

Commentary on Hebrews Chapters 1 and 2, by Chuck Smith 9.15.24

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September Memory Verse, 1 Thessalonians 4:15 (NKJV)

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

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Includes John MacArthur :: Bible Introductions – Hebrews

Chapter 1

There has been quite a bit of discussion as to the authorship of this book of Hebrews. And many different suggestions have been offered by different scholars. Needless to say, we don't know. There was no autograph on it. So we don't know for certain who was the author of the book of Hebrews. It is my own personal opinion that Paul the apostle was the author. It seems to have a Pauline style.

This is a book written, of course, as the title would indicate to the Hebrews, to the Hebrew believers. Now, in the church in Jerusalem there remained a strange and interesting adherence by many within the church to the Jewish laws. In fact, they were seeking to press the Jewish laws on the Gentiles. At times they would come to the Gentile believers, such as those in Antioch, and they would disrupt the fellowship declaring to them unless you are circumcised and you keep the law of Moses you can't be saved. Within Jerusalem there was a mixture of Judaism and Christianity. They remained Jews in their cultural practices, in their keeping of the cultural aspects of the Jewish law: not eating with Gentiles, the forbidding of eating certain meats, and so forth. This was a continued practice within the church of Jerusalem, going to the temple, going to temple worship. There were those who had, for a time, embraced Jesus Christ, who were actually going back to offering sacrifices in the temple worship again.

So the author of the book of Hebrews addresses the issue of Hebrew Christianity, and of the danger of turning away from Jesus Christ and trying to find salvation under the Jewish religious system once again. So we'll find the warnings about those who have tasted of the heavenly things, the kingdom to come, who have gone back and tried to offer sacrifices before the priests for sins again. And showing that there is no other sacrifice; Christ is the one, once and for all.

So with God, He did not seek to prove He existed. The Bible doesn't seek to prove that He existed. God's Word to us, the fact that He gives His Word to us, testifies of His existence. How could He speak to man if He did not exist? So, the existence of God is assumed, and then the fact that God has spoken to man is also assumed; two assumptions.

Commentary on Hebrews Chapters 1 and 2, by Chuck Smith 9.15.24

God, who at different times and in different ways spoke in times past unto the fathers by the prophets (Hbr 1:1),

And so God has spoken, various ways, various times.

But in these last days he has spoken unto us by his own dear Son [or unto us by His Son] (Hbr 1:2),

And so God in different ways, in different times spoke to our fathers, but in these last days He has spoken unto us by His Son.

whom [and now we find seven facts declared concerning Jesus Christ:] he hath appointed heir of all things (Hbr 1:2),

God's kingdom is yet to come, a glorious kingdom indeed. Through the prophets God revealed some of the aspects of His kingdom. He opened little windows and they looked on ahead into this time warp kind of an experience. They could see the glories of God's kingdom, an earth where men lived together in peace. An earth that wasn't cursed by commerce, but every man could freely take what he needed. Everyone's needs were supplied. Men lived together in love and in harmony. A world in which there were no sick people, no physical impairments: where the lame would leap for joy, where the dumb would be singing praises unto God, and the blind would behold the glory of God. The prophets saw into this glorious age and this glorious kingdom of which the Father has ordained to put His Son over this kingdom. He shall reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. "He shall sit upon the throne of David to order it and establish it in righteousness and in justice from henceforth even forevermore and the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this" (Isaiah 9:7). So they foresaw this glorious age that God was going to bring to pass. Christ, the heir of all things, and we who are in Christ, adopted as sons through Him, have become joint heirs with Christ. So, God has appointed Him heir of all things.

Secondly,

by whom also He made the worlds (Hbr 1:2);

Jesus Christ was the agent by which God created the worlds, the universe. "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God and all things were made by Him, without Him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:1-3). Colossians tells us that He made all things. It was by Him and for Him were all things created. And by Him all things are held together, Colossians. And so, He is declared here to be the Creator.

Next of all,

Who being the brightness of his glory (Hbr 1:3),

There is surrounding God a glorious brilliance. The glory of God so bright that man cannot perceive it. Brilliant to see; a light unapproachable by man we are told, this shining forth of God. In heaven we're not going to need any light of the sun or the moon,

Commentary on Hebrews Chapters 1 and 2, by Chuck Smith 9.15.24

for the Lamb shall be the light. The glory, the outshining of God, through Jesus Christ will light up heaven. There'll just be a glow about everything. Everything will just be glowing as you get there. Glowing with the presence of God, the Shekinah of God that lit the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle in the Old Testament.

