

Hebrews 2:1-4

Warning Against Drifting

In chapter one the writer of Hebrews has just demonstrated the superiority of Jesus over the prophets and angels. God has declared His final, decisive Word in His Son Jesus Christ. All the fullness of God is in Jesus. Now he puts theology into practice by use of warning messages (Heb. 2:1-4; 3:12-4:3; 4:14-16; 5:11-6:8; 10:32-39; 12:3-17; 12:25-29). Because of who Jesus is we must pay thoughtful attention to what He says and put it into practice. He is serious about applying the truth to everyday life situations. Biblical truth motivates and governs the whole life of the Christian.

"For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, 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, 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, NASB95). (Unless otherwise noted all Scriptures are from the New American Standard Bible, NASB95).

It is like the author of Hebrews shouts: STOP, LOOK LISTEN!

In this passage the writer of Hebrews uses a standard Jewish method stating his argument from the lesser to the greater. He moves from the Mosaic Law to the greater which is the danger of neglecting the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

PAY CLOSER ATTENTION TO GOD'S REVEALED TRUTH

"Therefore" or "for this reason," connects us with what has been discussed in chapter one regarding the revelation of God through the prophets and the angels to a the superior revelation through His Son. Jesus is superior to the angels and His revelation of God is therefore far more superior.

Therefore, "We must pay much closer attention" to the superior revelation we have received from God through Jesus Christ. The original word for "pay much closer attention," "to hold" the mind to, is almost the sense of to hold "with extreme care." They must hold their minds with much closer attention to this great truth.

Pay closer attention to your salvation.

The salvation is so great because of the greatness of the Savior who provides it. The writer of Hebrews tells us the greatness of this salvation was first proclaimed by Christ Himself, confirmed by eyewitnesses and authenticated by God through a variety of signs. "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

It is a great salvation because we have been saved from the penalty of sin, and in another sense we are still being saved from the power of sin, and thank God one day we will be saved from the presence of sin (cf. Heb. 1:14; 2:3, 10, 14-15, 18; 4:1-3; 5:9; 6:4, 12; 9:14; 10:22). The consummation of this great salvation will come in the future. It is a present reality, but we will come into the full possession of it when Christ returns. "Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him" (Hebrews 9:28).

How many people do you know who give serious attention to their salvation? How many people do you know who love Jesus Christ? How many people do you know who think about, meditate, feel continual gratitude for the gift of eternal life? How many people do you know who drift into sin? How many do you know who day by day drift farther and farther away from Jesus Christ?

We must pay our closest attention to the saving gospel. Eternal consequences are the utmost concern. Nothing demands our greatest attention than our relationship with Jesus Christ. See what length God went to send His own Son to die for our sins on the cross and raise Him from the dead.

The message of "salvation" is the gospel of salvation proclaimed by Jesus Christ. It is the redemption God has provided in Christ. Jesus declared the full redemptive revelation of God.

"For this reason we must pay closer attention to what we have heard" (Hebrews 2:1b). The idea is "to keep holding the mind to something," "to give heed to." It is exceedingly necessary that we give close attention to Jesus the Word of God. The author pleads with his readers to continue to keep on holding in the mind the things that they have heard about the saving gospel of Christ. The greater attention is due to the greater revelation we have received.

What is it that "we have heard"? (Heb. 2:1b) Jesus Christ is greater than the prophets and the angels because of His person and saving work (Heb. 1:1-4). He is the final word of revelation to lost mankind. The opening verses give evidence to the absolute supremacy of the unique, one of a kind Son of God as the savior of the world. There is none other like Him. Therefore, we can have complete confidence when He says that He is "way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). The apostle Peter summed up this great truth in his invitation at the end of a sermon in Acts 4:12. "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Evangelicals through out the history of the church have proclaimed this great truth because Jesus Christ alone "made purification of sins." He alone has dealt with our sin problem. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

The Word of God

God is the source of the saving gospel. It is His saving word. "In these last days God spoke to us in His Son" (Heb. 1:2a).

