
The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

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

Compromising Faith (Part 1)

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.

In the April of 2004, our family took a vacation down in the Orlando, Florida area to visit some friends. On one of the days, we took a trip to Daytona Beach to spend the day in the sun and the surf. Now, being a Southern California native, I have spent much time at the beach. My children, however, had never been to the beach and have never dealt with the power of the waves and the pull of the tides. On the particular day that we went to the beach, there was a strong rip tide pulling everything to the north. Upon entering the water, I informed my children to keep an eye on the building behind where all of our stuff was on the beach so as not to get pulled so far away they might lose sight of where we were camped out.

Now for anybody who has spent anytime in the surf with strong rip-tides, you know how easy it is to get lost in the fun of jumping waves and body surfing that before long, you find yourself quite a distance away from where you pitched your towel. Such was the case for my children. Before they knew it, they found themselves being pulled far away from everything familiar and had to work to get back in the proper place.

In our text this morning we not only start the second chapter of Hebrews, but also a new thrust in the book. I will explain this more fully momentarily, but I would like you to make this mental note. Hebrews 1 is entirely factual. It is a treatise on the person and deity of the Son, Jesus Christ. There are no commands given to God's people in the first chapter. But starting with the second chapter we are presented with the first command and with the first of six warning passages that are scattered throughout this book. *Now the warning passages of the book of Hebrews are calls to the people of God to respond properly to some significant truth previously presented.* In other words, it is not enough to hear and be able to regurgitate truthful facts. The key is rather, do you understand the truth in such a way that it is making a real difference in your life. This is a major thrust in the whole of the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the New Testament.

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For example, turn with me if you would to Matthew 13. In Matthew 13 we have several parables of our Lord Jesus Christ, the first of which is the parable of the soils. Now we are not here to do a message on this parable, but remember that four types of soils are presented by Jesus by which the seed, that is the Word of God, may be spread. Each of these soils represents the condition of a person's heart. Jesus says there is the hard soil, the shallow soil, the thorny soil and the fertile soil. In Matthew 13:18 and following, Jesus explains that the first three soils, although they all **hear** the truth of the gospel, all fail to make a genuine and lasting difference in the hearers life. To be sure, there are some short, temporary changes, but ultimately the first three types of people all end with the same result, fruitless and lifeless. In Matthew 13:23 however, Jesus says that the people who heart's are of fertile soil not only **hear** the word, just like the others, but they also what – **understand** the word, with the result of being fruitful. In other words, the Word of God results in real and radical changes in person's life. The word for "understands" in verse 23 means to "comprehend something to the point of action."

While it might be perceived on the part of those whose hearts are but shallow or thorny soil that they are believers, that they are Christians, that is only a perception as without a continual and increasing fruitfulness in their lives of godliness and holiness, the inevitable result will be merely a person who professes to know Christ – knowing some truths and facts about Christianity, but one who nonetheless is not possessed and truly changed by Christ.

Remember also then that we made this note about the make up of the audience who first received this letter. Those to whom our author is writing is made up primarily of a congregation of Jewish people who have professed faith in Christ. However, a profession of faith in Christ is not the same as the possession of faith in Christ. The former is more talk than walk, more of that regurgitation of facts than a real regeneration of the heart; there is no real and abiding relationship with or desire to live for Christ. The later, the possession of faith in Christ, is a life that longs for and seeks out ever-increasing godliness and holiness in life. This is what the Apostle Paul prayed for the Thessalonian Church in 2 Thessalonians 1:11;

To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power.

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Likewise then, we must remember that we are not unlike the audience of the letter to the Hebrews. For the church today is also made up of professors of the faith as well as possessors. If you might follow this logic then, all possessors of faith are professors of faith, but not all professors of faith are possessors of faith (Matthew 7:21). So, when the author of the letter to the Hebrews speaks then, *“For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it...”* he is not suggesting that genuine believers might drift and fall away from the faith. Rather, he is appealing to this congregation to make sure that that facts of Hebrews 1 is having a real and radical effect upon their lives in the present. He is impassioned, desiring that they would come to truly know salvation in Jesus; that all in this congregation would be true possessors of faith and not merely professors. For those who ultimately drift away from the truth of who Christ is, also ultimately reveal that no matter how much they knew or how much they had formerly and eagerly participated with God and His people, that they in fact never truly understood the gospel and were never genuinely saved.

