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Hebrews 4



Hebrews - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses Hebrews chapter 4 where he examines the idea of rest as entering the promised land. He notes that the writer of Hebrews sees a spiritual fulfillment beyond just Canaan rest and that the context of the text is linked to Jewish works done according to the law code. He emphasizes that the message of the Gospel is that God promises and wants what is good for people, but it requires belief in that promise, and ultimately leads to accountability.

Transcript

So we've come to Hebrews chapter 4 now, and this continues the warning section that began in chapter 3 at verse 7, and this continues on through the majority of our chapter 4 through verse 13. So we've got like 13 verses at the end of chapter 3 and 13 verses at the beginning of chapter 4. So at 26 verses, a rather lengthy digression from the main argument. The main argument that seems to have been hinted at in chapter 2 verses 17 and 18 is that Jesus is the high priest.

There will be a variety of things that are said about that general theme in the course of the remainder of the book, but we see the author's concern manifesting again in these recurrent warnings about the danger of either falling away or drifting or not going forward. Now in chapter 3 verse 7 where this warning section began, there was a lengthy quote, 5 verses long, from Psalm 95. And it was an exhortation of the psalmist to his generation of Jews, of Israelites, not to make the mistake that their ancestors had made, who had had a promise from God of inheriting the promised land, Canaan.

This inheritance in Canaan was regarded to be a state of rest. And so in the psalm, David says that we should not be like that generation that failed to enter into God's rest. In fact, God was so angry at them that he swore that they would not enter into that rest.

Now our writer is going to extrapolate from some of the things in the psalm that God is saying that there's an opportunity for us at this late date. Perhaps people in every generation, while it is called today. As long as there are a succession of days, there's always a today.

As long as there's a today, as the Psalm 95 7 begins, today, if you'll hear his voice, we could see that is speaking to us in our time as well. And therefore an offer to enter God's rest. Now I want to clarify, I said at the end, during our last session, that entering into Canaan was sometimes referred to as entering into God's rest.

And I'd like to show you the scriptures in the Old Testament quickly that the author is thinking of and that Psalm 95 was thinking about also. In Deuteronomy chapter 3 and verse 20, Moses said in verse 19 and 20, but your wives, your little ones, your livestock. I know that you have much livestock shall stay in your cities, which I have given you until the Lord has given a rest to your brethren as to you.

Now, these are instructions that Moses is giving to Manasseh and the half tribe of Manasseh and Gad and Reuben, which were tribes that didn't want to settle in the promised land. They wanted to settle east of the Jordan, which was where they camped before they entered the promised land. And Moses said, you can do that if you'll go with your brethren to help conquer the promised land.

Then you can come home to your livestock and wives and so forth. But notice he says, until the Lord has given a rest to your brethren, rest from war, rest from fighting, rest from traveling. And when they can settle down, that's entering the promised land.

And to a generation that's been wandering around for 40 years, that sounds pretty good to rest finally, to settle and not have to keep wandering. In chapter 12 of Deuteronomy, verse 9, Moses says to the Israelites, for as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance, which the Lord your God has given you. Again, a reference to Canaan as the rest.

In Deuteronomy 25, 19, it says, therefore it shall be when the Lord your God has given you rest from your enemies all around in the land, which the Lord your God has given you to possess as an inheritance, etc. So entering the land of Canaan is said to be entering rest. That's Joshua 1.13. Also, we see the theme of rest still in the context of entering the land of Canaan.

Joshua 1.13, remember the word which Moses, my servant, the servant of the Lord, commanded you, saying, the Lord your God is giving you rest and giving you this land. And so, Psalm 95 says that God said that he would not let the Israelites who didn't believe enter into his rest, that is, into the land. Now in chapter 4 of Hebrews, the writer wants to play around with this word rest a little bit.

He sees the entrance of Israel into the promised land as being a type of Christian experience. Now, Paul saw Israel's travels in the wilderness and so forth as part of Christian experience, too. In 1 Corinthians 10, the first 11 verses, Paul talks about how our fathers came out of Egypt.

They passed through the Red Sea. They were baptized in the sea. He said they were baptized in the cloud.

They ate spiritual food and they drank spiritual drink. And in all those things, they were a type. That's actually the word that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 10.6. These were a type.

Our Bible might say examples for us, but the word is type in the Greek. So the coming of the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt into the wilderness, actually, was a picture of our own salvation. And then Paul, in the next five verses or so, in 1 Corinthians 10, said, But God was not pleased with all of them.

Many of them fell into the wilderness. And he says, We don't want to be like them. We don't want to be idolaters like them.

We don't want to be fornicators like them. Because all those things happened to them as a type. He uses the word type again in 1 Corinthians 10.11. Again, I think our Bible might say example.

