
Drifting Away From Christ

By David Wilkerson

July 6, 1992 "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation" (Hebrews 2:1-3).

Here is a sin that is more vile and shameful than adultery, alcoholism or drug abuse. I believe the Word of God agrees that the sin of drifting away from Christ is the most tragic, dangerous sin of all. It has ruined multitudes who once were disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ!

You would be shocked to discover how many famous people were followers of the Savior at one time but have drifted away from their spiritual roots:

The New York Times recently profiled a professional basketball coach for one of the top teams in the NBA. He's rich and famous. And as he spoke about his childhood, he told of being raised in a Pentecostal preacher's home.

He remembers what he calls "doomsday preaching" and talk of the Second Coming of the Lord. Yet today it is but a fading memory to him. He has forgotten the early days of going to church so often, praying for the sick, interceding into the wee hours, witnessing in the street, worshipping and crying out with tears, "Jesus, I love You!"

By the language he used, he seemed to want to put a distance between himself and his past. You could sense he was drifting farther and farther away from his roots!

Yet this didn't happen to him over-night. Rather, he drifted away over time. It started when he went to college. And eventually, everything he was taught and had in a relationship with Jesus became only dim memories. Now he sounds as if he would like to forget it all completely.

A Broadway theater executive was especially rude to me during the time our ministry was negotiating to buy the Mark Hellinger Theater. I didn't really know the man - but he acted as if he could not stand to be near me, as if I had a contagious disease. He didn't even want to be in the same room with me. If we were walking somewhere together, he'd walk ten feet ahead.

I was hurt by his actions - and I wondered why he singled me out for such cruelty. I thought, "What is it about me that makes this man so nervous?" So I began to pray for him - and I set out to win his friendship.

It took a while, but slowly he softened. One day, as we sat in a restaurant, he began to open his heart to me. And when he did, I was shocked to find out this Broadway executive had had a powerful experience with Christ when he was a teenager! The Spirit had come upon him powerfully, and he had broken down, weeping. He had heard the Lord say, "Give Me your life!" - and he received a call to preach the gospel.

After that, he had a caring heart for people and a true love for Jesus. But later, in his early twenties, he began to drift. He didn't turn his back on Jesus; he simply neglected Him. He quit going to church, reading his Bible and talking to the Lord.

He buried himself in work and ended up on Broadway, involved with theater celebrities. Eventually he began to distance himself from his experience with Christ - and he began to drink heavily. His respect for the things of the Lord had lingered; but as he drifted farther away, it became easier for him to curse God and mock other believers.

When I came on the scene years later, invading his world, it brought up all the old memories: of church, God's Word, Jesus, his calling. I was a reminder of what his life should have been - and he resented it!

The last time I saw this man, he had lost his prestigious position - and he was staggering past our church, drunk. I had been a reminder to him and a rebuke - and now, in his need, he couldn't face it.

All of Us Know Friends, Family or Acquaintances Who Once Walked Close to Jesus - Yet Who Are Now Drifting Away From Christ! You remember the former days when certain people were tender, full of love for the Lord, praising and worshipping the Savior in God's house. Yet today you know them as different people. Every day they are slowly drifting away from everything they once knew and loved - leaving Jesus and heading in the opposite direction!

Most drifters do not see themselves as wicked or as being in any danger. They say, "So what if I don't go to church or act very religious? I haven't changed that much. I still love God in my own way. I'm not a drunk, and I don't do drugs. I don't run around - I'm a family person. I'm honest and I work hard. And I'll do anything I can to help somebody." That's true - they are usually very kind, loving people.

But they don't see the danger ahead. It never occurs to them they've neglected Jesus! This is like a man who's drifting on a boat down the Niagara River - heading toward the Falls. He's paddling along, lazily enjoying a Sunday afternoon on the water. But people are yelling from the shore, "Stop! Row back to shore - you're in trouble! Quick, grab your oars!" They even throw out a lifeline.

But the man smiles back and says: "Hey, I'm okay - I'm not in trouble, What could be wrong?"

Beloved, when you are drifting away from Jesus, it doesn't matter how "okay" you think you are. You're in danger! You are drifting toward total spiritual blindness and destruction! You see, the river of neglect slowly carries you farther and farther away from the Lord. And the farther downstream you go, the swifter and more dangerous that river becomes! You don't know it, but there are raging falls ahead - a place where there are forces beyond your control, a place of no turning back, of shipwreck!

