

Hebrews 2:17-3:6

Considering Christ

Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus (3:1).

As we enter the third chapter in Hebrews it's good to keep in mind the flow of Paul's argument. Right out of the gate he stresses the fact that God has spoken. *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son (1:1,2).* All that follows places a strong emphasis on the nature and the character of the One who has spoken to us in these last days. He is the brightness of His Father's glory and the express image of His person. He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. He is seated at the right hand of His Father where He took His place after purging our sins. He is the greatest of the prophets and ranks higher than the angels.

All of which leads Paul to say in 2:1 *Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.* Christ has spoken – we should give earnest heed to what He's said. This is chapters 1 & 2 in a nutshell. And I should add here again that the failure to give earnest heed to what Christ has said is tantamount to neglecting so great salvation. It's like possessing that pearl of great price that Christ mentions in Mt. 13 only to let it slip through your hands.

Now when we enter chapter 3 of Hebrews we meet up with Paul's next exhortation. *Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus (3:1).* There's a sense in which you could say that Paul is calling for the Hebrew Christians to bump up their devotion to the next level. Not only should you give earnest heed to what Christ has said but now you should take the next step which is to *consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.*

The word *consider* carries the meaning *to fix one's eyes or mind upon.* It's sometimes translated by the English word *behold.* One time (and I like this usage) it's translated by the word *discover.* So we read in Ac 27:39 *And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.* And the reason I like this word is because of the ramifications behind it when we apply it to Christ.

When we consider or behold or think upon Christ we are bound to make new and fresh discoveries of Christ. We need never fear exhausting our knowledge or our experience of Christ. Paul makes this plain in his prayer for the saints at Ephesus when he prays for them that they would come to know the *breadth and length and depth and height and to know the love of God which passes knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.*

We play a part in seeing such a prayer answered. Our part is to *consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.* This is a key element when it comes to fortifying ourselves with grace – and it's a key element when it comes to advancing our

own personal sanctification. It is when we with open face behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord that we are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord (2Cor. 3:18). And what does beholding in a glass the glory of the Lord amount to but devoting ourselves to the contemplation of Christ.

So we're to hear Him and we're to give the more earnest heed to what He says to us. But we're not to stop there. We see now in this exhortation in 3:1 that we're to take the next step which is to consider Him. And in order to encourage and exhort you to heed this exhortation and make it your constant practice I want to conduct a simple analysis of it this morning.

Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus (3:1)

I. The Ones to Whom the Exhortation is Addressed

I find it interesting that it isn't until you come to 3:1 that you find the subjects of the epistle directly addressed. They are referred to in earlier verses – they are called *they who are sanctified* in 2:11. They are also referred to as *brethren* in that same verse. They are called *sons* in 2:10, sons that are on their way to glory. They're also referred to as *heirs of salvation* in 1:14 but it's not until you come to 3:1 that they are directly addressed.

And we notice in the way they're addressed that they are referred to in terms of what their character is, what their relationship is to each other and what their common experience has been. Their character is found in the word *holy*. They are not merely brethren, but *holy brethren*. This means that they are set apart for Christ – they are separated from the world – they strive for moral purity and integrity.

This character trait becomes an essential part of their being. For Paul will write a little later that *they are to follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord* (12:14). In our text they are referred to as partakers of the heavenly calling. In 12:10 they are referred to as partakers of holiness. The chastisements we receive from God have the aim of making us partakers of holiness.

In other places in the New Testament the followers of Christ are referred to partakers of His promise by the gospel (Eph. 3:6); partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light (Col. 1:12); partakers of the afflictions of the gospel (2Tim. 1:8). And just as surely as we partake of the spiritual benefits of the gospel we also partake of holiness which is one of the benefits of the gospel.

There's no such thing, you see, as a Christian that has no interest in holiness. If God's purpose in saving us is to conform us to the image of His Son then we must be holy even as God and Christ are holy. This same phrase is translated throughout the epistles by the word *saints*. A saint is a holy person. A saint is set apart to God. This isn't to say that he's someone who is sinlessly perfect. I've always found it interesting that for all the problems

Paul addresses in his first epistle to the Corinthians he nevertheless addresses that epistle *to the church which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints*. And in the original the words *to be* are not found so the phrase could read simply *called saints*.

It is the saints, then, that are called upon to consider Christ. It is those redeemed sinners who have gained an interest in Christ that are called upon to think much upon Christ. After all, the term brethren, as we've seen already, doesn't merely apply to a relationship that we bear toward each other. It does indicate that. We are all sons – sons by adoption brought into the family of God and therefore joined to each other by a common bond to Christ. But the term brethren also states a relationship that we bear toward Christ Himself. This was emphasized in chapter 2 beginning in v. 11 where we read of our union to Christ and as a result of that union we're told *for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren*.

