

Drifting Away #2 – Hypocrisy**980311**

In an earlier article I described a really stupid joke that we used to tell. I'm going to tell it again just so that you don't have to try to find the other article. Remember that you had to tell it in a group of people who knew the joke, and you had to have at least one newcomer who had never heard it before. The joke goes like this:

There were these two polar bears on an iceberg. As they were resting near the edge, a piece of the iceberg broke off with one of the bears on it. As the bears drifted away from each other, the one on the main iceberg yelled to the other, "Radio!"

The joke is that it makes absolutely no sense. The point was to watch the ones who weren't "in" on the joke to see what they would do. We got our kicks from those who laughed really loud, but who obviously did not get the joke.

This joke was a great way to see the easy hypocrites. There were some listeners, of course, that plainly thought it was a stupid joke. But many fell victim to peer pressure, and laughed in a big way. They were too concerned with what people thought of them to expose the joke for what it was.

There is a great concern for people who quit coming to church. We may call them "backsliders," and condemn them from our pedestal. But many times there is more to their absence than just apathy and laziness. Many times they have drifted away because someone in the church gave their boat a good shove from the dock, a hypocrite who operates with their own agenda rather than the love of God.

I used to think that I had it all figured out about people not going to church because of the hypocrites there. If someone said, "I won't go to church because so-and-so goes there, and I am already better than he is," or, "I won't go where that hypocrite goes," I was prepared to say, "You would go to a ball game, though, even if Satan himself was there!" Or, "You go to a ball game with people who just go to watch the cheerleaders, and it doesn't bother you!"

But I have found that the problem is more complicated than that. If we found out that the ones who really just wanted to see the cheerleaders were the ones who actually made up the rules for the game, then it might be somewhat different. Having the game controlled by those with principles that were in opposition to ours might cause us to stay at home and find some other game on TV.

It is hard to worship with an open heart at a church where we know the "intimate" details about the hidden lives of some of the people who are right up front during the worship. It is difficult to want to go to a place if we have personally experienced hostility from some who have worked themselves into positions of leadership there. It is hard not to be "put off" by their presence.

We have to work in the framework of the church that exists. There is no way that people not connected to the situation can understand what we are up against. It is easy for them to say that we should just let it go. But when we try to let it go it is pushed back into our face. So we drift away, and because of all the interconnections between people sometimes we run out of choices. It is really not all that hard to do.

How can we prevent this from happening? The only way I know is to have everybody love their neighbor as themselves. Wouldn't it be a great world if we did that? But in a practical sense, it just doesn't happen. Those who are aggressive enough end up taking over and casting the meeker ones adrift. When we motivate people to actually care for each other rather than feed their own sense of importance we will have the right environment to keep people from drifting away.

The philosopher Soren Kierkegaard once said, "The difference between the theater and the church is essentially this, that the theater honestly and honorably acknowledges itself to be what it is; on the other hand the church is a theater which dishonestly tries in every way to hide what it is." The church which hides hypocrisy will not be pleasing to God. Neither will the church which does not care for the wounded. We must strive to be genuine worshipers of God and His Goodness, and humble ourselves before Him.