Here is the heart of this matter of drifting away from Christ:

No Believer Is Immune to the Sin of Drifting From Christ!"For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation" (Hebrews 2:2-3).

The writer of Hebrews here is addressing the "heirs of salvation" (1:14), all devout Christians who love the Lord. And he is saying, "Be on guard against drifting!"

The history of God's people has been one of drifting, backsliding, neglecting and forgetting God. Moses and the prophets seemed incredulous at the tendency of God's people to quickly forget the Lord and drift back to their old ways!

Just before he died, Moses looked back over the history of God's children in the wilderness. Nearly an entire generation of complaining, backbiting, unbelieving, sensual people had been wiped out by God's judgment, consumed in the hot desert. And now, standing before Moses was a faithful remnant - a tried, tested, separated people who had remained true to the Lord. Moses told this remnant:

"Your eyes have seen what the Lord did because of Baal-peor: for all the men that followed Baal-peor [idol worship], the Lord thy God hath destroyed them from among you. But ye that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you this day.... For what nation is there so great who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?" (Deuteronomy 4:3-4,7).

Moses was saying: "You stayed true in a time of great apostasy! You never gave in to idol worship, as did those who were destroyed. And no one has had God nearer to them than you have!" Now they were about to enter into the Promised Land - into the Lord's fullness! I believe these people represent a holy remnant today - Christ-lovers who have clung to their Lord through fiery trials and desert experiences. And the Lord is saying to this remnant, "You have not apostasized. You truly love Me and My Word. You have the nearness of Jesus in your heart!"

Yet, as Moses looked into the future with his prophetic eye, he saw an overcoming remnant drifting from God - after a time of great blessings and favor! He said: "Take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life" (verse 9). Moses gave them a warning at the very point of their nearness to God!

He told Israel that God was going to bring them into safe cities, put them in good homes and shower them with good things. They would have wells they wouldn't have to dig and vineyards they wouldn't have to plant. But Moses warned that, at that very place of fullness and blessing, "Beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth!" (Deuteronomy 6:12).

God loves to favor and bless His beloved remnant. The wonderful blessings He lavished on Israel in Canaan are proof that He delights in pouring out good things upon those who walk faithfully in covenant with Him.

But fullness - favor, blessings, the good life - carries a hidden danger for the remnant. You see, it is harder to cleave to the Lord in times of blessing than in times of hardship and trial! Moses said to this holy people:

"Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes...lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses,...and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage" (Deuteronomy 6:11-14).

Moses was saying, "Your temptation will not be idolatry or sensuality or fleshly wickedness, as it was for those who died before you. Instead, your spiritual senses will be dulled by ease, prosperity, blessings and fullness, You will be so wrapped up in good things, you will forget the Lord! You will neglect Him -- and He will fade from your mind. You will drift away from Him!"

Did God's Holy Ones Heed the Warnings of Moses? Did this remnant still cleave to the Lord? No - not

at all! They wouldn't listen to the warning because they couldn't believe it. They thought, "Never in a million years! How could we ever do anything like that?"

But what the devil could not do to them through sensuality and lust, he did through riches, blessings and fullness of bread: "But Jeshurun [Jerusalem] waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness [blessings]; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.... Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee" (Deuteronomy 32:15, 18).

Jeremiah later prophesied to Israel: "Ye all have transgressed against me, saith the Lord... wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee. Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number" (Jeremiah 2:29, 31-32).

Jeremiah was saying: "It is amazing! God has blessed you incredibly. Yet now, when you ought to be thanking Him and drawing near to Him, you go for days without seeking Him. You have forgotten the Lord - you have drifted far from Him!"

This theme appears time after time throughout the prophets.' "My people...have forgotten their resting- place [refuge]" (Jeremiah 50:6). "Therefore saith the Lord God...thou hast forgotten me, and cast me behind thy back" (Ezekiel 23:35). "Israel hath forgotten his Maker" (Hosea 8:14).

As I was preparing this message, I asked myself, "How could Israel do such a thing, after all God did for them - after receiving all His benefits and being so near to Him?"

