changed in ways they never anticipated.” And what he is referring to is that the standards were lost and they just went into liberal church life and back toward heathenism.

I gave this message at Blue Rock probably the first one I had and then one of the older brethren living in the area said, “I can see exactly what you were talking about.” And I explained a little bit about some of the things and some of those practices and so on, and he said, “All I need to do is go to a neighbouring Lancaster Conference church right now and I see the very things that they were trying to get out of the people back there in Africa like the rings and the jewellery. That was a common thing in the African culture — body rings and piercings and that type of thing.” He said, “We have it right there in their church. Or, the beating drums when they worship.” That was part of the African mentality. But now the whole thing has turned around and this is happening back in America in the churches that were originally the sending churches. Or, the immodesty of attire and the undress that permeated the African setting is slowly coming, and has come into the churches here. So, I think that is certainly an illustration of drifting and all the way from one pole to the other to be able to drift so far. And today there is no identity.

3) And the third one would be the Lancaster Mennonite School another oft told story, told often. And a book that gives some direction on that would be *Passing on the Faith* which is again, this one we could say the showcase of Mennonite drift in action as you just thumb through quickly and see the pictures you just see what has happened from the good old conservative position that we had with dress, all the way down the road to what the world has to offer.

And not only on dress but just enumerating a number of things that happened there in the 70's and 80's in school life. It is certainly a picture of the departure from the faith. They had contesting sports. They had entertainment, drama, dancing, instrumental music, worldly dress, immodest exposure. That is just part of what they had already in the 70's and the 80's. I am sure that today it is nothing less. And these things all happened in a few decades and sometimes almost overnight, sometimes drifting takes place so fast that you can hardly believe that it changed so much. And that is what happened here. In the school term year '79-'80 all the students and instructor women were wearing coverings. And in one school year that changed almost completely. We talked about overnight drifting and what happened is that they, the year of '79-'80 they said that the women no longer need to wear coverings. So, immediately the coverings were pulled off and till the end of the year there was only 22% that wore it. They started the year or started at least a year ago with a full acceptance and within a year, within a term they were down to 22%. Well, obviously they were practicing it without appreciating it, and as soon as the law was taken away then the coverings went too.

So, that is another sad illustration of churches drifting. It was a school of course, but it was a church sponsored institution and it is a picture, we could say, of reckless drift. So, churches do drift. They do. And we could say, "Well, that was other people, you know." But the same thing could happen to us very subtly and sometimes very swiftly. We want to keep that zero apostasy emphasis and not allow it to lose any ground.

II) Now, the second question the rest of the message is: Why and when do churches drift?

1) First point is churches drift when they lose sight of their identity. Now, go with me to 1 Peter. We are not looking at many Scriptures but I

do want to pick up this when it is so basic. The question is who are we as an Anabaptist Mennonite people? What do we represent? Where do we come from? Where are we going? What do we believe? Those are the big questions and our young people should be able to answer that and tell us where we came from and tell us where we are going and what we stand for in all that.

Here is where we came from 1 Peter 2:9-10. “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. ¹⁰Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” That is who we are. We are God’s chosen people — not exclusively, not just our group. But we are part of God’s chosen people. And we must humbly fit into this and recognize that we have a special work to do. We believe for the plain people today and the revival groups there is a special work that we need to be doing and that is of course, bringing others into the kingdom while we endeavour to maintain our own in the kingdom.

Verse 10 always impresses me, “Which in time past were not a people.” He is referring there to the gentiles. We are a part of that. “But are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” There is a tremendous debt that we owe because of what God has done for us. So, churches drift when they lose sight of their identity.

I understand that the liberal Mennonite churches are facing an identity crisis. Like I said, they do not know who they are. They do not know their background. They do not want to link with the background except maybe by a little historical study. And that is too bad. And we must be careful lest we do not end up with the same where our young people would ask the question, “Well, who are we?” We need to be teaching. We need to be directing. We need to believe in church discipline whatever it takes so that we can be God’s special people.