But notice with me also that the ones that are addressed in our text are also labeled in terms of their common experience. They are *partakers of the heavenly calling*. This is a timely reference to the doctrine of effectual calling since our next chapter in the WCF is on that very doctrine.

Only in our text do we find this effectual call referred to as a heavenly calling. It's called a *high calling* in Phil. 3:14; It's called a *holy calling* in 2Tim. 1:9. Whenever the term *calling* is used as it pertains to our salvation the meaning of the term is that effectual calling that is wrought upon the heart by the Spirit of God. It is this call, according to our shorter catechism that convinces us of our sin and misery, enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ, renews our wills and persuades us to embrace Christ.

It is this calling that Peter tells us we are to make sure along with our election. And the way we can make such a calling sure is test ourselves by that statement in the shorter catechism. Are you convinced of your sin and misery? You would think it wouldn't be hard for sinners to be convinced of their sin and misery but such is their pride and the depravity and deceptive nature of their hearts that nothing short of a supernatural calling from the Spirit of God will convince them of their sin and misery. Has your mind been enlightened in the knowledge of Christ? If it has then you will acknowledge of Christ all that this epistle to the Hebrews reveals Him to be – our prophet, priest, and king – our exalted Redeemer who exists two natures, human and divine in one person forever.

Has your will been renewed so that you find yourself willing and desirous to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered in the gospel? The natural man won't embrace Him because the natural man has no desire for Him. But those who have had their wills renewed will embrace Him and will by the grace of God cling to Him. They may be tempted to forsake Him at times as these Hebrews were – they may be sorely tried and afflicted but still their minds and hearts will respond to Christ the way Peter did at a time when many who had not been effectually called were turning away from Christ. Peter and the others, on the other hand responded by saying *to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life* (Jn. 6:68).

There's the mark of a man who knows the heavenly calling of God – He sees in Christ the words of eternal life. I like Arthur Pink's comment on this heavenly calling. He writes:

We are partakers of the heavenly calling because He, in wondrous condescension, partook of our earthly lot. What He has, we have; where He is, we are. He is the Holy One of God, therefore are we holy. He has been "made higher than the heavens," therefore are we "partakers of the heavenly calling!" Just so far as our hearts really lay hold of this, shall we walk as "strangers and pilgrims" here. Where our "Treasure" (Christ) is, there will our hearts be also. That is why we are here bidden to "consider" Him.

Here, perhaps, is the sure way to make your calling and election sure. Do you consider Him? Are you taken up with Him? Have you set Him as a seal upon your heart? If you have then heeding this exhortation will come quite naturally to you. We think about those that we love. We are taken up with them.

We see, then, the ones who are addressed by this exhortation. Would you think with me next on:

II. The Way This Exhortation is Practiced

We are exhorted to consider Him. What does it mean to consider Him? I like the words of one commentator who writes: *Consider. Attentively ponder all that is said of the Messiah.* He then goes into ways in which this can be done when he continues: *Think of his rank; his dignity; his holiness; his sufferings; his death; his resurrection, ascension, intercession.* We could add to that that we should think of His rule and reign and His return to establish a new heaven and new earth. This commentator then lists reasons why we should think of Him: *Think of him, that you may see the claims to a holy life; that you may learn to bear trials; that you may be kept from apostasy. The character and work of the Son of God are worthy of the profound and prayerful consideration of every man; and especially every Christian should reflect much on him. Of the friend that we love we think much; but what friend have we like the Lord Jesus?*

In our text we're given two things, in particular, that should occupy our thinking. We're to consider Christ as the *Apostle and High Priest of our profession*. As the ranking Apostle we should think of Him as sent from God. This receives strong emphasis in the Gospel of John where Christ refers to Himself again and again as One sent by His Father. When we think of Christ as the ranking Apostle of our profession we are back to considering His office as our prophet. He declares to us by His word and Spirit the will of God for our salvation.

Our the High Priest of our profession we consider what He has done and what He is doing now. He has accomplished our redemption by the offering of Himself and He ever lives to make intercession for us – intercession that salvation to the uttermost will be applied to us by His Spirit. So there are a number of ways in which we can consider Christ.

And just as we've been partakers of the heavenly calling you could say that in this exhortation we're called upon to engage in heavenly activity. Isn't this what we find in those scenes of heaven that are given to us in the book of Revelation?

Rev. 4:9-11 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth forever and ever, The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

Do you see how these characters in the book of Revelation are taken up with Christ? They're worshipping Christ – they're casting their crowns before His throne in recognition that any reward they've gained has really been gained by Christ. They're considering Him – they're taken up with Him. A call to consider Christ inevitably leads to the worship of Christ. The two things work together. We consider Him and are led to worship Him and as we're engaged in worship we're devoting ourselves to considering Him.

In Rev. 5 we have yet another heavenly scene depicting for us how the hosts of heaven are taken up with Christ. *And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever.*

What a standard, then, is set for us when it comes to considering Christ! When we pray *thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven* we see what our part must be behind that prayer. If we want heaven to be our standard in this world then we must be taken up with Christ as those hosts of heaven are taken up with Christ. And the closer we come to rising to this standard the closer we come to bringing heaven to earth.