But the Greek word is type. Israel's experience of deliverance from Egypt, wandering the wilderness, and apparently entering the promised land, are all seen in the New Testament as types, foreshadowing something, some spiritual benefit of the believer. Now, that's what we're going to see as the assumption of our writer as we come to chapter 4. At the end of chapter 3, he points out that they, that generation that came out of Egypt, could not enter that rest, couldn't enter Canaan, because of their unbelief.

Now he continues, But the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. For we who have believed do enter that rest, as he has said, So I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest. Although the works were finished from the foundation of the world, that's the last line in verse 3, for he has spoken in a certain place.

Once again, he doesn't say what place it is, so this one was hard not to know where it is. Of the seventh day in this way, and God rested on the seventh day from all his works. Now, he's been talking about the entrance into Canaan as the rest, but now he kind of introduces, kind of sideways in here, there's another place that talks about rest, that God rested from all his works on the seventh day, and we can weave this into our thinking here too, and he will, in an interesting way.

But now we've got two Old Testament kinds of rest mentioned. One is God's rest, where God rested on the Sabbath, the seventh day, and the rest that God gives to his people. And these two are joined in the mind of the writer, I believe.

God himself rests, and he gives rest to us. The Sabbath is the image of God resting, Canaan is the image of God's people resting. So, he brings that up, and then verse 5, And again, in this place they shall not enter my rest.

Or in the Hebrew, if they shall enter my rest. Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, Again, now by the way, the last verse of chapter 3 says they didn't enter because of unbelief. Here it says they didn't enter because of disobedience.

Again, these terms are used interchangeably. Again, he designates a certain day, meaning in David's time when Psalm 95 was written, he's referring to that, saying in David, Today, after such a long time, as it has been said, Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. For if Joshua had given them rest, then he would not afterward have spoken of another day.

Now, the King James says if Jesus had given them rest, but Jesus is the Greek form of the name Joshua, and it's clear that the writer is referring to Joshua. If Joshua, by bringing them into Canaan, had given them the rest, that is the ultimate rest, there'd be no need for David, 500 years later, to be talking about his generation entering the rest. That's what this author is arguing.

He's saying that when David said today, this is a long time after the conquest of Canaan, a long time after Joshua's time. In Joshua's time, they did enter into the rest. They did come into the Canaan rest.

But the writer is saying there must have been something more than just the Canaan rest that God was concerned about, because why then, so much later, after so long a time, we still find this word today. Today, if you'll hear his voice, don't harden your hearts. So, how he's arguing is, there was a rest, in fact, that Joshua brought the people into, but it's not the rest that the psalmist is talking about, because the psalmist made his point much later, after Joshua's day, and therefore there must be another rest, and that's his point in verse 9. There remains, therefore, a rest for the people of God.

For he who has entered his rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from his. Let us, therefore, be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall. After the same example of disbelief, or disobedience, excuse me.

This is a really great section here, verses 9 through 11. But here's where we come to a question whose answer is not the same for all commentators. When he says, there remains a rest for the people of God, the word rest there in verse 9, and only in that verse, is a word in Greek that means a keeping of the Sabbath.

There remains, literally it says, there remains a keeping of the Sabbath for the people of God. Now the other occurrences of the word rest are not the same word, but here it is, the word keeping of Sabbath. And this word, of course, has led certain Christians, especially Sabbatarians, to believe that the Sabbath observance of the Old Testament is obligatory for Christians.

There remains this keeping of Sabbath, even now, for Christians. And so, this is pretty much the only verse in the Bible, in the New Testament, that would even be useful for saying Christians should keep the Sabbath. But is it saying that? Well, he has already, a few verses earlier, in verse 4, quoted the Sabbath text from Genesis 2, 3. Genesis, actually, 2, verses 1 through 3, talks about God resting on the Sabbath's day.

He's likening that a little bit, or at least tying it in with the Canaan rest. Certainly, as the Canaan rest was a type and a shadow of something else, so the Sabbath rest that he refers to is intended as a type and a shadow of something else. He's not saying that we necessarily keep the Sabbath day in the Jewish fashion, but there is something we do that corresponds to that.

Now, in case someone thinks that I'm not taking seriously enough the wording of this passage, I'd turn your attention to a similar statement by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5. In 1 Corinthians 5, verse 7, it says, What feast? Passover. Jesus is our Passover. The Passover has been sacrificed, so let's keep the feast.

Well, what was that? The Feast of Unleavened Bread. Under the Jewish ritual, the Passover was slain on the first day of a week, and the rest of the week was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Paul is using that imagery.

Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed, okay? Now what? There's the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Let's keep that feast. Therefore, let's keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Now, Paul is clearly saying, let us keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. When he says, let's keep the feast, there can be no other feast he's alluding to. And even what he says afterwards makes it clear.

