

## EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

### Message #4

### Hebrews 2:1-4

In 1947, William R. Newell said that he saw seven indicators that Christians, who claimed they knew Jesus Christ, were drifting away from God (*Hebrews*, p. 40).

- 1) They were not serious about understanding God's Word or in attending church services that carefully taught it.
- 2) They were completely absorbed with selfish, earthly interests, not heavenly things.
- 3) There was an increase in deadness in their hearts toward Jesus Christ and His great sacrifice.
- 4) There was a total preoccupation with the affairs and the news of this world rather than the world to come and the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 5) There was a loss of God-consciousness.
- 6) There was a dismissal of the thought about a judgment to come from God.
- 7) There were lifestyles of Christian people that mimicked the lifestyles of those who would perish.

Mr. Newell made these observations in 1947. Just imagine what he would say if he were alive today.

As we come to this text in Hebrews, we come to a passage that warns believers of this issue. **This is the first of the warning passages; it is the shortest of the warning passages but it is also a very serious warning passage. In this book of Hebrews, there are five warning passages that the writer presents to the believers : 1) 2:1-4; 2) 3:12-4:13; 3) 5:11-6:12; 4) 10:26-39; 5) 12:25-29.** The threat of the warning passages is some form of Divine retribution. These warning passages are designed to prevent believers (sometimes referred to as "you" and sometimes as "we") from succumbing to some form of unbelief. The "we" of **verse 1** aims this straight at believers. The threat was very real and still is. **These believers were in serious danger of backsliding in their doctrine and in their faith. The big danger in this section is drifting away from the doctrinal truth of the great salvation work of Jesus Christ.**

We may notice that **verse 1** begins with the conjunction "therefore" which immediately connects us to the preceding discussion. **The key word that connects the end of chapter 1 with this section is the word "salvation" (1:14 / 2:3).** In fact, the word "salvation" (σωτηρια) is found seven times in this book of Hebrews, more than any other N.T. book (1:14; 2:3, 10; 5:9; 6:9; 9:28; 11:7). If we look closely at the words used in **verse 1**, we can immediately see what was happening.

**The previous discussion showed how Jesus Christ is superior to everything.** He is our superior Savior, who purified us from our sins (1:3) and He is the Superior God/King who will end up destroying all enemies and ruling over everything. The verb "drift away" (παραπεω) is a sailing and nautical term and this word is only used here in the New Testament. It is a word that means to slip away or drift away from something or flow by something (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 343). **Apparently some were drifting away and slipping away from the true saving doctrine revealed about Jesus Christ.** The verb "pay close attention" (προσεχω) means to turn your mind and give careful attention to what had been taught about Jesus Christ being our only Savior (*Ibid.*, p. 385).

**Some of the believers were beginning to drift in their minds from the fact that everything they have in their relationship with God, including their great salvation, is rooted in Jesus Christ. In view of this, these believers needed to pay very close attention to their doctrine about Jesus Christ. This is true for salvation and this is true for sanctification. Believers must never drift away from that focus. The remedy for drifting away from grace is pay closer attention to doctrine you previously learned.**

**IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT JESUS CHRIST IS OUR ONLY GOD/SAVIOR, FAR SUPERIOR TO EVERYTHING, WE MUST PAY VERY CLOSE ATTENTION TO SEE TO IT THAT WE DO NOT DRIFT AWAY INTO RELIGIOUS WORKS OR FROM THE GREAT GRACE GOSPEL AND OUR FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST, OR ELSE WE WILL FORFEIT OUR INHERITANCE.**

In this text, God warns His own people to get their doctrine right, specifically their Christology. **He does not want His people drifting away from grace and going back under O.T. law.** The salvation that we have is due solely to Jesus Christ and we must never waver from that. The threat of the early Church was that they would drift back into a “dead sea of legalistic law and legalistic Judaism.”

