

“Pay Close Attention”
Hebrews 2:1-4
(Preached at Trinity, October 1, 2023)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Chapter 2** opens with the phrase, “because of this.” The writer is making some important application to what he wrote in **Chapter 1**. Namely, if Jesus Christ is infinitely superior to the prophets; if He is the great High Priest who provided purification of sins. If He is infinitely superior to the angels and is seated at the right hand of Majesty on high, how should we respond? What expectation is placed upon us?
We are never allowed to enter the Word of God in neutral and coast right through without engaging the mind. Rather, we are accountable for every Word.
The author understands the weightiness of this and wants his readers to share in this.
Hebrews 13:22 NAU - "But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly."
God’s Word to us is crystal clear:
Matthew 17:5 NAU - "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!"
“Pay close attention!” “Give earnest heed!”
2. The writer is alluding to what he had just written as well as the entirety of the Christian faith—“what we have heard.” If Jesus is of infinite superiority, then we must pay close attention to His message of salvation lest we begin to drift away from it.
These Hebrew Christians were in great danger of drifting back to Judaism.
Only a solid hold upon Jesus Christ would preserve them.
This is the first of five warnings in the Book of Hebrews that deal with the danger of falling away from faith in Christ.
No true believer can finally and completely fall away from their salvation.
1689 Confession 17:1 – *Of the Perseverance of the Saints* – “Thos whom God has accepted in the beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, and given the precious faith of His elect unto, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved . . .”
3. It is also true, however, that multitudes embrace the Christian religion without embracing Christ. They are attracted to the community of Christians and the blessings of the Church, but they are totally unprepared for the demands of discipleship. As soon as they are called upon to follow Christ in His sufferings they turn away.
4. Even genuine believers can grow weary in the rigors of the Christian life and begin to drift. It can be gradual, a slow drifting away. How can you tell if a professing Christian is actually an unbeliever in danger of drifting away to perdition? The true believer does not fall away but endures. But we never presume upon God’s grace. Some of these Hebrew Christians had already witnessed those who had drifted away.
So, the warning goes forth to all. The Book of Hebrews is written plainly.
Hebrews 2:1 NAU - "For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away *from it*."
Hebrews 2:3 NAU - "how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"

5. The word for “drift away” is only found here, but we get the idea. It’s like a ship that has broken free from its anchor, adrift and in danger of breaking up on the rocks.
If you are not firmly anchored upon Jesus Christ you are in danger of shipwreck.
1 Timothy 1:19 NAU - "keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith."
6. The Book of Hebrews sets before us two types of people.
Genuine believers who love the Lord Jesus Christ and sincerely desire to follow Him.
And those who make an outward profession without any inward change. They lack the substance of Christian conversion.
- I. There are those whose faith is only an outward façade.
- A. Christianity does not allow us to go through life with a divided allegiance to Christ—where we give Him part of our life while we continue in our former way of living.
1. Many people believe they are Christians when in fact they are not.
 2. In our day there is the dangerous presumption that all a person needs to be saved is pray a prayer asking Jesus into their heart.
 3. While this may be a person’s response to the Gospel it means nothing without the fruit of repentance.
A.A. Hodge – “Any man who thinks that he is a Christian, and that he has accepted Christ for justification, when he did not at the same time accept Christ for sanctification, is miserably deluded in that very experience.”¹
 4. They don’t repent because they don’t understand the wretchedness of sin.
- B. In **Verse 2** the author takes us to the Mosaic Law. He refers to it as “the word spoken by angels.”
1. The Old Testament does not give any indication that God used angels to convey the Law, but they were surely present. And we can’t dismiss this passage - “the word spoken by angels.”
Stephen also mentions God using angels. The Jews placed weight upon the role of angels in delivering the Law.
Acts 7:38 NAU - "This is the one 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."
Acts 7:52-53 NAU - "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; ⁵³ you who received the law as ordained by angels, and *yet* did not keep it."
 2. The point is clear and unmistakable.
 - A. Transgressing the Law of God receives a just penalty.
Hebrews 2:2 NAU - "For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty."

¹ <https://www.monergism.com/sanctification-and-good-works-0>

- B. What can be done about our guilt? What can remove God's just condemnation? The Law makes demands but provides no means of forgiveness for transgressions.
3. Jesus Christ is God's revelation of Divine mercy and reconciliation.
Hebrews 1:2-3 NAU - "In these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. ³ And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,"
4. This great salvation was not brought to earth by an angel but through Jesus Christ. This Gospel was spoken through Christ and confirmed through the Apostles.
- This is one of the arguments against a Pauline authorship of the Book of Hebrews. The author doesn't seem to be including himself with the Apostles. Rather, he includes himself with those who received the message from the Apostles.
- Hebrews 2:3 NAU** - "After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,"
5. The great danger is to hear the glorious truths of the Gospel but remain unconverted. They hear but they don't heed. It is a tragedy to neglect God's gracious plan of redemption through Jesus Christ.
- a. Some of these Hebrews had come so far and yet drifted away.
Hebrews 6:4-6 NAU - " For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame."
- b. How shall we escape if we disregard this Gospel of God's saving grace?
 "how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"
6. Multitudes in this world hear the Gospel but neglect it. They fail to comprehend the weightiness of their sin and their desperate need of Christ. Martin Lloyd-Jones – "Many people in this world know something about the gospel; they know in their heart of hearts it is right and true, and they propose someday to pay attention to it and deal with it and listen seriously to what it has to say. They know something about heaven and hell and God and sin; they are aware of certain propositions, certain statements of the truth, but they neglect it all. Men and women are absorbed so much in other things that the gospel does not receive their time or attention; they neglect the truth."²

² Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *A Merciful and Faithful High Priest: Studies in the Book of Hebrews* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 12.

- C. To neglect the salvation of Christ is to leave ourselves under the sanctions of the Law. It is to leave us without hope, without a Redeemer.
1. The Law makes demands but provides no means of forgiveness for transgressors. Forgiveness can only come through Jesus Christ.
 2. To deny Christ is to make mockery of God's plan of salvation.
Hebrews 10:28-29 NAU - "Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on *the testimony* of two or three witnesses.²⁹ How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?"
 3. Those abandoning the faith were never saved.
- II. But there were also genuine believers in danger of drift
- A. This Book is written to Christians.
1. As I stated at the beginning, these brothers and sisters were suffering the trials of discipleship. They had suffered insults. Some had lost their property.
 2. The context implies the worst persecution was in the past but new trials were looming. For some, they were growing weary and the intensity of their love for Christ was growing cold. They are being encouraged, remember your former courage and steadfastness. Do not throw it all away now.
Hebrews 10:32-35 NAU - "But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,³³ partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.³⁴ For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.³⁵ Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward."
 3. These Hebrew Christian brothers and sisters were guilty of the sin of neglect. They were neglecting their salvation. What about you?
"how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"
 4. It demands careful attention.
Richard Phillips writes regarding the great danger:
"Do you realize that if you do not pay attention to your spiritual condition it will deteriorate on its own? Do you realize, given the corrupt nature of this world and of your heart, that you naturally become dull and then deadened spiritually, steadily believing the lies of this evil age? Without giving heed to the spiritual resources God provides, your heart will revert to greed, pride, avarice, sensuality, and malice—all those characteristics that define our natural state in sin and lead to destruction."³

³ Richard D. Phillips, *Hebrews*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 48.

5. The solution: Turn your heart to Christ!
Hebrews 2:1 NAU - "we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away *from it*."
- B. This problem has plagued Christians from the beginning, and it continues to plague Christians today.
1. We can become apathetic. We can grow lazy in the rigors of the Christian life. Compromise can become a way of life.
 2. We are always in danger.
We are always being drawn by this world or by the lusts of our own flesh.
 3. Instead of giving diligence to our spiritual health and growth in holiness we begin to neglect the means of grace.
The means of grace including prayer, the ministry of the Word, the sacraments, things that increase our spiritual appetite.
The word for "neglect" refers to carelessness. Christian carelessness is dangerous. We should always be willing to ask the question, is Christ central in my life?

Conclusion:

1. The Christian must always feel the tension. No true Christian can ever lose their salvation.
John 10:27-28 NAU - "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand."
2. But apostasy is always a danger in the church. It always stands as a warning.
1 Corinthians 10:12 NAU - "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall."
3. None of the disciples suspected that Judas was not one of them. Did Judas even suspect it? Demas turned away from Paul and drifted back to the world. Could he perceive the drift?
2 Timothy 4:10 NAU - "Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me"
4. Too often Christians view their salvation in the past tense. I trusted Jesus Christ. Many can even give you the date.
The truth is, salvation contains past, present, and future realities. We did receive Christ and we were justified, but we are presently following Him, and we will press on until the end, and we look forward to eternity with Christ.
5. The Christian must continue to pay close attention to the message of his salvation, the glorious Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Genuine faith is a lively faith. It is never a passive faith. It is a faith that is continuing to grow in God's grace of holiness. J.C. Ryle wrote in his book on holiness – "The faith which has not a sanctifying influence on the character is no better than the faith of devils. It is not the faith of God's elect. In short, where there is no sanctification of life, there is no real faith in Christ. There are no spiritual gains without pains. I cannot expect a believer to attain much holiness who *is* not diligent about his Bible-reading, his prayers, and the use of his Sundays. Our God is a God who works by means, and He will never bless that man who pretends to be so high and spiritual that he can get on without them."⁴

⁴ J. C. Ryle, *Holiness* (Moscow, ID: Charles Nolen Publishers, 2001), pages 21, 25.