He does mean the Feast of Unleavened Bread. But is this saying that Christians are supposed to keep the Jewish Feast of Unleavened Bread? No, he's very clear on that. No, we're not talking about, we're talking about abstaining from the leaven of malice and wickedness, not literal yeast in the house.

We're supposed to live with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. He spiritualized it. When he says, let's keep the feast, that is the Feast of Unleavened Bread, he means, let's keep the spiritual meaning of the feast.

I mean, the Jews keep the feast in a ritual way. We keep the feast too, but we keep its spiritual fulfillment. So one could take it that Paul, if they wished, but they'd be wrong, they could assume that Paul is saying, you know, Christians really ought to keep the Jewish festivals.

Because Paul right here says, let's keep the feast, and it's in the context of Jesus, our

Passover, it must be the Feast of Unleavened Bread. He even mentions unleavened bread. He even mentions leaven.

But the way he mentions it makes it clear he's talking about a spiritual Feast of Unleavened Bread. Spiritual leaven. You avoid the leaven of malice and wickedness.

And you live in the life of unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. It's clear that though he sounds like he's saying, let's keep the Jewish feast, what he means is, as the Jews keep the ritual feast, we'll keep the feast our way, the spiritual way. The ritual was a type and a shadow of something spiritual, and we'll keep the feast in the spiritual significance of it, avoiding malice and wickedness and living in sincerity and truth.

That's the avoidance of the leaven. Now here, when the writer says, there remains a keeping of Sabbath for us, he doesn't mean necessarily the ritual Sabbath, as he has likened the Sabbath of the Old Testament with the entering of Canaan, and he's clearly making the entering of Canaan correspond to some spiritual thing. So the Sabbath corresponds to some spiritual thing.

He's got two Old Testament rests, which there were literal rests, but both of them are being joined together to speak of the rest or the Sabbath that we keep. What Sabbath do we keep? Well, that's even controversial. Even among those who don't use this first approved Sabbatarian practice, there's still two views about what the rest is he's referring to.

One view is that he's talking about heaven. In fact, this is the view I find most frequently in commentators. I don't think it's the best view, but commentators on Hebrews very often, if not always, seem to refer to this rest as going to heaven.

In other words, there's a rest at the end of our lives. Now there would be some, some arguments can be made in favor of that. For example, if Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 has said that the Israelites coming out of Egypt is like our salvation, and their requirement of avoiding idolatry and fornication in the 40 years wandering represents our life now, well then what is represented by crossing the Jordan out of the wilderness into the promised land? Death.

If the wandering in the wilderness represents our present lifetime, then what's after that lifetime? When they go into Canaan, when we go to heaven. Lots of people see the rest that Paul, that this writer's talking about, and Paul, as going into heaven when we die. And that very assumption has informed lots of Christian literature and hymnody.

Pilgrim's Progress, for example. Crossing the river Jordan is going to the celestial city, the promised land, heaven. That's when the Christian dies and goes to heaven in the story of Pilgrim's Progress.

Lots of hymns talk about going over Jordan and, you know, meaning when I die I'm going

to go over Jordan and be in the promised land in heaven. It's a very common thing for Christians to see this rest that we enter by crossing Jordan, coming into the promised land. It represents dying.

And there's even some scriptural support that would give some encouragement to that view. If you look over at Revelation 14. Revelation 14, 13 says, Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.

Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them. So when people die in the Lord, they enter into a rest. That's certainly, if John, or if the Revelation, was using the term rest the same way the writer of Hebrews is, that would support, certainly, probably the most popular view among Christians, that the rest we are to enter is heaven.

We cross the Jordan when we die and end up in the next life in the promised land. Now that's not how I think the writer of Hebrews means it. Though I can see reasons for people seeing it that way.

I think there are some things that he says that don't fit. He says, for example, earlier, verse 3 in this chapter, he says, For we who have believed do enter that rest, present tense. He doesn't say we who believe will enter that rest, but we do by believing.

By believing we are entering into that rest. And in verse 10, he says, For he who has entered his rest has himself also ceased from his works, as God did from his. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience.

Now, of course, it's possibly saying you need to labor and persevere so you'll end up in heaven. So you labor and strive to enter that rest. But the wording here, I think, is exhorting them to do something now, not later.

To enter into his rest today. Today, if you hear his voice, enter his rest, is what is implied by his use of Psalm 95 and his current reference, his frequent reference to today, today, today. We need to enter today.

He didn't mean we need to die today and go to heaven, but we need to enter into that rest today that remains for people to enter into. And, of course, he says that in verse 6, since it remains that some must enter into that rest. That is, it's mandatory.

Some of us have to do that. Now, I think the rest, therefore, is to be seen as something spiritual. The Sabbath rest is a spiritual thing, a spiritual state of mind, just like keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread is a spiritual thing.

