

## The Consequences of Neglect

In my last article we began looking at Hebrews 2:1-4 and the potential for spiritual drift in our Christian lives. I noted that there are two nautical terms in the first verse; one which speaks of drift as of a ship drifting without a firm anchor (largely unnoticed) and the other which speaks of our need to be intentional to guide the ship of our lives to safe harbor by means of giving grace empowered effort toward spiritual growth. I would ask us to consider whether or not there may be times in our lives when we're just 'going through the motions,' picking and choosing for ourselves when, or if, we'll obey clear teaching from the scriptures. Although it's certainly true that we're saved by grace through faith in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8-9), as Dr. Bryan Chapell has written, "Grace doesn't make obedience optional" (see James 2:14-17). To affirm that we're saved by grace is not a license to live in any way that neglects God's word and the teaching it gives on fellowship with other Christians in a healthy local church (Ephesians 4:1-16; Hebrews 10:25).

In John Bunyan's classic allegory entitled, "Pilgrim's Progress," the main character, a man named Christian, is on his journey to the Celestial City with a friend named Hopeful. They become aware of the importance of being watchful against anything that would draw them away from their journey. How can they prevent lethargy and drowsiness? The answer given by Hopeful is, "To prevent drowsiness in this place, let us fall into good discourse." To which Christian replies, "Where shall we begin?" Hopeful then begins to sing a song that speaks of a well-managed Christian life and of Christian fellowship and relying on God and his word to keep from becoming drowsy. Bunyan's point is clear. Regular Christian fellowship and godly conversation is important to all Christians as we journey as pilgrims in this world on our way to Heaven.

In verses 2-3 of our passage we read, "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?" (The context allows for: eternal damnation for those unrepentant non-believers or Fatherly discipline for Christians). Our author uses the word 'message' initially to speak of the Old Testament law given by God at Sinai. Exodus chapters 19 and 20 teach us that the law was given directly to Moses. But, in Deuteronomy 33:2, there's an indication that there were angelic intermediaries. We see this also in several New Testament texts (Acts 7:38, 53; Galatians 3:19). Our author's line of reasoning is as follows: If the message given in the Old Testament and 'declared by angels proved to be reliable' and those who disobeyed in those days were punished for their disobedience, can we in our day ever think that it's okay to neglect or willfully disobey the "message declared first by the Lord and then attested to us by those who heard (the apostles in speaking and writing)...?" Can we neglect the final and complete word given in the Son, Jesus Christ? How foolish. Of course we cannot disregard God's word without negative consequences.

Along with the word being declared by angels in the Old Testament and then later declared by the Lord Jesus and his apostles in the New Testament, our passage teaches us that God the Father bears witness in special ways to Jesus and the gospel of salvation. “While God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will” (vs. 4). The evidence is overwhelming! We have everything we need to keep us from neglect and spiritual drift. The word of God, illumined and empowered by the Spirit of God will help us against patterns of ongoing neglect and its various consequences. With all of the blessings that we’ve been given, what should our response to God be? We must rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ even as we seek, by grace, to continue running the race of holiness and faithfulness guided by the scriptures as we gather with the body of Christ on the Lord’s Day for worship, preaching, prayer, sacrament and fellowship.

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