The Danger of Drifting

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Sanctification / Hebrews 2:1–4

Imagine for a moment that you are sitting in a small boat on a beautiful lake. The sun is shining, the water is calm, and you have a destination in mind. You know where you want to go, so you point the boat in that direction and begin making your way across the water. But after a while, you decide to relax. You put down the oars, lean back, and enjoy the warmth of the sun. The gentle movement of the water is almost soothing. There is no urgency, no apparent danger, and nothing that seems to demand your attention. So you simply allow the boat to float. Some time passes, and eventually you sit up and look around. Something has changed. The shoreline no longer looks quite the same. The place you were heading toward is no longer directly in front of you. In fact, you have moved a considerable distance from where you intended to go. And here is the interesting thing: you never decided to change your destination. You never deliberately turned the boat in another direction. You simply stopped paying attention, and the current carried you somewhere you never intended to go.

And I wonder, could the same thing happen in our Christian lives? Think back to when you first came to faith in Jesus Christ. Perhaps you remember the joy of knowing that your sins were forgiven, the excitement of reading God's Word, and the desire to live a life that was pleasing to Him. You wanted to know Christ better. You wanted to follow His teaching. You wanted your life to honor the One who had saved you. But then life happened. Responsibilities increased. Work became demanding. Families needed attention. There were bills to pay, problems to solve, and countless things competing for our time. And gradually, almost without noticing, some of the things that once mattered most began to receive less and less attention. And all the while, the world around us was changing. We live in a culture that increasingly tells us that truth is whatever we

believe it to be. Instead of asking what God has said, we are encouraged to decide for ourselves what is right and wrong. We live in a culture that tells us personal happiness is one of life's highest goals, while Jesus tells us that following Him involves denying ourselves and taking up our cross daily (Luke 9:23). We live in a culture that constantly encourages us to pursue more possessions, greater comfort, and greater success, while Jesus warns us that life does not consist in the abundance of our possessions (Luke 12:15).

The danger is that we can begin to absorb these values without ever consciously deciding to abandon what we believe. We still attend church. We still call ourselves mature Christians. We still believe the Bible is God's Word. But slowly, the way we think, the choices we make, and the priorities we establish can begin to look more like the world around us than the teaching of Jesus Christ. And perhaps the most frightening thing about drifting is that we can be moving away from where we ought to be without ever realizing how far we have travelled.

Apostle Paul warned believers in Romans 12:2 not to conform to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds. In other words, we must not simply allow the world around us to determine the direction of our lives. And that brings us to our passage this morning. In Hebrews 2:1, the writer gives us this solemn warning: “We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.” Notice that he does not begin by warning about some dramatic act of rebellion. He warns about the danger of failing to pay attention. And as we examine these four verses together, we are going to discover why drifting is so dangerous, what is at stake when we neglect the salvation God has given us through Jesus Christ, and why we must never lose sight of the One who has spoken to us through His Son.

Drifting Begins When We Stop Paying Attention

Hebrews 2:1 NIV

We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

Notice that Hebrews 2:1 begins with the word “therefore.” The writer is pointing us back to everything he has just told us about Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 1, we learned that God has spoken through His Son, the One who created and sustains the universe, made purification for our sins, and now sits at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven (Hebrews 1:1–3). Because the One who has spoken is none other than the Son of God, His message deserves our most careful attention. We are not simply being told to become better people; we are being warned not to neglect the glorious message of salvation revealed through Jesus Christ..

Remember when “beautiful feet” brought you the Good News (Romans 10:15)? Perhaps you considered yourself a kind, generous, hardworking person who loved your family and genuinely tried to live a good life. Yet being spiritually dead in your sins (Ephesians 2:1), you were unable to discern the truth of the Gospel apart from the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14). When confronted with Christ's declaration, “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6), perhaps you dismissed it as foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18), or simply one opinion among many competing voices.

