



GRACE

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli ♦ Deo ♦ Gloria

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Sermon Notes

Strive to Enter Our Rest

Hebrews 4:11-16

April 5, 2009

¹¹Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

¹²For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

¹⁴Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

- I. **We Must Strive to Enter Into Our Rest**
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- ❖ Known as the “Morning Star of the Reformation,” **John Wycliffe** was an English Theologian who believed firmly that the Bible should be translated into the language of the people so that each Christian could read it for himself. So, in 1382, he completed what is now known as the Wycliffe Bible – an English Translation of the Bible translated directly from Jerome’s Latin Vulgate. Wycliffe would die two years later. Yet, despite his untimely death, Wycliffe’s influence only grew. In fact, thirty-one years after his death, the Roman Catholic Church ordered all his books burned, his bones dug up and burned, and his ashes scattered on the River Thames.
- ❖ Yet, ten years prior to the publication of Wycliffe’s translation, **Jan Huss** was born in modern-day Czech Republic. Huss would be greatly influenced by Wycliffe’s works, especially his commitment to the authority of Scripture. Huss’s commitment to the Word of God lead him to publicly oppose the rule and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. And, on July 6, 1415, Jan Huss was burnt at the stake, declared a heretic by the Roman Catholic Church. At his sentencing, the Bishop of Lodi condemned not only Huss, but Wycliffe as well, reading the “heretical” theses of each. According to tradition, Huss’s dying words were, “*in a hundred years, God will raise up a man whose calls for reform cannot be suppressed.*”
- ❖ Whether or not Huss actually said these words, just over one hundred years after his execution, on October 31, 1517, an Augustinian German monk, named **Martin Luther**, nailed 95 Theses to the door of Wittenberg Chapel Church. And, whereas, this is no doubt Luther’s most famous act, his most important would not occur for another five years. Following his condemnation as a heretic by Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms, on May 25, 1521, Frederick III, Elector of Saxony, a quiet supporter of Luther, had him “kidnapped” in order to save his life. Frederick had Luther exiled to the massive Wartburg Castle in Eisenach, Germany. It would be here, from May 1521 to March 1522, that Luther would translate the New Testament into German for the first time, thus, getting the Scriptures into the hands of the people. In fact, Luther would later say,

“Let the man who would hear God speak read Holy Scripture.”

- ❖ And this is likely the most significant principle of the Protestant Reformation: **Whenever God chooses to powerfully move among His people, it always coincides with a return and recommitment to the Scriptures.**
- ❖ In fact, the birth of the Reformation was by no means the first time God had moved through the rediscovery of His Word. In the Old Testament, in the Book of 2 Kings, the young boy king, Josiah, ordered the high priest Hilkiah to oversee a renovation of the Temple. Yet, as laborers went into the Temple to make improvements, they made a major discovery.

This is recorded in **2 Kings 22:8**: “And Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan [Josiah’s secretary], ‘I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD.’ And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.”

It continues, in **Verse 10**: “Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, ‘Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.’ And Shaphan read it before the king. When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes.”

- ❖ As recorded in **2 Kings 23**, the rediscovery and reading of the Scriptures sparked one of the great reformations recorded in all of the Scriptures.

- ❖ **And, consequently, the writer of the Book of Hebrews is committed to imparting to his readers the supreme importance of committing themselves to the Word of God that they not fall away, but rather, enter into the very Rest of God.**

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I. We Must Strive to Enter Into Our Rest

- The author of the Book of Hebrews writes in **Verse 11**, “Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.”
 - The Verse, at first glance, may appear to be a contradiction to what the author has previously stated in **Verse 10**, “for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.”
 - In other words, it may appear that Verse 10 is saying that we *have already* entered into God’s rest; whereas, Verse 11 tells us to do the opposite of rest and *strive* or *make every effort*.
 - Yet, no such contradiction exists. **This Verse is in NO WAY stating that we are to work of our salvation...for salvation is WHOLLY a work of God’s grace.**

This Verse is speaking of our persevering in a life of faith and obedience, in the power of the Holy Spirit, knowing that it is God who preserves us.
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- The word for *strive* [*spoudazo*] implies a certain degree of *haste* or *urgency*. In other words, it is as though the author of Hebrews is urging the people of God, “Do not waste any time, but act urgently, hastily with respect to **believing** and **obeying** the words and commands of God.”
 - This is perfectly consistent with the author’s emphasis on **Today** [3:13 and 4:7].
 - That is, “Believe and obey TODAY...do not waste another day.”

