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Christ is Superior to the Angels (Part 2)

“The Warning against Drifting from God’s Word”
Hebrews 2:1-4

Introduction:

Robert Robinson was **saved** under the powerful preaching of **George Whitefield**. He was just **23 years old** when he wrote the hymn **“Come, Thou Fount”** that in the **third verse** contains the statement, **“Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love.”** He would go on to become a **pastor** who was **greatly used** by God.

Unfortunately, because of the **neglect** of spiritual things, later in his life he **drifted** from the Lord, **wandered** and **lapsed** into sin. In an **attempt** to find **peace**, like **Jonah** on the run from God, he began to **travel**. But on one of his journeys, **Robinson** sat next to a **young woman** on a **stagecoach** they were both riding. She just **“happened”** to be **reading** a **book of hymns** and began **humming** his old hymn. After **finishing** she then **asked** him what he **thought** of the hymn. He simply tried to **avoid** her question, but the **Spirit of God** was sovereignly using this to **convict** him of his **sin** and **rebellion**. Finally, **overcome** with **emotion**, he said, **“Madam, I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the fellowship with God I had then.”**

The young woman then **repeated** a **statement** from the **first verse**, **“Streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise,”** and **assured** him saying, **“Robert, these ‘streams of mercy’ are**

still flowing.” God then used the **encouragement** of this young woman to **lead** him to **restored fellowship** with the Lord.

Because of the **reality** of **indwelling sin** in our lives as believers, we are all “**prone to wander**” and “to **leave** the God (we) love.” It is because of this that we need to **encourage** one another and **heed** such passages as we will be looking at this morning. Now the **long section** of **Hebrews 1:4-2:18** is on the subject of “**Christ’s superiority to angels**” and can be **divided** into **four sections**. Thus far, we have seen the **first section** in **1:4-14** which was Christ’s superiority to angels **affirmed** by the Old Testament. The **second section** we will look at this morning in **2:1-4** is: **The Warning against Drifting from God’s Word**. Turn in your Bible to **Hebrews 2**.

In **Hebrews 2:1-4** we see *three reasons* why the author exhorts and warns those who call themselves Christians to persevere in faithfulness to Christ, regardless of the difficult circumstances of life.

The *first reason* is:

I. To Avoid spiritual Drifting from Christ

A. Look at v. 1: **For this reason we must pay much closer attention** to what **we** have heard, **so that we** do not **drift away** from it.

1. As we come to **2:1-4**, the author now **pauses** in his **proclamation** about **Christ’s superiority** to make **application**. It is as if he could only go **so far** without stopping to say, “Now **what** are you going to **do** about this?” And **warning** his readers, “Here is **what happens** if you **don’t!**”

2. This is why **Hebrews 13:22** tells us that the **entire letter** is referred to as a “**word of exhortation.**”
3. Now here in **vv. 1-4** we see the **first of five warnings** against **apostasy**, which is **forsaking** and **denouncing** Christ, **interspersed** throughout the book (2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; 12:12-29). It is the **briefest** and **most restrained** of all of them as it **warns** against **careless failure** to hear Christ speak.
4. There is a **crescendo effect** to these **five warnings** as the author **intensifies** each one making it more **urgent** and **severe** to avert increasingly more **defiant responses** to God’s **final revelation** in His Son (1:2).
5. Here in **2:1** the one Greek word translated “**For this reason**” or “**Therefore**” in the **KJV** refers back to **everything** the author has just said about Christ’s **superiority** to the **prophets** and the **angels** in **1:1-14**. Because Christ is **superior** to **everything** and **everyone**, the author **exhorts** all professing believers, **including himself** with the word “**we**” used **5 times** in the **first three verses**, saying “...we must **pay much closer attention** to what **we** have heard.”
6. Although the author does not **explain** what he means by “**what we have heard,**” there is **no doubt** that he is referring to the **marvelous truths** about the **supreme greatness** of Jesus Christ and His **gospel** of salvation. These are **so important** that they must be **carefully remembered** and **responded to obediently**, so that they don’t just **slide** through our minds.

