

One Greater than the Angels  
Hebrews 2.

1 Corinthians 15:1-19

Romans 5:1-11

Responsive Reading Psalm 15

A few weeks ago when we started here in this book during the introduction I had made mention that this book is interesting for the simple fact that it does not hold to the standard structure that we see in other books, there is no greeting, or introduction, yet at times it takes the writing form of a letter written with intent, and at other times takes the form of a more pastoral tone, and then ends more like a letter. This week we are going to be seeing the first admonition here in this book, the author having set forth the ground work in the first chapter about the superiority of Christ, and having laid out in simple concise terms why the worship of angels, or any other heavenly being outside of God, and his Son, is not only unnecessary, but is in fact wrong to do so.

So let us start this morning by reading our passage we will be looking at, which is starting in Chapter 2, of the book of Hebrews and we will be going to verse 9. As you notice, the first word here is Therefore, which ties this all together from the previous statements, the author here is continuing to build upon what he had said, so basically he is saying, if everything I said is true, therefore we can also conclude, this. Starting out in verse 1. ( read 1-9 ) These passages here serve to show that the teachings of the author of Hebrews is not just some lofty doctrinaire scholarly teaching, but is in deed practical to every day life, the implications here in this book if understood properly will have a profound consequence on your faith, and what you believe. In some circles there is this idea that Theology is something that is something for scholars, and teachers to argue over, but as we know that is not true. Theology at it's base, is the study and understanding of God, of his purpose and plan in the life of his children.

Theology and doctrine can not be ignored, for it is through an understanding of these things that sets forth what kind of believer you are. If you have wrong doctrine, and wrong theology, well, to put it bluntly you will be a mess. We talked about some of that last week when we summarized just a few of the popular faiths who fail to understand the basic of holding Christ as central and preeminence over all things, and instead seek to put things that are tangible to us in this physical realm as holding importance to at least equal with Christ. Not so much in word, but in deed, much like the Judiasers were doing in their deception of the Galatians. Sure, Christ is important, sure, your faith comes from him, but now that you are saved you need to live by the 10 commandments, by the law, or by the mandates and dictates of the clergy, or the elders of the church.

So you can see how such doctrine and theology can actually be dangerous to a believer, it begins to erode the faith which they were first given, it can begin erode the freedom that they first found in Christ, and instead trade it in for bondage to the church, or law, or organization, or even in some cases the individual teacher. What you believe, is what you will live. Your life will ultimately match your theology and doctrine. Which is why it is so important, and also why there is such debate over what is the correct, biblical doctrine and theology. Sure there are many debates that borderline on the crazy, and unnecessary I think, and often times can cause a division between brothers and sisters where there ought not be one. I think the various beliefs and eschatological views is a good example of this. There are churches that demand their members hold to a specific view to even be able to apply as a member. I think that is putting a little to much emphasis on something that is not fully clear and is yet a mystery that has not been revealed to us.

As I had mentioned last week, we need to maintain to keep the main things the main things, and not get tied down into secondary issues. Issues of the faith that are not central to the core. Whether you are a dispensationalist, a-millennial, post or pre-mill, as long as your core doctrines of salvation by grace alone, by God alone, through Christ alone is solid then it is of little difference and not worthy of contention or strife. That is just one simple example that I have seen to cause issues within the church, and the Apostle Paul brings out others as well. Lets turn there and read what he writes to the Roman's who obviously were dealing with this very issue of casting judgment upon their brothers and sisters for practices that had very little consequence in the core of salvation. Chapter 14, verse 1. "Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things." In other words, be gracious toward ones who may not understand as you do the things of God, who may yet be babes in the faith given to misunderstandings and who may have been instructed poorly" For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him."

