



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)

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STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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What is the gospel of Jesus Christ? Part 4

JESUS CHRIST THE SAVIOR

But....

I think that must be the most powerful word a human being can speak. It's small, but it has the power to sweep away everything that has gone before it. Coming after bad news like what we just heard in the last edition of this newsletter, it has the power to lift the eyes and restore hope. More than any other word that can be spoken by a human tongue, it has the ability to change every-

thing.

- The plane went down. **But** no one was hurt.
- You have cancer. **But** it is easily treatable.
- Your son was in a car wreck. **But** he's fine.

Sadly, sometimes the **but** doesn't come. Sometimes the sentence stops, and all we get is the bad news. Yet those moments only magnify for us the times when the **but** does come. And they are glorious.

Thank God the bad news of human sin and God's judgment is not the end of the story. If the Bible had ended with Paul's declaration that the whole world will stand, silenced, before the judgment throne of God, there would be no hope for us at all. There would be only despair. **But** (there it is again!) thank God there is more!

You are a sinner destined to be condemned. **But** God has acted to save sinners just like you!

A Word of Hope

Mark begins his account of Jesus' life with the words, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." From the very beginning, Mark and the other early Christians knew that the coming of Jesus Christ was God's good news to a world destroyed and dead at the feet of sin. In the wake of sin's dark devastation, the coming of Jesus was His piercing, thundering announcement that now everything had changed!

Even in the garden of Eden, God had

given Adam and Eve a word of hope—some good news in the midst of their despair. It wasn't much, just a hint really, a phrase tacked onto the end of God's sentence against the Serpent.

“He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” ([Genesis 3:15](#))

But it was something. God wanted Adam and Eve, rebels though they were, to know that the story was not over. Here was some gospel, some good news in the midst of the cataclysm.

The rest of the Bible tells the story of how this tiny seed of good news germinated, sprouted, and grew. For thousands of years, God prepared the world through law and prophecy for His stunning *coup de grace* against the Serpent in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When it was all over, the guilt Adam had inflicted on his entire race would be defeated, the death God pronounced over His own creation would die, and hell would be brought to its knees. The Bible is the story of God's counteroffensive against sin. It is the grand narrative of how God made it right, how he is making it right, and how he will one day make it right finally and forever.

Fully God, Fully Man

All the gospel writers begin their accounts of Jesus' life by showing that He was no ordinary man. **Matthew** and **Luke** tell the story of an angel coming to a young virgin named Mary and telling her that she would be with child. Incredulous at the news, Mary asks, **“How will this be, since I am a virgin?”** The angel explains, **“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” ([Luke 1:34–35](#))**. **John** begins his story with an even more astonishing statement: **“In the beginning”** (words that point back strongly to [Genesis 1:1](#)) **“was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” ([John 1:1, 14](#))**.

All of this—Jesus' birth to a virgin, the title **“Son of God,”** John's assertion that **“the Word was God”** together with His announcement that **“the Word became flesh”**—is meant to teach us who Jesus is.

Put simply, the Bible tells us that Jesus is both completely human and completely God. This is a

crucial point to understand about Him, for it is only the fully human, fully divine Son of God who can save us. If Jesus were just another man—like us in every respect, including our fallenness and sin—he would no more be able to save us than one dead man can save another. *But* because He is the Son of God, without sin and equal in every divine perfection to God the Father, He is able to defeat death and save us from our sin. In the same way, it is also critical that Jesus be truly one of us—that is, fully human—so that He can rightly represent us before His Father.

As [Hebrews 4:15](#) explains, Jesus is able **“to sympathize with our weaknesses”** because He **“in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”**

The Messiah King—Here!

When Jesus began His ministry, He proclaimed a fantastic message: **“The time has come! The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news!”**

Word of this man preaching that the kingdom of God had come spread quickly throughout the country, and excited crowds soon surrounded Jesus to hear this **“good news”** that He was proclaiming. *But* what was so exciting about it?