- B. Now the author says “we must pay much closer attention” to these **biblical truths** about Christ we have heard, “...**so that** we do not **drift away** from it.”
1. The Greek word translated “**drift away**” (pararheo) has **several meanings** referring to things that **slip away**. Here it is used as a **nautical** or **sailing term** that refers to a **ship** whose **anchor** has broken loose from the ocean floor and is **drifting along** and carried by the **wind** and **current**.
 2. This is a **vivid picture** of a person’s **failure** to keep a **firm grip** on the **truth of God**, which **anchors** their soul, but through **carelessness** and **lack of concern** has **drifted** away from Christ. It is **so easy** to just **drift along** with the **natural current** of **sin**.
 3. All we have to do to **spiritually drift** in our Christian lives is **nothing!** No one sets out to **deliberately** and **intentionally** drift, it comes from **inattention**, **carelessness** and **unconcern**.
 4. But a **slow drift** on the open **sea of life**, given **enough time**, will carry us a **long way** in the **wrong direction**. And there are **many ways** that we can **drift away** from Christ.
 5. It happens almost **imperceptibly** as the **storms** of affliction, persecution, worldly cares and worries come and our “**second-thing**” desires become **more important** to us than the “**first-thing**” of Christ Himself.
 6. It happens when our **hearts** become more **consumed** and **preoccupied** with the selfish, temporal things of life than the spiritual, eternal things, such as: spending time with the Lord in

reading His Word, prayer, worship with fellow believers, exercising our spiritual gifts, and other spiritual things.

7. This **spiritual drifting** is clearly seen in the church at **Ephesus** when the **glorified Christ** confronted them in **Revelation 2:4-5**, saying, “But I have this **against you**, that you have **left your first love**. Therefore **remember** from where you have fallen, and **repent** and **do the deeds** you did at **first**; or else I am coming to you and will **remove** your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.”
8. The **knowledge** of Christ’s **superiority** over everything and everyone is meant to **anchor** our souls from **drifting spiritually** and to hold us **firm** and **secure** to Christ and our Christian faith amidst whatever stormy seas of life we encounter.
9. The **second reason** why professing Christians are to persevere in faithfulness to Christ is:

II. To **Prevent God’s Judgment for Apostasy**

- A. Look at **vv. 2-3a**: For **if the word** spoken through angels **proved unalterable**, and every **transgression** and **disobedience** received a **just penalty**, how will we **escape** if we **neglect** so **great a salvation**? (Stop There)
 1. The author is **pressing** on his readers the **extreme seriousness** of **carelessness** and **unconcern**. And he employs an **Old Testament illustration** to **prove his point**.
 2. Here he uses an **argument style** that goes from the **lesser** to the **greater**. In other words, if a **lesser thing** is true, then **how much more** is the **greater thing**!

3. The **lesser thing** he is referring to is “the **word** spoken through **angels**,” which is a reference to the **Mosaic Law**. In some way not fully elaborated in Scripture, the **Law** was given by **angels** (Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:17; Acts 7:38, 53; Gal. 3:19).
 4. Now this angel mediated Law “**proved unalterable**,” in that, as the very Word of God it is **absolute truth** and **unchangeable**. And because of that the **history of Israel** showed, “...every **transgression** and **disobedience** received a **just penalty**.”
 5. The word “**transgression**” (parabasis) refers to willful stepping over the line as a willful act. It is an overt **sin of commission**—of **intentionally doing** something we know to be wrong.
 6. And the word “**disobedience**” (parakoe) refers to deliberately shutting one’s ears to what God’s commands in His Word. It is a **sin of omission**—of not doing something we should have done.
 7. Whereas the **first** is an **active sin**, the **second** is a **passive sin**, but **both** are **willful** and **serious**. The **author’s point** is that the **Mosaic Law**, though given through angels, was so **binding** that **every violation** “received a **just penalty**.”
 8. **Punishment** was **certain** and **just** for **every violation** of God’s Law. Although God is often accused of being “**unjust**” when His punishment **seems** to us to be **out of proportion** to the wrong committed (Lev. 10:1-7; Num. 16; Josh. 7), by His **very nature** God can never be **unjust**.
- B. We now come to the **greater thing** in the **first part** of v. 3: how will we **escape** if we **neglect** so **great** a **salvation**?
1. The **obvious answer** is “**We won’t!**” The word “**neglect**” is the **opposite** of “pay much closer attention to” in v. 1, for it

means to **not pay attention to**; to **disregard, slight** or **omit** through carelessness and unconcern.