Then I thought of all my drifting friends and acquaintances - those I once knew who are now backslidden, floating swiftly down the river away from Christ. I thought, "How could anyone do that? How could they be so blessed of God, and drift away from Him?"

Then the Holy Spirit stopped me dead in my tracks. He turned His light on me and said, "David, what about you?"

I began to search my own heart - and I recognized certain things about myself that point to drifting. I don't have the zeal for the Lord that I desire; I don't have the tears. The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak!

I fell on my face before the Holy Spirit. He showed me that it is just as easy for any servant of the Lord to begin drifting from Christ. There isn't a pastor or evangelist who is immune!

Even the Most Devoted Believer Can Begin Drifting - From the Slightest Neglect! Each of us hits a dry spell at times. But often, instead of running quickly into Christ's presence and drinking of His Living Water, we let the day go by. Then another day passes. Slowly, we begin to get lazy and passive about the things of the Lord. And before we know it, we're caught up in the swift current of neglect, a dangerous drift - and it becomes harder and harder to get back into intimate communion with Christ!

Slow, daily neglect of the things of God is all it takes. Satan knows that God's holy remnant will not be seduced by gross sin or perversions of any kind. So, instead, he tries to overcome the saints by convincing them to drop one church service at a time, or one prayer meeting.

Has this happened to you? You missed something dear to your heart, like daily prayer time or Bible

study. Then you missed it for days at a time...then weeks.... You dropped off a little here, a little there - and suddenly you were carried away into a drift!

Many who are reading this message right now have been mightily blessed by God, The Lord has brought them out of sin and darkness and set them free. He has kept His hand on their family. Yet they go day after day without praying! And they never crack their Bible except in church!

Be warned! A year from now, you won't be reading any messages like this one - because you will have abandoned God's house and His people altogether!

You see, we wouldn't reject the Lord - none of us would do that. But we do neglect Him. I ask you: Have you lost your spiritual awareness, the urgency to examine yourself and say, "Wait a minute - I'm drifting. I'm getting lazy about seeking the Lord!"

You May Already Be Drifting From the Lord! Here are the signs of a dangerous drift:

1. Spasmodic attendance in God's house. You make no special effort to get there; other things come first. But those who cleave to Jesus realize that once they begin neglecting God's house, they cut themselves off from spiritual life!

You see, to stay away from the body is to remove yourself from the Head - because the Head is connected to the body. And to keep the body's spiritual life flowing through you, you have to be connected to it. You can't get everything you need all by yourself - not even in the secret closet - if you've cut yourself off from the body of Christ!

Some attend only on Sunday mornings. But as they drift, even that will go! It will be replaced with Sunday trips, television, the Sunday newspaper, backyard playtime with the kids. Watch out - it's all a sign of a drift!

2. Less time for fellowship with Jesus, and more time for friends and personal things. Those who cleave to Jesus will spare no cost to give Him their best time!

For some it is the early hour: They're up first thing in the morning with a cup of coffee and their Bible. They meet the sunrise on their knees with Jesus, and it makes their day. For others, like me, the best time is the midnight hour. I like to close out the day with the Lord, so that the telephone and all other distractions are gone. Yet whatever time you give Him, it must be unhurried, quality time - regular and daily!

The drifter hits the ground running in the morning. He has only "thought prayers." He whispers them here and there throughout the day - but his mind isn't set on the Lord. Day after day, he just drifts along. He really does want to pray and read the Bible, but he keeps putting it off. Suddenly weeks have gone by, and his drifting has become worse. He has time for everything else - but not for Jesus!

3. An unwillingness to endure the discipline required to keep from drifting. Our flesh is not inclined to pray, read God's Word or seek His face. These things are disciplines. And we have to bring our-selves under subjection to do them. We have to get hold of ourselves and say, "I will not let myself drift!"

But if you just do nothing - if you sit by passively, doing your own thing - then you will drift away from Jesus totally! You may talk like a true follower, and you may still act holy - but you will have a dead

spirit, a hard heart!

You have to understand that once you set your heart to seek God, the devil will try to keep you from communion with Him more fiercely than ever. There is a "conspiracy of interruptions" that is sent straight from hell: You'll yawn more than you ever have in your life! Weariness will hit your body. Your thoughts will run wild.

