

Hebrews: Call to Wholehearted Commitment Introduction

Do you know any halfhearted Christians? How about disheartened Christians, Christians who need encouragement because of the serious challenges they face to their faith? The Book of Hebrews seems to suggest that its recipients were Christians who were either half-hearted or disheartened or both, with the likely emphasis on halfhearted. Some passages call for a rekindling of devotion and effort where presently there was neglect, waywardness, or even laziness (see Hebrews 2:1-4; 12:12-13, for example). Other passages seem to suggest that the first readers of the Book of Hebrews were disheartened by persecution because of their faith (Hebrews 12:3-11). The main emphasis, however, seems to be to challenge Christians who are halfhearted, uncommitted, weak, tired, bored, and neglectful. Do you know any Christians like that?

We live in a day when we often attach adjectives to the word "Christian" to define it. We talk of someone being a "born-again" Christian, a "real" Christian, or a "nominal" Christian. Often many who bear the name Christian seem not to bear it very well.

What's the remedy? The message of Hebrews is mainly challenge and warning, with a few pats of encouragement along the way. Do we dare listen to that message? Hebrews says, "See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking" (12:25, NASB). The book bluntly reminds us that "our God is a consuming fire" (12:29, NASB). Maybe we'd better listen, in spite of the fact that Hebrews is among the most challenging and least-studied books of the New Testament.

We tend to study other portions of the New Testament more than we study the Book of Hebrews. Why? Perhaps one reason is that Hebrews contains much that seems mysterious to us. The content of the book seems not of our time or place. Hebrews talks about high priests and sacrifices and the tabernacle. Too, some little known person named Melchizedek looms large in Hebrews, even though he appears only in Hebrews, Genesis 14:18, and Psalm 110:4. Moreover, the sentences and ideas of Hebrews seem woven tightly together, joined by a logic that is different from our ways of thinking.

Sometimes people avoid studying Hebrews for another reason. They don't want to deal with its difficult teachings that seem to suggest the possibility of being lost again after one has been saved. Rather than studying passages that appear to disagree with our view, sometimes we avoid them rather than try to understand them, even though they are in the Bible.

The list of difficulties continues. We would like to know more, much more, about the Book of Hebrews than we do. We do not know who wrote it. We do not know from where it was written or the location to which it was written. (We know it has some connection with Italy. See Hebrews 13:24.) We do not know when it was written, or what its nature as literature is.

Too, what particular difficulty were its recipients having?

- (1) Were they Gentile Christians who were in danger of turning their backs on Christ?
- (2) Were they Jewish Christians contemplating taking up the Jewish rituals again, thus denying the grace of God by adding such practices to it? Related to this possibility, were they being tempted to turn back to Judaism and away from the world mission effort that called for extending the gospel to all people by grace through faith?
- (3) Were they non-Christians?
- (4) Were they a mixed group, some Christians and some not Christians, with the message of Hebrews to each group so intertwined that we cannot readily unravel it?

The most likely answer is either (1) or (2) or some combination of them, with the nod going to (2). Hebrews is filled with references to Jewish practices and seems to reflect the tension between the teachings of Judaism and Christianity. Hebrews warns that readers must make the choice to be wholehearted about Christian faith. Being halfhearted won't do. Hebrews calls for wholehearted commitment to Christ.

As you study the challenging message of the Book of Hebrews, you will see that Hebrews weaves together both theological exposition and ethical exhortation. The sessions attempt to include both elements and thus provide a challenge to action that is based on the theological truths of that portion of Hebrews.

As you study the Book of Hebrews, don't worry that you are going to become bogged down in theological ideas that have no relation to your life. You will find plenty of relation to your life. In fact, each session will challenge you to consider the vitality of your spiritual life and the action God wants you to take.

Hebrews: Call to Wholehearted Commitment

11-31-01-en	Pay Closer Attention to God's Message	Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:1-11, 14-18
11-31-02-en	Heed God's Call to Obedient Faith	Hebrews 3:1-6, 12—4:1, 6-13
11-31-03-en	Press On to Maturity	Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:11—6:12
11-31-04-en	Remember Who Jesus Is	Hebrews 7:11-17, 26—8:13
11-31-05-en	Live in a New Relationship with God	Hebrews 9:11-15, 24—10:4, 19-25
11-31-06-en	Be Faithful to God No Matter What	Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-22, 39—12:3, 12-13
11-31-07-en	Do Not Refuse the One Who Is Speaking	Hebrews 12:25—13:8, 20-21

Additional Resources for Studying Hebrews¹

F.F. Bruce. The Epistle to the Hebrews. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Revised edition. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990.

Fred B. Craddock. "The Letter to the Hebrews." The New Interpreter's Bible. Volume XII. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.

Robert J. Dean. Hebrews: Call to Christian Commitment. Nashville, Tennessee: Convention Press, 1985.

William G. Johnsson. Hebrews. Knox Preaching Guides. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980.

William L. Lane, Hebrews 1—8. Word Biblical Commentary. Volume 47a. Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1991.

¹ Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writers or Home Church Online or Eternal Interactive, Inc.