And what is it? Well, it says there in verse 10, he who has entered his rest has himself ceased from his works. Now, in many cases in the New Testament, when works are

spoken of something you need to cease from or works are spoken of in a negative way, you're not saved by works, for example, it's in the context of the Jewish works done according to the law code in order to try to be okay with God by being under the law. That certainly is what Paul means in almost every case when he talks negatively about works.

He's almost always talking about the Jewish works of the law. And by that, he usually means things like circumcision and keeping festivals and kosher diet and things like that. Those are what Paul usually refers to as the works of the law.

The writer of Hebrews may be thinking the same way, especially since his readers are contemplating going back into the works of the law, back to the old covenant. He says, no, you will only be in God's rest if you cease from those works. You cease from your own works.

Those are not God's works. Those are your own works. You cease from counting on your own works.

You can do one of two things. You can either strive by working hard to be okay with God. And you'll never quite know if you're striving hard enough.

You'll never quite know whether the amount of works you're doing now is enough. Because it's not clear where the line is that you've done enough good works to really be okay with God. And whether the works you're doing that are good really outweigh the number of works that are bad.

I mean, you can never be at rest. If you're thinking you have to be saved by your own works, you can work at it. And you can even do a lot of good works.

But you can never know for sure. You can never rest assured that you're okay with God. There might be something more he's expecting yet, for all you know.

Might be another sacrifice to offer if it happens to be Jewish works that you're doing. Might be that he wants you to... Maybe there's some other thing you're missing. And if your own works are what you're counting on, then you're not going to rest.

Resting happens when you count on Christ's work. Now, this is the important thing. The reason that the Sabbath was brought into this discussion is because the Sabbath, as he quoted from Genesis 2, was when God rested.

And why did he rest? It says, because he had finished his works. He rested on the seventh day from all his works. His works were finished.

And therefore, God rested. Now, when we say God rested, it doesn't mean he wasn't doing anything. It doesn't mean he lapsed into retirement.

It means that he ceased from that project because the project was complete. He rested from his creating. He did other things.

Just like if you have a day of rest from your job, it doesn't mean you're not going to mow the lawn. It just means you're not going to go to your work and do that job. You're resting from one kind of work, and you may do something else.

God, when he was on his creation project, was at work for six days. When it was done, he rested from that work. When it comes to redemption, Christ did the work, and he rested.

And that's something that writer Hebrews is going to focus on in chapter 10. Christ offered himself once and then sat down. Unlike the Old Testament priests who have to keep working all the time, always on their feet.

They stand continuously, offering again another sacrifice. They don't ever get the job done. Christ got the job done with one sacrifice and sat down.

He's in a posture of rest from that work. Now, if you want to know how to be righteous, it's been done. The work is done.

Jesus did it. You rest in his finished work, as sometimes preachers say. The Bible doesn't ever use that expression, but it's a good expression.

This is what the writer, I think, is talking about. We stop striving. We stop counting on our works to make it okay with God.

Jesus did that. He did it once and for all. He's sitting down.

Why shouldn't I be? I'm seated with him in heavenly places, says in Ephesians 2.6. Christ is seated. I'm seated in a way. In one sense, I'm in a posture of rest.

Jesus said, Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and meek, and you will find rest to your souls. This is the rest that I think the writer of Hebrews is talking about, the rest to your soul that comes when you unload the heavy burden.

What was the burden? Legalism. Jesus said in Matthew 23 to the Pharisees, he says, Heavy burdens and grievous to be borne on men's shoulders. He means all those legal requirements the Pharisees put on people.

People are laboring under this burden of this heavy legalistic load. Jesus said, All of you who are heavy laden and burdened, I'll give you rest from that. Come to me, you'll find rest to your souls.

You're not going to find that in the legalism of Judaism. You'll find that when you give up on your own works. And you rest in his finished work.

This is something Christians come into now. This is in fact simply the normal Christian life, which the readers I think we're drifting back from. They were not figuring on Jesus being the last word and the final word and the finished work.

They wanted to go back to the works they'd done before in the temple and sort of count on those instead. He says, No, I can see you being tempted to go back there, but you need to strive not to do that. Fight against that tendency.

Therefore, let's be diligent to enter that rest. He says in verse 11, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience. Now, I didn't say anything.

Maybe I didn't need to, but I just want to say a little earlier. I like verse two. So really, verses one and two are really important enough to look at just a little more than we did.

I think we read over them without comment for the most part. He says, Therefore, since a promise remains of entering his rest, and now we've talked about what is meant perhaps by that rest, let us fear, lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed, the gospel was preached to us.

Now, gospel means good tidings. We have had good tidings preached to us as they had good tidings taught to them too. They didn't have the same message, gospel, as we did, but they had a promise from God, good news.

God's given you this promised land. So they had a word from God. We have a word from God.