To put this another way, beloved – by the grace of God, do not entertain the notion that there is no spiritual danger in drifting away from God, His Word and His people; that there is no danger in toying with personal sin; no danger in sporadic attendance with God’s people; no danger in spotty Bible reading or prayer and devotional life. For while it is true that genuine believers may stumble and come back to the Lord, this idea that a person may remain in a state of spiritual apathy or complacency and remove himself from the truth without consequence is absolutely foreign to the teaching of the New Testament and is nothing short of spiritual Russian Rullet. While my children could rather easily correct their drifting in the surf by walking back, spiritual drifting is not often so easily corrected. If you are here this morning and come to the conclusion that you have drifted, as we will define in a moment, do take heart and praise God that He has presented this to you and will Himself pull you to safety if you will but repent and call upon Him for deliverance.

So then, this morning I wish to expound a bit on this first verse of Hebrews 2, the first of four verses that address the danger of spiritual drifting into a compromising faith. Again then, look at the opening statement of Hebrews 2,

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.

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From this verse I present to you three considerations. The first will be your **REFLECTION** upon the truth of Hebrews 1. The second will be your **RESPONSE** to the truth. The final consideration will be the **RESULTS** of an improper reflection and response to the truth.

I. Reflection upon the truth

“For this reason...”

The author of this letter calls his readers attention to what they had just learned. *“For this reason..”* might also be translated *“Therefore...”* The idea here is this – in light of what you have just learned about the person and work of the Son, let me present to you the only proper response. The “therefore” is a call to pause and reflect upon such wonderful and awesome truths. When we read the phrase, *“for this reason...”* we have to stop and ask the question, *“What is the reason for which we are to now reflect and respond?”* I submit to you that we must reflect upon the person of Jesus. Who is this man? I suspect that many of you can tell me many facts about the person of Jesus. He was the Son of a carpenter. He was born of the Virgin Mary. He performed many miracles. He died a horrific death on a Roman cross. He rose from the dead on the third day according to the Scriptures.

Now if you would pardon my apparent vulgarity for a moment, “What do these things matter?” Many a persons in hell will have known far more about Jesus and the Word of God than many Christians, but the truth remains that because such knowledge did not affect and infect their lives, such people will be testaments to the truth that spiritual drifting was a real danger to which they did not take heed. And where does such spiritual drifting and the temptation to compromise one’s faith begin? It begins, according to the author of Hebrews, by not properly and regularly reflecting on the person of Jesus Christ.

Who is Jesus? What have we learned from Hebrews 1? As you reflect upon that first chapter, what comes to your mind? Let me remind you of the person of Christ as present in the first chapter. Jesus is...

1. The Heir of all things (v. 2)
2. The Maker of the world (v. 2)
3. The Radiance and exact representation of God’s being and nature (v. 3)
4. The Upholder of all things (v. 3)
5. The Redeemer (v. 3)
6. The Ruler (v.3)
7. The Almighty God (vs. 4-8)

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What effect does this truth have on your life? Are you saying to yourself, “Yes, I know these things – I have heard them before.” Or, is there something within you that causes you to wonder at such things – to wonder why such a Being as the Son of God, He who is greater than the angels of heaven, has taken notice of me? Does the description of the person of Christ move and motivate you to want to worship Him more, to serve Him better, to express a more honorable and pure love towards Him? Do you stop to reflect upon who Jesus is and how such a knowledge of Him is to affect your life? You see, it is not enough to know these facts and truths, but to have such truths so affect your life that you desire to communicate them to others, inviting them, warning them and exhorting them to come to Jesus, just like the author of Hebrews is doing here.

In the Gospel of John we see the same thing. In the Gospel of Jesus, Jesus is present as the Son of God. This is to say that there is truth after truth and fact after fact presented about Jesus. But what is the goal or intention of such knowledge? What does John, or better yet, the Holy Spirit, wish to accomplish by offering such knowledge? Is it so that people might pride themselves on such knowledge? No – rather in John 20:30-31 we are told exactly why such truths about Christ are presented.

