

The First of Five Warnings to the Hebrews

Hebrews 2:1-4

Hebrews 2:1-4 - *“Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. ² For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, ⁴ God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?”*

Background Notes

In Hebrews 1, the author went to great lengths to show that Jesus Christ is superior to the prophets, and He is superior to angels. The Lord Jesus Christ is more than a prophet - **He's God!** He is the Messiah predicted by the Old Testament prophets, and to whom they looked forward. He is superior to the angels because, as God, He created the angels. Even though the angels are high and lofty creatures, they are only creatures. They are subject to Jesus Christ and they serve Christ. As God, Jesus Christ is the Creator of all things - including the angels.

Remember that this letter was written to a primarily Jewish audience, and that is why the superiority of Christ over the prophets and over the angels is stressed in these early chapters. In the Hebrew mind and in the readers' background in Judaism, the Old Testament prophets and the lofty holy angels were very important and significant. In fact, this topic was so important that the author to the Hebrews returned to the subject of Christ's superiority over the angels in chapter 2, beginning in verse 5.

But in verses 1-4, the author gave a warning to his readers. It's the first of five warning passages in the letter to the Hebrews. The obvious question is, “Why are there warning passages in the epistle to the Hebrews?” Again, the answer has to do with the fact that the readers were Jewish. The author was concerned to know if they were all truly committed Christians. They had all come out of Judaism, and they had all at least professed Christ as the Messiah - but had they all accepted Him as Personal Savior? Listen to the author's concern in Hebrews 3:12: *“Beware brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the Living God.”*

Furthermore, the author was concerned because many of these professing believers were not growing as Christians. Hebrews 5:12: *“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God, and you've come to need milk and not solid food.”*

So the author was very concerned about the reality of the faith of the Hebrews to whom he was writing. Had they really seen that Christ is “the end of the Law”? Had they really seen that all the Old Testament promises and prophecies were fulfilled through Jesus – the One who was and is the true Messiah? Had they really left Judaism behind? Or were they in danger of turning back to Judaism, thus proving that they had only professed to be Christians, but had never been true believers after all?

This warning passage has an important application for today. In the congregation of any large evangelical church today, there is a mixture of people. Many are committed Christians, but some may only be professing to be Christians. The people who only profess to be Christians need to be warned that they are in danger. They need to prove the reality of their faith in Christ by moving on and maturing in their Christian faith.

Doctrinal Points

1. It is possible to drift away from a present profession of accepting the gospel.

It's important to recognize that this Doctrinal Point is **not** saying you can lose your salvation. But this Scripture **is** saying that it's possible to profess to be a Christian, but not really be saved at all. It's possible to drift away from a present “profession” of accepting the gospel. *“Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away” (v1).* The term “drift away” is used here in the sense of a ship drifting by a safe harbor.

Here's an illustration of the danger of drifting. A number of years ago I learned how to windsurf. I was learning in an area near the shore that was somewhat protected from the stronger winds that were further out away from the shore. One of the more experienced windsurfers warned me to be careful not to drift away and get out into the open waters. I finally got the hang of pulling up the sails - and I was sailing! But while I was learning the skills, I didn't realize I had drifted away from the safety of the shore, and the wind was getting stronger. To make a long story short, my drifting was almost disastrous. The strong winds took me away from the shore, and I had to be rescued!

Do you see the illustration? I didn't heed the warning, and I drifted away from the safety of the shore into near disaster. In the same way, the readers of this epistle (and that includes us) were warned about drifting away from the safety of what we've heard into the disaster of judgment mentioned in these verses: *“Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.”*

“To give heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.” What were the things these readers had heard? What have we heard? What's in view there? What were they, and what are we in danger of drifting away from? Answer: the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The “therefore” of verse 1 leaves no doubt that this verse referred to the content of chapter 1: that Jesus Christ has come and purged our sins. Hebrews 1:3: *“Christ who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”* Jesus Christ is the ultimate revelation of God. He is greater than the prophets and greater than the angels. He is **God**, and He is the **Savior**. The work of redemption is finished, and Jesus Christ is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Now, says the writer of the Hebrews, make sure you fully believe what you’ve heard. It’s possible to drift away if you’ve only heard, but have not truly believed. Be **more than just a hearer** of the Word! You’ve professed to accept the gospel, so now give earnest heed to what you’ve heard. Make **sure** you’re a true believer.

The warning is just as good today as it was in the 1st century. It is possible to drift away from a present profession of accepting the gospel.

2. It is impossible to escape the future judgment for neglecting the gospel.

Verses 2-4: *“For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward,³ how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him,⁴ God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?”*

Notice that verses 2-4 are one long question. How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? What’s the answer? We cannot escape! If we neglect the gospel, it is impossible to escape the future judgment. *“For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward....”*

What did the author mean by the phrase, *“the word spoken through angels”*? He was speaking of the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 33, when the Lord came to Mt. Sinai where the Law was given, He came with myriads of His holy ones. In Acts 7:53, Stephen told the unbelieving Jews that they had *“received the Law by the direction of angels,”* but they had not kept it.

The author of Hebrews then moved in his argument from the “lesser” to the “greater.” If those who broke the Mosaic Law, which was given *“by the direction of angels,”* were punished, then how much more will those who neglect the gospel be punished, since the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who is greater than the angels, spoke it?

Some commentators believe that the judgment mentioned here is only the loss of reward for believers. They feel that believers who neglect the gospel and live mediocre Christian lives will lose out on a heavenly reward. I think the proper

interpretation of the judgment mentioned here is eternal loss and punishment in hell for unbelievers who neglect the gospel message. Remember, the audience that was reading this letter contained a number of professing Christians who were still unbelievers, and they were in danger of neglecting the gospel and drifting away back into Judaism. That would be a disaster.

Remember, too, that there are other warning passages in Hebrews. Hebrews 10:39 leaves no doubt that the danger in drifting away and drawing back leads to **perdition**. That's not loss of reward for the believer - perdition is the utter loss of the soul, or damnation. The point of the warning is obvious to the reader of Hebrews, then and today. It is impossible to escape the future judgment for neglecting the gospel.

Practical Application

How much more evidence do you want?

In verses 3-4, notice how much evidence was given to back up the great message of the gospel. *"How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?"*

Do you see the three lines of evidence given here?

- **One, it was given by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.** To deny this evidence means that you have to say Jesus lied.
- **Two, it was confirmed by those who had heard him.** The disciples had lived with the Lord and knew His perfect character. They knew first hand of His crucifixion, and they had seen the Lord after His resurrection. And - they were willing to die for the truth of this gospel!
- **Three, it was accompanied by signs and wonders.** *"God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will."* The Hebrew readers knew of these New Testament signs and wonders, and various miracles, and the obvious gifts of the Holy Spirit since Pentecost. These things could not be denied. They could not be explained away. So the writer asked them, "How much more evidence do you need?"

The same is true today. How much evidence do **you** need? The evidence for the credibility of the Christian faith is overwhelming! As most of you know, I teach a course at Emmaus Bible College called "Christian Evidences." There is so much evidence for the Christian faith that we can only scratch the surface in one semester!

Romans 1:20 says *"No one has an excuse."* How much evidence do you want?