For centuries, through His law and His prophets, God had foretold a time when He would once and for all put an end to the world's evil and rescue His people from their sin. He would sweep away all resistance and establish His rule, His **“kingdom,”** over all the earth. Even more, God had promised that He would establish His kingdom in the person of a messianic King, one in the royal line of the great King David. In [2 Samuel 7:11](#), God promised David that one of his sons would rule on his throne forever. And the prophet Isaiah said of this kingly son:

**“He will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of His government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over His kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.” ([Isaiah 9:6–7](#)
[NIV](#))**

So you can imagine the excitement that greeted Jesus when He began announcing that the kingdom of heaven had come. It meant that the long-awaited Davidic Mes-

siah was finally here!

The Gospel writers are insistent that this Davidic King is none other than Jesus Himself. Luke records the words of the angel announcing Jesus' birth to Mary:

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” ([Luke 1:32–33](#))

Matthew begins his book with a genealogy that traces Jesus' ancestry directly back to King David, and then on back to Abraham Himself. Fascinatingly, Matthew stylizes his genealogy, dividing it into three generations of fourteen. And fourteen, as any good Jew would have known, was the number arrived at by adding up the values of the three Hebrew letters *D-V-D*, “**David**.” Matthew, like all the other Christians, practically screams as he begins his story about Jesus, “**King! King! King!**”

Unexpected Good News—If You Can Get in on It

The New Testament then tells the story of how King Jesus inaugurated the rule of God on earth and began rolling back the curse of sin. The kingdom Jesus inaugurated, though, looked nothing like what the Jews expected or wanted. They wanted a messiah who would establish an earthly, political kingdom that would overthrow and supplant the Roman Empire, the ruling power of the day. Yet here was Jesus not at all looking for an earthly crown, but preaching, teaching, healing the sick, forgiving sin, raising the dead, and telling the Roman governor in no uncertain terms, “**My kingdom is not of this world**” ([John 18:36](#)).

That's not to say His kingdom would *never* be of this world. Just a little earlier Jesus had said to the high priest, “**You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven**” ([Mark 14:62](#)), and in [Revelation 21](#) we read of Him reigning over a new heavens and new earth radically transformed by His power and released from its bondage to sin.

Now all that is undeniably good news—if you can get in on it. *But* then we're back to the problem of our sin, aren't we? Unless something happens to remove the guilt of our disobedience and rebellion against God, we are still separated from Him and

destined not for the joys of a new heaven and new earth, but for the eternal punishment of hell.

But here is where the good news of Christianity gets really, really good. You see, King Jesus came not only to inaugurate the kingdom of God, *but* also to bring sinners into it by dying in their place and for their sin, taking their punishment on Himself and securing forgiveness for them, making them righteous in God's sight, and qualifying them to share in the inheritance of the kingdom ([Colossians 1:12](#)).

A Suffering King?

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” That's what John the Baptist, the camel-skin-clad, locust-eating prophet, said when he saw Jesus coming toward Him ([John 1:29](#)). What did he mean? The Lamb of God? Taking away the sin of the world?

Every first-century Jew would have known immediately what John meant by “**the Lamb of God taking away sin**.” It was a reference to the Jewish festival of the Passover, a memorial of God's miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt some fifteen hundred years earlier.

As judgment against the Egyptians, God had sent ten plagues on them, and each time the Egyptian king hardened his heart and refused to let the people go. The last of the plagues was the most terrible of all. God told the Israelites that on an appointed night, an angel of death would sweep through the land of Egypt, killing every firstborn child and animal in the country. That horrible judgment would include the Israelites, too—unless they carefully obeyed God's instructions. Each family, God told them, was to take a lamb without any defect or blemish, and kill it. Then using a branch of hyssop, they were to put some of the blood around the doorframe of their house. Then, God promised, when the angel of death saw the blood, he would “**pass over**” that house and spare it the judgment of death.

The Passover feast—and especially the Passover lamb—became a powerful symbol of the idea that the penalty of death for one's sins could be paid by the death of another. This idea of “**penal substitution**,” in fact, grounded the entire system of Old Testament sacrifices. On the annual Day of Atonement, the high priest went into the center of the temple, known as the Most Holy Place, and killed an unblemished animal as payment for the people's sins. Year after year this happened, and year after year the penalty for the people's sins was deferred yet again by the blood of the lamb.

It took time, but eventually the followers of Jesus realized that His mission was not just to inaugurate the kingdom of God, but to do so by dying as a substitutionary sacrifice for His people. Jesus was not just King, they realized. He was suffering King.

