



Why disciples stagnate

Discussion Questions

It is easy!

1. Why is it easy to drift (or stagnate)
2. Who is most at risk of drifting away? Why?
3. What are some signs that a Christian may be drifting away?

It is serious!

4. Hebrews 12:14 says *“Make every effort...to be sanctified: without sanctification no one will see the Lord.”* What does this imply about stagnation?
5. *“Just as new shoes can cause blisters, new life in Christ can bring discomforts.”* Discuss this in the light of Hebrews 12:1, *“let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”*
6. How is the seriousness of drifting indicated? (You may like to refer to the sermon again – the serious outcome & the serious witnesses.)

It is real!

7. In the sermon, Peter mentioned some well-known people who had “drifted away”, and in 2 Tim 2:17 Paul mentions some in the New Testament church. Does this surprise you? Why/why not? What can we learn from these examples?
8. How can you be sure of your salvation if it is possible to drift away? What does it mean in practical terms for each of us?
9. How would you help a fellow Christian you suspect is drifting?

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Series: We exist to glorify God by making disciples
Title: Why disciples stagnate
Passage: Hebrews 2:1-4 and 5:11-6:3
Outline:

1. It is easy!
2. It is serious!
3. It is real!

It is normal to be a baby just after birth ... but it is not normal to still be a baby years later. The lack of progress means something is dreadfully wrong. Likewise when 'born-again' people stagnate, showing no signs of growth, there are serious problems. Instead of growing more mature in Christ they remain childish and vulnerable. Such people are not merely 'staying put' ... they are actually 'drifting away'. So the Bible warns:

*"We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we **do not drift away**. For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will"* (Hebrew 2:1-4). Notice three features of this stagnation (drifting away):-

1. It is easy!
2. It is serious!
3. It is real!

1. It is easy!

It takes no effort at all. It is very comfortable to 'go with the flow' and just cruise along in life. Other sins require effort, but this sin of complacency is effortless. No great crime is committed ... no blasphemy is uttered ... no truth is denied. Just do nothing at all! Simply ignore what the Bible says! You don't reject it or oppose it ... just don't take any notice of it! Don't let God's word bother you ... i.e. *"ignore such a great salvation."* That's why some people miss out on salvation! Though they know about salvation in Christ, and they speak well of it, they simply drift on by! They neglect it. They don't apply it to themselves. They do not give it the strict and careful attention it deserves.

Alarm bells! You can be close to Christ, but drift past him ... close to the Rock of Ages, but not anchored to him. You can be in the right stream (historic orthodoxy) ... and in the right company (a true church of true believers) ... and 100% agreeable to the right things (Bible) ... yet drifting away! It may be a very slow drift. Their boat makes no obvious shift today or tomorrow. They seem to be the same this month as they were last month. They seem to be standing firm, but that's only because it is 'slack water.' But as the tides of time change ... as they age and their fortunes wax and wane and all the issues in life compete for their attention, the drift becomes noticeable ... and they drift right into the pit of destruction.

Who is most at risk? This warning is for people like us *within* the Christian Church ... those who have Bibles and hear it preached and explained. *"We must pay more careful attention so that we do not drift away ... how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?"* You don't have to physically leave the church to be drifting away! The worst danger is actually for familiar faces in the church! How do people drift? By not taking Christianity seriously, by not paying strict attention to everything God says, by not pulling their weight in the body of Christ ... by not contributing their gifts and energies ... by not responsibly loving the brethren ... by not living joyfully, eager to be about the Father's business ... by failing to grow mature in word and deed ... by not applying Christian principles in their work, home, and sport.

How tragic ... some people will be eternally lost who were sympathetic to the truth! They perish with a Bible in their hand! If only it was in their heart! But it isn't. It isn't pulsing through their veins ... it isn't their guide and constant reference point. They hear many clear and practical sermons (and they agree). But they don't adjust their thinking, or attitude or lifestyle. They relax ... nothing changes ... and God says to everyone like them ... *"you must pay more careful attention to what you have heard, lest you drift away."* Getting into hell is easy! It requires no effort at all!