They're good words, good news. But the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. Now, the implication is very strong here.

God has given us a promise too, but it might not benefit us if it's not mixed with faith. They had a word from God, which cannot fail to come true if you trust it. If they had trusted God and gone against the giants, the giants would have gone down, and the cities of Canaan would go down, and Israel would have conquered because God promised that.

If you've got a promise of God, it's true. And if you trust it, it will come true. And so they didn't see that come true in that generation because they didn't believe it.

They didn't mix it with faith. They had the word, but they didn't have the faith. And he says we're in a parallel situation.

We have a promise from God that we can be righteous before God, that we can come into this spiritual rest, but that word doesn't make it happen unless we believe it. You have to mix it with faith. It's like there have to be two ingredients here.

One is the promise, and the other is you're trusting in the promise. And they didn't

benefit, and you won't benefit either. God can make all the promises he wants, but it won't happen if you don't believe it.

It won't happen to you. It won't happen for you. So this is a really important thing, that it's not just enough to know that God made promises, but you have to lay hold of those promises and mix your own faith with them.

You have to, in other words, determine that you're going to trust those promises and their reliability. And so he, as we saw, he mixes together these promises about Canaan rest and about Sabbath rest. God rested on the Sabbath.

He gave rest to his people in Canaan. Christ rests from his work of saving the world. He's redeemed the world by his one sacrifice.

He's sitting at the right hand of God. He's resting. And we enter into his rest.

He gives us rest in him. We are seated in him, in heavenly places, says Paul in Ephesians 2.6. So it's not that we enter into our rest. We enter into his rest.

He's resting already. We enjoy that rest with him. We sit with him.

We come to rest to our souls by sharing with Christ in what he has accomplished and trusting in his finished work. That's what I believe rest is. Now, verse 12 and 13 says, For the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

And there is no creature hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Now, we all are familiar with verse 12, I'm sure. The word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword.

This image of the word of God being a sword is also found in Ephesians. When Paul's talking about the armor of God in Ephesians 6.17, he says, And take the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, as the spiritual sword is the word. Here he says the word is sharper than two-edged sword.

In Revelation, we see proceeding out of Jesus mouth in Revelation 1 and in Revelation 19, a sharp two-edged sword. Well, what comes out of a person's mouth? His words. It's a depiction of his word being like a sharp sword with which he goes out and makes war against the world.

That's the preaching of the gospel, God's word going out to conquer the nations, as it were. Proceeds out of Jesus mouth, his words. The word is like a sword.

And so this image is somewhat, some of us really like that image, and we know this verse and might quote it. But the question comes up, why is it mentioned here? What is

the function of this statement in this place, in this discussion? It's one of those verses you lift as a memory verse and quote in situations when you want to, but you never pay attention to what's before or after it. I mean, you're asked, why did the author say this? I mean, he's not writing a book of Proverbs where there's a bunch of standalone aphorisms that you can just pick out for your favorite occasion.

This is part of a flow of his argument. And I have to tell you, it's challenging to answer that question. I'm not really sure I know for sure, except that what he seems to be saying is the word of God, which is the word which did not benefit them because they didn't mix with faith.

We have that word from God, too, that promise of God. There's a good message, a gospel, good tidings, a word from God that he's given us. And it's capable of bringing about the results that he promises if we mix it with faith.

It's just like the children of Israel were afraid they couldn't go into the land and conquer the giants. Well, they had the word of God. They had a sword that could conquer any enemy.

We have that same advantage. We have the word of God. It's a powerful weapon.

It's a powerful, sharp sword. But he also talks about it not only as a, well, he doesn't specify it so much as a weapon of spiritual warfare, but he does mention that it pierces even to the division of the soul and spirit and the joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Now, what does it mean piercing even to the division of soul and spirit and joints and marrow? You may be aware that there is one theological controversy that you never necessarily ever have to resolve because it doesn't have so much practical value, but there is a controversy between people who are dichotomous and trichotomous.

This has to do with how many parts or components are there of the human being. Are there three parts, body, soul, and spirit? Or are there only two parts, the body and then another part that's not physical, which can be alternately called the soul slash spirit, soul or spirit, or heart, or inner man? In other words, there are some theologians who believe that man has two parts, the outer man and the inner man. The outer man is the body.

The inner man is that nonphysical part of us. And that nonphysical part can be called the soul or the spirit or the heart or a number of other terms, but they're all the same thing. There's just two parts, physical and nonphysical.

Others feel that the soul and the spirit are not two different terms for the same thing, but they can be distinguished, that there are three parts of us. There's the body and there's the soul and there's the spirit. Now, what is the difference between the soul and the spirit? Well, it's not entirely clear.