Jesus Himself knew from the very beginning that His mission was to die for the sins of His people. The angel had announced at His very birth that **“He will save His people from their sins”** ([Matthew 1:21](#)), and Luke tells us that **“when the days drew near for Him to be taken up, He set His face to go to Jerusalem”** ([Luke 9:51](#)). Jesus foretold His death many times in the gospels, and when Peter foolishly tried to stand in His way, Jesus rebuked Him: **“Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me”** ([Matthew 16:23](#)). Jesus’ face was set like flint toward Jerusalem—and therefore toward His death.

Jesus also understood the significance and purpose of His death. In [Mark 10:45](#), he says, **“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”** And in [Matthew 26:28](#), as He shared a last supper with His disciples, He took a cup of wine and declared, **“Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”** ([Matthew 26:27–28](#)). **“I lay down my life for the sheep,”** He said in another place. **“No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of my own accord”** ([John 10:15, 18](#)). Jesus knew why He was going to die. Out of love for His people He willingly laid down His life, the Lamb of God slain so His people could be forgiven.

Taught by the Holy Spirit, the early Christians also understood what Jesus had accomplished on the cross. Paul described it like this: **“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us”** ([Galatians 3:13–14](#)). And in another place he explained, **“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God”** ([2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV](#)). Peter wrote, **“Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God”** ([1 Peter 3:18](#)). And, **“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed”** ([1 Peter 2:24](#)).

Do you see what these Christians were saying about the significance of Jesus’ death? They were saying that when Jesus died, it was not the punishment for His own sins that He endured. (He didn’t

have any!) It was the punishment for His people’s sins! As He hung on the cross at Calvary, Jesus bore all the horrible weight of the sin of God’s people. All their rebellion, all their disobedience, all their sin fell on His shoulders. And the curse that God had pronounced in Eden—the sentence of death—struck.

That is why Jesus cried out in agony, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** ([Matthew 27:46](#)). God His Father, who is holy and righteous, whose eyes are too pure even to look on evil, looked at His Son, saw the sins of His Son’s people resting on His shoulders, turned away in disgust, and poured out His wrath on His own Son. Matthew writes that darkness covered the land for about three hours while Jesus hung on the cross. That was the darkness of judgment, the weight of the Father’s wrath falling on Jesus as He bore His people’s sins and died in their place.

Isaiah prophesied about this seven centuries before it happened:

**“Surely He has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed Him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But He was wounded for our transgressions;
He was crushed for our iniquities;
upon Him was the chastisement that brought us
peace,
and with His stripes we are healed.”** ([Isaiah 53:4–5](#))

Do you see the significance of this? Ultimately, it means that *I’m* the one who should have died, not Jesus. *I* should have been punished, not *He*. And yet *He* took *my* place. *He* died for *me*.

They were *my* transgressions, but *His* wounds. *My* iniquities, but *His* chastisement. *My* sin, *His* sorrow. And *His* punishment bought *my* peace. *His* stripes won *my* healing. *His* grief, *my* joy.

His death, *my* life.

The Heart of the Gospel

Sadly, this doctrine of substitution is probably the one part of the Christian gospel that the world hates most. People are simply disgusted at the idea of Jesus being punished for someone else’s sin. More than one author has called it **“divine child abuse.”** And yet to toss substitutionary atonement aside is to cut out the heart of the gospel. To be sure, there are many pictures in Scripture of what Christ accomplished with His death: example, reconciliation, and victory, to name

three. **But** underneath them all is the reality to which all the other images point—penal substitution. You simply cannot leave it out, or even downplay it in favor of other images, or else you litter the landscape of Scripture with unanswered questions. Why the sacrifices? What did that shedding of blood accomplish? How can God have mercy on sinners without destroying justice? What can it mean that God forgives iniquity and transgression and sin, and yet by no means clears the guilty ([Exodus 34:7](#))? How can a righteous and holy God justify the ungodly ([Romans 4:5](#))?

The answer to all these questions is found at the cross of Calvary, in Jesus' substitutionary death for His people. A righteous and holy God can justify the ungodly because in Jesus' death, mercy and justice were perfectly reconciled. The curse was righteously executed, and we were mercifully saved.

