

HOW NOT TO DRIFT AWAY

HEBREWS

Introduction

Chapter 1 begins boldly with an introduction into the grand theology of Jesus. But it doesn't take long for us to find the pastoral concern that prompted the writing of this letter, for in 2:1 there is a "therefore", showing us that there is something common among Christians that needs to be addressed.

Practical purpose of the book of Hebrews stated positively and negatively

2:1 "Pay *closer* attention" versus "drift away"—No middle road or passive state, but a trajectory

Why should our spiritual trajectory be increasingly?

2:2 The Gospel message is true, and disobedience has always been punished

2:3-4 Our Lord Jesus told us the Gospel and His Apostles confirmed it with miracles!

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is true. You cannot therefore just coast along, but need to embrace it, continue in it, mature and grow in it. If you are not actively growing, then you are drifting.

Growing or drifting, which are you?

Lest you answer that with a wrong idea of what growth or drifting look like, the rest of the book tells us how to "pay closer attention" and not "drift away".

How not to "drift away"

1. Do not persist in your own ways

3:8 "harden" is not always a wilful decision, as much as it is a slow progression of seeing God's ways (9) but challenging it in ways that really make sense to you, but clearly ignore something clearly revealed (think of Golden Calf incident at Mt. Sinai that made perfect sense, even to Aaron, but contradicted everything they had witnessed about God throughout the Ten Plagues)

3:10 The real issue is at your heart—you do what makes sense to you rather than why God actually said

3:12 Such a heart does not really believe God and His ways, but only believes in oneself and one's own ways of working

"pay closer attention to" the ways / word of God:

3:13 Go speak to one another!

4:12-13 Point each other to the word of God that can expose our most deceptive and hidden thoughts and motives

4:14-16 repeated "hold fast" (3:6, 14; 6:12, 18; 10:23)
and "draw near" (7:19, 25; 10:1, 22; 11:6)

Don't let go, and don't stop moving!

Maintain what you already have, and keep going in the right direction.

Again, it is not about where you think you might be, but about what your trajectory is.

2. Do not rely on your experiences

3:15 Repeated warning against persisting in your own way (cf 3:8; 4:7)

3:16 Your previous spiritual deliverance experiences or previous spiritual leaders are not the test of your spiritual maturity

3:17 Your current lifestyle and current faith is the test of your spiritual trajectory

Also,

6:4-8 Like the rocky and thorny soil in Jesus' parable of the sower, it is possible for those with wonderful spiritual experiences (understanding the Word to some degree, getting at least some taste of heavenly things, being around the work of the Holy Spirit, enjoying the good Word of God) to still end up entirely without fruit

"pay closer attention to" your current acts of faith, love, and obedience:

6:9-12 Pay closer attention to your practical love and imitation of the faithful (13:7 later again)

10:22-25 Be fully assured of the truth of the faith (confidence in God)

Be cleansed from a misguided conscience (mental renewal)

Be washed with purity (obedience)

Replace wavering doubts with truth

Think of how to love more and do more good

Get together with the saints whenever you can

3. Do not get distracted

12:1-3 Stop entertaining the side-issues that weigh you down spiritually and put off all sinful habits that keep you spiritual weak and tired

"pay closer attention to" God's discipline

12:5-6 When God uses His revealed ways (a clear verse from His Word, other saints, spiritual leaders) to call you back, embrace it!

4. Do not spread bitterness

Bitterness is that mental activity that keeps turning itself over in your mind until you are so consumed by how right you are that you do not realise the soul destroying effect it has on yourself and on others.

12:15 Let the good grace of God overcome all expressions of pride, harshness, judgemental-ism—especially so in your active participation with others

"pay closer attention to" fellowship

12:14 learn from personal offences how to make peace and be more holy next time

12:28 define your worship by a high view of God

13:1 Express of practical love to the saints

13:7 Imitate the faith of your leaders

13:15 Define praise by words that confess His nature

13:16 Do good instead of keeping to yourself

13:17-18 Listen to the care of your church leaders as you pray that they act honourably

What a great series of exhortations to end this book with!

Though the warnings are serious, the exhortations are filled with confidence, joy, love, and fellowship!

Conclusion

It is not always easy talking about these things, because of the nature of spiritual weakness.

Spiritual weakness often acts strong, and therefore doesn't perceive its own weakness.

Spiritual weakness is often hard to explain, because the same Biblical terms are used by everyone, but often with less-than-precise definitions and less-than-accurate contexts.

5:11-14 The frustration of spiritual weakness

Spiritual weakness never stays spiritual weakness. It either morphs into a drifting away, or it becomes spiritual maturity.

There is no straight line on the graph of spirituality. There is either an upward slope, or a downward slope. When you reach the top of the graph, it is called Heaven, or as Hebrews calls it, "rest". When you hit the bottom of the graph, it is called apostasy, proving that the faith you had was not the same as the great men and women of faith, but was instead just a personal spiritual path like any other false religion.

1. So, may you never be found drifting, ...
... by persisting in your own way instead of knowing God's ways.|
Instead, "pay closer attention" ...
... to God's ways as revealed in God's Word.
2. May you never be found drifting ...
... by thinking that the spiritual experiences in your past affirm that you are right.
Instead, "pay closer attention" ...
... to your current acts of faith, love, and obedience.
3. May you never be found drifting ...
... by filling your life with petty distractions and giving up, ...
Instead, "pay closer attention" ...
... to God's corrective measures.
4. May you never be found drifting ...
... by spreading bitterness.
Instead, "pay closer attention" ...
... to faithfulness in fellowship.

My prayer for you, brothers and sisters, is the closing prayer of the book of Hebrews

13:20-21