But that's when you have to discipline yourself and take every thought captive in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ! (see 2 Corinthians 10:5). Praying doesn't mean moving your lips while your mind is somewhere else - it means focusing your thoughts on Jesus, and becoming still and quiet so He can speak to you!

Let Me Show You the Frightful Consequences of Drifting Away From Christ! I can name several consequences of drifting, but I'll deal with only two. You may already be experiencing them:

1. God says, "You are headed for calamity - yet I have turned My back on you!" "Because my people hath forgotten me...I will shew them (my) back, and not (my) face, in the day of their calamity" (Jeremiah 18:15,17). God warns, "You may not have trouble, adversity or sickness at this present moment. But you can rest assured it will come - in fact, it's right at the door! And when calamity does come, who will be there to comfort and help you, seeing that you no longer desire My company?"

In all the trials of sickness that my wife, Gwen, and my daughters have been through, I could run into the outstretched arms of Jesus and find comfort, strength and hope. He was always there to embrace me when I hurt the most, I had a place to go!

But those who forget the Lord have no rescuer, no comforter. The Lord says to them in mercy, "If you drift away from Me, you will cut off your source of supply!"

Scripture says this:

"Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsel...I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when... your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.

"Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord.... For the turning away of the simple shall slay them. and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them" (Proverbs 1:24-32).

2. God says you will fall into deep sin - ending up lewd and wicked. "'thus saith the Lord God; Because thou hast forgotten me, and cast me behind thy back, therefore bear thou also thy lewdness and thy whoredoms" (Ezekiel 23:35).

The sin of forgetting God opens the door to all other sins! If you have forgotten Him, you shouldn't be surprised when you fall into all kinds of lewdness: adultery, pornography, drinking - things you never would have believed yourself capable of! Consider: How many wives live with a man who has been running from God? Many husbands are slowly dying from drugs or alcohol. They once were loving, kind, caring men. But now their families know what it's like to find them lying in their own vomit. These men have become totally different - they've been cursed!

A man who attends our church goes out at night looking for his wife who is a street drunk. She is running from God, and has become insane in her lewdness, She wasn't always that way - but she has become that way!

How incredulous the angels must be when an evangelist who thunders against sin gets in his car, drives down a sleazy street and asks a prostitute to jump in! The couple slips into a sleazy motel to engage in lewdness, and the heavenly hosts behold wicked indulgence - the spirit of a whore! The Scriptures this man preached echo the curse: "Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back, you will become lewd - having the spirit of a whore!"

Beloved, God gives His servants these warnings to try to stop them from disaster - from ending up in hell! And that's where it will all end - because hell is where all sin ends! When you drift away from Christ, it's even easier to drift away from your husband or wife - and finally from your children. If you leave Christ, how much easier will it be one day to leave your loved ones? You will turn into another person - cursed with the spirit of a whore!

God Is Convicting Me Through This Message! I have good health, a healthy wife, four beautiful children and nine grandchildren. Our church is free and clear of all debt. Indeed, God has poured out His blessings on us in many ways!

But that is the time to watch out! When you say, "Oh, I love my family and my church, and I love to worship You, Lord" - beware, lest you take Him for granted and begin to neglect the things of God!

Now is the time to discipline your flesh - to take hold of yourself, press in and say, "Jesus, I am more grateful to You than ever. Don't let me drift - get hold of my heart. Let me stay on fire!"

Are you willing to look Jesus in the face and say, "Lord, I can sense a little drifting in my spirit - I can see the subtle signs." Ask God to give you the honesty to say, "Yes, Lord - I see how easy it is for me to drift away into coldness, lukewarmness and neglect."

Do you remember a time when you were really close to Jesus? Do you have a background or experience with Him that you've neglected? Church meetings in your early childhood? A praying parent or grandparent who interceded for you? Perhaps there was something precious in your heart at one time - but now you stand before God, drifting.

Pray this from your heart:

"Lord Jesus, forgive me for neglecting Your body, Your Word and communion with You. I have time for everyone and everything but You. Instead of turning to You, I turn to turmoil, because I just get lazy.

"Forgive me, Lord - I don't want to turn back. You've given me everything I need in the Bible to keep me in holiness, righteousness and peace with You. I want to stay on fire during Your blessings. Keep me hungry for You!"

Amen!

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