
The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

Compromising Faith (Part 2)

Hebrews 2:1-4

1 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, 3 how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4 God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

It has been said that the goal of Biblical preaching is to comfort the afflicted while afflicting the comfortable. Whether you agree with this sentiment or not, it is certainly the practice of the author of the book of Hebrews. Remember that the general atmosphere in which the audience of this book found themselves in was that of hostility and antagonism toward this new and to some cult-like religion called “Christianity.” Most of these first readers were Jewish. Some had genuinely converted to Christianity and were paying a price, being ostracized by family and friends and being persecuted by local governments. But remember as well that many to whom our author is writing had seemingly come to Christianity only because at first it seemed to hold so much promise and excitement. But, having only made professions of faith in following Christ, it appears that many of them did not truly possess faith in Christ and were looking back to their old ways of Judaism and the exaltation of angels, hoping in some way to make Christianity acceptable and to blend it with what others, outside the church, would not so readily condemn.

Such is often the state of the church today. Not wanting to offend and desiring of increasing its membership regardless of whether that membership truly knows the truth, churches are using the methods and techniques of the world to entice unbelievers to come. And rather than presenting them with the truth of their sin and need of a Savior, such churches tend to promote entertainment and “fellowship” to keep such people in the pews. There is an old saying about one large denomination here in the United States that I think is actually more true of the whole church. In comparing this denomination to a river, it has been said that they are a mile wide but only an inch deep. Truly today’s church seeks to be a mile wide (seeking to bring in anybody and everybody regardless of beliefs) but is less than an inch deep, meaning that many people are coming into the churches, but they have no depth in knowing who God really is and what God really desires of His people. John Piper said it

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

well when he said, *“What is missing [in the church], is the mind-shaping knowledge and the all-transforming enjoyment of the weight of the glory of God.”* Jonathan Edwards once made a statement that ought to be the center of our thoughts both personally and as a church, *“...the whole is of God, and in God and to God, and God is the beginning, middle and end in this affair.”* God desires depth in His people. So, although it may not seem so impressive, it would be better to be an inch wide and a mile deep – but let us pray to be a mile wide and a mile deep – shall we?

Now last week we looked at Hebrews 2:1-4 and began to explore the message of this first warning passage of the book of Hebrews. We noted that the warning here is against spiritual drifting – the idea being that if you begin to compromise your faith by not heeding the warning presented in our text, it is inevitable that you will drift from the truth. So then, we considered three things from Hebrews 2:1 in order to lay the foundation for verses 2-4. We first considered our REFLECTION upon the truth presented in Hebrews 1 concerning the person of Jesus Christ. Secondly, we looked at the proper RESPONSE to the truth of Hebrews 1, namely to listen and heed the message of who Jesus is. And finally we looked at the RESULT of having an improper reflection and response to who Jesus is, namely a compromised faith and a subtle drifting from the truth.

This morning I wish to examine verses 2-4 which really are a continuance of the thoughts presented in verse 1. For in verses 2-4 we are presented with the answer to the question, *“Why should we concern ourselves with the person and message of Christ from Hebrews 1?”* Why must we “pay much closer attention”? What is at stake? Obviously we have already seen that if we do not pay attention we will be prone to drift from the truth. However, verses 2-4 present us with the REASONS we ought to concern ourselves with the person and message of Christ. Let me state these reasons, I see two, and then let us examine these reasons more closely.

The reasons why we are to concern ourselves with the person and message of Christ has to do...

1. With the gravity of the word spoken through angels (2:2-3)
2. With the greatness of the word spoken by the Son (2:3-4)

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

I. The GRAVITY of the word spoken through angels (2:2-3)

Let us read in our text again Hebrews 2:2-3 as we begin to look at this first point of the gravity of the word spoken through angels.

2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, 3 how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

If we are to rightly understand this passage, let us begin first of all with the phrase, *“For if the word spoken...”* In the English, the word “if” is generally used to convey the idea of uncertainty. We might say, “if” I win the lottery, I will buy a new car. The “if” here speaks of the uncertainty of whether or not I will win the lottery. In the Greek, “if” can be used this way, but it is also used to convey the assertion of a fact. Here in verse 2, the word “if” is not being used in the conditional sense of “this may or may not be true” but rather in the sense of stating the fact. So, we might rightly translate the beginning of verse two this way, *“For since the word spoken by angels proved unalterable...”* This is clearly the intention of the author as we will come to see.

By way of showing you another example of this, you might turn to Matthew 4. In Matthew 4 we have the temptation of Jesus. Two times in this passage, the devil says to Jesus, *“If You are the Son of God...”* (vv. 3, 6). The devil is not saying here, “I am not certain if You are the Son of God...” Rather, the devil is saying, “Since You are the Son of God, command these stones, or throw Yourself down, because as the Son of God You have the ability to do such things.”