30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

Do not forget that the word “believe” here does not mean just knowing some facts about Jesus. Our English word “believe” literally means “by life.” By my life, my actions and my activities, I reveal that I know who Christ is, that He is both Savior, the One who died for my sins; and He is Lord, the One to whom I owe my life, my allegiance, my all.

So, when we read, ***For this reason...*** we must understand that we are being called to respond to the person of Jesus. Is He truly your Lord and your God? Do you spend more time simply talking about being a Christian or actually doing the things that are consistent with being Christian? Do you reflect upon who God is and who you are in light of that? King David did. In Psalm 8:3-4 we read,

3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; 4 What is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him?

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Let us not forget to take time to regularly and intentionally reflect upon the goodness and greatness of our God, particularly in the person of Jesus Christ as this is a protection against compromising faith and spiritual drifting.

II. Response to the truth

“...we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard...”

Our second point represents the first command in the book of Hebrews. In its most simplest of terms, we are being told to listen. This is to be our response to the person of Christ. Our action, our duty is to listen to the Word of God as presented to us in the person of Jesus Christ. In a nutshell, the summary of Hebrews 1 and Hebrews 2 is this, beginning in Hebrews 1:2 and ending with Hebrews 2:1 we read, *“in these last days [God] has spoken to us in His Son...for this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard.”*

The command to “pay attention” here is actually a nautical term. It speaks of a sailor bringing his ship to land in the safety of the harbor. As sailor brought their ships into harbor in these days, there were many hazards. Great rocks could smash their ships to pieces. The winds could drive them off course with the result of running out of supplies and food. As the sailors approached land, great attention was given to such hazards so as not to have the ship taken off course and destroyed.

Our response to the truth of the person of Jesus Christ is to then take special care and precaution that we are on the right course and that upon entering the safe harbor of faith in Christ, we then ensure that our anchor is in place, that it is secure.

How can you know of your security in Christ? Simply ask yourself the question, “am I paying much closer attention to what I have heard?” I love the way the author has phrased this. For those who have been paying attention, the command is what – to pay much closer attention. Continue to watch for the rocks of spiritual compromise. For even the best sailor cannot afford to let his guard down as the ship is coming into port. And for those who have been careless or even reckless, the call and command come to you – quit your playing and games and pay attention to the condition of your soul. For if you do not wake up, you may find yourself very quickly upon the rocks of spiritual disaster.

So, who do you listen to? God has spoken to us in or by His Son. Are you listening more closely to Him? How does your listening to Christ compare to your listening to other things. The truth is that we all make the necessary provisions in order to listen to what we want to listen to. If I want to listen to Christian music in my car, I make sure that I have a CD player and the appropriate CD’s to listen to.

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If I want to listen to the news or a baseball game, I make sure that I turn on the radio or TV at the right time. If I want to know something about a friend of mine in Texas, I can write and email in the morning and often times check back later in the day and have a response. The list could go on and the point is that we all listen to something and I am asking you this morning, in comparison to such things, how is your listening to Christ? This it to be your response to who He is. Are you devoted to listening to Him?

III. The Result of neglecting the truth

“so that we do not drift away from it...”

I end then on this point, the result of neglecting the truth. And the result present to us in our text is in a rather negative light. If you do not properly reflect and respond to the truth of the person of Christ, the result is dangerous and devastating. Remember that the command was to “pay attention” – to bring the ship safely into the harbor. Now our author continues the nautical motif by warning his readers that failure to reflect and respond will result in a spiritual drifting, a tendency to compromise faith. The word for “drift” in our text literally means “to glide by.” What I find interesting about this phrase, *“so that we do not drift away from it...”* is that the Greek tense speaks of something having happened to us passively. Generally speaking, no one in an evangelical church intentionally sets out to miss the mark. There are not too many in the professing church who wake up in the morning and say, “I think I will give myself over to spiritual drifting of wrecking my soul upon the rocks of compromise and unbelief.” Just as my children did not go into the surf with the intention of being swept a half-mile up the coast, professing believer do not intend to be swept away into unbelief.

