

DRIFTING: THE NEW HERMENEUTIC

Text: Hebrews 2:1

INTRO: For individuals, for congregations, and for the entire brotherhood, we are never immune to the danger of drifting. In this lesson, we want to take note of the outcome of some 40 years or more of brotherhood drifting.

About 40 years ago, impressed with the activities of the denominations around us, some brethren wanted churches to become involved in what was called the social gospel. They wanted the churches to be more active in social work and in social and recreational activities. They recognized the validity of pattern-Christianity, but they adjusted their applications to allow for things not in the pattern, thus they began to preach sermons about "Where there is no pattern."

In the ensuing 40 years, another generation of leaders has arisen with a broader agenda involving new leadership roles for women, instrumental music in worship, etc.--and many of these new leaders are calling for a "new hermeneutic." They insist that the concept of pattern-Christianity is flawed, that the N.T. is not a pattern, and does not contain a pattern for churches to follow.

I. HERMENEUTIC--a system of interpretation.

A. The "old" hermeneutic involved learning God's will by command or precept, by example, and/or by necessary implication.

1. The "new hermeneutic" boys insist that the system we have been using all these years is flawed. They point to the division that exists among brethren as proof that the system does not work.
2. They insist that the N.T. was never meant to be a law, or a set of rules, that its writings were simply "love letters to churches & individuals in the first century. JS 1:25; Gal. 6:2
3. They insist that there was no precise pattern for churches in the 1st century; that the N.T. documents were not assembled together until the 3rd or 4th century, thus the N.T. congregations could not possibly have settled matters the way

we attempt to.

4. They point to the inconsistencies & errors in 1st century congregations and ridicule the idea that they can be a pattern to be followed by congregations today. "Which church should we follow? Jerusalem with its racial problems, or Corinth with its moral problems?"

5. Finally, most of them reason that the closest thing churches have to a pattern in religion is the personal life of Jesus. Jesus healed the sick, therefore churches should build hospitals. Jesus fed the hungry, therefore churches should establish soup kitchens, etc.

6. They suggest that restrictions against women in places of leadership was nothing more than a reflection of the cultural practices of the day, and have no bearing on us whatsoever. They see the rejecting of instrumental music in worship as an undesirable outcome of an unwarranted system of interpretation.

B. Jesus used the old hermeneutic.

1. He cited commands given by God, LK 18:18.
2. He taught by citing examples of obedience or disobedience, LK 17:32.

3. He taught by necessary inference, MT 22:32.

C. The apostles used the old hermeneutic, Acts 15:11-15.

1. James taught by precept, vs. 15.
2. Paul & Barnabas cited approved example, vs. 12.
3. Peter taught by drawing a necessary inference, vs. 11

II. THERE WAS A PATTERN TO BE FOLLOWED BY FIRST CENTURY CHRISTIANS AND THAT PATTERN IS STILL VALID TODAY.

A. There was a pattern for the plan of salvation.

For this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. (1 Tim. 1:16). Book of Acts.

B. There was a pattern for the organization, the work, and the worship of the church. When congregations behaved as they were taught by the apostles and prophets, to do, they became patterns other churches should imitate.

READ I THESSALONIANS 1:6-8.

II. THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH HAD THE SAME NEW TESTAMENT WE HAVE TODAY.

A. At first, in the inspired men. All the inspired apostles & prophets of the N.T. age were involved in teaching the same gospel as far & wide as their influence reached.

READ I CORINTHIANS 7:17; 3:5-9.

Compare 1 Peter with Ephesians & Colossians

B. As the gospel message began to be put in written form by Paul, Peter, Luke, John, James, Jude, Mark, and Matthew, the writings were circulated among Christians and congregations of the 1st century, so that most Christians had access to most of the N.T. writings by the time the last apostle died.

1. In 1 Tim. 5:18, Paul quoted from Luke 10:7 as Scripture, and apparently expected Timothy to be familiar with that writing.

2. Peter considered all Paul's epistles to be Scripture on an equal basis with the writings of Moses & the prophets, & apparently expected his readers to be familiar with those writings, 2 Pet 3:16.

3. Christians in Colosse were specifically instructed to

see that Paul's letter to them was also read in the Laodicean congregation, Col. 4:16.

4. The book of Revelation was addressed to 7 congregations at the outset, Rev. 1:11.

5. There is abundant evidence that the documents of the first century apostles and prophets were well known and well used among Christians and congregations throughout the known world and they were considered authoritative and binding among Christians everywhere.

CONCLUSION: As brother J.D. Tant said in an earlier generation, brethren, we are drifting. But as some around us seem to have lost their moorings, we must continue to insist on Scriptural authority for all that we teach and practice. As our nation makes cultural changes, we must see that our principles continue to be determined by the Scriptures of God, which do not change. We do not need a new hermeneutic. We need a new dedication to the old hermeneutic based on the teachings of Jesus and James, Peter and Paul, and the other inspired apostles and prophets of old.

Shiloh, Mexia, TX, October 16, 1994

La Porte, TX, April 3, 1997 (meeting)

Susquehanna, Marietta, PA, May 7, 2000

Taylors, SC, March 19, 2003 (meeting)