Once again this goes back to what we were saying last week, making something more important then it should be, elevating something higher then what is necessary, and in doing so at the very least causing strife and error. In this case, the Jewish dietary laws, some sought to still observe them, but gentiles had now been called into the family of God who never were under the Mosaic law, they were never under such dietary restrictions, and to enforce some idea that what is being eaten is related to how faithful one is, is once again a false understanding, a false belief, and putting to much emphasis on something that is not the main things. Paul continues again in verse 5. "One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike, let each be fully convinced in his own mind." We see this with our reformed brethren do we not? Even within their own church there are various degrees of observing the sabbath, which in church tradition was changed from Saturday to Sunday. Some observe Sunday much in the same way the Israelite did, you worship, eat, sleep, and worship some more. Others allow themselves entertainment, yet will not travel except to church and back, and yet others allow for traveling, and will even go to restaurants or shopping on Sundays, and others will even do the unthinkable...mow their lawns on Sunday. So as we can see even within a single church there are various levels of such belief and activities, and what does Paul say about it in verse 6?

"He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord, and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe the day. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks." Whether one observes a certain diet, or a certain day, if done in glory and honor to God it is righteous and correct, but that does not give one the authority to require the other to do so, for just as the observe such things to God, if those who do not observe such things do so to the Glory and honor of God, they to are practicing what is righteous and correct. So thinking upon this, lets look at verse 1 again. "Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away." We must be careful to not be caught up in requiring more for righteousness then what God himself requires. We must not put stumbling blocks before our brothers and sisters, heaping as it were unobtainable requirements causes them to fall into doubt or despair. Now that is not to say that there are things that we are to call out, for while Paul in Roman's advocates that we live in harmony with a preference for the weaker brother, we are also called to admonish, and correct each other in love when we see one is caught up in sin.

Just side note here that occurred to me, Paul's wisdom in his writing on this subject here in Roman's. Notice he says that we should give preference to the weaker brother. He really is talking to both parties to give preference to the other. For those who hold to a diet, or a day believe that they are wiser and stronger in their faith which is why they practice in such a way, and those who do not believe themselves to be free in Christ from such restrictions see those who hold to such things as being weaker in their understanding of their faith. I just find it interesting that this admonition from Paul to prefer the weaker brother isn't calling out as one being weaker than the other, but to be gracious to those whom we perceive to not be at the same level of understanding as ourselves.

Ok, back to Hebrews, verse 2. "For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward. How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard him" In short, it is exactly because of this reason that Christ is superior to all others, whether angels, or prophets, or priests and kings, that all honor belongs to him alone, and to ascribe honor, or worship to any other in fact destroys the gospel message. The gospel of Jesus Christ is unique to all others, because Christ himself stands alone as the one who is both the atoning sacrifice, and the ruling king. As Paul said in Galatians, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel, which is not another." It is not another equal gospel, it is not another way of salvation and truth, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach to you any other gospel than what we have first preached to you, let him be accursed." There is one gospel, one lamb, one mediator, one king, which offers salvation and justification before God. Any other so called gospels only bring with them a deception, curse, and damnation for in them is found no salvation and justification before God.

Again, we must keep the main thing the main thing, and not be tied up into various doctrines and beliefs lest we be found following a different gospel than that which we have first received. And that is the admonition of this author here to the Hebrews, to remain faithful to the gospel that was given to them and to not be lead astray by another. It would seem that these Hebrews were being lead into such things as worshiping angels, not unlike the Galatians being lead back into practicing the Law. Verse 3, asks the question. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" As history and the old testament shows, Israel always fell into neglect of the law, and it doing so it always produced dire consequences. How much more so, the gospel, which as the Author here says in chapter 1, who has been given to us in these last days, by the Son, who has been appointed as the heir of all things. If those who broke the mosaic law were punished, how much more so those who reject and despise the word given by the Son.

There is also another implication here, and that is the purpose and effect of the law. While the account written in Exodus does not mention the presence of angels at the time that God gave Moses the law, we see references to it in many other places. In Duteronomy 33, Moses is recalling the events that took place there at Mt. Sinai and he declares that with God there were myriads of holy ones. Also, the book of Acts, Stephen speaks of the law as having been delivered by angels. God spoke to Moses on MT. Sinai, but also used angels as his messengers not unlike how Moses was God's messenger to deliver his law to the people of Israel. So if this law, given to Moses by mediation of angels is the word of God, binding and unchangeable which is evident by the just punishment from break it. How much more so the New Covenant spoken to us by the Son?

