

The Teacher and Remaining True to Apostolic Doctrine

Key Verses

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. (Acts 20:28–31)

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine. (Acts 2:42)

Lesson Objectives:

After this lesson, students should be able to

- Define “drift”
- Identify drift
- Avoid drift

Introduction:

To effectively teach students at a Bible school, it is imperative that God's Word be taught and practiced. Someone has rightly said, “Bible doctrine should shape our lifestyle not our lifestyle shape our doctrine.” So, it is in the Bible school classroom. Bible doctrine should shape our curriculum and permeate our courses. We must remain true to apostolic doctrine in order to legitimately impact our world for eternity.

I. Avoid the Drift

Ruth Rieder, in *Covenant by Sacrifice*, tells a story of two fishermen on the reservoir. Caught up in the excitement of the trip, the men neglected to put down the anchor as they reached their favorite fishing spot. Unmindful of the subtle undercurrent of the water, they began to fish. Hours quickly passed; suddenly one of the fishermen looked up. To his horror, the boat was drifting dangerously close to destruction. He shouted a warning to his partner, and they began rowing with all their might, seeking to escape the deadly rapids that lay just ahead. After a furious effort, they made it safely to shore. The fishermen were shocked that they drifted so far. It had happened without notice. The danger went undetected until it was almost too late.

The writer of Hebrews warns us to, “give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip” (Hebrews 2:1). “So we must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it” (Hebrews 2:1, NLT). It is as if the truth could slip out of our hands, and we could slip out of His grace.

John Trent, author of *Heart Shift* and a professional counselor, tells of a plane trip where he sat beside a NASA petroleum engineer. He took advantage of the opportunity to ask the missile scientist, “How many degrees can a space rocket be off before it becomes a huge problem? Could it be two degrees off?”

The man pulled out his calculator and started punching in numbers. “To be two degrees off from when you blast off, and taking into consideration the time and distance traveled, you’ll miss not only your point of orbital entry, but you’ll miss the moon by 11,121 miles.”

Trent goes on to say, “Just be two degrees off from the right heart attitude, add in enough time and distance, and an entire church can end up miles from God’s heart.”

Just a two degree shift in doctrine and convictions can cause change for the worse, pulling the church away from God. And a two degree shift toward correct doctrine and appropriate convictions can bring a church closer to God. “Even small shifts in a positive direction could move a person from ruin to renewal.”

“Drift” refers to something that has carelessly been permitted to become lost. It is another word for “shift.”

In his excellent book *Historical Drift*, Dr. Arnold L. Cook poses the question, “Must my church die?” His timely book teaches us how to detect, diagnose, and reverse the trends that churches and Bible schools have toward drifting from fundamental truth. This book has been a primary source used in writing this lesson. Cook explained that the biblical word *drift* means “to let something slip away—can describe a ship, which drifts by the dock due to the carelessness of the mariner who failed to calculate carefully the wind or tide.”

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine. (Ephesians 4:14)

II. When do Bible schools and churches drift?

A. When they fail to pass on the truth to successive generations.

It takes one generation to bring about extinction of truth in a family.

B. When they move away from their foundational doctrines.

The trend is for church denominations to drift (or move) away from their foundational doctrines over time. It does not have to be this way. Drifting can be prevented. It must be prevented. John Wesley once said:

I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist . . . But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having a form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline which they first set out.

The *Charisma* magazine (October 1993) quoted the Assemblies of God general superintendent as saying, “We might be Pentecostal in doctrine but we’re not Pentecostal in experience.”

“Too many people,” George Wood said (in the same meeting), “are leaving our churches unchanged, unmoved, unsaved, unfilled, unsanctified and unmotivated to turn their heart and will over to God completely. We need a holy fire which sets aside business as usual in the church until Jesus comes.”

Hold on. Before casting a judging eye on another’s church, there is a question for consideration. Could this same thing be said of your church?

C. When they move away from soul winning.

Southern Baptist L. R. Scarborough once said, “It is found that so long as the heart of an institution burns hot with the fires of soul-winning, it is not likely to drift in its theology.”

D. When they concentrate on maintaining the organizational structure at the expense or losing out in careful teaching.

This would be a classic case of failing to put emphasis on the right priorities. It is a failure to keep the main thing the main thing. We should major on the majors and minor on the minors. Arnold Cook said, “As a result of their position on the aging side of the life cycle, congregations are being sustained by their management rather than fueled by their vision. Generally, the more aged the congregation, the longer it takes to produce lasting change.”

E. When seminaries and Bible schools fail in training the leaders.

Timothy Beougher and Alvin Reid, in *Evangelism for a Changing World*, cautioned, “When a denomination’s theology changes, that change almost always begins in the seminaries that train its leaders.”

