

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

Message #8

Hebrews 4:12-16

God's goal for His people is that they finish their lives on earth in such a way that they are rewarded and honored in eternity. God wants His people finishing with a full inheritance. He has not just left believers here on earth to try and make it on their own. He has given specific things to believers to keep them from falling .

There are certain things believers need to turn to and rely on if they are going to finish winners. God has provided everything we need to prevent us from hardening our hearts in sinful things to the point where we would lose the fullness of our rewards. That is precisely what this passage is all about. What this text says is this:

IF WE WANT TO ENTER ETERNITY WITH THE FULL KINGDOM HONOR OF GOD THAT WILL GIVE US FULL REWARD , WE NEED TO CONTINUALLY RELY ON AND TURN TO THAT WHICH GOD HAS PROVIDED TO ENABLE US TO FINISH AS WINNERS.

We may observe from **verse 12** that it begins with a conjunction “for.” That “for” of **verse 12** immediately connects us to the challenge of **verse 11**. **We do not want to fall away from receiving the full Kingdom inheritance and the “for” explains what God has provided to keep us from falling away.**

There are three specific failure preventative provisions that God has given to His people that will keep us from hardening our hearts and minds and pursuing willful sin:

FAILURE PREVENTATIVE PROVISION #1 – God has provided His Word . **4:12**

There is no piece of literature on this earth more powerful than the written Word of God. In fact, in this verse the Word of God is literally called “the Word of the God” (ο λογος του θεου). This same construction also occurs in Hebrews 13:7 where we are admonished to carefully remember those who taught us the Word.

In this verse, the Word of God is personified in that it is given living qualities that have amazing powers which no other book in the universe has.

No one wants to miss what is revealed here. You will not be prevented from falling away from God by a psychology book or a philosophy book or by talking to your counselor or doctor, but **the only book that can keep you from falling away from God is the inspired Word of God.** You will not be prevented from falling away from God by your good intentions or feelings. The only book with enough power to keep us on track and keep us from losing full rewards is the Bible, the Word of God. Get away from the Word and you are on the path of loss.

Now the Word of God is qualified by some amazing terms. There are **five amazing facts** brought out in this one verse about the written Word of God:

Fact #1 - The written Word of God is living (ζων). **4:12a**

The emphasis of this present participle “living” is that the Bible is continually alive and has the power to continually give life. The Bible is a life-giving book and it is a book that is continually alive. When you have the Bible in your hands you have a living book in your hands.

Hardhearted sin will kill your spiritual life and vibrancy. As a believer you will walk around spiritually dead. The Word of God will bring you back to life. It is the only book that can bring you back to life. The Scriptures are alive.

Fact #2 - The written Word of God is active (ενεργης). **4:12b**

The emphasis of this noun is that this Word is active and effective and powerful. The written Word of God has the power to effectively accomplish everything. It can save us. It can restore us. It can keep us on the path of an award winner.

The Word of God is like a mortar. It gets into a person, and just as shrapnel physically turns on the inside of a person, so does the Scripture spiritually turn. It is alive and it is active.

Fact #3 - The written Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword. **4:12c**

The superlative “sharper” (τομωτερος) means that the Word of God is sharper than anything else in existence, including a razor sharp double-edged sword. The stress of the superlative is that there is nothing in existence that is able to cut like the Word of God.

Now the noun “sword” (μαχαира) used here in **verse 12** is one that refers to a large knife or dagger as opposed to another kind of “sword” (ρομφαια) which refers to a very large broad sword. This kind of sword was used for personal cutting and surgery.

There are a couple of points we need to consider here. **First**, God’s Word has the power to cut into us deep and bring us under conviction, and **second**, it also has the power to judge us if we do not respond to that conviction. The Word of God can cut open our hard heart and cut away sin or it can bring the divine chastisement of God upon us because we will not deal with our sin.

J. Vernon McGee said that one of his professors used to say when you communicate the Word of God it will cut into the people to whom you are communicating, but don’t ever forget it is two-edged in that it will also cut into you (*Hebrews*, Vol. 5, p. 534).

Fact #4 - The written Word of God has the ability to pierce soul and spirit. **4:12d**

There is only one book that can divide a soul and spirit and it is the Word of God.

One writer said the thing I love about the Bible is that it has the ability to instantly perform a “sweet surgery” (R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews*, Vol. 1, p. 118). God’s Word is penetrating.

Now the connection between the soul and spirit, as I understand it, is that the Word of God has the power to examine and penetrate into the immaterial part of every one of us to show the truth about what is going on in our soul in regard to the Spirit of God.

Now the question comes here, what does it mean that the Word of God has the “division” power of soul and spirit? Some have suggested that the Word of God has the power to pierce and divide what is happening in a sinful body as opposed to the Holy Spirit.

The Scriptures have the power to cut into the immaterial part of us and penetrate or pierce us as to what really and truly is taking place. The Scriptures will quickly reveal where we truly are spiritually-speaking.

Fact #5 - The written Word of God is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
4:12e

When it comes to being an award winner, it is not so much determined by acts, but by thoughts. The matter of spirituality is really not as much external as it is internal. Like Jesus said, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile a man” (Matthew 15:19-20).

The Word of God becomes the judge or the critic of our thoughts and intentions of our heart. The Scriptures can go deep into our minds and hearts as no other book. It will show whether or not our thoughts and heart intentions are on the path of an award winner.