2. It is serious!

The seriousness of drifting is indicated in two ways: firstly **by the serious outcome reached**. Drifters cannot escape God's judgement ... *"how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?"* To emphasize his point, the writer employs what is called the '*a-fortiori*' technique ... moving from a strong case to an even stronger one. See it in verse 2 ...

"if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape?" The *"binding message spoken by angels"* refers to the Old Testament, where angels were key instruments (e.g. the many "Angel of the Lord" references).¹ Anyone who disobeyed an Old Testament revelation was punished accordingly. But (as the start of this letter tells us) Jesus is far superior to angels. The Christian church is far more privileged than OT Israel. God has now spoken through his Son. If you disobey the greater message and messenger what hope is there? None! *"How shall we escape?"*

The second indicator of the seriousness of drifting is **the witnesses ignored**. Anyone who drifts away from the gospel insults the integrity of three very significant witnesses: Christ, the Apostles, and the Holy Spirit.

- **Christ**

"This salvation was first announced by the Lord" (v 3). The writer has already told us in detail who this witness is. He is God in flesh, the maker of the universe, the heir of all things, the radiance of God's glory, and the exact representation of his nature. He is far superior to angels (they are commanded to worship him). He sits on the everlasting throne at God's right hand. Ignoring him is deadly! You don't have to oppose ... all you have to do is nothing ... just drift on by! You don't have to be against Christ - just be uncommitted! *"He that is not with me is against me"* (Matthew 12:30).

- **Apostles**

That's what the writer means by *"This salvation was confirmed to us by those who heard him"*. The original band of Christ's disciples (led by the Apostles) confirmed everything about him. They heard his profound wisdom and saw him calm storms and raise the dead. They saw him fulfil prophecy. They beheld him crucified, dead, buried, and resurrected on the 3rd day ... even Thomas (especially Thomas) ... confirmed it. So anyone who neglects any bit of New Testament teaching neglects these eyewitnesses, and that is deadly. That is stagnation ... drifting to destruction.

- **The Holy Spirit**

"God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." The Book of Acts records them -- the signs and wonders done by the Apostles, proving them to be the authentic interpreters of Jesus. With these miracles the Holy Spirit endorsed the message they preached. He wanted people to be 100% convinced and committed to Apostolic teaching (i.e. the New Testament). No one should treat it lightly. So, to drift away from Christian truth is very serious, because it trifles with these three God-given witnesses!

3. It is real!

We should not delude ourselves by thinking this matter of drifting away is merely theoretical. It has actually happened! For example, Paul said, *"Hymenaeus and Philetus have wandered away from the truth"* (2 Tim 2 17-18). They adopted strange ideas on the resurrection. The point is *"they wandered away"* from the truth. The implication is that they were not always 'away'. Once they were 'at home' with the truth! They didn't always have strange ideas about resurrection ... but they stagnated. They began to drift. Worse ... *"Their teaching will spread like gangrene."*

A more modern example of drifting from the truth was a man in highest levels of the Church of England, Bishop J.A.T. Robinson (1919-1983). He studiously read the Bible and took vows to preach it and live by it. He was very capable intellectually, yet he drifted so far over the years that he became a heretic. He wrote about how far he'd drifted from orthodox moorings in his book, ineptly entitled *"Honest to God"*². He became a Universalist and wrote: *"Hell is an ultimate impossibility because already there is no one outside Christ ... the world has been redeemed. Hell has been harrowed, and none can finally make it their home."*

¹ And see Acts 7:53, Galatians 3:19, & Deuteronomy 33:2.

² *"Honest To God"* by J. A. T. Robinson, (SCM Press, London, 1963)

What about us? We must all examine ourselves. Am I drifting? Am I complacent? Are you neglecting the word of God set regularly and plainly before you in this church? Is it making you a more mature and discerning Christian? Or are you drifting? It's no good saying "I don't dispute or disagree with any Biblical truth". The real question is ... are you anchored in these truths? Are you holding fast to them? Are they changing your thinking? Are you giving up former opinions exposed by God's word? Is your faith maturing? That's the warning before each one of us. Don't drift away! Let us serve God without compromise.