And then,

he is the express image of his person (Hbr 1:3),

Jesus said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). He is the express image of His person, or as we might say today concerning a kid, he's the spitting image of his old man. The express image of God. So he who has the Son has the Father. He who rejects the Son, rejects the Father also. He is the express image of the person of God. You cannot love God and hate His Son. You cannot receive God and reject His Son. They come as a package. To have one is to have the other. Read I John. You deny the Son, you deny the Father. He is the express image of His person.

Then,

he is upholding all things by the word of his power (Hbr 1:3),

Now, it is interesting to me that in the beginning when God created the universe, That is, He declared it into existence. "And God said, 'Light be,' and light was" (Genesis 1:3). He spoke it into existence. And God said, "Let there be a firmament dividing the waters." And God said, "Let the dry land appear." He spoke these things into existence. And so the worlds were created by the word of His power, but the worlds are also being held together by the word of His power.

You really wonder how powerful is the word of God that He could speak the universe into existence, but just as easily, He could speak the universe out of existence. How awesome is the God that we serve. Jesus Christ the express image of His person, upholding all things together by the word of His power.

when he by himself purged our sins (Hbr 1:3),

Significant, because Jesus, in making atonement for us, had to go it alone. No angels to comfort or succor Him there, but alone He bore our sin and our guilt and died in our place. He made atonement for you and for me. And so, "had by himself purged our sins."

And now, has sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hbr 1:3);

We see Jesus sitting down now, sitting down at the right hand of God. We are going to be told in chapter 2 of His waiting there until all things have been brought into subjection unto Him.

Now we begin in this point in chapter 1 discovering the superiority of God's revelation through Jesus Christ, the superiority of Jesus Christ over the angels.

Commentary on Hebrews Chapters 1 and 2, by Chuck Smith 9.15.24

Jesus is not the opposite of Satan; Michael would be. Jesus, again, is the express image of the person of God. He is the off-shining of the glory of God. He is that which we see of God.

So he was made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, [that is, did God say,] Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? (Hbr 1:4-5)

I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? (Hbr 1:5)

The prophecy is in II Samuel the seventh chapter, of God to David when David said he wanted to build a house for God. Nathan had to tell David that God wouldn't allow him to build the house because his hands were bloodied with war. "But you tell David that I'm going to build him a house and I shall raise up of David a seed and He shall sit upon the throne forever and I will be to Him a Father and He shall be to me a Son." God's declaration to David concerning the seed that should rise up from David and reign over the world.

And of angels [what did God say of angels?], He made his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom (Hbr 1:7-8).

But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows (Hbr 1:8-9).

Verse 10: And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hands (Hbr 1:10).

Quotation from Psalms 102.

They shall perish; but you remain: and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail (Hbr 1:11-12).

Talking now about the eternal nature of the Son. Even the universe is going to grow old.

But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? (Hbr 1:13)

He never said that to any angels, and yet to the Son in Psalms 110:1. Speaking of the angels,

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation? (Hbr 1:14)

The angels are first of all ministering spirits. And that first term recognizes their ministry unto God. In Isaiah, as he saw the throne of God, he saw the seraphim as they were

Commentary on Hebrews Chapters 1 and 2, by Chuck Smith 9.15.24

worshipping God saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." In the book of Revelation, chapter 4, when John saw the heavenly scene, he saw the cherubim around the throne of God saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." Their first ministry is to God, in the worship of God, there in the heavenly scene. But God dispatches them to His children to minister to us or to serve us at particular times of need.

Now in Psalms it said, "He will give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all of thy ways. To bear thee up, lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone" (Psalm 91:11-12). So these angels are actually ministering spirits, but God never said to the angels or to any particular angels, "Let the angels of God worship Him," nor did He say to any angel, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool." Because they are servants. Jesus is not there as a servant. He is there reigning. And a vast difference over the angels who worship and serve God continually there in the presence of God and Jesus who sits there to be worshipped and to be served, reigning there upon the throne.

Chapter 2

Therefore we ought to take the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip (Hbr 2:1).

More literally, "we should drift away from them."

God has spoken unto us by His Son, the complete revelation. We had better give the more earnest heed to what God has said through the Son than what He said through angels or through prophets or through others.