As Bible school educators, it is paramount that we take special note of what was just stated. Many colleges started out with the objective of teaching God’s Word but have strayed far from that. God forbid that this ever happens in our apostolic Bible schools.

F. When Satan lulls us into sleep rather than the church experiencing revival.

Revival means “to bring back to life.” As believers backslide, they become a corpse. Revival is imperative.

In *Firestorm of the Lord*, Stuart Piggin said Satan likes to threaten us. “I will cool you insensibly, by degrees, by little and little. What care I . . . though I be seven years in chilling your heart if I can do it at last; continual rocking will lull a crying child asleep.”

In *The Frog in the Kettle*, George Barna explained the drift in this way:

Place a frog in boiling water and it will jump out immediately because it can tell that it’s in a hostile environment. But place a frog in a kettle of room temperature water and it will stay there, content with those surroundings. Slowly, very slowly, increase the temperature of the water. This time, the frog doesn’t leap out, but just stays there, unaware that the environment is changing. Continue to turn up the burner until the water is boiling. Our poor frog will be boiled, quite content, perhaps, but nevertheless dead.

Ruth Rieder, in *Covenant by Sacrifice*, related the story of a man that met an overland traveler, who had walked on foot for a long distance. He was interested in knowing what the greatest difficulty the traveler had encountered was in his long journey.

He suggested that perhaps the mountains on the trail had been the greatest barrier, but the traveler assured his questioner it was not that. Then he suggested that perhaps the swollen streams, which cut across the road, presented the greatest hazard, but it was not that. After a little the traveler said, “What almost defeated me in my journey across the continent was the sand in my shoes.”

Rieder points out that life is forever tripping over small things. It is not the big diversion that will send you down the path of compromise. It is usually just the subtle curve in the road. More than likely the giant assaults of the enemy will not destroy our consecrations. It will probably be nothing more than . . . little foxes. (See Song of Solomon 2:15.)

G. When their leadership drifts.

Arnold Cook, in *Historical Drift*, stated, “Organizations don’t drift, only their leaders.” Backsliding occurs in the pulpit before backsliding begins in the pew. We as leaders must remain dedicated to God and to teaching and exemplifying apostolic doctrine and lifestyle.

In *Famine in the Land*, Steve Lawson said:

If a reformation is to come to the church, it must be preceded by a reformation of the pulpit. As the pulpit goes, so goes the church . . . Too many preachers today bear more resemblance to entertainers than expositors, stand-up comics rather than knee-shaking servants. God-fearing, awe-struck men in pulpits remain the need of the hour.

H. When there is the lack of vision.

Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he. (Proverbs 29:18)

I. When there is a desire for the world (and to be like everyone else).

Arnold went on to say that, “Robert Bork, in his book, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*, comments on the power of culture to unrelentingly squeeze us into its mold: With each new evidence of deterioration, we lament for a moment, and then become accustomed to it.”

Look closely at what happened to Lot. The same picture could happen today.

- Looked toward Sodom (Genesis 13:10).
- Chose the ground near Sodom (Genesis 13:11).
- Pitched his tent toward Sodom (Genesis 13:12).
- Moved to Sodom and dwelt there (Genesis 14:12).
- Became like the people of Sodom. Acted like a citizen (Genesis 19:9).
- Gave his daughters to Sodom (Genesis 19:8).
- Hesitated in leaving the city (Genesis 19:15–16).

Even when the angels delivered him from destruction, he still wanted to live as close to Sodom as possible (Genesis 19). His wife even looked back to the city—longing to be there.

J. R. Ensey, in the *Apostolic World Report*, offered a book review on *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*. He said, “Prosperity urged him to move on into the city where he became a judge, or maybe a mayor. He never intended for things to turn out as they did for his family, but he pitched his tent too far in the wrong direction . . . If we don’t want to go to Gomorrah, we shouldn’t pitch our tent in that direction.” Consider the short warning found in God’s Word: “Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:32).

We should fight against compromise and the pull of the things of this world. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (I John 2:15).

The case of Sodom and Gomorrah is not the only biblical example of historical drift. The Book of Judges records the appalling cycle of drift seven times.

- The people fell into sin.
- God disciplined them with foreign oppression.
- The people cried out in repentance.
- God raised up a deliverer.
- Peace was restored.

God provided them with leaders called “judges,” but still “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

The following adaptation from *Historical Drift* is another illustration of the typical evidence of loss of commitment. (Several additions have been made.) Watch for these “lacks” in your life, in Bible school and in the local church.

Lack of faithfulness	Inconsistent church attendance. Quest for fewer and shorter services.
Lack of stewardship	Not faithful in tithing and giving of time, talent, and treasure.
Lack of love and understanding for God’s Word	No apparent desire for serious Bible study.
Lack of biblical preaching	More interested in modern trends, methods, and current events than sound, doctrinal preaching and teaching.

