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Lesson 4
The Danger of Drifting
Hebrews 2:1-4

Did you ever wonder why it is that many people who make a profession of faith in Christ fall away? The falling away may take place weeks, months or even years after that initial profession of faith in Christ. When a person falls away, he always becomes totally indifferent to Christ. In some of those who fall away, we see a vicious, antagonistic spirit towards Christ; these actually become haters of Christ and do all they can to destroy Christ in the minds of men. How is it possible for a person, who once professed Christ, to turn against Him? What are the steps that lead a person to fall away? Who are these people who once professed Christ, but then became haters of Him? The book of Hebrews gives us the answers to these questions in the warning passages of this epistle.

The warnings in Hebrews are based on the Biblical doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. The Bible teaches that once a person is truly saved, he can never be lost because of the Father's election, the Son's death for sin and the Holy Spirit's efficacious call which has made the person's salvation secure. However, the truly saved person begins to manifest the life of Christ in him through spiritual good works. Through faith and obedience to Christ, a person proves and demonstrates that salvation is real. He pushes on in the Christian faith to give evidence that he has true saving faith.

“Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine” (John 8:31).

“Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble” (2 Peter 1:10).

The warnings are addressed to men who are responsible and accountable to God. Men are accountable creatures with moral responsibility to God.

The gospel is to be accepted and obeyed by men. The gospel is more than a publication of good news; it is more than an invitation for lost souls to come to Christ for relief and peace. The gospel is a divine mandate, an authoritative command.

“Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith” (Romans 16:25-26).

The consequence for failing to obey the gospel is divine punishment. *“For it is time for*

judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God” (1 Peter 4:17)? The gospel demands changed lives and a progressive desire to please Christ more and more in one’s daily experience.

Why are warnings so important? Warnings are designed by God to face men with God, who is a consuming fire, and to teach men to fear Him as well as love Him. Warnings are given to exhort true believers to persevere in the Faith and to cause mere professors of Christianity to truly believe.

A truly saved person can never be lost, but he can become indifferent to spiritual realities. When this happens, he needs warnings to cause him to persevere, or push on in the Faith, that he might prove and demonstrate the reality of his faith in Christ. ***“But I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified (rejected, reprobate)”*** (1 Cor. 9:27).

There is always the possibility a person may be a mere professor of Christ with only the externals of Christianity with no reality. Because he is not genuinely saved, he needs warnings to shake him to reality in Christ that he might truly believe and be saved.

THE ARGUMENT OF THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

The key to understanding the warning passages in the book of Hebrews is to understand the background behind the writing of this book. The author is writing to a group of professing Hebrew-Christians. He is convinced that the great majority of them are truly saved, but he questions the reality of saving faith in some of these Jewish-Christians. Why? Well, these Jews had made a profession of faith in Christ, but were beginning to doubt the reality of Christ, and they were seriously considering going back under Judaism. Some were not satisfied with the gospel of grace in Christ and were beginning to believe that salvation was really in the Mosaic Law. A few had already left the Christian assembly and had gone back into Judaism. ***“Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all he more, as you see the day drawing near”*** (Heb. 10:25). These, and others, who were about to leave Christianity to go back into Judaism, were guilty of apostatizing from the Christian Faith. ***“Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away (apostatizing) from the living God”*** (Heb. 3:12). They were on the verge of becoming apostates. An apostate is one who has known the truth of Christ, and willfully turned from it so as to become a complete hater of the truth.

The author of the book of Hebrews writes with great zeal and passion to persuade these professing Hebrew-Christians not to go back into Judaism, warning them of the grave consequences if they make this move. They may become apostates with no hope of ever being genuinely saved.

THE DANGER OF DRIFTING (2:1) ***“For this reason...”*** – This actually says, “therefore,” which tells us that this warning in 2:1-4 is based upon what was taught previously in Hebrews 1:1-14. In Hebrews 1, it was shown that Jesus Christ is superior to all the Old Testament prophets and to the angels. Chapter 1 shows us that Christ is the most glorious and supreme

person of the universe. He is the Creator, Sustainer, Heir of all things, King and Ruler. Christ is the God-Man, infinitely superior over all creatures, who is also the Redeemer. Because Christ is a superior person who has done a superior work of redemption, we should give heed to the salvation He has provided for all who trust Him by faith.

The “therefore” also tells us that the author is digressing from the main argument to plead with those who were toying with apostasy not to do so. This digression shows us the evangelistic heart of the author, who yearned to see men come to Christ. He was so concerned; he dared to tell them that their souls were in danger of eternal judgment if they had not genuinely laid hold of Christ for salvation.

“...we must...” -- It is their moral responsibility that these professing Christians give heed to the gospel. They are accountable to God to trust Christ and to prove the reality of their faith in Christ by their good works.

“...must pay much closer attention (more abundant heed) **to what we have heard”** -- These professing Christians are exhorted to give “more abundant” attention to the Gospel of Christ than to any Old Testament teaching. These Hebrew-Christians had heard the gospel, but were not heeding it; they were not giving much attention or consideration to it. “To give heed” literally means, “to apply the mind to.” It is not just enough to hear the gospel, but there must be personal appropriation of the gospel. One must personally receive Christ as Savior and Lord and commit to Him.

More people stay lost because of indifference and carelessness to the gospel of Christ than those who boldly reject it.