2. Now **to whom** is this **first warning** directed? Remember that the author told his readers in **v. 1** to “**pay much closer attention** to what **we** have **heard**.”
3. Therefore, this is not directed to **unbelievers** outside the church because they cannot **neglect** what they have not heard. It is directed to **those** in the church who **call** themselves **Christians**.
4. The New Testament books containing **warning passages** always have **multiple applications** to the **professing believers** receiving them. The Holy Spirit knows **professing believers** can be a “**mixed audience**” of both **true believers** in Christ and **false believers**.
5. The Spirit of God **applies** the Word of God to **everyone’s heart** not like a **single shot rifle** but rather a **sawed-off shotgun** whereby He **hits** them **dead-on** exactly where they are in their relationship with Christ.
6. Now God **promises** salvation to all who **believe** in Jesus Christ. Therefore, **genuine believers** can never **lose** their **salvation**, for they are **enabled to persevere** by the **grace** of God.
7. But He also gives **warnings** against apostasy that **function** as a **means** for **true believers** to **persevere** in order to **secure** their future salvation not to **doubt** it. **God’s warnings** appeal to our **minds** to **conceive** or **imagine** the **consequences** of **eternal condemnation** for **apostasy** from Christ.
8. God **warns** us by calling on us to use our **imaginations** to **conceive** or **envision** the dreadful consequences of **failing** to

persevere in faithfulness to Christ. He does not **frighten us** by **threatening** that we **may fall away** or that it is **likely** that we will **fail** to persevere.

9. **Warnings** simply caution us against **conceivable consequences**, not **probable consequences** that are likely to happen. The **very fact** that God tells us what the **eternal consequences** would be for **apostasy** is part of the **means** of keeping us from it.
10. **God's warnings** do this in at least three ways:
 - **First**, by **causing** us to **examine** our **motives** and **behaviors** as to how they **match** with what God's Word **requires** of all who believe (1 Jn. 2:3-6).
 - **Second**, by **causing** us to **strive** for holiness of life.
 - **Third**, by **driving** us to **dependence** on the **grace** of God, which alone can **enable** us to **persevere**.
11. Obviously, because of indwelling sin **true believers**, like **Robert Robinson**, can **spiritually drift away, wander and leave** the God they love. But the **central issue** here is that they will not do this **indefinitely**.
12. God will not **sit idly by** and **permit** His children to **indefinitely rebel** against Him. He has made it very clear in His Word that those whom He **loves** He will **discipline** when necessary (Heb. 12:5-11).
13. So this **warning first** is directed to **true believers**. But the Holy Spirit also uses it to confront **false believers** in the church who **profess** Christ but don't **possess** Him.

14. They believe intellectually the **facts** about Jesus but have never committed themselves to Christ and **received** Him as their personal **Savior** and **Lord** by faith. Although this verse says “**neglect** (not **reject**) so great a salvation,” for them to **continue** to **neglect Christ** is to inevitably **reject Him** and to suffer the **consequences of eternal condemnation**.
15. In this case, **God’s warnings** are intended to **reveal** their **spurious** faith. Those who **fail** to **remain faithful** to Christ and **apostatize** **reveal** that they were **never** genuine believers (Lk. 8:1-15; 1 Jn. 2:18-19) and their “**so-called faith**” was not **true saving faith**.
16. Now the author’s **lesser** to the **greater argument** goes like this: If the **punishment** was always **certain** and **just** for **every violation** of the Mosaic Law which was given by **angels**, **how much more** severe will be the **punishment** of neglecting the gospel message of salvation that came through the **Son of God!**
17. **John MacArthur** said it like this, “If disobedience to the **older covenant** of Law brought swift judgment, **how much more severe** will be the judgment of disobedience to the **New Covenant** gospel of salvation, which was mediated by the Son who is **superior** to the angels (Matt. 10:14-15; 11:20-24)? The **messenger** and **message** of the **New Covenant** are **greater** than the **messengers** and **message** of the **older covenant**. The **greater** the **privilege**, the **greater** the **punishment** for disobedience and neglect (Heb. 10:29; Lk. 12:47). (Mac Study Bible pg. 1867)

18. The **third reason** why professing Christians are to persevere in faithfulness to Christ is because of:

III. The Greatness of Salvation in Christ

A. The gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ is God's **final word** to mankind. We get a glimpse of its **incomparable greatness** in **vv. 3b-4**: **After** it was at the **first spoken** through the Lord, it was **confirmed to us** by those who heard, 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. Notice **three truths** about this great salvation in Christ:

1. **First**, it was **proclaimed** by **Christ**—"After it was at the **first spoken** through the **Lord**..."