He Has Risen

Of course, all this is true—and good news—only because King Jesus the crucified is no longer dead. He rose from the grave. All the doubt that crashed in on the disciples as Jesus died was erased in a moment when the angel said to the women, **“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen”** ([Luke 24:5–6](#)).

If Christ had remained dead like any other **“savior”** or **“teacher”** or **“prophet,”** His death would have meant nothing more than yours or mine. Death's waves would have closed over Him just as they do over every other human life, every claim He made would have sunk into nothingness, and humanity would still be without hope of being saved from sin. But when breath entered His resurrected lungs again, when resurrection life electrified His glorified body, everything Jesus claimed was fully, finally, unquestionably, and irrevocably vindicated.

Paul exults in [Romans 8](#) over Jesus' resurrection and what it means for believers:

“Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” ([Romans 8:33–34](#))

What an amazing thought—that the man Jesus now sits in splendor at the right hand of His Father in heaven, reigning as the King of the universe! Not

only so, but He is even now interceding for His people, even as we await His final and glorious return.

But all this raises one more question, doesn't it? Just who are “His people”?

Continued in next edition...

CORAM DEO **(Before the face of God)**

The New Testament is in the Old concealed; the Old Testament is in the New revealed.

—Augustine

God has made enough of His Word so crystal clear that only blind and blatant disbelief will not understand. He has made enough of His Word so deep that even the most faithful must depend on His enlightenment rather than their intellect. There is no book like the Bible—clear enough to speak to the layman, yet challenging enough to keep the scholar humble. Neither layman nor scholar should ever tire of this special revelation but should endeavor to increase the sphere of knowledge necessary to understand more and more. There is always more blessing to enjoy.

The key that unlocks the meaning and all the blessing of Scripture is the Lord Jesus Christ, the principal theme of the entire Bible. The overriding purpose of special revelation—which for us is the Scripture alone—is to guide men to a proper relationship with God. God's gracious salvation is the only way guilty sinners can experience that relationship, and God's gracious salvation is in and through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Himself declared that He was **“the way, the truth, and the life,”** the only way for anyone to come to God ([John 14:6](#)).

It follows that if the purpose of Scripture is to guide people to the Lord and if the only way to the Lord is through the redemption of Jesus Christ, then the revelation of Christ should be the grand and predominant theme of Scripture. Indeed, it is. All revealed truth in one way or another relates to and is ultimately defined by the central truth of the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed. Obviously, the New Testament develops this saving theme.

The Gospels, with narratives concerning His earthly

ministry, introduce the performance of His saving work, the historic foundation of the gospel. Acts records the initial proclamation and dissemination of the message of His saving work. The Epistles explain and expound the nature of His person and work and the implications for personal and church life. The Revelation assures the consummation of all the glorious truths of His person and work. Understanding the message of the New Testament is impossible without reference to Christ.

Understanding the Old Testament is also impossible without reference to Christ and His gospel. He is the key that unlocks all the mysteries. This is not speculation; this is the teaching of the New Testament, both by direct statement and by example. When the resurrected Christ walked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, He expressed His concern that they were slow to believe what the prophets had written concerning His suffering and glory ([Luke 24:25–26](#)).

He then started with Moses and continued through the Prophets, expounding what those Scriptures taught about Himself ([Luke 24:27](#)). Later in the company of all the disciples, He included the Psalms in that corpus of messianic revelation ([Luke 24:44–45](#)). His reference to Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms was the Jewish designation for the entire Old Testament, similar to our referring to the New Testament as the gospel and Epistles. In other words, Christ said that the entirety of the Old Testament spoke about Him. The Pentateuch, the first five books with all their religious rituals, prepares the way for the Perfect Priest to stand between God and the people He represents as the perfect sacrifice for sins. The Historical Books draw attention to the Perfect King, who would come to rule His people and subdue His enemies. The Prophets anticipate the Perfect Prophet, who represents and reveals the only true and living God. The Poetical Books put it all together with the Christ as the great theme for worship and praise. What an authoritative clue for interpretation this is! It means that if we read any book of the Old Testament without reference to what it teaches concerning Christ, we are missing the key element in the book. If we do not see Christ, it is not because He is not there.