So, the author of Hebrews is stating an important fact for his readers, stating that the word spoken by angels is unalterable. This was a fact understood by his readers and attested to by the Scriptures.

Let me now address this issue of the “word spoken through angels.” Just what is this “word spoken through the angels”? To what does this refer? May I remind you that these first readers were generally greatly enamored by angels, at times to a fault. Yet the Scriptures do reveal a truth greatly held by many of these readers, even if it was overly emphasized – namely that the Mosaic Law was ordained, appointed or given out in part by the angels of God. In Galatians 3:19 we read,

† The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

We see a similar idea presented in the Old Testament as well. In Psalm 68:17 we read this,

The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; The Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness.

And in Deuteronomy 33:2 also seems to be a reference to angels being present with the giving of the Law. Here we read,

He said, "The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; at His right hand there was flashing lightning for them."

In Stephen's accounting of the history of Israel, he makes reference to the presence of angels with the giving of the Law in Acts 7:38;

This is the one [Moses] who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you.

And finally, in showing the Jews why they were standing in the face of judgment, Stephen concludes his message in Acts 7:53 with these words,

...you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it."

The angels of God played some role in the impartation of the Law to Moses and to the people of Israel. This idea of angels having such a part in giving the Law is not corrected by the author of Hebrews under inspiration of the Holy Spirit by is rather used by the Holy Spirit to bring about further teaching on the greatness of Jesus Christ.

What takes place next in our text is really remarkable. Our author employs a standard Hebrew literary device called a *qal wa homer*. Bet you didn't wake up this morning thinking you were going to be versed in Hebrew literary devices –

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

but if you will bear with me, I trust you will find this fascinating and meaningful. A *qal wa homer*, which literally means “light and heavy”, is an argument that says if a lesser or light concept or idea is true or binding, then how much more true is a greater or heavier idea to be counted true or binding.

Let me give you some examples of a *qal wa homer*. I could say to you, “if gold is valuable because it is rare, then how much more valuable is platinum?” Our Lord Jesus Christ employed the use of a *qal wa homer* often. Look with me at Matthew 12:10-12. Here we read,

10 And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” — so that they might accuse Him. 11 And He said to them, “What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

In other words, if a sheep is valuable enough to deliver out of a pit on the Sabbath, how much more valuable is a man that he might be healed, even on the Sabbath? In Matthew 23 we see Jesus using the *qal wa homer* in verses 16-22 and again in verse 23. Let me point it out for you in verse 23 where we read,

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

Again, the point is this, if tithes of mint, dill and cumin are important (light); then how much more important are the provisions of the law; justice, mercy and faithfulness (heavy). This then is the type of argument we find the author of Hebrews presenting to us in Hebrews 2:2-3. The *qal wa homer* is this – if the Law of Moses, the word spoken through God’s angels (light), was unalterable (meaning that it was sure, steadfast and unchangeable); then how much more binding would be the word spoken by God’s Son (heavy), who has already been shown to be superior to the angels. The word spoken by angels (the light or lesser) was unalterable. Therefore the word spoken by the Son (the heavier or greater) must be of more value and greater importance to follow.

But do not make the mistake of thinking that just because we are referring to the word spoken through angels as light that it means it is without importance.

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

The author makes it abundantly clear that the Law was unchangeable, precise and severe, giving a just penalty to every transgression and every disobedience. Let us note these two words, “transgression” and “disobedience” as they are used to describe various forms of sin.

First, the word “transgression” (in the Greek – *parabasis*) – meaning to come right up to the line and cross it, speaks of a willful act of defiance. Often times you might hear of a preacher speaking about “sins of commission” which are willful, active acts of deliberately doing what is wrong. Such willful acts are transgressions.

Second, the word “disobedience” (in the Greek *parakoe*) – meaning to mishear or to be inattentive, speaks of a more passive act of sin. These are what we might call a “sin of omission” which is simply not doing what is right.

At issue is the truth that every sinful act under the Law of Moses, whether actively willful or done out of inattentiveness, had its own strict and just penalty. For example, turn with me to Numbers 15. In Numbers 15 a segment of the Law had just been spoken to the people of Israel. Then beginning in verse 32 on through verse 36 we read,

32 Now while the sons of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering wood on the sabbath day. 33 Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation; 34 and they put him in custody because it had not been declared what should be done to him. 35 Then the LORD said to Moses, “The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.” 36 So all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

Does this not seem like an over-reaction by the Lord toward a man who simply picked up some sticks? The Lord commands that this man die! Is this too severe of a penalty? We must remember however that the Lord had just given to the people rules for observing the Sabbath, one of which was to do no labor but to be devoted to the worship and reflection upon the person of God. These words were still fresh in the minds of the people. At issue was not simply that the man picked up some wood for a fire, but that he willingly and flagrantly rebelled against and defied the express command of God even within days of hearing the command. The implication is not that this man was accidentally out gathering wood, but was publicly and brazenly defying the command of God before others and therefore this brazen act was severely punished.