The idea of drifting away is that something just happens that you do not dramatically notice. Kent Hughes said that he physically experienced this kind of thing when he lived on the Californian coast. He said that when he was out fishing and the winds and surging tides would hit, his anchor would slip from the seabed and he would end up several hundred yards out to sea. He said if he didn't stay focused on that anchor, he would dangerously drift and even could be smashed on rocks (*Hebrews*, Vol. 1, p. 48).

That is precisely the point here. If we do not stay focused on our anchor, Jesus Christ, and on the sound doctrine we know, we can quickly begin to drift in our doctrine and in our faith.

Now **there are two main reasons** the writer gives to us for not drifting away from the grace of God found in Jesus Christ and going back into and under the O.T. law:

**REASON #1** – Because the law is far inferior to the great salvation offered in Jesus Christ.  
**2:2**

These believers highly valued the O.T. law even though it was only given by angels. We know from **Deuteronomy 33:2** that angels were present at the giving of the law. Both Paul (**Galatians 3:19**) and Stephen (**Acts 7:53**) also acknowledge that angels played a vital part in the giving of the law.

Many people love the law but have no idea how it works. The law is unalterable and it shows all our transgressions and moments of disobedience. If you want to cling to the law, the just recompense will be death because we have all sinned. **In other words, the law demands just punishment for sin. Any violation of the law demanded just recompense**

Now these believers were infatuated with the law and were looking intently at it and were passing right over Jesus Christ as if He were second-rate to the law.

To violate the O.T. law was serious business. The law was spoken through angels and was unalterable. There was no grace. Every transgression was recorded. Every act of disobedience was on full display and demanded just recompense, which was death.

Suppose you are pulled over by a police officer for speeding. The officer says you have broken the law but “I’ll give you two options.” I will offer you grace in that you can drive away totally free or I will offer you legal law, in which case, you will go to court and be fined. Now which would you choose? Imagine the stupidity of choosing law over grace. But that is precisely where these first century believers were in their thinking. They were drifting away from Jesus Christ and moving toward law.

**REASON #2** – Because the great salvation offered in Jesus Christ is far superior to the law.  
**2:3-4**

If a disregard for the law brought about serious consequences, there will be far more serious consequences for a disregard of the work of Jesus Christ. If a created being like an angel would back up God’s law and demand just recompense for lawbreakers, how much more accountable would one be to Jesus Christ the great Creator?

Now the word “neglect” (αμελεω) means to neglect something in the sense of being careless about something (*Ibid.*, p. 24). The word “neglect” does not mean reject. The warning is to those who accepted the Gospel but could neglect it. **The specific carelessness in this context is grace salvation**. Some of these believers were becoming careless about the doctrine of their salvation. They were drifting away from a focus on Jesus Christ and drifting into a focus on law and works, and this is very dangerous because it is possible to drift into something you cannot escape. Someone once asked, “What must I do to drift away from God?” NOTHING! Just neglect sound doctrine.

The word “escape” (εκφυγω) means to escape or flee away (*Ibid.*, p. 143). Now the question here is if we neglect to focus on true doctrine of Jesus Christ, what will we not escape? This is clearly written to believers by use of the pronoun “we.” So what would a believer not escape if they drifted into faulty doctrine, specifically if they drifted from the great grace salvation into Judaistic law?

**This cannot obviously be talking about escaping hell because the believer in Jesus Christ is set free from all condemnation (Romans 8:1) and is guaranteed everlasting life.** The apostle who was writing this certainly did not think he could lose salvation and go to hell, when, in fact, in this very book he will argue otherwise. Jesus made this very point about escaping condemnatory judgment by believing on Him (John 5:24; 3:18).

**We think the immediate contextual point is how you will escape the demands of the law if you put yourself back under the law and neglect the great salvation of grace.** If you drift back into law, how is it that you can ever escape the just recompense the law demands?

**The real point here is that if a believer drifts away from his focus on grace and on Jesus Christ and goes back under law, there will be serious consequences.**

We know in **chapter 6** these believers had not grown and become mature believers because God had not permitted them to grow (6:3). We also know from **chapter 10** that a believer could throw away confidence and rewards. The goal of God for every believer is that he/she would become mature and would not ever lose their confidence or their eternal rewards.