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Hebrews 12 – Overview Part 7

Hebrews 12:25

This study will look at the final warning given in Hebrews. It occurs in [Hebrews 12:25](#) which says,

Heb 12:25 **See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven,**

There are three key words/phrases in this verse – “do not refuse”, “speaks”, and “turn away”. Now, once again, it is important to keep all of this in its context. The writer is writing to believers. In [Hebrews 12:1](#) he begins with the words “Therefore we....” He has just given an amazing account of all of the believers who had trusted God in the midst of incredible trials in [Hebrews 11](#), and so his intent was to encourage these Hebrew believers to “lay aside” the sins that hindered them and to “run” the race before them with “endurance”. This is spiritual language to believers, not an encouragement to a lost person. Then in [Hebrews 12:18-24](#) he speaks about an amazing “company of angels” that surround believers, as well as what he called in [Hebrews 12:23](#) “the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven”, of “God the Judge”, and then of “Jesus the Mediator”. So, to think that when the author gets to

Hebrews 12:25 that he immediately begins talking to lost people is not good exposition of these verses.

When talking about these warnings, it is the small words that seem to create the confusion. In v25, as it seems to be in all of the warnings, it is the little word “if” that causes the stir. For whatever reason, that small word seems to create an atmosphere where some think that a believer can lose their salvation. However, that doctrinal position does not fit into their theological position of eternal security (nor should it fit there), so the individual makes the assumption that the verse is talking about lost people – which it is not. To the contrary, it is very much talking to believers and giving them a sober reminder and warning that there is much to lose in the Christian life. In fact, the author uses the example of the Israelites and how they refused to hear God at Mount Sinai and later when they were to enter into the Promised Land. Just think of all that they lost. For forty years they wandered, just wandered in the wilderness. They lost forty years of their life and their children lost forty years of their life. People never sin in a vacuum – never. Then to make it worse, they all died in a place where they had not made one single impact whatsoever – not one single impact. There was not one convert, not one spiritual revival among them, and not one single work by which the Bible remembers them except their unbelief and complaining. They have one of the most abysmal testimonies in the Scriptures of what God wanted to do through them, but never did. Without over-spiritualizing too much, this certainly seems very similar to the landscape of the church age of today – great ineffectiveness in the light of amazing promises to the contrary. When reading this verse carefully, it does not say one single word about salvation – not one word. What it says that happened to the Israelites is exactly what can happen to any believer. If a believer refuses to listen to what God says and refuses to be obedient to Him, then just like the Israelites in the wilderness, the believer will not escape from God’s discipline on their life either. They refused to listen to God and it cost them everything. Everyone always reaps exactly what they sow.

It is important to remember that the five major warnings in Hebrews have a kind of crescendo effect. The first warning **Hebrews 2:1-4** warns against someone who is just spiritually careless and who thoughtlessly fails to hear Christ speak to their life. However, when arriving at **Hebrews 12:25**, the warning is no longer about just being careless, but

now it is clearly refusing to do what God says. The author expresses it this way when he says, “**See that you do not refuse Him who speaks.**” The term “see that” is one Greek word and is often translated as “see to it that”. However, what makes it important is that it is a very weighty term. His audience knew full well what the author was saying and how he was saying it. This little phrase would immediately arrest their attention and invoke a very serious watchfulness on their part. When they started a sentence this way, it meant that what was to follow was very serious and had grave implications if not listened to and followed. In fact, it is this one Greek word that gives this verse such a sober importance to the believer. God is not someone who a believer can just ignore and refuse to listen to when He speaks. He and His words are not something that can just be ignored without ultimate consequences. Some Christians just seem to have an aversion to listening to God’s Word and to following and heeding what He says. In this case, it is clear that God is speaking, but the individual is simply refusing to do what they know is the right thing to do. God is always speaking and always providing direction and encouragement, but He is also always warning and cautioning believers in certain critical and important areas. In fact, just to emphasize the fact that God is a speaking God, a form of the verb “speaks” is used two times in this verse and implied once.