For if the word spoken by angels [who are an inferior medium of revelation] was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and then was confirmed unto us by those that heard him (Hbr 2:2-3);

How are we going to escape if we neglect this great salvation? How are you going to be saved? You can't go back to the law. For under the law every transgression received a just recompense of reward. Under the law you get what's coming to you. That's what the law is all about. Jesus taught us the grace of God and the forgiveness of our sins through our faith and trust in Him. So we better take the more earnest heed. We better not drift away from this, as some of the Jewish Christians were prone to do, drifting away from the truth in Christ and seeking again to be justified by the works and the deeds of the law.

So Jesus, first of all, proclaimed this glorious message of salvation, and then those who heard Him, the disciples, confirmed the things to us that Jesus said.

God also bore them witness, both with signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will? (Hbr 2:4)

Commentary on Hebrews Chapters 1 and 2, by Chuck Smith 9.15.24

The word was first spoken by Jesus, the word of faith, salvation through faith. It was confirmed by the disciples who had heard Jesus. Then God Himself confirms the witness with the signs and the wonders, and the miracles, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit that were operated by those apostles who had heard the message from Jesus and declared the message. God proving it now to be true. Yes, they are of God and here's the proof--the signs, the wonders, the different miracles and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

For unto the angels has he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak (Hbr 2:5).

The angels aren't going to be ruling the world that is to come. They will still be serving.

But one in a certain place testified, saying, [and of course we know who that one was. It was David the psalmist.] What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? (Hbr 2:6)

Speaking of man:

You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor, and you did set him over the works of thy hands (Hbr 2:7):

So man was created a little lower than the angels.

Angels are ministering spirits. They can take on a bodily form, but they are not restricted by a body as we are restricted by our bodies. You see, our body, made up of atoms, experience the repelling force of atoms when we walk into a wall. You want to know the repelling force of positive charges? Run into the wall.

And so God made man a little lower than the angels and He crowned him with glory and honor, and He did set him over the works of His hands. God said to Adam, "I give you dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air, every moving and creeping thing. Have dominion over them." So God placed man over the works of His hands.

He hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him (Hbr 2:8).

But what do we see?

We see Jesus, [who also became a man,] who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death (Hbr 2:9),

He had to become a man in order to redeem man. He had to become next of kin in order to redeem that which man had forfeited to Satan--the world itself. We see Jesus made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death. As God, He could not die. He had to become a man and take on the limitations. So we see Him now,

crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man (Hbr 2:9).

Commentary on Hebrews Chapters 1 and 2, by Chuck Smith 9.15.24

There you have what redemption is all about. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). For God laid upon Him the iniquities of us all and He tasted death for every man.

Jesus tasted of death for every man. You remember on the cross He cried, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" At that point, when our sins were placed upon Him, He suffered the consequence of our sins. Being forsaken of God, He suffered death for us. And so, we see Jesus, "who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man."

Because He tasted death for me, I don't have to taste death.

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things (Hbr 2:10),

Notice the place of Jesus. All things are for Him. This is told us in Colossians 1, all things were made by Him and for Him. He is before all things and by Him all things are held together. Here again, the same declaration concerning Jesus. All things are by Him, and all things, here it declares, are for Him. And by whom are all things. He is the Creator, but He is more than that. He is the object of creation.

"It became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things,"

in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation complete through sufferings (Hbr 2:10).

And so there was a work of God being wrought through the sufferings of Christ. In Isaiah the fifty-third chapter, as he prophesies the sufferings of Jesus, "For it pleased the Father to bruise Him." Now, here is "the captain of our salvation made complete," and we'll understand this as we get to the end of the chapter, how He has become complete through His suffering. Because it is through His sufferings that He can understand what it is to experience suffering.

Jesus, because He suffered, made complete our captain of our salvation, because now He is able to understand, and thus, to help us when we are in need and trouble.

For both he that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one (Hbr 2:11):

In other words, we have been made one together with Jesus Christ. That's what the word *fellowship* means. Coming into fellowship with our Lord.

for which cause he is not ashamed to call them his brothers (Hbr 2:11),

If we only realized what Jesus has done for us. Suffered, tasted death for us, and now He calls us His brothers. We are one together with Him.

Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brothers, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee. And again, I will put my trust in him. And, Behold I and the children which God hath given me (Hbr 2:12-13).

Commentary on Hebrews Chapters 1 and 2, by Chuck Smith 9.15.24

So here, "I and the children which God hath given me." Jesus made the way for each of us to come into the presence of God and to become a part of the kingdom of God by tasting death for us, by bearing our sin and our iniquity, by purging us Himself from our sin. And now to present us as brothers, joint heirs with Him, unto the Father to share together with Him the glories of God's eternal kingdom.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood (Hbr 2:14),

You see, I'm made up of flesh and blood. This body, made a little lower than the angels.

