

Watch! Don't drift off!

(Hebrews 2:1–4; reading Luke 8:4–15)

Just as it is dangerous when driving, not to pay attention to the road, so it is dangerous in the spiritual life of a person, to fail to maintain close attention to the truth in Jesus Christ. A profession of faith is no guarantee that a person is truly saved, as the parable of the soils pictures so clearly. The concern of the author of Hebrews that his audience be among those who will inherit eternal life (1:14) moves him to exhort them to pay more careful attention to the gospel message they had received. The superiority of Jesus Christ, the Son, over angels and all created things, means that the Good News of Jesus Christ demands our close attention. Two reasons are clearly given in these four verses.

I. Without close attention, we may drift away (2:1).

1. The exhortation, to “pay more careful attention,” is with reference to the “great salvation” (v.3) which they had heard. The believer is obligated to “heed” the message, much like a ship must be carefully brought all the way to land or into harbor, anchored or tied to dock, to keep it safe. In the parable of the soils, the desire or goal is to see the seed sending roots deep into the heart and producing fruit.
2. Inattention, or neglect (v.3), will allow one merely professing faith to “drift away,” like the ship that did not tie to dock or anchor in harbor. Again in the parable of the soils, there is the analogy of the weeds and thorns which draw the attention away from the truth and cause fruitlessness.

Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ must persevere, by which they demonstrate the work of God in their lives. Continue to pay close attention to what you have heard, lest you drift away.

II. Without close attention, we endanger our eternal destiny (2:2–4).

Failure to persevere reveals an unbelieving heart and that failure need not be rejection of the truth, but merely neglect. Nevertheless an unbelieving heart faces eternity without salvation. The author of Hebrews argues that if neglect was dangerous in olden times under the Mosaic Law, neglect is therefore much more dangerous now when the message has been so much more assuredly affirmed.

1. Neglect was dangerous in the days of the Old Covenant (2:2).

The context (2:2b) indicates that “the message spoken by angels” is the Mosaic Law. The role of angels is at best only implied in the OT (cf. Deuteronomy 33:2; Psalm 68:17), but mentioned by Stephen (Acts 7:53) and Paul (Gal 3:19), and assumed for his audience as true by the author of Hebrews. That Law was fully valid (cf. “confirmed”, v.3), as every Jew would agree, and had careful defined punishments for any violation.

2. Neglect is more dangerous in the days of a more reliably affirmed message (2:3–4).

- a. The author assumes a negative answer to his question. There is no escape if such a great salvation, that which is provided in Jesus, is ignored (2:3a).
- b. The gospel message was triply affirmed, making it superior to the giving of the Law (2:3b–4).
 - (1) The Lord Jesus Himself announced it (cf. Mark 1:14; Luke 19:10) and brought about salvation by His perfect life, sinless sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection.
 - (2) It was confirmed or attested to, to the author and his readers, by those who heard the Lord Jesus (v.4a), that is primarily the Apostles, but secondarily other witnesses (cf. 1 Cor 15:6).
 - (3) It was witnessed to by God Himself who affirmed the preaching by the apostles with signs (which pointed to something), wonders (which caused awe in those who saw them), miracles (supernatural works of power), and (lit.) distributions of the Spirit (either the gift of the Spirit, cf. Gal 3:5), or more probably, the gifts distributed by the Spirit, cf. 1 Cor 12:11).

Jesus the Son, far superior to angels, establishes His message more strongly and has the additional affirmation of witnesses and the Father Himself (cf. Deuteronomy 19:15). If you pay attention to the Law, you need to pay that much more attention to the Gospel. Eternal life is at stake because there is no salvation from the penalty of sin outside of Jesus Christ.

As shown in the Gospels and Romans, the gospel message is more than brief summaries (e.g., Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:3–5), though they are good. (See also Ephesians 2:8–10.) The true believer begins in faith (cf. Romans 10:9) and perseveres in faith by paying close attention to the message. We are helped by sitting under good teaching, studying to teach others, and challenging one another (Hebrews 5:12; 10:24–25). Thoughtful participation in the Bread & Cup is a good basic reminder as well. The person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is far superior to every created thing in the universe which means that the Good News of Jesus Christ demands our careful attention.

For further reflection: To what type of person is the author of Hebrews addressing this warning? Where do you find them? • How might the weeds and thorns (Mark 4:19) distract a person from the message of the gospel? What helps to limit distractions? Give concrete biblical responses to those distractions. • Why is the gospel so much more important to understand and heed than the “Golden Rule”, which is based upon the Mosaic Law?