

Submitting to the Word of God in 2024

Main Idea: For us to receive the fullness of God's mercy and grace in 2024, we must submit ourselves to the revealing and sanctifying work of God's word.

Introduction

Most of you that know me know that I have had high blood pressure issues on and off for several years. In the past couple of years, I have connected with a wonderful cardiologist that is really helping me. I'm very thankful for the help of good physicians! Like most good doctors, he always wants more information on my condition. At our last office visit a few weeks ago, he asked if I would consider having a nuclear stress test. Doesn't that sound like lots of fun? Hooking me up electrodes and gadgets, walking on a treadmill with increased speed and incline to the point of stress, being observed by several people as I pant and display my lack of fitness, wondering if I will be able to get to the target heart rate. But wait. That's not all! Twice, I get to lay in a confined space flat on my back after having some radioactive material being introduced through a needle thrust into a vein in my hand. Sounds great doc. Sign me up! He convinced me that I probably wouldn't enjoy the process, but would be glad to have the information.

I'm sure most of you can relate. Such diagnostic procedures are not in the category of entertainment and fun. So why do people submit themselves to such stress and discomfort? It is to hopefully uncover and understand their true physical condition so they can get appropriate treatment if needed. We may feel great, but have problems we don't feel or see, or we might feel terrible and just want to find out why and hopefully get some relief. Tests like this are designed to uncover what is going on. I'm glad to report that my recent nuclear stress test, though it was not a delightful experience, revealed that my heart is in pretty good shape. The truth is that the test wasn't all that bad. I dramatized it for the sake of the illustration!

How is your heart? I'm not talking about that physical organ in your chest that pumps your blood. I'm talking about your soul, the inner man, where you have your deepest thoughts, desires, hopes, fears, and hopes. What is the condition of your soul?

Is there a diagnostic tool available that can reveal the true condition of our spiritual heart? The resounding answer is yes! It is the word of God. And if we want to experience the blessing, assurance, and joy of spiritual health, it is essential to submit to God's diagnostic tool, the sword of the Spirit, that alone has the power to reveal our spiritual condition. Listen to Hebrews 4:12-13

READ Hebrews 4:12-13

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.

God's Word confronts and exposes the heart of every creature. It is the ultimate heart diagnostic tool. If you submit to the testing of the Word, and respond in confession, repentance and faith to the test results, you will experience healing, restoration, and the blessing of peace with God, which is spiritual health. However, if you refuse to take heed to the test results by resisting and doubting, your spiritual disease will continue and end in your judgement, death and destruction.

This morning we are going to see a plea from the writer of Hebrews to the Jewish Christians of his day to respond to the Word of God by fully embracing Christ and entering God's rest. We will see from this passage that there is a rest that God offers to weary souls, a secure, stable place of hope, peace and spiritual health. We will also see the way to experience and receive this rest of God.

The Context: Christ Sufficient and Superior

The letter of Hebrews is an exhortation written to first century Jewish Christians, urging them to submit to the gospel and fully trust Christ alone for their salvation. Christ is the sufficient and superior remedy for the desperate plight of sinners, then and now.

Chapter 1 of Hebrews begins by presenting Jesus Christ as the Creator of the universe, the full and complete revelation of God, the very nature of God Himself, and the exalted resurrected Son of God at the right hand of the Father. The writer continues showing Christ as greater than the angels, since the angels of God worship and bow before Him.

In chapter 2, the author urges them to pay close attention to the message of the gospel of Christ, lest they forget and perish. He presents Christ as the unique Son of God, the author of salvation, and the only one that can forgive and sanctify a sinner and lead them home. Finally, he explains that this Savior, Jesus Christ, truly understands our condition as a perfect intercessor. The Son of God left heaven and came to earth as a human being so He could be tempted and overcome sin as the second Adam, since the first Adam failed and plunged the human race into sin. Christ came to earth and took on flesh so that He could suffer, be rejected, filled with sorrow, and yet in all His human suffering bear the guilt and punishment for sinners as the perfect sacrifice. He was born, lived, and died as the perfect God/man. He was buried, and then raised to life three days later conquering death for all who put their faith and trust in Him as their Savior and Lord.

Chapter 3 compares Moses to Jesus, and shows that Jesus is the superior Son as the builder of God's house, Moses being the faithful member of the house. Then the writer reminds those Jewish believers of the disobedience, rebellion, and unbelief of their forefathers and warns them not to take that same path but instead, submit themselves to the voice of God, not harden their hearts and miss the promise of God's rest.

That brings us to chapter 4, where the writer proclaims that there still is a rest in God that is available to them, if they not harden their hearts and heed God's voice. Though their

forefathers failed to enter the rest of the promised land because of their unbelief, there is a full spiritual rest of God available to them today, if they will repent, and fully believe the gospel concerning Christ.

Let's take a closer look at this promise of rest and warning in verses 8-11 of Hebrews 4:

⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰ for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his ¹¹ Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

The failure of the desert wandering Israelites to enter the rest that Joshua offered need not be the end of the story for these first century Jews. The writer is encouraging them that in the coming of Christ, there is an eternal rest offered to the people of God, and it is imperative that they embrace and believe Christ today. This ultimate spiritual rest for God's people is likely the future eternal hope referred to in Revelation 14:13 – *And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Blessed indeed, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors for their deeds follow them!"*

There is another key passage where the apostle Paul warns professing believers to learn from the example of the unbelieving desert Israelites that fell in the wilderness.