There is a clipping from the Lancaster newspaper I will just share briefly. On the subject of the Mennonites and numbers among the Mennonites there is a man who did some research in that again. And he says, “He was curious to know how many members in the global south are even aware they are Mennonite or Anabaptist.” He is referring to the fact that the statistics have changed some and the Mennonite emphasis through the years has been in the North in the globe. But now it is more in the South. But he

is saying that those in the South, and those farther away from the centre hardly even know that they are Mennonite or Anabaptist. And he says again, “The emphasis is more on being Christian. Denominational differences mean less.” And that certainly that is what has happened. There is an emphasis on being Christian but the Mennonite name and the Mennonite concepts, Anabaptist concepts dropped off along the way.

He says this as well, “Instead of the North sending missionaries to the South,” and we could consider that you know, Pennsylvania sending missionaries to Africa. It would be the same idea. “Instead of the North sending missionaries to the South,” this man sees, “the South sending them North.” He says, “We have lost our imagination for Christ’s presence in the world,” he says. “We have become secularized.” I think that is pretty revealing that someone from a liberal background would point that out.

So, churches drift when they lose sight of their identity. I think, this is my first point but I want to be sure that it is driven deeply and underscored that we know who we are and we do not experiment with things such as dropping the Mennonite name because we are thinking it holds people away and so on. Those are the type of things that help us to lose sight of our identity.

2) Number two, churches drift when homes fail to take their place. And that is a sure kill, is it not, when homes are not taking their place and consequently we do not have the reproduction from them as far as reproducing the faith. And there are many issues where parents need to take a stand. Sometimes we tend to think of it, you know, the church making the rules and whatever happens within the church well then it must be all right and that type of thing. But, I would like to make a plea that we have parents that see the need for rules and regulations in our homes and not only in our churches. The church just cannot do it all. That is the way it is. The church leaders cannot, for instance the electronic maze that we are into just now, the church leaders cannot go around and check with everybody and see exactly what they have and look through the things, but the fathers can and the mothers can and should be doing it. So, we need homes that are ready to take their place lest we so easily drift and start slipping away and not realizing what is happening.

I do not have a lot of illustrations on that but there are many practical areas where we should not be afraid to stand and to give direction to our

young people. And sometimes when they say, "Well, everybody is doing it," we can just answer, "But, we are not doing it." I know it takes a good relationship to be able to do that. If it is a strained relationship that does not work very good perhaps but we must build a good relationship between parents and children so that when those questions do come they can accept the answers that we give them.

So, we do in a sense, we do look to each other as parents, and we do what others do. I think there is a sense of blending in but yet when there is something questionable that comes into focus, we do not have to just bend to it because others have done it. Rather, we should think it through ourselves. So, that second point is that churches drift when homes fail to take their place.

3) Thirdly, churches drift when they despise the concept of ongoing revival. That is an interesting one and one that we have heard many times through the years, the forty years of our church life how there is ground to gain. And we must tighten up here and we must, you know, like the ships plug the holes lest the world comes in. You know, the Christian life and family is like a ship on the water and that is fine. But when the water is in the ship then you have something else happening.

So, what we are looking at here is a despising of the ongoing revival. And there is a side where we need to rest and we do not have to always be pushing for new things or changing this or that. We need to rest with what we have. But usually when we look over our groups, our families and our congregations, I think invariably we can see some areas where we need some shoring up and some ongoing revival. And we should not be afraid of that. For instance, when the radio came in, or came in, actually was on the way out when the church group started and of the two year period of grace was given, all of that was to give time for revival. We were in a revival movement. The maternity dress was an issue from the beginning. And the loose flowing, smock type of thing was a question back there and our brethren in the ministry at that time had tried to turn that around and give it some direction. There has been a lot of improvement but it is so easy to slip again. It is so easy to slip back toward the direction we were in. So, we should think in terms of revival continuing.

Another area would be the woman's place in the church. There has been a lot of growth from where we were in the beginning to where we are now.