But when, by God's grace, you repented of your sins and placed your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, everything changed! The old was gone, and the new had come (2 Corinthians 5:17). Having discovered the treasure hidden in the field and the pearl of great value (Matthew 13:44–46), and having been sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13–14), unspeakable joy entered your life! No longer were you content merely to live a good life by worldly standards; you now desired to live a life worthy of the Gospel (Philippians 1:27). Though an infant in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:1–2), how you desired to trust in the Lord with all your heart (Proverbs 3:5–6) and follow the Good Shepherd who calls His sheep by name (John 10:3)!

But what happens when the message that once meant everything to us gradually becomes something we rarely think about? Fast forward many years. Perhaps you wonder what has happened to your spiritual walk. You began with passion and a genuine desire to hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6). But the distractions of life and quiet compromises have gradually taken their toll. Perhaps you fear you have become lukewarm (Revelation 3:15–16). The writer of Hebrews warns us to pay careful attention to the message of salvation, lest we drift away from the very truth that once transformed our lives. Perhaps there was a time when you would not begin your day without spending time in God's Word. But now the first thing you reach for in the morning is your phone. You check the news, read your messages, and think about everything you need to accomplish. And before you know it, another day has passed without giving much thought to the One who gave His life to save you. You have not stopped believing in Jesus Christ. You have simply stopped giving Him the attention He deserves.

The Greek word translated “drift away” carries the idea of slipping past or being carried along, like a boat gradually carried beyond a safe anchorage [1]. Spiritual drifting often begins imperceptibly. Other voices grow louder, other priorities become more important, and the truth of the Gospel gradually receives less of our attention. Before long, we may find ourselves far from the message that once transformed our lives. Like ships at sea, we need only begin slightly off course to eventually find ourselves far from our destination [2].

But notice that the writer also tells us how to guard against drifting: pay the most careful attention to what we have heard. The Gospel must never become something we merely acknowledge while allowing the world to determine how we live. Paul tells us to let the message of Christ dwell among us richly (Colossians 3:16). The Gospel is not merely the message through which we first came to salvation; it is the truth upon which we must continue to build our lives. As Leon Morris rightly states, “One need not be violently opposed to the message to suffer loss; one need only drift away from it” [3]! And perhaps that is the question we need to ask ourselves this morning. Are we still giving the

message of Jesus Christ the attention it deserves? Or have we become so comfortable with the currents of this world that we no longer recognize how far we may have drifted?

Drifting is Dangerous Because God's Word is Certain

Hebrews 2:2 NIV

For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment,

The author of Hebrews has already warned us to pay careful attention to the message of salvation we have received through Jesus Christ. But now he explains why disregarding God's Word is such a serious matter [4]. In Hebrews 2:2, he reminds us that the Law given to Israel through the mediation of angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment. God's Word was not merely good advice that His people could choose to follow or ignore. It carried divine authority, and those who disregarded it were accountable to Him. But notice the argument the writer is making. The Old Testament Law was truly God's Word, given through angelic mediation (Galatians 3:19). All Scripture is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16). Yet God has now spoken to us through His own Son (Hebrews 1:1–2), who fulfilled the Law (Matthew 5:17) and established the New Covenant through His blood (Luke 22:20). The difference is not that the Old Testament was any less inspired or truly God's Word, but that God's revelation has reached its fullness in Jesus Christ.

And because God has spoken to us through His Son, we must be careful whose voices we allow to shape our lives. That is particularly important in a world where we are virtually drowning in an ocean of communication, media, and advertisements. Someone is always trying to convince us there is a better way to live. As R. Albert Mohler Jr. reminds us, "The fight of sanctification is a fight against the tides of the world, the flesh, and the devil" [5]. But amid all

these competing voices, we must remember that God's Word is not simply another opinion to be weighed against the wisdom of this world. When God speaks, He speaks with an authority that no human voice can claim. We may choose to ignore His Word, but we cannot escape our accountability to the One who has spoken. And if disregarding His Word in the past carried such serious consequences, how much more seriously must we receive the salvation proclaimed through Jesus Christ?