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood,"

he also himself likewise took part of the same (Hbr 2:14);

He came in a body of flesh. He shed His blood for my sins. He took on the limitations of a body of flesh. He experienced the same pain of weariness that you experience in a body of flesh, knew what it was to be tired, knew what it was to stub His toe, knew what it was to hit His finger with a hammer, knew what it was to experience the restrictions and the limitations and the pain and the sufferings that we have in a body of flesh and blood. He partook of the same.

that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil (Hbr 2:14);

So Jesus through His death... the word *destroyed*, katargeo, or put out of business, he who had the power of death, that is, the devil. He who brought death to mankind by tempting Eve and Adam. Satan no longer has a hold over me because of sin. I've been made righteous through Jesus Christ. Satan, then, has no more claim upon me as far as death because of my sin, because Jesus has cleansed me from my unrighteousness and has made me righteous before God. And so through His death He put out of business the one who had the power of death, the claim of death upon me, that is, the devil.

And he delivered them, who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Hbr 2:15). That is, the bondage of sin and the slavery to sin.

For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took upon himself the seed of Abraham (Hbr 2:16). He became as a man.

Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brothers, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted (Hbr 2:17-18).

Our great high priest, Jesus Christ, understands us, and that's important. He understands us because He came in a body of flesh and He experienced the limitations and all of this body of flesh. He was made like us in order that He might be merciful. He has mercy upon me. He knows what it is to go through the hassles of life. He knows

Commentary on Hebrews Chapters 1 and 2, by Chuck Smith 9.15.24

what it is to be hungry. He knows what it is not to have money for taxes. He knows what it is to be pressed unjustly for taxes by the government. He knows these things that we've experienced, these things that we chafe under. He knows what it's about, and thus, He is merciful. In that He Himself has suffered, He is able to also minister to us and to help us when we're tempted. He knows what it is. He has experienced it.

John McArthur Bible Introductions – Hebrews

Title

When the various NT books were formally brought together into one collection shortly after A.D. 100, the titles were added for convenience. This epistle's title bears the traditional Greek title, "To the Hebrews," which was attested by at least the second century A.D. Within the epistle itself, however, there is no identification of the recipients as either Hebrews (Jews) or Gentiles. Since the epistle is filled with references to Hebrew history and religion and does not address any particular Gentile or pagan practice, the traditional title has been maintained.

Author and Date

The author of Hebrews is unknown. Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Apollos, Luke, Philip, Priscilla, Aquila, and Clement of Rome have been suggested by different scholars, but the epistle's vocabulary, style, and various literary characteristics do not clearly support any particular claim. It is significant that the writer includes himself among those people who had received confirmation of Christ's message from others (2:3). That would seem to rule out someone like Paul who claimed that he had received such confirmation directly from God and not from men (Gal. 1:12). Whoever the author was, he preferred citing OT references from the Greek OT (LXX) rather than from the Hebrew text. Even the early church expressed various opinions on authorship, and current scholarship admits the puzzle still has no solution. Therefore, it seems best to accept the epistle's anonymity. Ultimately, of course, the author was the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21).

The use of the present tense in 5:1–4; 7:21, 23, 27, 28; 8:3–5, 13; 9:6–9, 13, 25; 10:1, 3, 4, 8, 11; and 13:10, 11 would suggest that the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system were still in operation when the epistle was composed. Since the temple was destroyed by General (later Emperor) Titus Vespasian in A.D. 70, the epistle must have been written prior to that date. In addition, it may be noted that Timothy had just been released from prison (13:23) and that persecution was becoming severe (10:32–39; 12:4; 13:3). These details suggest a date for the epistle around A.D. 67–69.

Background and Setting

Emphases on the Levitical priesthood and on sacrifices, as well as the absence of any reference to the Gentiles, support the conclusion that a community of Hebrews was the recipient of the epistle. Although these Hebrews were primarily converts to Christ, there were probably a number of unbelievers in their midst, who were attracted by the message of salvation, but who had not yet made a full commitment of faith in Christ.