And I think we are at a happy place where basically the sisters are not involved in the public worship in any way and I think that we are all satisfied with that. And I believe that we want to continue that emphasis where the women, the sisters would not be in leadership roles and would not be part of the leading in the worship service.

One more that is worthy of some discussion I will give here. We are looking still at this point of churches drift when they despise a concept of ongoing revival. There has been a revival, this is a dress related one, the sisters' weight of hosiery. Go with me back to the Denver Meeting house about forty some years ago and Paul Ebersole was a preacher. And we were at a point there where a number of sisters coming out of Conference would have worn transparent hosiery and at the pulpit that night he just nailed it down real good and tight. He said, "We are going to have to get away from that. It is of the world and we are going to have a standard of black stockings for the sisters." And he said, "That is just the way it is going to have to be." And the church rallied around that. There were others that had that conviction and that is just the way it was. But it has been still a battle ground down through the years.

And you cannot just automatically do something and it is done for many years. You must keep working at it and I appreciate in recent years we have seen a good response to that where the hosiery have been darker maybe at times. And I was trying to think this through from what Isaiah says where he talks about and condemns the "haughty" (Isaiah 3:16) daughters of Zion because of the garments they were wearing and it refers to the garments which the Septuagint translation refers to as "transparent, gauze-like garments." And I remember some like in the Early Church Fathers and among the Anabaptists where they took a stand against the silk stockings because of their finery and the sheerness. Well, now in came along the way here some decades ago, and we sort of snatched that up but it still wonders me what God really is telling us in relation to this question, you know, why would we want to wear materials that can be seen through when Isaiah condemns their [appearance] — something to think through. And it is something where we want to continue to have the revival emphasis.

4) All right, this one, the fourth one, churches drift when fellowship lines are blurred. Again, this can be a sure kill because, you know, we are so in-

fluenced by those that we fellowship that we associate with. I had to think of that with the letter that was faxed around, maybe e-mailed in relation to some of the things happening there in Haiti. And reading down over the letter, it used terms like “guys,” and just a number of terms in that letter that just did not fit to the way our people talk. And that is what happens when you cross fellowship lines. And you begin to see some of those discrepancies. And there could be many other illustrations that relate to the ministries that others have. We do not condemn, we do not judge them but neither do we necessarily join them. I think we should keep that in mind.

We are glad for ministries, people helping in Haiti or wherever the needs are, but for instance the MCC [Mennonite Central Committee] drive for the cooking of meat and the preparing of that. We basically disassociate ourselves from that. They have people. They can do that. And like I said we do not judge them but neither do we have to join them. So, let us be careful about the fellowship lines that can easily be blurred.

Another place it affects us is with our youth and maybe some others. I have seen it already, in fact it happens too often that when an individual is disciplined in church life, or maybe put out of church completely then he is still close friends with the other boys or girls you know and they still go places together. Maybe it is just to Numidia or Ashland (Bible Schools) or whatever it might be. But the whole fellowship thing just continues and they do not really help each other, they do not get the impact of what disciplined church life should be doing. So, somehow we must try to break that and maybe help our young people in a time like that. How much should they associate with one who has taken a position against the church and is out of fellowship. Why, it should be very limited. I think we would agree to that.

5) Churches drift when evangelism and mission efforts are emphasized above obedience to the Scripture. Brother Nathan’s devotion certain emphasized that point how Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). We should stay close to God. We should be building on what Jesus said. We should be doing what Jesus said. And there other Scripture that would fit in there such as Revelation 22:14, “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.” The point here is sometimes churches have a lot of fanfare about all their evangelism activities

and mission work and so on but back things are not the way they should be. And they are not following the Scriptures. And that is a challenge. That is another one of those sure kill in relation to drift.

6) Number six, churches drift when we allow surrounding culture to influence Christian practice. That is what happened in Africa. They did not want to maintain their Christian stand as far as the dress standards and that but they swung to the other side and picked up and pulled from that culture.