That's one reason there can be dichotomous as well as trichotomous. A dichotomous believes there's only two parts. If it was very clearly stated in scripture, the soul is this and the spirit is this other thing, and told us what the difference was, there wouldn't be any dichotomous.

We'd all be trichotomous. But because soul and spirit are terms that are used more or less interchangeably in many passages, it's led to the belief that they may both be the same thing. Now, it's a discussion that really doesn't need to be resolved.

I am, I think, a trichotomous. I say I think because I'm not set in stone about it. I've always been a trichotomous since my youth.

I believe in body, soul, and spirit. If it turns out otherwise, it won't bother me in the least. But a trichotomous like myself would say the body is the physical man, the soul is like what we might call the mind, the intellect, the emotions, the will.

This is what people usually define the soul as, the intellect, the emotions, and the will. The spirit, on the other hand, is something not exactly the same thing as the mind, more like the capacity for spirituality, the capacity to know God, to be a spiritual being, not just an intellectual being. And where the difference is between the soul and the spirit in this paradigm is not always clear.

But nor is it very important. I don't know of any reason why we would have to know the answers to this. But in that debate, there are only a few places where soul and spirit might be said to appear to be treated as separate and divisible units from each other.

And this is the main one. Because it says the word of God pierces even to the division of the soul and spirit. Now, if it is saying that the soul and spirit are, although closely joined, yet divisible, the word of God can distinguish between the soul on the one hand and the spirit on the other.

This establishes the trichotomy case right there. There's a soul and there's a spirit and they can be divided from each other. They're not the same thing.

They're not synonyms. I would say, though, there's another way of looking at this that does not establish the trichotomy view. And that is that he's talking about a division between two parts.

On the one hand, the soul and spirit. On the other hand, the joints and marrow. Joints and marrow simply mean the physical body.

Soul and spirit meaning the non-spiritual, I mean, the non-physical aspect. Soul slash spirit, joints slash marrow would be the two categories. The word of God divides, in other words, between the spiritual and the physical, is how some people think this is meant.

It's really hard to say. Maybe we would need to know if we could make good sense of this verse, because it's really hard to know what he means. He says that the word of God pierces between these things.

And no matter how we list these things, it's still not clear how this piercing is somehow a summary of this section of the book. Because he is closing this warning with these statements. It may be that he's saying the division between soul and spirit and joints and marrow is the separation of the soul from the body, death.

James said, as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead. But he implied the body without the spirit, that's dead. If the spiritual life has gone out of the body, you've got a dead body.

And if God divides the soul, spirit, spiritual side of man from the joints and marrow, the physical side, that could indicate death of some kind. But even that might be spiritualized here. It's hard to know.

I have to say that I've always loved this verse, but I've always found it very difficult to know exactly how it caps off this section. Because it actually begins with the word for, meaning because. It means this is summarizing something that's been said before this.

But in what sense it is a summary is hard to say. I think in the most broad terms, we could say he's saying the word of God is something to be reckoned with. It's not something you can ignore.

It's like a sharp sword. It could kill you. And therefore, if God's word says today, enter his rest, then you'd better take him seriously because that's his word.

And he could be simply, you know, waxing eloquent about how the word of God is not to be trifled with. But the specifics of his wording would, I mean, would have to be accounted for beyond what I frankly feel I can. And I'll tell you beyond what I found the commentaries able to do.

This is quite a mysterious verse to me, not so much in terms of some of the things that's affirming, but how it's affirming something that is in the argument. But certainly what he has been saying all along in this section of this warning is that God is calling people to not ignore his word. If you hear his voice, don't harden your heart.

There's a promise here being offered. That's the word. God's word to you is something you need to mix with faith.

It's clear that the whole section, the last part of chapter three and early part of chapter four, is an exhortation to take God's word seriously. And therefore, as I said, without having anything much more intelligent to say about it myself, I might just be able to say that he's saying don't trifle with God's word. It's sharp.

It's powerful. You know, ignore it at your own risk. He does say the word of God is a discerner of the thoughts, the thoughts intense in the heart.

And perhaps what he's saying there is when God gives you a promise, you'll either believe it or you won't. And it'll show what's in your heart. Are you a believer? Are you an unbeliever? Is your heart trusting of God or distrusting of God? Does your heart view God favorably as someone who's reliable and trustworthy and whose words you'll count on? Or does your heart view God critically and suspiciously and not? I mean, the word of God itself, by the very coming of the word of God, you are being tested.

God said it. What are you going to do? You know, it says about Joseph when he was in prison in one of the Psalms says the word of the Lord tested him. That's interesting.

The word of the Lord tested him. Well, see, God had given Joseph promises through dreams that he'd someday be reigning over his brothers. It certainly didn't look like it.

And these circumstances and God's word of promise were going to bring out whether he's going to believe God or not. Is he a man who trusts God or not? What's in his heart? And I believe he did trust God in those circumstances. And so when God gives us a promise, our response to it reveals what's in our heart toward God.