In an interesting comment the writer speaks of the "message spoken through the angels" (Heb. 2:2. cf. Deut. 33:2; Acts 7:38, 53; Gal. 3:19). The first-century Judaism commonly believed that the law was given through angelic mediators which was based on the Greek Septuagint (LXX) translation of the Deuteronomy 33:2 and Psalm 68:18), but the Bible is just not clear as to how the angels were involved in the giving of the law to Moses. The angelic mediation of the law of Moses is not recorded in the Old Testament. The references are to the Old Testament law where God is the primary speaker. "Ten thousand holy ones" is probably a reference to angels surrounding the mountain in Deuteronomy 33:2 when God gave the law. The Psalmist is also referring to this event. "The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; The Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness" (Psalm 68:17). We will have a clear understanding when we get to heaven. The text indicates that God was the actual speaker, even though He made use of his messengers the angels in some way. However, there is no speculation about how the LORD God has provided salvation by means of the atoning sacrifice of His Son for our sins.

God's Word is steadfast and unalterable.

"For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty" (Hebrews 2:2). This is not a hypothetical case, this is a fulfilled condition. The idea is "in view of the fact that" we have a sure word from God in which we can put our confidence. The apostle Paul wrote to his young friend and colleague Timothy "from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:15-16). "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

It is pay back time. There are eternal consequences if we disobey such a firm word. "Every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty." "Transgression" (*parabasis*) is the overstepping, crossing over the line. God drew a line in the sand and said do not cross it. To go beyond it is to transgress. "Disobedience" (*parakoe*) is the unwillingness to hear, therefore disobedience. This requires a "just penalty."

"Just penalty" (*misthapodosia*) is the giving back with payment, a paying back, recompense or retribution. It is literally payment of wages. A full punishment is in store. Look at the history of Israel wandering around in the

desert for 40 years, and their exile to Babylon. "The wages of sin is death . . ." "The soul that sins will surely die," wrote the prophet Ezekiel. The message proved to be so firm that every violation or disobedience received its just penalty. Denying it or rationalizing it away will not remove the consequences of disobedience. Truth will not just go away. To treat the gospel lightly is to have no excuse when you face the judgment of God when you die physically. We are without excuse. There can be no escape if we neglect, deny, reject the good news in Christ.

We need to pay much closer attention because the revelation we have received is much greater than that given to Moses in the law. The gospel was mediated by the incarnate Son of God. Calvin said correctly, "In accordance with the greatness of Christ, so will be the severity of God's vengeance on all despisers of the Gospel." The glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ surpasses the glory of the law of Moses. That in no way disparages the law which is a gracious manifestation of the will of God.

God is the source of the revelation.

The authority of the gospel is the authority of Jesus Christ who is the Son of God. "It was at the first spoken through the Lord" (Heb. 2:3). As Moses was the mediator of the Law, Jesus is the mediator and embodiment of our great salvation. "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). The "Lord" is the divine, incarnate Son of God recorded for us in Hebrews 1:1-4. He is the God-man. He is God with us. Because He is greater than the angels He is infinitely qualified to be the mediator between God and man. He has first spoken the good news of salvation. "Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God" (Mark 1:14). What greater source can there possibly be?

Jesus Christ is the prophet spoken of by Moses. The LORD God said to Moses, "I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 'It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him'" (Deuteronomy 18:18-19). We have a record of His teaching and prophetic ministry in the four Gospels. John Owen wrote, "He who spake on Mount Sinai in the name of God was none other than God Himself, the second Person in the Trinity."

Jesus Christ, His teaching, death, resurrection and ascension is a clear testimony of God's saving message to lost mankind. We have the last and final word of divine revelation from God. It was completed by the end of the first century A.D. We do not need the latest religious fad, or the cults to bring us their new revelation of Jesus Christ. We do not need another testament or a second gospel of Jesus Christ. God spoke and He did not stutter when He moved over men's minds to reveal Himself as they wrote. The complete final and perfect written revelation of God to a lost mankind and the church is found in the 66 books of the Bible. Any other so called inspired books or revelations added to it are clear indications they are false religions of the world.