Lack of worship	Not interested in consecrating one's life, bowing, and submitting to God as King of kings.
Lack of prayer	No interest in attending prayer meetings.
Lack of repentance	No interest in deep soul-searching and conformity to God's will and Word.
Lack of evangelism	No involvement in witnessing.
Lack of vision	No involvement in outreach or missions.
Lack of holiness	No apparent interest in godly living.

Remember, the church in the Book of Acts spread like a blazing fire. Persecution could not stop it. The church was vibrant, active, and powerful. Great signs and wonders were performed. Its members were strong, loved God and His truth, and shared it with everyone.

Someone has rightly said that the challenge of the twenty-first century is to take the church to the world without the world coming into the church.

III. How can we steer away from drifting?

Imagine you are riding a bicycle down the road. Take your hands off the handle bars and place them behind your head. If you like, close your eyes and relax. How long do you think it will take before your bicycle begins to drift? How long before you swerve into oncoming traffic or bend into the ditch? A good rider knows that in order to stay straight on the road, it requires making small corrections.

Much emphasis today is placed on being like everyone else. Absolutes are minimized or considered obsolete. This is done, many times, in the name of unity. Unfortunately unity is getting confused with tolerance and compromise. C. H. Spurgeon once said, "I am quite sure that the best way to promote union is to promote truth. It will not do for us to be all united together by yielding to one another's mistakes."

Adrian Rogers said (as quoted in *Famine in the Land* by Steven Lawson), "It is better to be divided by truth than to be united in error. It is better to speak the truth that hurts and then heals, than falsehood that comforts and then kills. It is not love and it is not friendship if we fail to declare the whole counsel of God. It is

better to be hated for telling truth than to be loved for telling a lie . . . It's better to stand alone with the truth than to be wrong with a multitude."

Philip Melancton said, "In essentials, unity. In nonessentials, liberty. In all things, charity." It is important for us to ascertain what is essential and important and place our emphasis there. What does this mean to us? We should be united when it comes to the essential, major doctrines of the Word of God. We should always speak the truth in love.

When I think of drift, I don't usually get a word picture concerning trees. They don't drift; they bend and bow. They don't stand as straight as they should or once did. So, bending, breaking trees are closely connected with drifting. Our association with others can either lift us up or pull us down. Let us learn a lesson from the trees. The world's largest tree (and one of the world's oldest) is the Coast Redwood (of California). It grows from a seed that is no larger than the one from a tomato. It rises like a skyscraper (tall, towering building) to 367 feet. These trees can live for more than two thousand years.

These natural giants have an attention-grabbing root system. (Trees are held in place by anchoring organs called "roots." Roots grow constantly. We are to be rooted in the Word of God.)

The roots of the redwood only go down ten to thirteen feet deep before they spread sixty to eighty feet. How can such a tall tree with such a shallow root system withstand the wind? The roots often entangle with neighboring trees. This provides for greater stability. The trees grow close together and gain strength from being a forest. Through growing together and connecting with other members of the body, we have the strength of the combined body. We become stronger through our association with each other. We also become grounded and settled in God's Word.

Let your roots grow down into him and draw up nourishment from him. See that you go on growing in the Lord, and become strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Let your lives overflow with joy and thanksgiving for all he has done. Don't let others spoil your faith and joy with their philosophies, their wrong and shallow answers built on men's thoughts and ideas, instead of on what Christ has said. (Colossians 2:7-8, TLB)

You now have a hint of the down side to these close relationships. Because the roots are entangled or fused together, it is conceivable that when disease strikes, it can spread throughout the common root system, as is common with the oak tree. The root systems of oak trees within fifty feet of each other can become grafted together. If one tree becomes infected, the disease can easily move from tree to tree.

Our association with others can build us up, or pull us down. It has often been said that if you show me your associates, I can tell you a lot about your personal character. We are like those we hang around.

G. K. Chesterton once said, “Whenever you remove any fence, always pause long enough to ask yourself the question, ‘Why was it there in the first place?’”

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the early church was their allegiance to the apostle’s doctrine. They believed and aggressively spread it everywhere. They were steadfast—unwavering, unswerving, unfaltering, and resolute in preaching the truth delivered to them (Jude 3). C. H. Spurgeon said, “And, oh, beloved, there is one thing that I dread above all others—lest I should ever handle the Word of God so as to persuade some of you that you are saved when you are not.”

Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. (II Corinthians 4:1-2)

Truth-teaching and preaching has never been popular, but it has eternal rewards. We have been given a trust—the Word and the students of God. The phrase “handling deceitfully” originally meant “to catch with bait, to ensnare, to corrupt with error.” Never spoil the treasure by corrupting it through distorting the Word of God. Set it forth plainly. Never aim to deceive or make a false impression. Start where the Bible starts. Stop where it stops. Avoid truth decay. It destroys spiritual well-being.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers,

having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (II Timothy 4:3-4).