And the word itself becomes a discerner and a revealer of the thoughts and intents of what's in our heart that would otherwise remain hidden. And there is no creature hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. So, whatever else this may mean in the context, it's very obvious as a freestanding verse that God sees all, God judges all, knowledgeably.

Nothing can be hidden from him. Everything's naked before him. And we're going to give an account to him.

So, whatever the thoughts and intents of our heart are had better be good because they're not going to be hidden from his sight. And we're going to have to give account to him. We'll have to give account for what he sees in our hearts.

And actually his word to us not to fail to enter in is one way that the thoughts of our hearts are being revealed. This invitation to go forward with Christ rather than take the easy way and go back and fail like the Jews did to fail to enter into his rest. That promise, that word is testing us all, he says.

And it's going to reveal what's in your heart. And it's good to have that revealed because God knows what's there. Anyway, nothing's hidden from him.

And we'll have to give account. So, I think he's simply saying consider this passage in the Psalms and its implications for us. How that it calls us to something to actually rise above the natural course and be more faithful than even the Israelites who came out of

Egypt were.

And to enter into that thing that God wanted his people to enter into, which they didn't. And that's how that particular warning section ends. Now, since it's the end of a warning section he picks up his argument again.

At this point in verse 14. And there's only three verses remaining in chapter 4. But the argument continues into chapter 5. But what he reintroduces in chapter 4 verse 14 is what he had alluded to in chapter 2 verses 17 and 18. Here in verse 14 he says, Seeing then that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

That is, let's not deny Christ. Let's confess Christ. In the face of the persecution of our Jewish brothers and sisters and as our Jewish relatives and friends who want to persecute us because we're confessing Christ as Lord.

Let's not let down that confession. We need to not deny him, but confess him before men. Now, it says, For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses.

But was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Now, Christ is calling us to be faithful to him in the face of persecution. But he knows what it's like.

It's not like he's unsympathetic. He's not saying, Hey, be loyal to me and whatever you have to go through, just deal with it. It's like he's aloof from all that.

He just says, well, that's the price of it is. Pay it or miss out. No, he's sympathetic.

He's been persecuted too. He's been through suffering too. If you suffer for him, he knows what that's like.

He's sympathetic towards you. He doesn't give you a break and say, you can't be faithful because of your suffering, but he knows it's hard. He's not making an unreasonable demand as some kind of a callous ruler up in his ivory tower, asking people to do hard things that he hardly knows what it's like to do.

He says, We do not have that kind of a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses. He was in all points tested as we are, tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Now, the point here, and it continues into chapter five, is that, of course, Christ is a high priest. This is not the first time that's mentioned. And the particular thing about him being high priest that's in this passage, and there will be other things about his high priesthood, but this one is that he's sympathetic.

He's not aloof or callous. He knows what it's like to be tempted. He was there.

He knows what suffering is like. He's made perfect through suffering. And therefore, don't be shy about approaching him.

It's not like he's unsympathetic. He is sympathetic. So let's come boldly to the throne of grace.

Now, we can see that's the same thought that was introduced back in chapter two, verses 17 and 18, where it said, Therefore, in all things, he had to be made like his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself has suffered, being tempted, he is able to aid those who are tempted. Now, these two verses and the ones in chapter four that we just read mention him being merciful, compassionate, empathetic, and they mention his having been tempted.

Both passages mention that he was tempted. Now, the word tempted really means tested, but he probably means tempted in the sense that we normally think of, of just the devil trying to tempt him to sin. But of course, he was tempted always like we are, but without sin.

He didn't succumb. How could Jesus have been tempted in all things like we are? I mean, we're tempted with all kinds of modern things that are in our world that weren't in his world. Certainly, there are specific temptations that you face that Jesus didn't have that exact temptation during his lifetime.

But it doesn't say that he was tempted with every instance of temptation, but in all points like our temptations. Our temptations are of certain categories. We're tempted with the lust of the flesh.

We're tested with the lust of the eyes. We're tested with the pride of life, says John in 1 John 2, verses 15 through 17. John says that's all that is in the world.

1 John 2 says, all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are not of the Father, but of the world. So Jesus was tempted in all those points. We even read of those specific temptations in the wilderness.

There's three temptations in the wilderness. One corresponding to each of these categories. Also, Eve was tempted in those same three ways.

According to Genesis 3.6, it says, when Eve saw the fruit was beautiful to look upon, that's the lust of the eyes, and good for food, that's the lust of the flesh, and desires to make one wise, that's the pride of life, she ate it. Jesus faced the same three kinds of temptations in the wilderness. Lust of the flesh and turning stones into bread.