- **Yet, we must not forget that the context of Chapters 3 and 4 is the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites after they had been delivered from Egypt.**
- Thus, we must *strive* to enter into the Rest that God has promised, contrary to the Israelites in the wilderness who rejected the Word of God and chose not to believe and press forward from Kadesh-Barnea into the Promised Land. Rather, they chose to *not believe* the promises of God and *disobey* Him, to the point of expressing their desire to actually return *back* to Egypt.
- As Richard Phillips states:

“We are to strive with the resources of his rest. In contrast to the unfaithful Israelites, who failed to trust the provision of God’s grace, we follow and strive because of our faith receives the benefits of God’s saving work in Jesus Christ. `Appreciating the reality of our present challenge – here is the difference between a realized and an *overrealized* eschatology, the latter of which forgets our present pilgrim status – we eagerly draw forth on every resources of grace that God provides.”
- Once again, this is the already-not-yet aspect of our salvation. We experience a glimpse of the Promises of God in our salvation right now; however, it will not be until the *Eschaton* [Last Day...Second Coming] that we will fully know the fulfillment of our Promised Rest.
- The last phrase in this Verse states, “Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, *so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.*”
 - In the original Greek, this phrase literally means, “so that **no one may fall into the same example.**”
 - In other words, in our lives, we should listen to the Word of God, believe it and obey it so that we might not fall into the same pattern and example of disobedience as the Israelites.

II. God Provides Us With His Written Word

- Then, the author states, in **Verse 12**, “For the word of God is...”
 - The author of Hebrews is clearly drawing a connection between Verse 11 and Verse 12.
 - That is, the way that **we strive to enter our rest is through adherence to the Word of God.**
 - Furthermore, within the context of the Israelites’ wilderness wanderings, they failed to listen to the Word of God (Hebrews 4:2).

- Donald Guthrie writes, “The warning [against falling in the example of the Israelites] was based in fact on the nature of the divine revelation. It was of such a character that its claims could not be dismissed as of no consequence.”
- **We must consider as well, Jesus Christ’s own wilderness experience. He, being the Living Word, relied on the Written Word and the Person of the Holy Spirit to remain faithfully obedient to the will of the Father. What does this say about us?**
- The author then lists the characteristics of the Word of God which demonstrates all the more why it should be obeyed. It is: (a) living; (b) active; (c) sharper than any two-edged sword; (d) piercing; (e) discerning; and (f) exposing.
- **One of the primary reasons why this is significant is that all of these are characteristics of the very nature of God. Thus, to disobey the Word of God is to disobey God Himself.**

<p>a. The Written Word is Living</p>

- The first characteristic of the Word of God is that it is **living**.
 - This is one of the chief characteristics that makes God God. God is life. In fact, God is the source of all life, for life is inherent to the being of God.
 - In other words, as the Scriptures state, “**in Him is life**” (John 1:4 and John 5:26).
 - Yet, to say that the Word of God is *living* does not mean that it is changing.
 - Rather, the Word of God is living and is **life-giving**, for it is the instrument through which God speaks and gives life to His people.
 - This truth echoes **1 Peter 1:23**: “since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;”
 - One of the most beautiful examples of this truth in all of Scripture is when Jesus Christ, the Living Word, declares to the decaying corpse of Lazarus, “Lazarus, come out!” (John 11:43), and he did!
 - So it is with the Word of God.
 - Also, the fact that the Word of God is **living** demonstrates that it is not some dead dogma, but is always relevant and fresh. In fact, there is nothing more relevant than the Word of God (contrary to what so many Pastors seem to think).
 - As the great Puritan Thomas Watson stated, “By reading other books the heart may be warmed, but by reading this book it is transformed.”

b. Active

- ❑ The next characteristic of the Word of God which should cause us to listen is that it is **Active**.
- ❑ For centuries, theologians have referred to God as being *pure ACT*. In other words, God is never passive; He is always actively and providentially moving all things towards His purposes.

Isaiah 55:11 states, “my word...that goes forth from my mouth: it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”

- ❑ Consider the very name of God, YHWH, which itself is derived from a verb, meaning, *to be*.
- ❑ Thus, being coupled with *living*, the word of God is *living and active*, pursuing and giving life to the people of God.
- ❑ Donald Guthrie writes, “A thing may be alive but dormant, but the nature of true life is that it springs into activity and challenges on every front those who fall short of its standards. The Word of God, in its intellectual and moral demands, pursues men and cries out for personal decision to be made in response to its exhortations.”

c. Sharp

- ❑ Next, the Word of God is “sharper than any two-edged sword.”
 - In other places in Scripture, the Word of God is referred to as a sword:

Ephesians 6:17 states, “...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Revelation 1:16 says, “from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword...”