Neglecting Salvation Has Serious Consequences

Hebrews 2:3 NIV

how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.

Having reminded us that disobedience to God's Word carried serious consequences under the Old Covenant, the writer of Hebrews now confronts us with a question that demands our attention: “How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?” (Hebrews 2:3). He does not specify the consequences, but his warning is unmistakable. For those who have heard the gospel but have never truly trusted Christ, there is no escape from God's judgment apart from Him (John 3:36). Yet Scripture assures us that those who genuinely belong to Christ are secure in His hands (John 10:27–29). That assurance, however, must never become an excuse for spiritual indifference. God does not abandon His children when they drift, but neither does He leave them without correction. Later in this same letter, the writer reminds us:

Hebrews 12:5–7 NIV

And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says,

“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline,

and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,

because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,

and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?

Notice that we are not to make light of God's discipline. His grace is never an excuse for disobedience, and His love does not mean He will leave us uncorrected. Because we belong to Him, our heavenly Father lovingly disciplines us when we wander from His ways.

But God's discipline is not the only consequence of allowing our spiritual lives to drift. While the writer of Hebrews does not describe every consequence of neglecting our salvation in this passage, other portions of Scripture reveal just how seriously spiritual neglect can affect our lives, both now and in eternity. The salvation we have received through Jesus Christ is far too precious to treat with indifference. The Apostle Paul reminds believers to “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). He is not suggesting that we must earn our salvation (Ephesians 2:8–9) or live in constant fear of losing it, but that we are to take seriously the life God has called us to live, recognizing that God Himself is at work within us (Philippians 2:13). God's Word is not merely something to read, study, or memorize; it is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105), calling us not simply to hear what God says, but to put His Word into practice (James 1:22). When we neglect our walk with Christ, we risk losing the joy of close fellowship with Him (Psalams 51:12), missing opportunities to accomplish the good works He has prepared for us (Ephesians 2:10), and even suffering the loss of eternal rewards for work that does not endure (1 Corinthians 3:12–15). he danger of drifting is not that Christ becomes

less faithful to us, but that we become less attentive to the salvation He has so graciously given.

Our Salvation is Too Great to Ignore

Hebrews 2:4 NIV

God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Having warned us about the danger of neglecting our salvation, the writer of Hebrews now reminds us why this message deserves our most careful attention. In Hebrews 2:3–4, he tells us that this great salvation "was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him," and that God Himself testified to its truth through signs, wonders, various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will. Think about the significance of that for a moment. The eternal Son of God, through whom the universe was created and by whom all things are sustained (Hebrews 1:2–3), came into this world and personally proclaimed the way of salvation. And those who heard Him became witnesses to His life, His teaching, His death, and His resurrection. As the Apostle John explains, the miracles of Jesus were recorded so that we might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing we might have life in His name (John 20:30–31). The message of salvation was not invented by human beings. It was proclaimed by Jesus Christ Himself and confirmed by those who heard Him.

But the writer goes even further. He tells us that God Himself testified to the truth of this message through signs, wonders, and various miracles. These extraordinary works were not performed simply to astonish people or draw attention to those through whom they were accomplished. They served a far greater purpose: they demonstrated that the message being proclaimed was truly from God. We see this in Acts 14:3, where Paul and Barnabas spoke boldly

for the Lord, who confirmed the message of His grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders. The miracles were never intended to become more important than the message. They pointed beyond themselves to the One who had sent His Son into the world to save sinners.