It has been said that the besetting sin of our day is this inattention to spiritual drifting. Through carelessness and unconcern, many who attend good churches neglect Christ, the Anchor, and then begin to slowly, quietly and subtly drift away. It may take many years, but one day, such a person wakes up not caring any more about God’s Word, about Christ or about His Church. C.S. Lewis once remarked, *“As a matter of fact, if you examine a hundred people who had lost their faith in Christianity, I wonder how many of them would turn out to have been reasoned out of it by honest argument? Do not most people simply drift away?”* As our text reveals, there is not one of us here this morning who do not need to heed the call of this command. Each one is very capable of drifting away from the truth. And while I firmly believe in the security of the believer and the perseverance of the saints; that all that God has truly called will be saved and

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delivered from sin; the Scriptures also present to us that many in the church, who think they are genuinely saved, are nothing more than spiritual drifters who will come up short of the safe harbor of Christ.

By way of application then, let us consider just a few of the more pertinent factors that cause spiritual drifting. If any of these are found in you, be adequately alarmed, but do not fret – for if you recognize these things to be true of you, confession and repentance are the keys to getting back on course with God. I submit to you then three factors that contribute to spiritual drifting.

1. The factor of time

The issue here is that with the passing of time, it is easy to drift off course. During the days of the great sailing ships it was important that the navigators know their craft well. For if a ship set sail from England on its way to New York was just ½ degree off course, they could find themselves arriving in Miami.

Many apparently good Christians, even growing up in the church, have had lives end in spiritual disaster as they were seemingly so close to the truth, but being just a degree off course imperceptibly drift off course. Such individuals labor to keep up appearances, but time has carried them far away from true devotion.

The amount of time one has spent in the church is no guarantee against spiritual drifting. In fact, if one does not pay much closer attention to what he has heard, it can actually be a detriment. With the passing of time, have you grown closer to Christ or are you just maintaining appearances?

2. The factor of familiarity

The second factor is that of familiarity. I remember the first time my family and I descended into the depths of Marvel Cave in Branson, MO. Being borderline claustrophobic, it was a marvel I went into it. But I found it so overwhelming impressive the first few times we traversed through it. Now, although we have ample opportunity to go through the cave, we are not as inclined to do so. Why? Because after twenty or so tours, the cave has lost some of its wonder because of its familiarity.

Upon coming to Christ, an individual may be truly overwhelmed and exhilarated at the mysteries of Christ. But, as they come to learn more, rather than continuing in their wonder and amazement, they become more like bored tourists. There is nothing wrong with being familiar with Christ, but never allow your familiarity to grow into boredom or contempt. Rather, pray that the mercies of God may be unto you new ever morning.

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3. The factor of busyness

The final factor is that of busyness. This is a factor that can easily affect us all. John Foster Dulles was a great statesman and man of legendary busyness. He almost lived on a jet – so many were his globe trotting responsibilities. In fact, it was once suggested that the President should tell him, “Don’t just do something, stand there!” Perhaps there is some irony in the fact that one of the nation’s busiest airports, Washington D.C.’s Dulles airport, is named after him.

We live in the most busiest of times. We have more to do than ever before. And in the midst of such busy times, we can easily forget or forsake He who is to be our first love. The illustration is given of a small cut. No one is too worried about a small cut. Chances are that a small cut will not kill or even really hurt you. But have you heard of the phrase, “death by a thousand cuts”? We live in a time where each activity, each event, each happening is like a spiritual cut to our soul. If we do not take the time to avoid so many cuts, we may well die spiritually. Busyness is like that, it can cause the soul to drift slowly away from the truth of the person and work of Jesus. It can cause the heart to lose faith and lose the desire to be with God, in prayer and in the Word and with God’s people.

This is why the author of the book of Hebrews gives us this word, “*pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.*” I do not know where you are on the beach of life. Have you lost sight of the marker where your towel is? Are you being ever so subtly taken up the coast, further and further away from the truth, further and further away from the watchful and protective eye of the Savior?

Take heed my friends – embrace the Savior – praise Him as your Lord and your God. Never take your eyes off of Him. Stay true to His Word as it is the only sure guide to an abundant and meaningful life.

Soli Deo Gloria

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