- The idea here is that, as a double-edge sword, the Word of God *both judges and saves*.
- In fact, for the believer, it does **BOTH**; for, it judges us, revealing our condemnation apart from Christ; and it also saves, for it points us to our Savior in our Lord Jesus Christ.
- F.F. Bruce suggests that the author may be thinking [with respect to the Word of God as a double-edged sword] of several Old Testament passages, “such as the dividing of the carcasses in Genesis 15:10 or the circumcising of the Israelites with flint knives in Joshua 5:2.”
- In fact, Justin Martyr, writing in the second century, compared Jesus and Joshua, writing, “Jesus Christ circumcises all who will with knives of stone.”

- The early Syriac Church Father Aphrahat wrote in his work *On Circumcision*, states, “Jesus our Savior circumcised a second time, with the circumcision of the heart, the people who had been baptized by baptism, and they were circumcised *with the scimitar which is sharper than a sword with two edges.*”

d. Piercing

- Next, as a sword, the Word of God is *piercing*, for it pierces “to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow...”
 - The idea here is that the Word of God penetrates to the deepest depths of who we are.
 - Some view this verse as an explanation of the constitution of man [as being either tripartite or bipartite]; however, this misses the point of the verse.
 - Philip Hughes states, “Our author is not concerned to provide here a psychological or anatomical analysis of the human constitution, but rather to describe in graphic terms the penetration of God’s word to the innermost depth of man’s personality.”
 - A.B. Davidson writes, “the idea of dividing the soul and the spirit suggests the division of a body into its members, hence joints and marrow are attributed to them, expressing the subtle articulations of the spiritual being and the innermost nature and substance of it.”
 - In other words, **when God uses His Word to sovereignly pursue His people, no armor is too thick that He will not penetrate.**
 - If Jesus Christ is the Great Physician, then the written Word of God is His scalpel.

e. Discerning

- Next, the word of God is “...discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”
 - Nothing is more convicting than the Word of God.
 - We can often times fool ourselves into thinking that our motives and intentions for doing something are pure; however, when we bring them into submission to the Living Word of God, we quickly see them for what they are.
 - There is, indeed, a thoroughness to the actions of the Word of God that can be found in no other source.

f. Exposing

- Finally, the Word of God is *exposing*.

- The Israelites often acted as though God could not see them.
- Yet, the Word of God exposes all things, for God sees all things.
- Every creature is, literally, *naked* before God... fully exposed.
- The word translated *exposed* literally means “to bend back the neck” (as a wrestler would do to an opponent).
- In other words, it is as though the Word of God “bends back the neck”, thus exposing the throat, demonstrating our complete vulnerability in the face of God.
- Consider the power, then, of the Word in evangelism. For the Word and the Word alone exposes the sin of the sinner, leading him to repentance.
 - Richard Phillips comments, “Our evangelism now relies on manipulative psychological ploys, our spiritual growth depends on techniques and programs and store-bought gimmicks, our worship reflects the glitter of Hollywood entertainment. Far different is the message of the writer of Hebrews, who says that nothing is able to escape the revealing, energetic Word of God. Therefore, it alone is sufficient for our every need.”
- God knows everything. Our deepest secrets, our private sins...everything. Yet, He still pursues us and conforms us into the image of Christ through the Word of God.
- F.F. Bruce writes, “Stripped of all disguise and protection, we are utterly at the mercy of God, the Judge of all. Therefore, ‘let us make every effort...!’”

III. Christ Sympathizes With Us As the Living Word

- The author of Hebrews then writes, in **Verse 14**, “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.”
 - The question one must ask, however, is, “What is the connection [in this context], between the Word of God and Jesus Christ?”
 - However, the answer to this question is simple: **it is the Written Word points us and leads us to the Living Word, Jesus Christ the Son of God.**
 - Yet, it is also true that we can say *all day long* that the written Word points us to the Living Word, but what does this really mean?
 - The author of Hebrews *now* explains.