The lust of the eyes, when Satan showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and they're glorious, I'll give this to you. The pride of life, where he indicated that he should test God and jump off the temple and show what he was, and display to himself and others who he is, to elevate himself in that way and make himself famous. It's interesting, these three categories are the three categories that Eve fell to and Jesus resisted successfully, and that John says we all face.

These are the categories. Everything we face is either a lust of the flesh, a lust of the eyes, or related to pride, the pride of life. Lust of the eyes refers to the desire to acquire things.

Lust of the flesh refers to things that are sensual pleasures, whether it's food, sex, drink, even sleep can be pleasant to the flesh, and if we can get more of that than we need, than we should have, that can be an issue too. What the body craves is the lust of the flesh. What the eye craves is stuff.

I mean, if you want to drive a Rolls Royce, no doubt it's a little more comfortable than a Mercedes, but a Mercedes is probably about the same. But one looks better. One's going to make people more notice you.

It's not the comfort, it's not the physical sensual pleasure it gives you, it's more the, you like the way it looks and what it represents and all of that. To want something because it's attractive, but not necessarily pleases some kind of physical lust, that's the pride of life. Actually, that's the lust of the eyes.

So, Jesus was tempted in all those categories, as we are, but he overcame them, he didn't sin. And so we're told to come boldly before the throne of grace, or to the throne of grace, and for two things. Obviously, to obtain mercy, but also to find grace to help in time of need.

The throne of grace may be another name for the mercy seat. Throne, seat, grace, mercy? Possibly. The writer is very interested in the tabernacle and its furniture, and especially in the Holy of Holies, which is where the mercy seat was.

Certainly, Jesus, our high priest, has gone past through the heavens, he says. Where to? Into the Holy of Holies. That's where the mercy seat is.

He may be referring to the throne of grace as sort of a New Testament or spiritual counterpart to the mercy seat. Hard to say for sure. But he says we come boldly there, to the throne of grace, and we can obtain two things.

One is mercy. Mercy is needed when we did something wrong. Mercy is necessary when we want to avert judgment for our actions.

Well, there's that. There is mercy there. Grace includes mercy.

But it's not exhausted by mercy. There's also grace to help in time of need. In addition to being forgiven for doing the wrong thing, we need help to do the right thing.

And the enablement that God gives us is called grace. If you do a word study on the word grace in the New Testament, you'll find many times Paul refers to grace as something which is some kind of an enablement, supernatural enablement from God. When Paul said that he prayed three times for God to take away his thorn in the flesh, Christ said, my grace is sufficient for you, my strength, who made perfect in your weakness.

I'll make you able to handle it. I'm not going to take away the pain. I'm just going to give you grace.

It'll be enough. God can give grace. Paul said, I according to the grace of God that was given to me as a wise master builder laid the foundation of the church of Corinth, according to the grace of God that's given.

In fact, even the gifts of spirit, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which we maybe think of as divine enablements to do certain things, the Greek word for them is charismatic. It means gifts of grace. This enablement in this gifting is a grace that's given to us.

It's the grace of God enabling. You see, we often think of grace only in terms of forgiveness of sins. You know, we're saved by grace, not by works, meaning I don't earn forgiveness of sins, but I get it undeserved.

Well, that is true, but that's the mercy part. You come to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and grace to help in time of need. Trusting in God to help you through trials, to help you to do the thing you want to do.

This is the thing that many Christians miss, that Christianity is not intended to be lived out with your natural strength. It's God's work in you. God works in you to will and do of his good pleasure.

That working is the working of grace in you to enable you to help in time of need. And so the writer says, we've got a high priest who's entered into the Holy of Holies. Let's go in there with him.

Let's come boldly in there because we belong to him. The veil has been rent. We can go right in there.

We can come boldly. We don't have to be shy about it. Into the throne of grace and find that grace to help in time of need.

Later in Hebrews 10, along a similar vein, he says in verse 19, Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the holiest, meaning the Holy of Holies. This is no doubt

equivalent in his mind to coming boldly to the throne of grace or the mercy seat. Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the holiest place, Holy of Holies by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he consecrated for us through the veil that is his flesh and having a high priest over the house of God.

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. So this is really the exhortation of the book of Hebrews repeatedly. Come boldly to God.

Don't think that there's unsettled business between you and him. He settled it. Jesus died once for all.

He's now interceding for us in the holy place. He invites us to come in. And we should come boldly and obtain what we need.

Yeah, we need forgiveness sometimes. But it's available. We need grace to help.

Well, it's available. And that's the message, really, of Hebrews. Why go back to a system that you can't go into the immediate presence of God? You can't go into the Holy of Holies.

Your high priest in the old system, he doesn't even know your name. But we have a high priest that invites us right in. We can approach the Holy of Holies, the mercy seat ourselves.

And that's what he exhorts us to do because we need the grace to help.