One of the biggest ones we are facing is the embrace for a greeting. And we keep talking about it and it seems that it keeps happening among some of our people at funerals, at ordinations and that kind of thing. We do have a mandate from the Scriptures and that is that it is to be the Christian salutation. We know what that is — the holy kiss. But a lot of emphasis and putting this emphasis on the embracing instead of this ordinance certainly is undermining it. It is one of those ways in which the boat just continues to drift. And if we compare ourselves with the other boats around us then we do not see what is happening even though it is happening.

There would be others that would fit into this category such as the brethren's hair and how we need to struggle with that, something that homes should be taking care of but it seems the church must get involved. And where does the emphasis come from? Well, it is the culture that is pushing in on us. And I suppose there are some things related to cultural change we can expect. There would be some of that, for instance in the brethren's hair if you go back one hundred, two hundred years ago why ours does not look like that either. There is a change took place. But we should especially stay away from the cutting edge like the world has with its emphasis on an overly short haircut.

There are other things we could look at and we do not have time to. I am thinking now of the divorce and remarriage in the church when we left. The culture of the world can push in on us and we begin to think in their patterns and do like they do.

7) Number seven, churches drift when parents and grandparents follow the children into apostasy. That again is a very unfortunate situation where maybe we have seen parents, where there were children growing up and there were good, strong supporters, everything was going fine and then af-

ter a while there were a few questions and the church needed to touch one of the teenagers perhaps. And then the parents get excited, “No, what is going here?” And that can really be undermining. We need parents and grandparents who are not going to follow their children into apostasy. And sometimes that has happened and maybe the children left the church and after a while the parents even left the church and have gone onto something more liberal. Well, it can happen and we need to be aware of it.

Just a couple more here yet.

8) Churches drift when wedding practices shift worldward. It is interesting to watch that connection. You know if you look at the weddings you can pretty well tell what we have in the churches. Somehow the weddings are on the cutting edge, you know. It is the gown type dresses, just check at the wedding to see how are things looking, the flashy dresses and the sensual shoes and the bridal tables being all decked out and just a number of things like that. Now, we have many weddings that are just, I believe, the way they should be. There are many among us who want it conservative and traditional. And that has been working well, but we are always pressured with this. We are looking at drifting and here is an area where it can come into focus quite quickly.

9) Number nine is that churches drift when the role of church leaders is misunderstood or resisted. Sometimes it happens, and again it happened recently where there was a letter being circulated, I think it was anonymous, it was not clear as to who would have written it and it was circulated around. The emphasis of the letter was that we sort of need an overhaul among our ministry and the emphasis was that the ministry should feel less responsible to give direction to the churches and to the homes especially and that the home should give direction to the issues of the day rather than the churches giving direction.

Well, we know that the homes must, there is a role for them to fill. We referred to that earlier but we know that who is accountable too. The Scriptures tell us that. This letter went on to say that the members and the homes should decide issues, and then this one “Church leaders” in this kind of setting “Church leaders would resist the temptation to be in control. Well, as if the church leaders are battling with some selfish idea I want to be in control. Rather, it is like the Scripture says, “they watch for your

souls, as they that must give account” (Hebrews 13:17). And that is what makes it so sobering both for the ministry and for the members. So, sometimes you have that sort of rising up against the established leaders, rising up against them and thinking of some other ways it might work. But you always bump into again and again in Hebrews 13:17 that “they watch for your souls, as they that must give account.” And that always makes it very sobering. So, let us not be swayed about by those who would give that kind of an emphasis.

10) The final one is that churches drift when they lose sight of the Rock, Christ Jesus. And that is so important. Get the picture again of the little boat floating along but here is one great Rock and that has always been there for hundreds, thousands years it has always been there. So, that is a reference point. And we must always use the Bible and Christ Jesus as our reference point. We must stay close to Him and close to His people lest we begin to drift. He is like we sing “The Anchor that keeps the soul steadfast and sure, while the billows roll.” Jesus is the one whom we build on.

All that I have said this morning must come back to this point that Jesus is the rock and without Him there is no other way to make it through. Again, I want to express appreciation for the church life that we do have and the revival that we have seen and let us continue to press ahead. Jesus is surely coming.

Let us kneel for prayer.