Don’t Be a Drifter

Michael d'Offay 11 October 2018

A man by the name of Howard Hendricks took it upon himself a number of years ago to investigate the circumstances leading up to the devastating moral failures of 246 men who were all in full-time ministry. What is both fascinating and incredibly sobering about all of these men was that every single one of them believed with absolute certainty that this kind of morally disqualifying sin ‘could never happen to me’! In this article, we will look at how Scripture warns us of the dangers of drifting and, at worst, falling away.

> If you stop swimming upstream, this world’s current will pull you downstream, away from Christ and His church.

‘Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it’ (Hebrews 2:1)

In context, the author is writing to Jewish Christians who have increasingly become disillusioned in their faith and were in danger of drifting away’, back to their old way of life under the law of Moses. The book of Hebrews was written to persuade these embattled believers that Jesus is better than, and the fulfilment of, the Old Testament law and promises. The author urges them to

‘pay much closer attention’ to the truth of Christ.

The phrase ‘drift away’ in the original text (gk. π□□□□□□□) carries the idea of slipping away from a fixed point or making forfeit of your faith.[1] If you stop swimming upstream, this world’s current will pull you downstream, away from Christ and His church. There is a spiritual principle that if we are not pressing into Christ, we will slide backwards.

Four Commonalities Leading to Moral Failure

As mentioned earlier, Howard Hendricks conducted a study with this group of 246 men in full-time ministry. As far as Hendricks could discern, these pastors were born-again followers of Jesus who had all, within 24 months of each other, been involved in an adulterous relationship.

After interviewing each man, Hendricks compiled four commonalities underpinning their moral failures:

1. None of them were involved in any kind of **real personal accountability**.
2. Each of them had all but **ceased having a daily quiet time** of personal prayer, Bible reading and worship.
3. More than 80% of them became sexually involved with the other woman after **spending significant time with her**, often in **counselling situations**.
4. Without exception, each of the 246 had been convinced that this sort of fall ‘**would never happen to me**!’

You might have the same conviction as these men and feel that you love God too much to fall. Good! But God is wiser than us and gives us these warnings for a reason.

Persisting in Faith

Apostasy is never instantaneous, but a slow drift initially, an inner eroding and an indifference towards the things of God until you harden your heart to the point that you can fall away from the Lord (see Hebrews 3:12). The Christian life is not like an airport travelator, where you move along effortlessly and just ‘let go and let God’. Rather, it is more like a treadmill, where if you give up walking out your faith, you slide off the back. This is why the Bible is full of encouragement for us to keep persisting in our faith (Hebrews 3:6, Hebrews 10:36, 2 Peter 1:5, Romans 11:22, Colossians 1:23).

> There is no neutral ground in the kingdom of God.

In practice, at its most basic level, persisting in faith involves daily abiding in Christ (what the 246 men slowly gave up) and maintaining real, accountable relationships in church life (Hebrews 3:12-13). Let's not be lulled into a false security and believe it could 'never happen to me'.

Now if we think that the Christian life is just an exhausting swim upstream, that would be a mistake. We have been given the power of the Spirit to joyfully follow the Lord in this world. But let's continue to keep our wits about us. If we are not moving forward in the Lord, we are moving backwards. There is no neutral ground in the kingdom of God. We are to keep pressing into Christ! After all, He is better than all that the world has to offer.

[1] Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words 2006