Commentary on Hebrews Chapters 1 and 2, by Chuck Smith 9.15.24

One thing is clear from the contents of the epistle: the community of Hebrews was facing the possibility of intensified persecution (10:32–39; 12:4). As they confronted this possibility, the Hebrews were tempted to cast aside any identification with Christ. They may have considered demoting Christ from God's Son to a mere angel. Such a precedent had already been set in the Qumran community of messianic Jews living near the Dead Sea. They had dropped out of society, established a religious commune, and included the worship of angels in their brand of reformed Judaism. The Qumran community had even gone so far as to claim that the angel Michael was higher in status than the coming Messiah. These kinds of doctrinal aberrations could explain the emphasis in Hebrews chapter one on the superiority of Christ over the angels.

Possible locations for the recipients of the epistle include Palestine, Egypt, Italy, Asia Minor, and Greece. The community that was the primary recipient may have circulated the epistle among those of Hebrew background in neighboring areas and churches. Those believers probably had not seen Christ personally. Apparently, they had been evangelized by "those who heard" Christ and whose ministries had been authenticated "with signs and wonders, with various miracles" (2:3, 4). Thus the recipients could have been in a church outside Judea and Galilee or in a church in those areas, but established among people in the generation following those who had been eyewitnesses of Christ. The congregation was not new or untaught ("by this time you ought to be teachers") yet some of them still needed "milk and not solid food" (5:12).

"Those from Italy" (13:24) is an ambiguous reference since it could mean either those who had left Italy and were living elsewhere, or those who were still in Italy and being singled out as native residents of that country. Greece or Asia Minor must also be considered because of the apparently early establishment of the church there, and because of the consistent use of the LXX.

The generation of Hebrews receiving this epistle had practiced the Levitical sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. Jews living in exile had substituted the synagogue for the temple but still felt a deep attraction to the temple worship. Some had the means to make regular pilgrimages to the temple in Jerusalem. The writer of this epistle emphasized the superiority of Christianity over Judaism and the superiority of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice over the repeated and imperfect Levitical sacrifices observed in the temple.

Historical and Theological Themes

Since the book of Hebrews is grounded in the work of the Levitical priesthood, an understanding of the book of Leviticus is essential for properly interpreting Hebrews. Israel's sin had continually interrupted God's fellowship with His chosen and covenant people, Israel. Therefore, He graciously and sovereignly established a system of sacrifices that symbolically represented the inner repentance of sinners and His divine forgiveness. However, the need for sacrifices never ended because the people and priests continued to sin. The need of all mankind was for a perfect priest and a perfect

Commentary on Hebrews Chapters 1 and 2, by Chuck Smith 9.15.24

sacrifice that would once and for all actually remove sin. God's provision for that perfect priest and sacrifice in Christ is the central message of Hebrews.

The epistle to the Hebrews is a study in contrast, between the imperfect and incomplete provisions of the Old Covenant, given under Moses, and the infinitely better provisions of the New Covenant offered by the perfect High-Priest, God's only Son and the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Included in the "better" provisions are: a better hope, testament, promise, sacrifice, substance, country, and resurrection. Those who belong to the New Covenant dwell in a completely new and heavenly atmosphere, they worship a heavenly Savior, have a heavenly calling, receive a heavenly gift, are citizens of a heavenly country, look forward to a heavenly Jerusalem, and have their very names written in heaven.

One of the key theological themes in Hebrews is that all believers now have direct access to God under the New Covenant and, therefore, may approach the throne of God boldly (4:16; 10:22). One's hope is in the very presence of God, into which he follows the Savior (6:19, 20; 10:19, 20). The primary teaching symbolized by the tabernacle service was that believers under the covenant of law did not have direct access to the presence of God (9:8), but were shut out of the Holy of Holies. The book of Hebrews may briefly be summarized in this way: Believers in Jesus Christ, as God's perfect sacrifice for sin, have the perfect High-Priest through whose ministry everything is new and better than under the covenant of law.

This epistle is more than a doctrinal treatise, however. It is intensely practical in its application to everyday living (see chap. 13). The writer himself even refers to his letter as a "word of exhortation" (13:22; cf. Acts 13:15). Exhortations designed to stir the readers into action are found throughout the text. Those exhortations are given in the form of 6 warnings:

- Warning against drifting from "the things we have heard" (2:1-4)
- Warning against disbelieving the "voice" of God (3:7-14)
- Warning against degenerating from "the elementary principles of Christ" (5:11-6:20)
- Warning against despising "the knowledge of the truth" (10:26-39)
- Warning against devaluing "the grace of God" (12:15-17)
- Warning against departing from Him "who speaks" (12:25-29)