Some, having itching ears, will look for teachers who say what they want to hear, things that will suit their liking. They are looking for a preacher to rub, scratch or tickle their ears. They will turn away from listening to truth.

Paul knew there would be truth decay. He looked in the future and saw a day when:

1. Errors enter the church.
2. People turn from truth.
3. They look for false teachers.
4. They substitute God's Word with fables and stories.

"Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." (Acts 2:40, NIV).

Bruce Wilkinson teaches on "The Three Chairs," representing a three-generation principle. This concept is expanded in his book, *First Hand Faith*, and has deep implications for Christians. Wilkinson believes these generational insights from Scripture are universal truths. They exist for all time and all people. His teachings serve as a strong warning against becoming a generation that has gone astray. These teachings are outlined below.

It is possible for dynamic churches to shift from godliness to godlessness, from vibrant faith to empty faith. When a church moves toward the first generation, it is called a red-hot, on fire for God, revival church. But as a church moves into the third generation, it becomes a liberal, lukewarm, cold church. Worse yet—*Ichabod*—"the glory of the Lord has departed" could be written over its door.

<p>First Generation The Life of Joshua <i>Commitment</i></p>
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- They knew God.
- They had first-hand faith.
- They had the works of God in their midst and saw tremendous miracles.

- They knew what they believed and understood why they believed it.
- They served God.
- They did what was right in God's eyes.

Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. (Joshua 24:14-15)

<p>Second Generation The Elders that Outlived Joshua <i>Compromise</i></p>
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- They knew about God.
- They had second-hand faith.
- They did not have the works of God, but they had seen and heard about them.
- They knew what they believed, but did not understand why they believed it. They were not committed to it and wanted to try other things.
- They served the God of their fathers, but lacked a personal relationship.

And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel. (Judges 2:7) (See also Joshua 24:31.)

Arnold Cook said, "The second generation holds its convictions less fervently than pioneers . . . With each succeeding generation, isolation from the world becomes more difficult."

The second generation failed. They knew the landmarks were there, but had forgotten their purpose.

Third Generation
The Generation that Did Not Know
Confusion

- They did not know God. (Wilkinson calls this the “Conflict” or “Chaos” generation.)
- They did not know the works and wonders of God.
- They had no faith—a faithless, godless generation.
- They grew up in an environment where the people had moved away from God.
- They did not know what to believe.
- They did evil in the sight of the Lord.
- They served other gods.

Why do you think there arose a generation that did not know the Lord? Parents never instilled truth in them or worse, never told them. As Bible school instructors, we have a tremendous responsibility to pass truth on to the next generation. The future of the church depends on our ability to transfer truth with passion and conviction.

Albert Outler (as quoted in *Evangelism for a Changing World*) said, “It is as if, once upon a time, an earlier generation understood it all and then forgot to tell their children—who never asked.”

And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. (Judges 2:10)

In his book *And Are We Yet Alive?* Richard Wilke said:

“Our sickness is more serious than we first suspected. We are in trouble, you and I . . . We thought we were just drifting, like a sailboat on a dreamy day. Instead we are wasting away . . . Once we were a . . . revival . . . fired by the Spirit, running the race set before us like a sprinter trying to win the prize . . . Now we are tired, listless, fueled only by the nostalgia of former days, walking with a droop, eyes on the ground, discouraged, putting one foot ahead of the other like a tired old man who remembers, but who can no longer perform.

Never let these words be written about us and the churches we represent.

Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:10-13).

Where do you stand? Which generation are you a part of? Are you closer to God today than you were last year?

Compare where your life, your church, your Bible school was five or ten years ago to where it is today. Are you moving toward commitment, compromise, or worst of all, confusion?

As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. (Joshua 24:15)

I have chosen whom I am going to serve. Have you? I am going to be committed.

I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. (Revelation 3:8)

Conclusion

The following was found among a young pastor's papers after he was martyred for the cause of Christ.

I am part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I am a disciple of His and I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still.

My past is redeemed. My present makes sense. My future is secure. I am done and finished with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap living, and dwarfed goals.

I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, or first, tops, recognized, praised, or rewarded. I live by faith, lean on His presence, walk by patience, lift by prayer, and labor by Holy Spirit power.

My face is set. My gait is fast. My goal is heaven. My road may be narrow, my way rough, my companions few, but my guide is reliable and my mission is clear.

I will not be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded or delayed.

I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice or hesitate in the presence of the adversary. I will not negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won't give up, shut up, or let up until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, and preached up for the cause of Christ.

I am a disciple of Jesus. I must give until I drop, preach until all know, and work until He comes. And when He does come for His own, He'll have no problem recognizing me. My colors will be clear!

Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. (Deuteronomy 4:9, NIV)

