

## Lest We Drift Away

by Hendrik Joubert

The norms and values in any given society change over time. Some changes are revolutionary while others develop quite subtly. Perceptions of right and wrong may evolve to such an extent that the old ways drift into obscurity. Change is not always for the better; however one may find fierce resistance against any attempt to revert to the old forgotten standards. A kind of roles switching take place and the *new* is defended as *the way it has always been...*

We find in the Scriptures an example of subsequent traditions replacing the original rules when it is highlighted by the Lord in person. In **Matthew 15:2** the question is asked of the Son of God: **"Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."** The switch where the new replaces the old become obvious from the Lord's question-reply: **"Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? (Matthew 15:3)**

It is obvious that they have become concerned about obeying the rules made by men, rather than the rules made by God. The Lord quotes what God had previously said through the prophet Isaiah to illustrate both a timeless principle and a timeless problem – God must be worshipped as He directs, and man always makes adjustments as he may see fit. The consequences are gravely serious – God rejects such worship, and man remains lost in his sin.

Changing God's rules may be blatant, leaving out, or adding whatsoever man sees fit. It may be done more subtly by changing the meaning of what God has said through *interpretation*. This problem is addressed when Peter explains that Paul wrote **according to the wisdom given him (by inspiration of God 2 Timothy 3:16)**, and that there are those who will **distort** (or **twist**) what he writes, **as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. (2 Peter 3:15-16)**

Notice the phrases **according to the wisdom given him** and **by inspiration of God**. They convey the same meaning and therefore the writings of the apostle is considered, or declared part of the Scriptures when Peter writes: **as they do also the rest of the Scriptures**. Notice the serious consequences again...**to their own destruction**.

Israel of the time of Christ found themselves in the parable of the landowner who planted a vineyard, and rented it out to vine-growers before going on a journey. (**Matthew 21:33-46**) They had the Son among them and would not respect Him. Even if they will not see themselves in it, we hiss and sigh about the obviousness thereof. When we consider the mistakes of others we have 20/20 vision as we notice the splinters, but miss the beams in our own eyes, and we will mimic the Pharisees and Sadducees if anyone should make an attempt at declaring to us our sin – fiercely believing that we are defending the ways of God.

We will use the example of the Corinthian church in its infancy to justify our weaknesses, while ignoring the stern warning to the church at Ephesus about losing their first love and would be rejected for that although they were strong doctrinally. (**Revelation 2:1-7**) It is similar to what the Lord says to Israel through the Psalmist: **"I do not reprove you for your sacrifices, And your burnt offerings are continually before Me."** (**Psalms 50:8**) In the next few verses God points out that He does not need their sacrifices in a literal way, and then adds that He wants them presented from a conscious and humble heart, demonstrating that you understand why you are doing it: **"Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving And**

***pay your vows to the Most High; <sup>15</sup> Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me.*** (Psalm 50:14-15)

Being aware of this propensity towards change we should be all the more diligent (***noble-minded***) to keep our eyes on the mark: ***“Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.”*** (Act 17:11)

Israel found themselves smack in the middle of the parable we mentioned, however notice our responsibility and the warning tied in with it: ***For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. <sup>2</sup> For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, <sup>3</sup> how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, <sup>4</sup> God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.*** (Hebrews 2:1-4)

We have the announcement by the Lord, the testimony of the witnesses as well as God’s seal of approval. In addition to this we have the 20/20 vision we use to effectively judge Israel, and others – ***how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?***