As Hughs put it, “Unlike the law which was, as it were, mediated by word of mouth, the gospel was mediated by the word made flesh. The intensified seriousness of the situation since the coming of Christ is clearing underlined by our Lords own warning that in the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for those who spurn the gospel.” Think upon that for a moment, the dire consequence of the rejection of the gospel is worse then the judgment and destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Because rejection of the gospel does not lead to destruction, but to everlasting damnation. Breaking the law and old covenant brought punishment and death, not heeding the gospel and breaking the new covenant brings eternal suffering. Once again, “IF the word spoken through angels proved steadfast and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?”

The implication here, is that now that the New Covenant has come, now that the Word has become flesh, who God has spoken to us in these last days, the old covenant as Paul says, has faded, and passed away. It is no longer the standard by which God's children live and conduct themselves, for one greater then this law given by Angels has come and He, the Son of the most high God has given us a new commandment, a new standard, which is Christ himself. The law did not produce a new birth, the law did not truly produce righteousness of the heart, but it is only through Christ and the new birth, and it is Christ working through this new life through the conviction of the Holy Spirit who guides, chastises and teaches us, not through any law. So in short, no, the 10 commandments are not your ruling guide for christian conduct, the ministry of Christ in you through the Holy Spirit is. Those who have been reborn as children of God no longer need an external list of rules and regulations to aid in their walk to live a holy and just life, for in the new birth God has written his law upon the heart of each and every one of his children, and they obey and seek him not out of fear of retribution like the old law, but out of love for the father.

The following verses here just continue to put forth this comparison between that which was given by angels, to the prophets and the fathers of Israel in contrast to that which is given to us by the Son. As if much any evidences are needed, for even up to this point the author here has put forth an extremely strong argument about the supremacy of Christ in all things, he continues again showing that the Son is once again superior to the angels. Reading, Verse 4.” God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders with various miracles, and gifts of the holy spirit according to his own will. For he has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subject of angels. But one testified in a certain place, saying; What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you take care of him? You have made him a little lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the works of your hand. You have put all things in subjection under his feet”

The incarnation of Jesus is described here as becoming lower then the angels. The implication of this is that the present status of man is in some sense inferior to that of angels, which was a common belief from medieval authors such as Origen who spoke of angels being superior to men so that men, when made perfect will become like angels. This does not mean that mankind becomes angels as many seem to believe today, for we see in Revelations a distinct difference between angels and men as they gather around the throne and worship. But in verse 10 we see that Jesus who for a while became lower then the angels, for suffering of death has been crowned with glory and honor. At present man is of course earthly beings, inhabiting that which we were created to inhabit, while angels are heavenly beings inhabited that which they were created to inhabit. But in the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ, we will be “made like the angels” becoming spiritual heavenly beings as well.

In this last verse we are looking at today, we see not only the mention but the importance of the incarnation of Jesus. And that through his suffering and death was elevated to a position of glory and honor, the fact that his death on the cross was not his defeat, but it was his victory, it was not the destruction of his kingdom, but rather his coronation as king. And it is this death, which has paid the righteous price for all those who believe, everyone, Jews, gentiles, slaves, free, it does not matter, the blood of the new covenant, Christ's righteousness is sufficient and applied to all who believe. And notice the sort of oxymoron in the end of this verse, which says, "by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone." Not many would equate death with grace, but the reality it is that it is only by God's grace toward us that he sent his Son to pay the price for our sins, there truly is no greater grace, or mercy than one who would lay down their life for another.

And this is the gospel, the one greater than Moses, the one greater than the prophets, the one who has spoken to us not only by his words, but by his deeds, has once and for all accomplished redemption for God's people. Praise be to God for his grace and mercy toward us, that he would send his son to become like us, a little lower than the angels so that through him we maybe elevated into his glory.