These believers were in danger of doing just that. It is serious business to drift away from the great grace salvation and regress back under legalistic law. God wants His people focused on grace and Jesus Christ.

You get away from sound doctrine and careful instruction from God's Word and it won't take long and you'll drift away.

Now to show how superior salvation in Jesus Christ actually is, there are at least four areas of superiority which are stressed:

**(Superiority #1)** - Our salvation is superior in greatness. **2:3a**

There is no greater salvation than the grace salvation found in Jesus Christ. You cannot find a greater salvation. You cannot better this salvation by your works, by your religion, or by your attempts to keep the law. The greatness of the salvation is found in the greatness of the Person and in the greatness of the salvation package.

**(Superiority #2)** - Our salvation is superior in revelation. **2:3b**

**The angels were involved in giving the law, but Jesus Christ specifically brought His grace to this world Himself.** There is one God and one Mediator between God and sinful man and that one Divine Mediator is Jesus Christ, and He specifically came to this world and brought that message to lost sinners.

Jesus Christ Personally came into this world and spoke the Gospel. He brought it directly out of heaven. There is no more superior revelation than this.

**(Superiority #3)** - Our salvation is superior in verbal confirmation. **2:3c**

Polycarp, who was the famed bishop of Smyrna, said that the Apostle John personally taught him all the Scriptural things about the mercy and grace of God as it related to Jesus Christ.

The Gospel of God's complete forgiveness in Jesus Christ was confirmed by those who actually traveled with Jesus Christ and heard it from Jesus Christ.

**(Superiority #4)** - Our salvation is superior in miraculous demonstrations. **2:4**

God bore witness that the apostles were presenting the truth by various signs, wonders and miracles.

God did amazing things through the apostles to confirm His grace salvation in Jesus Christ. In our doctrinal study of Biblical Miracles, we tabulated over twenty amazing miracles that God did through the apostles to confirm the Grace Gospel (*The Doctrine of Biblical Miracles*, p. 36).

Today we have the completed Scriptures so there is no more need of these sign gifts. God uses His Word and His Spirit to confirm truth today, but when the new Gospel was first proclaimed, the sign gifts were operative. Why did God send His Son and confirm these signs? Because it showed the superiority of grace salvation found only in Jesus Christ.

We need to keep our focus on Jesus Christ and on the Word of God. We need to make certain we never drift away from that focus. We need to be very secure in our doctrine and make certain we keep our faith-anchor secure.

In the mid-1700s, Robert Robinson wrote the song "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing." During his early teen years he got mixed up with a notorious gang of hoodlums and fell into a life of deep sin and debauchery. At age 17, he went to a meeting where the famed revivalist George Whitefield was preaching. His purpose for going to the meeting was to "scoff at the poor deluded people." God's Spirit gripped him that night and he was saved. In the next years he became a powerful preacher and pastor of a rather large church in Cambridge, England. He became known as a minister and scholar and wrote the song "Come Thou Fount" at age 23.

As time went on, Robert Robinson started to drift away from His focus on God's Word and Jesus Christ. He neglected his own spiritual welfare and went far, far astray. He quit the ministry and began to travel, and during one of his journeys he met a young woman who apparently had some real spiritual wits to her. She had no idea who Robert was and in one of the more amazing displays of God's sovereignty, the following thing happened.

She told Robert that she had been reading a hymn and she asked him what he thought of it. She handed him the hymnbook and he stared down at his own hymn that he had written, "Come Thou Fount." He tried to avoid her question, but God's Spirit convicted him and he broke down right then and there and confessed who he was and how he had drifted out of fellowship with God. The girl pointed to the first verse he had written and said to him, "'Streams of mercy' are still flowing," and at that moment the great Cambridge preacher rededicated his life to Jesus Christ and to the ministry of the Word of God.

Perhaps you have been drifting in your spiritual life. Perhaps you will admit that your love for God's Word and for the Lord is not what it once was. You have a great salvation purchased for you by a great Savior. Return to Him and return to His grace and return to His Word and you will experience those "streams of mercy" once more.