

The Danger of Drifting
Hebrews 2:1-13
October 4, 2015

Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. Now it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise." And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given me."

Two men were fishing above a dam near their house. The fish were biting, so the men didn't notice that their anchor had come loose and they were beginning to drift with the current. By the time they became aware of their situation, the current had become too strong for them to successfully row against. The boat crashed over the dam and the men were lost.

Those men lost their lives because they didn't realize they were drifting. However, the dangers of drifting aren't just restricted to boats. Christians can spiritually drift. We hear a warning about spiritual drifting from the author of Hebrews" *Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it* (Heb 2:1 ESV).

Today, we will concern ourselves with three points about spiritual drifting. 1) Things we should know about spiritual drifting. 2) Common signs of spiritual drifting. 3) How to protect ourselves against spiritual drifting.

We need to know that spiritual drifting requires no effort. No one works at drifting away from their faith. It's something like a bad habit. Reasonable people don't work at developing bad habits; they just happen because of lack of attention to how one leads his or her life.

Which brings us to the next thing we need to know; **spiritual drifting is an unconscious process.** Ships don't drift off course by making 90 degree turns. They

drift off course very slowly, almost imperceptibly.

Many Christians have drifted from their faith in small, almost unnoticeable steps. Steps so small that the drifting Christian doesn't feel Satan, this world, or their own sinful flesh pulling them along. The same has happened to entire Christian denominations that have slowly drifted from God's Word and become lost in a sea of false doctrine and political correctness.

The next thing we must know is; **we never spiritually drift upstream or against the current.** Over and over, Scripture warns us that the life of a Christian is counter-cultural. Following Christ is not the way of the world. When we drift spiritually, it's always toward sin. It's never toward faithfulness. The moment we stop growing in our faith, the current of the sinful world will start dragging us backward, away from God.

We must also know that **the longer you are spiritually drifting, the faster you go.** The farther you move from God, the harder Satan pulls. It's called progressive perversion. It's something like a snowball rolling downhill. Here's how Paul explained progressive perversion to the churches in Rome.

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them (Ro 1:21-23, 28-32 ESV).

What started out as ignoring God ended in every kind of sin imaginable.

We should also know that our drifting is dangerous to others. We do not live alone in the world. Parents, who are spiritually adrift, will lose the golden opportunity to bring up their children in the true faith. Children, who attend church without their parents, especially without their father, have a very small chance of holding on to their faith. We must live in such a way as to show our children, and all those around us, that we are anchored in Jesus Christ.

Lastly, we need to understand that **spiritual drifting always ends in a shipwreck.** Baptism and confirmation are not enough. Salvation is based on faith, not works. If we neglect our faith, what hope is there for us? If we allow our faith to wither and die, where can we expect to stand on the Last Day? Listen to the text: *how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?* (Heb 2:3 ESV).

Our second point is to look at some common signs of spiritual drifting. There are four "red flags" to look for in your life.

The first “red flag” is a diminished desire to study God’s Word and pray. The Bible is a unique book. It provides us with information that can’t be found anywhere else. The Bible is God’s revelation for our lives. How would we ever know about our origin, our purpose, or our destiny, if God hadn’t told us through his Word?

Scripture also tells us about the horrible consequences of sin and how God saves us from our sin. Furthermore, God’s Word gives us directions for a happy, productive life. St Peter writes: *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness* (2 Pet 1:3 NIV). The knowledge of the one who called us comes from the Bible. When you lose your desire to study God’s Word, you are spiritually drifting.

On the other hand, prayer is God’s wonderful blessing of allowing us to communicate with him. Many Christians never fully understand what a privilege it is to be able to take our wants, needs, and praises directly to the creator of the universe.

Jesus spent time in prayer. Mark tells us: *Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed* (Mk 1:35 NIV); and again: *After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray* (Mk 6:46 NIV).

Jesus was also concerned about his disciples’ prayer life. Luke introduces Jesus’ parable of the persistent widow with these words: *Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up* (Lk 18:1 NIV). When we pray less and less, we drift more and more.

Another “red flag” of spiritual drifting is a diminishing desire to be with God’s people. Of course, the most obvious way of being with God’s people is through regular worship. Worship is not a drudgery, it’s a privilege. Worshiping in the company of God’s people should be the high point of your week. You should rejoice at the opportunity to attend worship. If worship is no longer a reason to rejoice, you are drifting.

Naturally, worship isn’t the only time you should seek the company of God’s people. In the third chapter of Hebrews we hear this: *But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness* (Heb 3:13 NIV). Not once in a while, but daily. The right friendships strengthen us. The wrong friendships lead us to sin. Except for the purpose of witnessing, when a Christian prefers the company of unbelievers to the company of fellow Christians, he or she is drifting toward spiritual disaster.

A third “red flag” of spiritual drifting is a diminished desire to share the Gospel. When someone is a new creature in Christ, fully devoted to God, and truly understands what God has done for him or her, the most natural thing to do is to share the Gospel. A Christian, who has no desire to witness about their Savior, is drifting.

The last “red flag” of drifting is an increasing thrill over the things of this world.

I'm going to let St John explain this one: *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever* (1 Jn 2:15-17 NIV).

With all the warning signs before us, what we need to know is how to protect ourselves against spiritual drifting. **The first step is to keep rowing.** In other words, if we stay busy serving the Lord and our neighbors, we will be less likely to drift.

We have to keep moving. Being idle is an open door for Satan. Besides that, there is no such thing as retirement in your Christian life. There is never a time when a Christian can say, “I’ve done my share. I’m just going to coast from here on out.” That’s not coasting, that’s drifting.

Considering all that Paul did in the service of our Savior, listen to his opinion on Christian retirement. *Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus* (Phil 3:13-14 NIV).

We can also protect ourselves by watching out for undercurrents. We must always be on guard against the sneaky temptation. We are in an unending battle with our sinful flesh and Satan knows that. We have to watch so he doesn’t use our sinful nature against us.

We must also expect to be going against the tide; swimming upstream. The world is full of things that can lead us away from our faith; popularity, peer pressure, the praise of other people. We can also fall victim to false doctrines; those things which sound so sweet and logical but aren’t biblical. Satan is not against distorting Scripture to lure you into believing a lie.

If you start going with the flow of the world instead of against it, you are in real danger. If everything in your life is absolutely perfect, you might be spiritually drifting. Jesus told his disciples: *In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world* (Jn 16:33 NIV).

Jesus also said: *Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it* (Mt 7:13-14 NIV).

Our last defense against spiritual drifting is to be anchored in Christ. Our minds must have a firm grip on God’s Word. Our hearts must be rooted and grounded in the love of our Savior. And control of our lives must be totally given over to the Holy Spirit.

God has not abandoned us in this world. He has given us his Holy Word. He has given

us his Holy Spirit. He has given us each other. If we take advantage of the gifts our Father has given us, spiritual drifting will never be a problem in our lives.