I can speak firsthand to this because I was twenty-six years old the night I picked up a Bible and it cut open my heart and soul. No one was there talking to me; it was purely God’s Word. The next day I got up and wanted more of the Word of God. There was power in it and it lit up my soul. I wanted to know from day one what the Scripture said and what it meant by what it said.

God’s Word is surgical. It has the power to cut away things that could cost us rewards. It has the power to convict us, to communicate grace to us, and to deliver us.

FAILURE PREVENTATIVE PROVISION #2 – God has provided His presence. **4:13**

God wants His people to know that He sees everything about them. No one can conceal anything from God. You cannot conceal your body, your soul, your spirit, your thoughts from God. No one is hidden from His sight and He sees all things. They are open and bare before Him - all our words, actions, thoughts.

Now, of course, the reason God wants us to know this is because He wants us to know that when it comes time to face Him and give an account to Him, He will have seen everything we did, said, and thought. If you want to finish an award winner, you better take this theological truth to heart.

Dr. Samuel Alfred Mitchell was a great American astronomer, and one day he was observing the sun by looking through his telescope. Just as the sun was starting to set, Dr. Mitchell brought his telescope down from its focus on the sun and happened to see an orchard that was about seven miles away. In that orchard were two boys who were stealing apples. One boy was picking the apples and the other stood guard as a lookout to make sure they weren't seen. What they didn't know was that Dr. Mitchell saw everything they did because his telescopic eye was on them. That is the way it is with God. We may think we are getting away with something and that no one sees or knows. God says, "I see everything." People who want to finish award winners will keep that thought in their minds. We are on full display before God. He knows all and He sees all and wise are people who govern their lives with this reality.

Now why does God bring this up? Because this is a great preventative to keep us on track, realizing that everything we do is on full display before Him. This produces a very healthy, God-honoring fear. If ever there is something that should prompt us to want to take in God's Word and make adjustments in view of it, it is the reality God knows and sees everything about me.

FAILURE PREVENTATIVE PROVISION #3 – God has provided His Son / Priest .
4:14-15

Jesus Christ is our High Priest and all of us need a High Priest to have access to God. In fact, this is the only thing that gives any of us hope that we could finish an award winner. Now there is wonderful data given to us here about our High Priest. There are three amazing facts brought out here:

Fact #1 - Our great High Priest is God . **4:14**

We need to hold fast to our confession that Jesus Christ is God and He is the Son of God. Jesus Christ is Deity. Our High Priest is not a man on earth; He is God who passed through the heavens. Our High Priest visibly left this earth and ascended His way back to heaven.

In fact, according to Acts 1:10, His disciples stood there and watched Him ascend up into the sky. Our High Priest is not your average man on earth; He is God ascended into heaven.

Fact #2 - Our great High Priest does sympathize with our weaknesses . **4:15a**

The word "weakness" (ασθενεια) is a word that refers to our weaknesses, our frailties, and our sicknesses (Smith, p. 64). This is the same word used again in Hebrews 5:2 and there it is clear that it is not referring to physical weaknesses, but intellectual and moral weaknesses.

The word "sympathize" (συμπαθης) is one that means to have deep sympathetic feelings. Think about this amazing fact. When you have your moments of weakness, Jesus Christ has deep feelings for you. You are His family and He knows your frailties and your struggles.

Fact #3 - Our great High Priest has been tempted and is sinless . **4:15b**

Here is the big difference between our High Priest and us. Here is the only chance we have for finishing an award winner. We have all been tempted and failed miserably. He has been tempted and never failed once. So it is our relationship with and dependency on Jesus Christ that becomes our potential for finishing a winner.

The point is we have all been tempted and failed. Therefore, if we are to expect victory, we must look to the One who never failed. We must look to our High Priest, Jesus Christ, for victory.

I want to speak for a moment about temptation. There are two kinds of temptations we can experience. One is a test that comes from God in order to prove our faithfulness, in which God promises He will provide a way of escape (I Corinthians 10:13). The other is a temptation that does not come from God but comes from our own lusts and leads us to sin (James 1:13-15). It is this second type of temptation that is being discussed here. As Paul Ellingworth observed, the prepositional phrase “without sin” puts this into the realm of a temptation, not a test (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 268).

So I want us to clearly understand what is said here. This text in Hebrews is addressing the difference between Jesus Christ and us. Jesus Christ faced temptations but never sinned, and all of us face them and do sin. We are like the wretched Paul in Romans 7; there are times when we don't want to give in and yet we do. Gossip, greed, lust, covetousness - we get tempted and we fail. We plunge into the temptation and then once we give in we feel dirty, filthy, and miserable. We feel sick in our stomachs for how we have failed. How do we stop this depraved cycle? What chance do we have for finishing a winner when we are such failures? **The answer is we look straight at Jesus Christ.**

Look at what **verse 16** says. Don't harden your heart; draw near with confidence to Jesus Christ and the throne of grace. When we are tempted and fail we need to draw near the One who never did fail. Jesus Christ is at the throne of God and He will give you His grace.

It is in our moment of temptation failure when we need His grace more than at any other time. We need to focus on Jesus Christ in our time of need.

We have a High Priest who can resolve our sin problem and resolve our inheritance matters. Let us all draw near to Him for we all do have times of need.