- First of all, Jesus Christ, is our **great high priest** – thus demonstrating His superiority to Aaron.
- Secondly, he has “passed through the heavens.”
 - Many have tried to draw a correlation with the plural form of heavens and successive “levels of heaven” – whether they be three or seven.
 - Yet this seems to miss the central meaning of the text.
 - To begin with, the Hebrew word used for “heaven” in the Old Testament is always plural.
 - Donald Guthrie correctly writes, “It is most likely that the idea [here] is general and is intended to contrast with the limited entrance of the Aaronic high priest within the veil. Our high priest penetrates to the very presence of God. The words suggest that no hindrance obstructs his passage.”
 - The Apostle Paul writes, in Ephesians 4:10 that Jesus Christ “ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.”
- Thirdly, it is because Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is our great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, that we should “hold fast our confession.”
 - The verb here, translated “hold fast,” literally means “to cling.”
 - In other words, this verse further explains *why* we should “strive to enter our rest”: because we have a great high priest who has gone before us.
 - The concept of “confession” simply is the body of beliefs...the gospel. In other words, since Jesus Christ is our great high priest, we must cling to the gospel.
- Then, in Verse 15, the writer states, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”
 - This Verse reiterates as theme that the author has already addressed: Jesus Christ is able to relate to us on a very intimate and personal level because He has been through exactly what we have; yet, He never sinned.
 - It is true that Jesus Christ is the transcendent King of Kings; however, He is also a personal Savior who knows perfectly what it means to be human.
 - Our high priest is no stranger to temptation; yet He was without sin. Some might say that this would make Him less able to help us (for He cannot *fully* relate to us). However, the fact that Jesus faced temptation, but defeated it, demonstrates that He alone is able to help us.

- B.F. Westcott explains, “sympathy with the sinner in his trial does not depend on the experience of sin but on the experience of the strength of the temptation to sin which only the sinless can know in its full intensity. He who falls yields before the last strain.”
- Finally, the author states, in **Verse 16**, “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”
 - This is the conclusion of the author: **Since Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our great high priest, has passed through the heavens; and since he has been tempted in every way, yet was without sin, let us draw near to the throne of grace.**
 - This is one of the greatest blessings of Christ work on our behalf: we can now draw near to God.
 - Recall, the scene in the Garden of Eden *prior* to the Fall. **Genesis 2:25** records that Adam and Eve were “naked and were not ashamed.”
 - As one commentator writes, “With no sin to condemn them, they delighted in the gaze of their loving Creator.”
 - However, after the fall, they felt shame and feared the presence of Almighty God. In fact, **Genesis 3:8** states, “And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”
 - Because of sin, the presence of God is terrifying, and unapproachable. The very last thing that we want is the “**gaze of God upon us**” for it is so exposing, terrifying, and something we truly fear.
 - Yet, because of the work of Jesus Christ, we are encouraged to “draw near to the throne of grace.”

Phillip Hughes states, “Sinners are no longer commanded to keep their distance in fear and trembling, but on the contrary are now invited to *draw near*, and do so *with confidence*.”

- Consider again Adam and Eve in the Garden after the Fall. In an act that foreshadowed the work of Christ on behalf of sinners, we read in **Genesis 3:21**: “The LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.”
 - This is the first sacrifice recorded in Scripture. Adam and Even were no longer righteous, and they needed to be clothed, so **God provided a sacrifice on their behalf.**
 - In the same manner, Christ, our great high priest is the One who has been sacrificed on our behalf. It is His righteousness that we are now clothed with.

- Consequently, we can, with great confidence *in what Christ has done*, boldly approach the throne of grace.
- The **throne of grace** is no doubt the equivalent of the Old Testament **mercy seat**.
- Recall that the high priest could enter into the Holy of Holies on once a year, on the Day of Atonement, to make propitiation for our sins through sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood on the mercy seat.
- However, Christ, the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice has gone before us and destroyed all barriers between us and God. The veil has been torn and sin has been dealt with. **Consequently, we are encouraged to approach the mercy seat where we will “find grace to help in time of need.”**
 - **In other words, no longer is the inner-sanctum, the Holy of Holies, and the mercy seat, something to dread. Rather, it is a place where God pours out His limitless mercy and grace to His people.**

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- Therefore, the reader now understands the statement, “Let us strive to enter that rest...” for we know that God has provided (a) the Word of God to point us to Jesus Christ, as well as (b) a **personal** and merciful Savior who can fully relate to us and help us in our time of need.
- Again, God’s word serves to penetrate our souls and expose our sin, thus revealing our desperate need of a Savior. Further, it opens our eyes to behold Jesus and the truth of His high priestly work.
- Therefore, we can now, with great confidence in Christ, boldly approach the throne of Grace, that is the *mercy seat*, **where our exalted Lord is seated**, and find not only mercy, but help in our time of need.
- And that help is boundless and comes from One who truly understands everything we go through and is also **able** to help us “**strive to enter that rest**” through the One who enabled Him to conquer the power of sin: that is the promised Holy Spirit.
- Therefore, “Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience [as the Israelites in the wilderness]...Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.”

Christianity is not merely an academic or intellectual *religion* [although it certainly engages and stimulates the intellect]; it is also intensely personal, even emotional, for the Word of God, being living and active, will lead all of God’s people into a living and active relationship with the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ.