



**"Brethren, We Are
Drifting."**

By Keith Greer

Brother J.D. Tant, a preacher during the middle part of the 20th century, wrote about some of the discussions in which the church in those days was involved. He ended many of his articles with the words, "**don't forget brethren, we are drifting.**" It is inevitable that men who leave the paths of divine authority will "drift" away from God.

I was born in 1954. I did not witness the bitter disputes over church support of colleges and other human institutions (orphan homes, widows home, etc.). Nor, do I remember much about the battle over the sponsoring-church question, where one church oversaw brotherhood programs (such as the Herald of Truth) using monies from many churches. From reading and talking with brethren who were in those battles, I know the fight was difficult and very hurtful to the church. These "issues" divided preachers who previously stood side by side. Often, instead of Bible-centered discussions on Bible authority for such things, they muddied the waters with personal attacks and character assassinations and judged their brethren's hearts and motives. Those who opposed such programs and institutions were called antis. Nevertheless, the lines were drawn, and finally, a split occurred between the no-institution churches and those who were considered institutional. Then came the terms "liberal" and "conservative."

In my earlier years in the church, I understood some basic principles. Human creeds were things denominations had. Instrumental music was wrong because the Book instructs us to sing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). I'm told that in the middle 70s, there was an emphasis on following the pattern given in the NT. There had to be a "thus saith the Lord" for everything the church practiced. Bible authority was established when there was a direct command, an apostolic example, or a necessary inference. The Scripture's silence was respected and taught as equal in force to any direct command given. During my first eighteen years, my experience in the Lord's church (in northern Indiana) taught me that all churches understood these simple principles.

In 1985, I started preaching the gospel. At that time, I lived and worked in Las Vegas, Nevada. Did we have issues? Certainly! For certain, there were issues of worldliness, immorality, and the Crossroads and Boston Movements. But, one particular area -- attitudes between brethren who differ on some points of doctrine -- was new to me. I decided to go and speak with the preachers in all the other Las Vegas churches of Christ. What did I learn? Eight of the thirteen told me to stay on my side of town. Three would not even speak with me concerning our differences. Why? One determined I was apostate because I opposed the Boston Movement. Two others called me liberal because of my views and teaching on the marriage question. There were even brethren who were ready to fight physically over our differences! It seemed they were unwilling to have face-to-face discussions about serious differences in what we preached and believed. Why?

Now, 15 years down the road, I'm looking back. What do I see today? "Brethren, we're drifting!" Why do I think so? I ask each one who reads this article to carefully consider the things being addressed. I'm not an expert, and I don't have all the answers, but I know the One who does! I am going to share with you the feelings of one man and the dangers he sees for the future.

As we begin the 21st century, there are issues with which we must deal. Some with which I'm dealing are:

Humanity and Deity of Christ;

Romans 14 and Fellowship;

Sunday Evening Communion;

Women Speaking in Bible classes;

Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage;

Age of the Earth;

False Teachers and Labeling Them.

The more "modern" churches of Christ are dealing with many other problems:

Patterns;

Hermeneutics;

Terms of Salvation;

Social Aspects of the Church;

Unity and Diversity.

Issues will always be with us; we must continue to study and examine our Bibles to be sure we are standing squarely on the platform of truth.

Some of the things I read are very scary! For example: Max Lucado preaches for a church of Christ in San Antonio, Texas. Their bulletin states that the guest speaker for this Lord's Day will be Buckner Fanning of the Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio! This does not surprise me concerning brother Lucado who, a few years ago, during a radio sermon, asked the listening audience to quote the "sinner's prayer" so Jesus could save them! At this same church, the elders put the following announcement in the church bulletin. "The elders want to provide you with a statement about a question that may have been raised. That question has to do with the use of musical instruments in our worship. After many months of careful study and consideration, the elders unanimously concluded that there is no prohibition of the use of mechanical instruments in worship. We recognize the issue as a matter of diverse opinion and feel that any discussion in the future should be conducted in a manner that avoids division. We merely want to state that consensus to you today without any prediction of what that might mean to our worship services. Our worship style may or may not change, but we are in no hurry to change. We are highly sensitive to your feelings, and we want to hear your thoughts and wishes. Talk with your elders about it. Your feedback will help us, as we intend to offer teaching on this subject."

Possibly you're thinking, "these are just a bunch of far-out brethren." A little closer to home, some of our own "conservative brethren" believe and are teaching that Jesus could not sin and was not tempted while here on earth!

Brother Homer Hailey's teaching and understanding on the marriage-and-divorce question has fueled quite a fire during the past decade. Basically, brother Hailey believes it does not matter how many times a person is married before coming to Christ. In other words, baptism just washes away those past marriages! I thought baptism only washed away sins! Acts 22:16

Others divide over whether or not to have Sunday evening communion. Never mind, it's still the Lord's Day; the body is together; we have the bread and fruit of the vine; the Lord commanded His children to remember His death -- but those who are not present at 11 a.m. must wait until next week! Acts 20:7 tells us the disciples broke bread on the first day of the week. What it doesn't say is whether it was offered once, twice, or three times! Some say Sunday evening communion is just a tradition. Really? Is meeting for 10 a.m. Bible Study a tradition? Is meeting for worship at 10:45 a.m. a tradition? Does practicing something over a long period of time make it wrong? Folks who think this way will soon be trying to stop Sunday evening and Wednesday evening meetings! Tradition don't you know!

"Brethren, we're drifting!" What is happening to us? What will be the next issue to divide us? Somewhere, this very moment, someone is working on "some new thing" to cause division in the body of Christ.

Where will it end? What does the future hold for our children and grandchildren? I know the world's ungodliness will probably worsen -- moral values will decline; the thinking on certain issues will change. But what about issues among the brethren? "Brethren, we are drifting" into a spiritual hurricane.

What is the greatest "black cloud" on the horizon? "But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another" {Galatians 5:15}. In my humble

opinion, the greatest danger we face is within the body of Christ. Two things have led me to this conclusion.

1. An apparent lack of love for Bible preaching -- old-fashioned book, chapter, and verse preaching. Today, it seems to be fashionable to limit sermons to cute stories, little scripture, little substance, and little time! I wonder if we have willfully forgotten the demise of God's people of old. What eventually destroyed their relationship with God? "To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? Indeed their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot give heed. Behold, the word of the Lord is a reproach to them; they have no delight in it" {Jeremiah 6:10}.

It appears that many members of the Lord's church today have no spiritual appetite for God's word. Why? For too many years, preachers have changed their preaching to meet the demands of the weak Christians in the pews. To avoid making men feel the pain caused by sinful conduct, preachers, instead of preaching the Book, have taken feel-good, positive approaches. How can men and brethren possibly need less Bible-centered preaching while the world grows ever more ungodly? Men are becoming more wicked, and our preaching is becoming weaker. Sin is still sin; hell is still hot; Satan is still trying to draft souls into his army; and eternal damnation is still a real possibility. We must preach the book!

2. Our attitudes toward labeling preachers as "false teacher." The mentality that seeks to see how quickly we can label one as a false teacher is way out of hand! What ever happened to setting down together and discussing our differences? The first thing we do when we see something in print, or hear something spoken, is get on the internet and let everyone know that "brother so-and-so is now a false teacher." We forget to talk with the person, check out the facts, or make certain that we understood correctly. We rush headlong into putting a label on, and warning the brotherhood of, this spiritual monster. How does this exhibit brotherly love (John 13:34,35).

Don't misunderstand, the Bible clearly teaches that false teachers must be exposed (1 John 4:1; Matthew 7:15; 2 Peter 2:1-5). I'm convinced, by what I've observed, that we may have some "brotherhood watchdogs" who need to be on leashes! Recently, I

received the private correspondence between two gospel preachers who were discussing a difference. (It was also sent to 50 or 60 others.) What purpose was served? A one-on-one discussion between the two men might have worked out their difference.

"Brethren, we're drifting!" We all need to check our hearts. Is the cause of Christ first in our minds, or do we seek to create names for ourselves? I know Paul named "names," and so did our Lord. But an honest study indicates that they first established the facts clearly. No, my friends, I'm not getting soft. But, until I know for sure, I'm going to be a little more careful about condemning other preachers. Our Father in heaven is watching and taking notes!