"It was confirmed to us by those who heard" (Heb. 2:3). Someone was a missionary to these Jewish Christians. The apostles or other disciples of Christ brought the good news of Jesus Christ to them. The message these believers received came from those who had been in the presence of Christ and heard Him. The writer of Hebrews and his readers had not received the gospel of salvation directly from Christ. Remember the opening words of Luke in his Gospel? The testimony and teachings "were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word" (Luke 1:2). It is interesting to contrast the apostle Paul's testimony in Galatians 1:11-12. "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:11-12). Christ is the source of the saving Gospel for these believers as well as Paul. "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth" (1 Timothy 2:5-7).

God confirmed His message.

Note how God "confirmed" the message of salvation. It was made firm, established, secure. The emphasis is on the accuracy and trustworthiness of the message of salvation. He used "signs" and the working of the Holy Spirit in the heart creating the new man in Christ. What greater confirmation can there be than a changed man? "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

"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 2:4). In the original the present active participle implies continued action. God continues to testify.

God gave His testimony in three ways: signs and wonders, manifold powers, and the giving of the Holy Spirit. The "signs" were the miracles that signified a greater message behind the event. It points beyond itself to the authenticity of the mighty hand of God in the events. The "wonders" were rare and unusual with an astonishing character about them that aroused interest. The word is never used alone, but always to describe the character of something. The "signs" do not always need to be a wonder. The pagan religions had wonders but were never true signs. The miracles were works of divine or superhuman power." The omnipotent hand of God is involved. Moreover, God has given His Spirit to every believer according to His will.

God has given His testimony. It is found in His written Word. He has confirmed it by the "signs and wonders and by various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit." "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—" (Acts 2:22).

The book of Acts is full of testimony and confirmation of God's perfect and final revelation of Himself to man. These "signs" point beyond themselves to the sovereign hand of God behind them. There was a variety of powerful manifestations of the presence of God in the early church. They demonstrated that something new had come from God. The New Testament writers would not have referred to these miraculous manifestations if their readers would have said they had never heard of these things. They were common knowledge. "Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles" (Acts 2:43). "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus" (Acts 4:29-30). "At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico" (Acts 5:12). "And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8). "Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands" (Acts 14:3). "All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles" (Acts 15:12). God bore witness through these signs (cf. Acts 3:6-8; 5:18-20; 8:6; 9:33-34, 40-41, etc). The miracles and signs were never produced at the will of the apostles, but only when, where and how God willed to use them. God used these divine powers "for the distinct purpose of sealing the truth of the Gospel," wrote Calvin.

These evidences of God at work were supplemented by "gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will" (Heb. 2:4c). The "distributions of the Holy Spirit" is the energizing power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. He sovereignly distributes His gifts to His people to accomplish His eternal purpose. "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). In the first century God bore witness by supernatural signs, wonders and spiritual gifts. Signs, wonders and various miracles were performed only by Jesus and His apostles during the establishment of the church. However, God is still bearing witness to salvation through His divine presence in the believer. The gifts of the Spirit are still at work in the church today. The Holy Spirit produces evidences in believer's lives of His saving grace.

DO NOT DRIFT FROM THE TRUTH

The writer's concern is "so that we do not drift away (*pararuomen*) from it" (Heb. 2:1c). In contrast "to pay much close attention" there is the danger that we "drift away" from the saving truth of the Gospel. Instead of absolute seriousness there is a "so what" attitude. The writer of Hebrews uses a word meaning "to flow past" or "slip away." The idea is a piece of wood being carried along by the current of a stream of water or a ship that has lost its anchor in strong winds that causes it to drift past its harbor and fails to reach its destination. It can also convey the idea of allowing the wedding ring to slip off the finger and losing it or food going down the wrong way. It is used of something slipping from their memory. The passive voice signifies to get or to find one's self in a state of flowing or passing by when it requires close attention. How careless it is to not be anchored to the saving truth of the Gospel and drift own down the stream of life eternally lost. We need to anchor our soul in the Word of God and not drift from it. Because "it is impossible for God to lie," and we have a "high priest forever" the writer will say later, "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil" (Hebrews 6:19). The apostle Paul wrote, "As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming" (Ephesians 4:14). Strong politically correct storm winds were threatening to carry these Jewish Christians away from their true spiritual harbor. The anchor that holds is to keep the mind centered on the things you have heard in true Biblical Christianity. The author does not say they are rejecting so great salvation, but are neglecting it, just letting it pass by through indifference. It is important to note the author does not say they are actually drifting away, but the danger lies before them and may at once overtake them.