10 *For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.*

⁶ Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." ⁸ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹ We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, ¹⁰ nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. ¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. ¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

This warning helps us get an even clearer picture of our need. The universal problem is that as depraved sinners, we don't see our true condition. We have desires in our hearts that are in truth, false god....idols. What we need to clearly see and recognize are these deceitful feelings, things, and ambitions of our heart that entice and call us bow down and serve them.

The lie is that by getting what we think we want, we will be happy and fulfilled. God forbids to eat, but we doubt His love and wisdom, and rebel and go our own way. These Israelites had the presence of God in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. They had been supernaturally delivered from the bondage of Egypt, led by Moses, and had the abiding presence of Christ as a spiritual rock, yet they still were destroyed by the sinful lusts and desires of their heart; sexual sin, grumbling, discontentment, and resentment toward God. This warning says we face the same temptations. And God has not left us devoid of what we need to stand. We need not fall. So what must we do to bear these temptations and overcome?

This brings us to the heart of today's message. First, we must place ourselves under the Word of God, which is the Scriptures. We must hear the Word, listen to the Word, understand the Word, and then submit and agree with truth about our condition, problem, and God's solution. We must humbly accept the Word of God which can save our souls. Otherwise, we will fail to enter the rest of God and suffer the just punishment for our unbelief and rebellion, just as those Israelites perished in the wilderness.

We first must understand the truth about the deceitfulness of our hearts. The Word of God alone can expose the depth of our depravity and corruption. It leaves no excuse and no place to hide, for the Word of God is active, living, powerful, and sufficient to uncover completely and expose the very thoughts, motives, and intentions of the human heart, leaving every creature without excuse and accountable to the Creator. This testing and trying process of being examined and uncovered by the Word of God is painful, humbling, and devastating. It is the essence of the cross that Christ demands His followers to take if they choose to follow Him.

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The Word of God alone has the power to expose the thoughts and intentions of the heart, the false gods and vain demands that rule our hearts. As the Spirit of God convicts as He exposes our rebellion, it brings a heavy, just judgment and condemnation to us. It's not just what we do, it is what we think, feel, and want. It is our fallen nature and identity in Adam. We stand before the Word of God, fully exposed and guilty, revealed for the person we truly are.

The Word is like a two-edged sword – a knife that slaughters by cutting deep into the joints and marrow, so sharp that it uncovers motives and intentions as well as thoughts and actions. It cuts in a way that nothing is hidden or concealed.

This divine instrument wielded by the hands of the Spirit has the power to convict us which drives us seek relief, protection, and salvation from the just punishment for our sins. We need one to have mercy, a high priest who understands, to intercede for us and plead our case, one

who can offer a sufficient sacrifice to appease the divine wrath toward our rebellion. We need a perfect righteous sacrifice to die in our place, and a perfect one to offer that sacrifice to appease our guilt. We have fallen short, disobeyed, and followed and worshipped our wayward fickle heart, and our perverse affections. What hope do we have? Who is worthy to stand in the gap? What can wash away my sins? Such an accurate and complete diagnosis of my condition drives me to cry out for a remedy, for One who can save and rescue me from the judgment that is coming.

Within in this same Word that exposes my despicable and desperate condition, I hear a call to to forsake my sin, to turn away and cry out for forgiveness, mercy, repentance, faith, and deliverance. Because I have truly seen my condition, I have become obsessed with my need for salvation and deliverance from the coming wrath. And this same fearful righteous Holy God, gave up His own Son, the only One that could provide deliverance, rest, and reconciliation, to take the full punishment and guilt and give me His righteousness.

The word of God is designed to drive us away from our self-absorbed idolatry and to His throne of grace to receive what Christ alone can provide – mercy and grace. This written word of God has the power to expose our innermost motives, thoughts, and intentions. And the living Word of God, Christ Jesus, has the power and sufficiency to cleanse and remove our evil thoughts, motives and intentions, purify our hearts, and clothe us with His righteousness. He not only washes us clean and covers our guilt, He also begins and sustains a transformation of our on-going thoughts, motives, actions, and intentions. This change, called progressive sanctification, is a transformational renewing of our minds and habits as we regularly submit ourselves as a living sacrifice to the knife of God's word which exposes our sin, mortifies the flesh, reveals God's holiness, and calls us to the cross where we receive mercy and help in our temptations. God's word alone has the power to kill and to heal, as a two-edged sword.

As we daily confess our sins and plead the merits of Christ as our only hope, we also hear the voice of the shepherd calling us to His throne of grace, where we can find mercy, relief and help. The same Spirit and Word that convicts us, encourages us and shows us the path to the healing, restoring presence of God, who is Christ, the same mediator that offered Himself as the sacrifice that cleanses and removes our sin and shame, and offers His life as our robe of righteousness that we put on to cover our nakedness. This same Christ has promised to keep us to the end and lead us into this ultimate rest and peace of God.

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. ¹⁵ 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. 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.

That brings us to the question, what must we do? How should we respond?

First, we must see that today, God is offering mercy and grace that ultimately leads to eternal rest, joy and life to whosoever will put their trust in Christ and follow Him. If you have never fully trusted in Christ as your Savior and Lord, I encourage and warn you to plead for His mercy and salvation today. Today is the day of salvation. He promises to save all those who call on Him in faith and repentance.

Second, we must regularly avail ourselves to the ministry of the Word of God, and place ourselves under its direction and authority, so that we can see our true spiritual condition, our ongoing need for mercy and grace, and....

Finally, we must continue, by the grace and strength that Christ gives, humble ourselves by trusting and obeying Christ. He has provided all that we need through His grace and mercy to stand and endure victoriously to the end and enter our eternal rest.

I encourage all of you to find a community group and gather to discuss the questions on your outline. This is where you can give and receive help to practically respond and apply this message.