

• *The writer wants us to take what he is saying very seriously*

1. An appeal

• *To Christian people*

• *Neglect*

• *Slipping or drifting away*

• *The result of discouragement*

• *Resting content*

• *Wrongly thinking that achieving for God is automatic*

• *More concerned about receiving*

• *Failure to grasp the purpose of salvation*

• *The theme of much of this letter*

We come now to the first warning passage of Hebrews. The main theme of Hebrews so far has been the greatness of Jesus, the Son of God, and his great superiority over the angels ¹. But our writer wants us to take what he is saying very seriously indeed.

¹ 1:1-14

1. **He puts to us first an appeal.** ¹ *Therefore it is necessary for us to pay attention all the more to what has been heard, lest we slip away.* It is an appeal to Christian people. They are definitely 'holy brothers and sisters...who share in a heavenly calling'¹. The genuineness of their present faith is not questioned. And we must note that the writer does not say, 'how shall you escape if you reject such a great salvation?' He says: 'how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?' You **reject** something when you don't want it and you push it from you. You **neglect** something when you do have it but you don't use it. The writer is addressing Christian people in danger of not using what they have.

¹ 3:1

The key word here is 'neglect'. Don't neglect to work out the full implications of your having come to faith in Jesus Christ. It is the word used in Matthew 22:5. The king sends out an invitation to a marriage feast but 'they made light of it'. It is used in 1 Timothy 4:14 where Paul tells Timothy not to 'neglect' the gift that is in him. It is used in Hebrews 8:9 where God says he 'paid no attention' to the people who disobeyed his covenant.

We must not 'slip away' or 'drift away' from the full outworking of our faith in Jesus Christ. This word is unique in the New Testament, but it comes in the Greek translation of Proverbs 3:21 ('My son, do not let my advice **drift away** from you...') and Isaiah 44:4 ('the willows on the banks of streams with water **slipping by**'). So our writer is pressing upon us the danger of becoming inattentive to such a glorious Lord Jesus Christ as he has already described in Hebrews chapter 1.

How might we 'neglect' salvation? In the case of the 'Hebrews' it seems to have been mainly the result of deep discouragement, that made them lazy and unmotivated. But there are other ways in which we might neglect the salvation God has given us. It might be a matter of resting content with believing our sins are forgiven and making little or no effort to serve God. It may be thinking that because salvation is secure (and it is!) our achieving something for God is automatic (not so!). Some are more bothered about what they receive from God than what they do for him. It might be a matter of neglecting the gratitude he wants from us. Or maybe we have not grasped the purpose of salvation. 'He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works' ¹. God has got things for us to do for him. We are like the heroes of Hebrews chapter 11; there is something we must do 'by faith'. Otherwise it is impossible for us to please God.

¹ Titus 2:14

Our writer will spend much of the rest of this letter showing us that it is not reasonable for us to 'neglect salvation', for we have a sympathetic Saviour who is determined to bring us to glory and honour.

2. A warning

• Neglect leads to serious spiritual loss at the judgement seat of Christ

• Such a great salvation – it is dangerous to neglect it

• God has no other means with which to bless, purify and use us

2. He backs up his appeal with a warning. ²For if the word spoken by angels was valid and every transgression and act of disobedience received its just recompense, ³how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? He is contrasting the Mosaic law with the gospel. The law was given by angels (the phenomena in Exodus 19:16, 18–19; 20:18, 21; 24:15–16 were produced by angels; see Hebrews 1:7; Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19). Even sinning against the law was serious and was severely punished. But sinning against our experience of the gospel is worse. Penalties under the law were physical (beating, financial penalties, execution), but sinning against Christ's grace at work in us involves spiritual loss. We are likely to be severely chastised or even be 'saved through fire', suffering loss at the judgement seat of Christ.

The gospel is 'such a great salvation':

- (i) it does much more than the law, cleansing us from sin utterly;
- (ii) it comes not through angels but by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and his going to the cross on our behalf;
- (iii) God took so much trouble to attest it: *It was originally proclaimed by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard it, ⁴while God corroborated the testimony with signs and wonders and various powerful deeds and distributions of the Holy Spirit according to his will.* At first Jesus preached good news. Then God gave the apostles to make sure the message went out everywhere. At the same time God gave healings and wonders of many different kinds to attract attention to the message. If God has gone to so much trouble to get our attention it will be dangerous to neglect what he is highlighting so powerfully.

So our writer wants us to pay great attention to what God says through him. What he is about to say is utterly vital. It will be perilous to neglect it or treat it lightly. God has no other means with which to bless us and purify us and use our lives. How shall we escape terrible loss if we neglect what God has done in us and for us?



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