And Hebrews 2:4 also tells us that God testified through gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to His will. These gifts were not given for personal recognition or to elevate one believer above another. They were expressions of God's sovereign work among His people. The Apostle Paul reminds us that the Holy Spirit distributes His gifts as He determines (1 Corinthians 12:11), and that these gifts are given for the building up of the church (Ephesians 4:11–12). But notice their significance in this passage. Through these gifts, God Himself was bearing witness to the truth of the salvation proclaimed through Jesus Christ. The gospel did not rest upon human testimony alone. God Himself testified to its truth.

And perhaps that brings us to the question we must consider as we come to the end of this passage. If this salvation was proclaimed by the Son of God, confirmed by those who heard Him, and authenticated by God Himself, how could we possibly regard it as something unworthy of our attention? The Apostle Paul declared, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). This is not simply a message that offers advice about how to live a better life. It is the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again so that all who repent and place their faith in Him might receive forgiveness and eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:3–4; Acts 20:21). Through His resurrection, God has given us a living hope and an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade (1 Peter 1:3–5). What greater salvation could there possibly be? And yet, how easily something so precious can become something we take for granted. We can become so familiar with the message of the cross, the promise of forgiveness, and the hope of eternal life that we no longer give these truths the attention they deserve. We may never deliberately decide to turn away from Christ, but

the danger is that we can gradually allow other things to become more important to us than the One who gave His life to save us.

We began this morning by imagining a small boat drifting quietly across a lake. The person in that boat never intended to lose sight of the destination. He simply stopped paying attention, and little by little, the current carried him somewhere he never intended to go. And perhaps that is where some of us find ourselves this morning. We still believe the gospel. We still attend church. We still know what God's Word says. But somewhere along the way, our attention has shifted, our priorities have changed, and our walk with Christ is no longer what it once was. If that describes you this morning, I want to encourage you to take seriously the warning God has placed before us. Do not become comfortable with spiritual neglect. Do not assume that because you have followed Christ for many years, you are somehow beyond the danger of drifting. Examine your life in the light of God's Word. Consider what has been occupying your thoughts, shaping your decisions, and directing your priorities. And where you recognize that you have wandered from the Lord, turn back to Him in repentance and renewed obedience. Remember that the Saviour who called you to Himself remains faithful. His grace has not diminished, His promises have not changed, and He is no less worthy of your love and devotion today than He was when you first came to know Him.

But perhaps there is someone here this morning who has heard the gospel many times and has never truly responded to it. You may know about Jesus Christ, believe that He died upon the cross, and even acknowledge that the Bible is God's Word. But knowing about salvation is not the same as personally receiving it through repentance and faith. The writer of Hebrews asks a question that none of us can afford to ignore: “How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?” (Hebrews 2:3). Apart from Jesus Christ, there is no other way of salvation (Acts 4:12). Do not mistake familiarity with the gospel for faith in the Saviour. The salvation God has provided through His Son is not something to be admired from a distance. It is a gift to be received through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. And so, as we leave this passage, let us return to the words with

which the writer began: “We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away” (Hebrews 2:1). We have been reminded that drifting begins when we stop paying attention, that God's Word is certain, and that neglecting salvation carries serious consequences. But above all, we have been reminded of the greatness of the salvation God has provided through His Son. The One who created and sustains the universe is the very One who made purification for our sins (Hebrews 1:2–3). He is the Saviour who died and rose again, and through whom we have the promise of eternal life.

So, whether you have followed Christ for many years or have yet to place your faith in Him, do not lose sight of what God has done through His Son. The world will offer countless things to capture your attention, but none can offer what Jesus Christ has accomplished for us. He alone can forgive our sins, reconcile us to God, and give us the hope of eternal life.

May we never become so occupied with the things of this world that we neglect the greatest gift God has ever given. For our salvation is far too great to ignore.

Footnotes

[1] Robert James Utley, *The Superiority of the New Covenant: Hebrews*, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International, 1999), 10:22.

[2] R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 24.

[3] Leon Morris, “Hebrews,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 21.

[4] R. Albert Mohler Jr., Exalting Jesus in Hebrews (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 24.

[5] Ibid.