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

In the book of Hebrews, we learn that if such brazen acts against God were so severely punished (light), how much more severe would be the punishment and penalty for, as verse 3 says, neglecting the message of the Son, the message of salvation (heavy). For he says, *“how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?”* If the “light” argument of strict and severe punishment for neglecting the word spoken by angels is true, how much more intense will be the punishment for making of little or no concern or importance, of disregarding or putting off the message of salvation as spoken by the Son, which is the heavy argument?

Let me illustrate the point this way. Let’s say that you just painted the walls of your house and you instruct your child not to touch the walls because they are wet. ^[slide 23] Then, with you standing right there, you see your child look you in the eyes, knowing full well what you have asked, reach out his dirty hands and begin to smear them on the wet paint. This is what the man of Numbers 15 did to God. I assume that you would be outraged by the act of defiance and that there would be a just penalty.

Now then, the author of Hebrews takes this whole argument one step further by saying, if failure to live up to the law, which was given by angels, caused God and His people to give such stern attention to the law-breaker, then how much more attention ought to be given to the Gospel, the message of Jesus Christ? I think the above illustration could be improved upon this way. Let say that rather than painting your walls, you and your child go to Shelby Lane Mall in Rogers because there, at the Thomas Kincaid Gallery, Mr. Kincaid himself is to be onsite actually painting one of his pieces. You and others watch in awe as Mr. Kincaid makes the final strokes on the canvas when all of a sudden you see your child run up to the painting, reach out with his hands and rub his fingers through the oils and smear the colors into an utter mess. The question is this, which is worse, the placing of the hands upon your newly painted walls at home, or the placing of the hands upon Kincaid painting. I believe the latter would be much worse. And this is the point made here – we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, to the facts of the person and purpose of the Son of God because if the result of neglecting the words spoken by angels was detrimental to the soul, how much more dangerous is it to neglect the words of salvation spoken by the Son of God?

As we finish out considering this point of the gravity of the word spoken by angels, let us focus our final attention upon this phrase, “so great a salvation.” First, let us define the word “salvation.” The word “salvation” simply speaks of deliverance. In the Bible and in relation to the soul of man, “salvation” speaks of

† The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

being delivered from that which separates man from His creator – being delivered from the power, penalty and ultimately the presence of sin. The message of salvation as proclaimed by Jesus Christ is the Gospel – the Gospel is salvation, or deliverance from the threefold character of sin.

1. People need to be delivered from the power of sin which enslaves all people (Romans 6:16-18)

16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

2. People need to be delivered from the penalty of sin (Romans 5:12; 6:23)

Romans 5:12

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned —

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

3. People need to be delivered from the presence of sin (Romans 6:22; 1 Corinthians 15:54-57)

Romans 6:22

But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.

1 Corinthians 15:54-57

54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. 55 O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?” 56 The sting of

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the message, the word spoken to us by the Son, that we can have deliverance – salvation - from that which has exerted its power, its penalty and its presence in our lives. If we fail to heed the word of the Son, we will most assuredly suffer the strictest of judgment and shall not escape. However, if we will but turn to Jesus, look to Jesus and believe in the word He spoke, that in Him is life; that in Him is a love for and desire for God. Are you neglecting His Word? Are you considering it of little importance? Is it impacting you on a daily basis? For only by paying much closer attention to what you have heard regarding Christ can you escape the strict judgment of God, which clearly states that all have sinned (Romans 3:23) and that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). I encourage all to heed the warning of this passage and examine your life – see if you have neglected the word of Christ in any way. Ask the Lord to reveal to you those sins of commission as well as the sins of omission so that you might repent, ask for forgiveness and begin again to walk fresh and wholly unto the Lord. Anything less is a compromising faith that will only result in the damnation of the soul. But in heed such a word is life, is hope, and is joy evermore.

Soli Deo Gloria

Copyright © 2005 Edward K. Godfrey. This message is the sole property of the copyright holder and may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this message must contain the above copyright notice. This message may not be copied in part (except for small quotations used with citation of source), edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of the copyright holder. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Edward K. Godfrey, Pastor, Hope Community Bible Church, 2300 South 13th Street Rogers, AR 72758.

*The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ
Hebrews 2:1-4 – Compromising Faith (Part 2)
July 3, 2005*