Distractions that cause us to drift from the Word.

How tragic that the attractions of the world can carry a person away from the great truths of God. The author of Hebrews sounds like the apostle John in 1 John 2:15-17. "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

Jesus gave a picture of what it means to be distracted by the world and "neglect so great a salvation" in Luke 14:16-20. Jesus said to a man who reclined eating at the banquet: "A man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.' Another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.' Another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come'" (Luke 14:16-20).

ETERNAL CONSEQUENCES OF OUR CHOICES

"How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? (Heb. 2:3a). How shall we flee from to escape the punishment if we neglect so great a salvation? Obviously we shall not escape.

We are free to choose, but we are not free to choose the consequences of our actions and decisions. John Calvin observed, "Not only the rejection of the gospel, but also its neglect deserves the heaviest punishment, and that on account of the greatness of the grace which it offers."

Just like in the Old Testament "every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty," it is also true in the New Testament revelation (Heb. 2:2b). Jesus said, "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds" (Matthew 16:27). "For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality" (Colossians 3:25). "The threatening of future penalties on the disobedient are far more expressive in the gospel than in the law. The punishment threatened in the gospel is as unto degrees greater and more sore than that which was annexed to the transgression of the first covenant," wrote John Owens.

There is no escape if you "neglect so great a salvation" (Heb. 2:2a). The word "neglect" (*ameleo*) means to be unconcerned, ignore it; it denotes to be careless and indifferent. It is the opposite of to pay close attention.

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). That is true of every Christian. This judgment will deal with our rewards based on how we have lived the Christian life. It is not dealing with eternal life or salvation.

The writer does not tell us what the punishment is; we know it cannot be the loss of salvation because other passages make it abundantly clear that we cannot lose our salvation (John 10:27-30; Romans 8:31-39; Ephesians 1:11-14; Philippians 1:3-5; 1 Peter 1:3-5; 1 John 5:11-13).

Moreover, there is also a day of judgment for everyone who rejects Jesus Christ as their savior.

The day of the "wrath of the Lamb" is a terrible day of judgment for the unbeliever. "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). What we do with Jesus Christ today determines what He will do with us when we stand before Him after this life.

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:11-15).

The crucial question is what is your personal relationship with Jesus Christ?

ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Drifting is extremely dangerous and deadly in the Christian life. To drift is to perish.

There is no escape if we neglect so great a salvation God has provided through Jesus Christ.

The opposite of drifting spiritually is a mindset that is constantly looking to Jesus the Author and Finisher of our Salvation.

A sure sign that you have been born again and spiritual regeneration has taken place is that if you are drifting you will not drift long before you will repent and focus your eyes on Christ. If the Holy Spirit is pricking your heart, bringing conviction of unbelief and sin, you will turn your eyes on Jesus and listen to Him and follow Him daily. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."

A sure sign that you have never been born again and regeneration has not taken place is a spiritual deadness to the Word of God and you have no desire to guard against drifting.

You are either saved or not saved. If you are saved you will hear Him speaking to you through the Scriptures, Biblical preaching, the testimony of other Christians, and the Holy Spirit will move you to repentance and faith in Christ. If you are not saved, you have probably turned me off and are determined to go your own way being a religious person without Christ.

There are consequences for our decisions when we reject the pleading of the Holy Spirit. "For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty" (Hebrews 2:2). Since that is true regarding the Old Testament revelation, how much greater when we regard the transgression and disobedience toward the Son of God. God spoke through His Son in an even greater revelation of Himself. If we neglect His Word we are even more guilty than the Old Testament people who disobeyed the Word of God.

We will perish if we drift away from the Word of God and neglect so great salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved today.

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