The word “refuse” is “*paraiteomai*” and carries the distinct meaning of rejecting and of having nothing to do with, of declining and avoiding. Wuest’s Word Studies says that it means to disavow, to deny, and to turn down. Now, it is important to clearly recognize something that does not readily come out of the text. The meaning of the word in this context is not that of a stubborn and rebellious rejection of the person of Christ. Rather, it is a kind of begging off, of making excuses, of shunning responsibility, and simply evading what a believer knows God wants them to do. The result is that the individual begins to slowly, casually, and indifferently depart from the living God. They push God aside and allow so many other things to take His rightful place in their life.

No matter what technical definition one chooses, it is a very strong word. What is interesting about the word “refuse” is that it is in the subjunctive mood. The subjunctive mood states the action as an objective possibility. An example would be “The dog may bark”. It is a very objective possibility that something may happen. It is not saying that it has happened yet, but there is a very objective possibility that it will. Just assume that someone just decides to stop going to church. Well, if

they do, then there is a very distinct and objective possibility that it will have a major impact on their life in some negative way. It may not have happened yet, but most likely it will happen at some time. The consequences of refusing to do what is known to be right before God does not always readily become apparent. People rarely reap what they sow immediately. They generally reap later. That is one of the spiritual laws of sowing and reaping.

Then to make the warning even more serious, the author says in the last phrase **“if we turn away”**. So, the believer goes from refusing to listen to God to actually deserting God. The word is *“apostrophō”* and carries the idea of someone not only turning away from something, but also of perverting it when they do. It means to turn someone from allegiance, to get them to defect, and to get them to desert. When the author adds this word to the mix, it speaks of the individual not only turning away in allegiance to what they know is right, but they get others to follow them. It would be no different than someone who professes to be a Christian and is living in open sin that they know is completely outside of the parameters of Scripture, yet they try to get others to join them in that sin. They literally compound their sin by convincing others to do the same. Parents do this all the time when they turn away from the things of God in their life, and the next thing that inevitably happens is that their children have done the same. Many parents have simply become too busy and too distracted to be devoting meaningful time to the things of God. Unfortunately, they pass their lack of commitment to the things of God down to their children. As stated earlier, Christians never sin in a vacuum. Everyone is always impacting someone else – whether positively or negatively.

So, what the author seems to be clearly saying is that there are some individuals in his care who have reached a point in their life where they simply refuse to do what they know God wants them to do, or they do what they know that they should not do. They have reached a very dangerous place in their life. If a person rejects (or **refuses**) God’s obvious, clear, and known will for their life as revealed in the Word of God, then in reality they have rejected God. In speaking about the Israelites, the writer says that they refused Him who spoke, and in the process they **“did not escape”**. **“Did not escape”** what? They did not escape God’s discipline and God’s punishment – and neither will the believer who thinks that they can just ignore what God has said to their life as if God is simply passive about their con-

duct and their behavior. Once again, the author is not talking about a believer losing their salvation when they refuse to listen and obey God, but he most certainly is talking about the fact that they will not escape God’s disciplinary dealing with them. Why is that? It is because of what he has already taught in [Hebrews 12](#) about God’s chastening.

Now, there is an obvious question that this verse poses. The first sentence says, **“See that you do not refuse Him who speaks.”** So, how can a believer **“refuse”** to hear God speak to their life? Well, one obvious way is never spending any meaningful time in His Word. Unfortunately, this seems to be the norm for many Christians. They simply do not have any kind of meaningful spiritual structure in their life and so they do not have a regular time that they can spend with God. At best, their time with God in His Word is spasmodic, intermittent, and occasional. However, please remember that the word **“refuse”** is a word that indicates much more than someone missing their devotional one morning. It means to reject, to avoid, and to turn down and turn away from the Word. The point is that what precipitates that mindset is when someone casually and over an extended period of time ignores their time in God’s Word. If that happens, then eventually they reach a point where they see it as almost an “intrusion” into their life.

A second way that a believer can **“refuse”** God when He speaks is to develop a mindset that allows them to pick and choose what they are willing to obey. If what God says does not fit into their personal lifestyle agenda, then they simply find a way to ignore what was said or to rationalize that what God has commanded is not applicable to them personally – but still strongly contend that they are saved. This is such a prevalent mindset in the Christian culture that it is absolutely frightening. No matter how someone may try and define the Christian life, this pick and choose mentality is completely foreign to the Scriptures and is a spiritual magnifying glass into the real nature of a person’s salvation – whether genuine or false.