“lest we drift away from it.” -- Literally, this says, “Lest at any time we should slip past them.” It was not the truth of Christ that was in danger of slipping, but it was the professing Christian who was in danger of slipping. The word “drift” is a picture of a boat that should be anchored at a wharf but, because of indifference and carelessness by the captain, the boat drifts by the wharf. Professing Christians should be anchored to Christ, but, because of indifference and carelessness to Christ, they may subtly drift by Him and never really be saved.

If a person does not see Christ as the God-Man and the only Redeemer, he will drift. What must a person do to drift? Nothing! When we do nothing with Christ when we know about Him, we drift from the truth and may well become apostates.

This does not say that those who have been redeemed by Christ can be lost. This warning is to those who have heard the gospel and will not own it. They will not allow the gospel to grasp their lives. They will not lay hold of the truth of Christ. They profess the gospel, but they do not possess Christ.

There is nothing more heartbreaking than preaching to people week after week and to see certain ones constantly exposed to truth that you know could change their lives, and yet, they simply do not pay attention. The gospel is carelessly heeded. These people are drifting from the truth. During the preaching and teaching of the Word, which is the most important truth in all the

world, people drift away mentally. Their minds may be on next week's golf game, the business deal, the afternoon meal or the Sunday football game. Whatever, they are drifting from the truth.

What do you have to do to float downstream? Nothing! A dead fish can float down-stream, but only a live fish can swim up stream. A true Christian has to swim upstream, but a professing Christian can drift. The whole course of this world is contrary to a true believer. You will have a constant upstream battle. You will have to fight your way, all the way. The moment you relax, you will go downstream; the moment you stop fighting, you will begin to drift.

THE WARNING TO DRIFTERS (2:2-3a)

“For if the word (Mosaic Law) spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense...” -- In this parenthesis, or digression, the author does not leave the subject of angels completely. The angels were mediators in the giving of the Law of Moses and under the Law, all sin was rewarded with just judgment. ***“You who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it*** (Acts 7:53). The law brought strict and swift judgment upon all who disobeyed it. The Mosaic Law only judged men as sinners, but could never, in any way, save men.

If these professing Christians turned from Christianity and went back into Judaism for salvation, they would be placing themselves back under the Law and this would actually condemn them, not save them.

“how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation?” -- Professing Christians, who turn aside from Christ as the only way of salvation, shall not escape God's judgment. If the Law brought sure judgment, what will happen to the person who spurns the Son of God? Knowledge of the gospel does not lessen, but increases, our danger. The gospel does not diminish, but will terribly intensify, the severeness of punishment to those who reject it. The consequences of indifference to Christ, carelessness towards Christ and rejection of Christ are devastating. To neglect the gospel is to refuse God's only means of salvation, and the consequence of this decision is eternal punishment.

John Owen, in his commentary on Hebrews, said, “Can any man perish more justly than they who refuse to be saved?”

For rejecters of Christ, escape is impossible! There is no other way of salvation except through Christ! This is an urgent and solemn warning! Trust Christ and live, or you must face the temporal and eternal consequences of your rejection.

This is a “so great salvation” that Christ brought in the age of the gospel. Christ did not bring with Him a different salvation than the Old Testament saints had. Old Testament saints were saved by grace through faith in God's promise of the Messiah who was to come. New Testament saints are saved by grace through faith in the Messiah who has come. The old and the new did not have a different object of faith, but a different perspective of faith. Christ was revealed in prophecy, types and shadows in the Old Testament, but now Christ has come and fulfilled the Old Testament. Judaism is now defunct, because Christ has come. Salvation now is in the

reality of Christ, and not in the promise of Christ.

We have so great salvation because it is divine; it is complete; it is finished; it is free; it is sufficient for all and it is eternal, but the ultimate reason that it is so great is that salvation is found in God's Son, Jesus Christ.

THE CONFIRMATION TO DRIFTERS (2:3b-4)

"After it was at the first spoken through the Lor..." -- Salvation is only in Christ, the Messiah, and this salvation in the Son was first preached by Christ Himself. ***"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me'"*** (John 14:6). Christ was the first gospel preacher in the New Testament sense. The gospel has the authority of Christ!

"...it was confirmed to us by those who heard..." -- The gospel of Christ was confirmed by the Apostles who had been with the Lord. The gospel has the authority of the Apostles!

God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will." -- The gospel has the authority of miracles behind it! Men dare not reject this gospel with so much authority behind it.

CONCLUSION

Saved

For us who are truly saved, we must remember these warnings are given to all professing Christians. Therefore, as followers of Christ, we must heed this warning not to let ourselves drift by the truth of Christ. We must not be careless or indifferent to Christ and the Bible, lest we fail to prove the reality of Christ in our lives. We must push on to demonstrate that our faith is real. We can neglect our so great salvation by indifference to Bible reading, carelessness in prayer, sluggishness in witnessing, absorption into worldly pursuits and coldness of heart. Even true believers can drift temporarily, but in so doing they will experience the stern, but loving, discipline of their God. You shall not escape God's discipline. You must return to your God that you might experience Christ's blessings upon you.

Unsaved

Perhaps you are a person who has heard the gospel and made some kind of a superficial profession of Christ, but you have no reality of Christ and no real desire to do His will. You are in great danger. You may only be a professor and not a possessor of Christ, and you may be in danger of apostatizing. You will not escape God's eternal wrath. There is no salvation outside of Christ. If you neglect Christ, you shall not escape! You shall not escape! You are in danger of permanently losing your soul.

If this is your spiritual condition, flee immediately to Christ and ask Him to save you. Go to Christ, who alone can arrest your deteriorating spiritual condition. He will save you if you give

earnest heed to Christ and do not neglect the so great salvation which is found only in Christ.