- Although God's message of salvation had been previously **announced** by the prophets (1:1), it was Jesus Christ, as recorded in the Gospels, who **first proclaimed** a "finished" salvation through His sacrificial death on the cross that paid in full the penalty of sin.
- **Mark 1:14-15** says, "Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Matt. 16:21; Mk. 10:45; Lk. 1:69, 71, 77; 2:11; 4:18-21; 19:9-10).

2. **Second**, it was **confirmed** by **eyewitnesses**—"... it was **confirmed to us** by those who **heard**..."

- The word "**confirmed**" (bebaioo) means to **guarantee**. And the phrase "**by those who heard**" refers to the **apostles** who were **eyewitnesses** of everything Jesus said and did.

- They were the ones who **confirmed** or **guaranteed** the truthfulness of the gospel of this great salvation in Christ to the **author** of Hebrews and his contemporaries.
 - **John MacArthur** accurately states that this “...reveals the **succession of evangelism**. That generation of Hebrews would not have **heard** if the previous generation of witnesses had not **passed** the message along (1 Tim. 2:5-7).” (Mac. Study Bible p. 1867)
 - Where would you be if someone had not told you about the **life-saving, life-transforming gospel** of Jesus Christ? Are you being **faithful** to pass it along to others?
3. **Third**, it was **authenticated** by **God**—“...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.”
 4. God gave His **apostles**, the **first preachers** of the gospel after Christ, **signs, wonders, miracles** and **special spiritual gifts** to **authenticate** that the **message** of God’s great salvation in Christ they were **proclaiming** was **truly from Him**. They had the same “**miracles and wonders and signs**” that marked the ministry of Jesus (Acts 2:22).
 5. **Acts 2:43** states, “Everyone kept feeling a **sense of awe**; and many **wonders** and **signs** were taking place through the **apostles**.” This is because **2 Corinthians 12:12** tells us, “The **signs** of a **true apostle** were performed among you with all perseverance, by **signs** and **wonders** and **miracles**.”

- “**Signs**” were supernatural occurrences that acted as **proof** that the messenger was from God. It pointed beyond itself to the reality of the mighty hand of God in operation.
 - “**Wonders**” were supernatural acts that indicated God’s presence and working produced awe and amazement among those who saw them.
 - And “**various miracles**” were a variety of displays of the power of God beyond human ability. Such things as: raising the dead and healing many afflictions and diseases.
6. We also see here God **testifying** with the apostles “...by **gifts** of the **Holy Spirit** according to His own will.” These were **special spiritual gifts** of the Holy Spirit given to the apostles according to the sovereign will of God.
 7. These were such gifts as the gift of healings, miracles, tongues and interpretation of tongues that belonged **exclusively** to the apostolic age. The great Bible scholar, **Benjamin Warfield**, accurately stated, “These **miraculous gifts** were part of the **credentials** of the **apostles** as the **authoritative agents** of God in founding the church. Their **function** thus **confirmed** them **distinctively** in the apostolic church, and they necessarily **passed away** with it.” (Mac. p. 50)
 8. When the **New Testament canon** of Scripture was completed and became self-authenticating, all of the **revelatory** and **confirmatory gifts** of the Spirit **ceased**. These gifts do not exist today.
 9. It is also because of the **incomparable greatness** of the **gospel of salvation** in **Christ** that those who **claim** to be

Christians must **persevere** in faithfulness to Christ, regardless of the difficult circumstances of life. For it alone is man's **only hope** of salvation.

10. **There is no other way!** Jesus said in **John 14:6**, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."
11. And Peter proclaimed in **Acts 4:12**, "And there is **salvation in no one else**; for there is **no other name** under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be **saved**."

Conclusion:

Now **practically** what does this mean to us? Since all of us as believers are "**Prone to wander**" and "to **leave** the God (we) love," we too "must **pay much closer attention** to what **we** have heard about Christ's **superiority** to everything and everyone. This **biblical knowledge** is meant to **anchor** our souls from **drifting spiritually** and to hold us **firm** and **secure** to Christ and our Christian faith amidst whatever stormy seas of life we encounter. The **question** here is this: Is Jesus **truly supreme** in our lives above everything and everyone?

For if He is not then we are **already** in the process of **spiritually drifting away** from Him and His Word in our Christian lives. And this **warning** is directed at us! May we all of us who **call** ourselves Christians live in constant **dependence** on **Christ** and **His grace** to **persevere in faithfulness** to Him, no matter what difficult circumstances come into our lives.