A third way that a believer can **“refuse”** God when He speaks is by listening to God’s Word being taught, but never incorporating what is being taught into their life. If a believer is not willing to do be obedient to God’s Word when it is taught and preached, they would be better off not even coming to church. The average Christian in a normal evangelical church never takes notes, many never bring a Bible, and rarely remember what has been taught. If that is the case, then what God may have said to them becomes completely lost. It must be remembered that **GOD IS A SPEAKING GOD**. He uses “words” to communicate. God uses personal

study and meditation on His Word and He uses the preaching and teaching of His Word by others as a primary means of communicating and explaining His will for their life. What many Christians do in a normal church service is often no more than a mere exercise in spiritual futility. They only hear the Word being taught, but because they do not really remember what is being taught, they are rarely able to transpose what God has said into the structure of their life. They become what James describes as “**forgetful hearers**”. [James 1:22-24](#) says,

Jas 1:22 **But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.**

²³ **For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.**

[James 1:19](#) says to “**be swift to hear**” the Word of God. The clear emphasis is to be quick, rapid, and ready to hear the Word. It is a strong exhortation to not be indifferent, casual, uninterested, and unmoved concerning hearing the Word of God. It is imperative to spiritual maturity. It is a very emphatic command to receive the Word of God in a certain way. In [Matthew 7:24-27](#), Jesus closed out the Sermon on the Mount with the Parable of the Two Builders. This was His final summary and the pinnacle of all that He had taught in the Sermon, and what He emphasized was the difference between those who heard and acted on what they heard in contrast to those who heard the same message, but did nothing with what they heard. It is an incredibly dangerous spiritual condition for someone to casually and repeatedly disregard and not obey what they have heard from the Word of God.

Every believer is to do something about what they hear. When they hear, they should obey and do. For there to be real blessing and real benefit, there has to be some action. A lot of believers mark their Bible, but they never let their Bible mark them. When all someone does is hear but not obey, they live a life of deception and hypocrisy. They appear to be spiritual, but in reality they are self-deceived. The Bible is clear that believers have an enemy that seeks to constantly confuse, to counterfeit the truth, and to camouflage the truth. So, James is trying to help his readers keep from being deceived about where they are spiritually. Self-deception is extremely dangerous. It makes the person think that they are close to God, but in reality they may be very, very far removed from Him.

THREE ENCOURAGEMENTS:

ENCOURAGEMENT ONE: The believer should ask God to reveal any of the ways where they may have been refusing to listen to Him in their life. Just ask Him. They will never mature beyond the point that they allow God to speak to their life and reveal to them what He truly desires for their life. Do not be afraid to ask God to reveal different areas that genuinely need His corrective influence. If a believer will do that, then they will find that God’s correction or reproof on their life will be a great blessing.

ENCOURAGEMENT TWO: The believer should commit themselves to a **structured** and **meaningful** time in the Word of God each day. If the Christian’s time in the Word of God is not meaningful to them, they can rest assured that it was not meaningful to God. **MAKE THIS A NON-NEGOTIABLE ABSOLUTE.** The individual should write the commitment down in words so that they can go back and review and know what it is that they are going to be committed to doing. Do it. Make the effort to put God’s Word as an absolute priority in your life. Do not let anything become a distraction from doing this one thing.

ENCOURAGEMENT THREE: Purchase a journal in which to always take notes, whether it is in personal devotions or in a church service. It is critical that believers have a mechanism that provides them a legitimate way to “record” and “retain” what God is saying and doing in their life. What good does it do to read or listen to God’s word, have Him speak to the person’s life, but then completely forgot what He said to them? It does not do anyone one bit of good. They never know how it is that God wants to use His Word in their life – never. They do not know what the future holds or who He may bring into their life, but He does. Many Christians are fully unprepared for the future simply because they have casually removed the impact of God’s Word on their life out of their life through simple neglect. It is so important to find a meaningful way to retain God’s Word in their life and to retain what God is saying to them personally through His Word.

ENDNOTES

¹Strong’s, 1290.

²Wuest, 229.

³Harris, 173.

⁴Strong’s, 982.

⁵Harris, 203.

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