What does this mean for us, then, practically speaking? It means that when you open your Bible and read it you should be searching for Christ. *Search the scriptures*, Christ said in Jn. 5:39 *for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.* And to those Emmaus road disciples we read of Christ in Lu 24:27 that *beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.*

We are taught in our shorter catechism that the scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man. And so we learn of God and we learn of God's Son and even as we learn of our duty we should learn of it as

coming from Christ Himself. He directs us in our paths. He shows us the way to please Him. And He inspires and motivates us to perform our duty as unto Him.

We must be careful, then, not to think that when we consider Christ we make Christ the only subject of the Bible. The Bible addresses countless numbers of subjects. But when Christ is at the heart of our devotion then He becomes the lens through which we view every subject in Scripture. We behold Him in His glory and we contemplate His love and His grace and His mercy and then when it comes to our duty we see our duty as it relates to Him.

I wonder, then, this morning – are you taken up with Christ? Do you make it your practice to consider Him? Could I suggest to you this morning that to the degree you're taken up with Him to that same degree your children will follow after Him. Our children, you see, are able through their exposure to us to truly perceive what we're taken up with and what we spend our time considering.

If you're taken up with entertainment then that's what your children will be taken up with. If you're taken up with your own personal ambitions then your children will eventually learn to consider their own personal ambitions. If the things you consider most are the cares of this world then it will be the cares of this world that eventually will dominate the minds and hearts of your children.

But if you're taken up with Christ and He becomes foundational to everything else you do and say and think then your children will learn to make Christ foundational to their lives as well. The problem in our day and in our culture is that Christ is too often peripheral to our lives. You may consider Him to be an important aspect to your life – but He's an important peripheral aspect to your life. And then parents wonder why their children's interest in Christ turns out to be seemingly less than their own interest in Christ. And in many cases the children are simply following the examples of their parents and making Christ a peripheral part of their lives rather than foundational to their lives.

If He's at the core of your heart then you'll make it your practice to consider Him. It remains for us to consider then:

III. The Effects of the Exhortation

The effects of considering Christ can be seen in this chapter both positively and negatively. The positive effect of heeding this exhortation is found in v. 14. *For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.* By considering Christ we partake of Christ. We commune with Christ. We pray to Christ as we worship Him. We find ourselves abiding in Him and He in us and as a result we walk with Him in the light of His word.

This, in turn, leads to holding the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end. We persevere in the faith, in other words. We withstand the storms of life and the attacks of the devil. We read His providential dealings with us in the light of His love to us and our faith holds true and even becomes stronger.

The thing we need to note with regard to this exhortation and with regard to our Christian lives is that if we're not moving forward then we're drifting backwards. I think many Christians make the mistake of thinking that during those seasons when they've become strong in the Lord by staying near to the Lord they can continue for a time in that strength even when they become negligent in their spiritual habits.

Like Samson of old they think that they'll deliver themselves as at other times and will be unaware that the Lord's power has departed from them. And so the second half of Hebrews 3 is taken up with warnings – warnings about the danger of failing to heed the exhortation to consider Christ.

We are warned about the hard-heartedness that will ensue in vv. 7,8 *Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness.*

We're also warned in v. 12 to *take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.* Just as faith cometh from hearing and hearing by the word of God so unbelief comes by failing to hear and by negligence toward the word of God. And unbelief leads to a departure from God.

You begin to see, I hope, the importance of the exhortation to consider Christ. It's not simply a matter of entering more fully into the blessing of Christ. That is certainly the positive benefit to the exhortation but if the benefit was only positive and there were no negative consequences for neglecting the practice of considering Christ I suspect it would be all the more easy for Christians to neglect.

The truth of the matter is we're either going to gain ground or lose ground. We're either going to advance in our sanctification or become more conformed to the world. We're either going to advance in holiness or advance in worldliness. And which way we advance or what kind of progress we make will be contingent upon giving heed to the exhortation to consider Christ.

I hope and pray, therefore, that this will be an exhortation you'll take to heart. If you are indeed among the holy brethren and are a partaker of the heavenly calling then this exhortation won't come to you as a burden. You've already known the blessing and the benefit of being taken up with Christ. If you've grown careless in heeding the exhortation then you at least know that there have been times of blessing in your life and you know what the blessings are traceable to – they're traceable to those times when you kept close to Christ and were constantly in communion with Christ. They're traceable to those times when you considered Christ and it may be that you need to heed the exhortation again.

The failure to do so will lead to the hardening of your heart and your departure from Christ. And so it seems that we're all faced with a choice this morning. We can advance or we can backslide. We can grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ or we can be conformed more to the world. Which direction we go will be determined by whether or not we need the exhortation – *Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.*