

## **DEVIATION**

Joe Slater

In his farewell sermon Moses exhorted Israel: “Therefore you shall be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left” (Deuteronomy 5:32). Again, toward the end of his sermon, he said, “So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right or the left” (28:14).

After Moses’ death, the Lord gave the same order to Joshua: “Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left” (Joshua 1:7). He remembered this charge and passed it on to the people at the close of his life: “Therefore be very courageous to keep and do all that is written in the book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left” (23:6).

All of this pertained to the Mosaic Law. Is there application for Christians under the New Covenant? Assuredly so! Paul exhorted Timothy (and, by extension, us) to “be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:14). “Rightly dividing” means cutting a path along a straight line; it mirrors the Old Testament plea not to turn from God’s word to the right or the left.

A pilot heading a mere one degree off course will miss his destination one mile for every sixty miles he flies. On a trip from New York to Los Angeles, he would miss LAX by 41 miles!

If it is important for an airline pilot not to deviate from his course, how much more so for a Christian? Hold a straight course in the word! Don’t miss Heaven!

## **Is The Church Dying?**

The most recent Pew Forum survey revealed that Christianity in America is in decline, and some have suggested that Christianity is dying. The number of “nones” (those who have no religious affiliation) has grown from 16.1 to 22.8 percent since 2007. The number of those who call themselves Christians in America has declined from 78.4 to 70.6 percent.

Most of this decline occurred among mainline Protestants (18.4 to 14.7) and Catholics (23.9 to 20.8 percent). Evangelicals (which includes churches of Christ in this survey) declined less than one percent. The number of Christians with strong convictions has pretty much stayed the same, but many cultural Christians (people who call themselves Christians because of the culture) and nominal Christians (people who do not take their faith very seriously) are becoming “nones.”

The churches of Christ have declined in recent years. We are losing more than 8000 members and about fifty congregations every year (147 congregations from 2012 to 2015). In spite of this, we still have the fourth most congregations of any religious group in America. In actual attendance on the Lord’s Day, we rank eighth. We surpass almost everyone in the percentage of members who attend church and who give.

As you can see, we have much to do to take the gospel to the lost. The world has always been worldly and deceived by false religion. We must do all we can to preach the truth in love, so that by all means we might save some.

--Phil Sanders (Edmond, OK) via *Old Paths*, Aug. 2015)

## **Yes And No**

I grew up in a time when a man made a promise and kept it. Yes meant yes and no meant no. Our times, however, are changing. Man’s promises are not what they should be. Sometimes people make promises rashly and then don’t keep them.

I am glad that God’s promises are trustworthy. The Bible connects yes and no with the keeping of promises. The apostle Paul tells us that “*All the promises of God in him are yes, and in him amen, to the glory of God through us.*” (2 Corinthians 1:20). God’s promises are sure and faithful. We can rely on Him to keep His word.

When Jesus said, “*He that believes and is baptized shall be saved*” (Mark 16:16). He meant it. You can count on it. No matter what man says concerning salvation, that is what Jesus said.

God promises eternal life to the obedient. Peter tells us that God has give us “*exceedingly great and precious promises*” (2 Peter 1:4). In the book of Hebrews, we read about those. The writer tells of some who “*died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth*” (Hebrews 11:13). From that text, we learn that God’s promises can provide assurances that can be embraced.

Jesus is the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Heb. 5:8,9). If we obey Him, we have the promise of salvation from our sins and the hope of a home in heaven with Him.

--Bill Brandstatter (Marion, IL) via Bulletin Gold

“God has not called us to use the world’s police force to force unbelievers to live righteously. Instead, He has charged us with calling people to righteousness by the gospel” (--David May, via *Preacher Talk*)