

Christ Greater than Angels: Hebrews 1:5-2:18 deals with Christ superiority to angels. First, Christ's superiority is affirmed in 1:5-14. Next, the exhortation in 2:1-4 to pay earnest attention to revelation through the Son. Finally, an explanation in 2:5-18 showing that, although Christ has a human body, he is superior to angels who are immaterial spirits.

Taking time to demonstrate Christ's superiority to angels may seem a little odd today. But, when Hebrews was written, angels were of intense interest to Greeks and Jews. Greek Gnosticism viewed spirit as good, and matter as intrinsically evil. As spirit, God is good. Humans, having physical bodies, were caught up in matter's intrinsic evil. Gnostics believed salvation required freeing the soul from the body. If Christ had a physical body, angels, as pure spirit, were superior to Him. The Gnostic heresy eliminated that difficulty by claiming Jesus only appeared to have a physical body but was actually pure spirit.

The Jews affirmed the goodness of matter but perceived God to be transcendent and remote. Angels were thought to be necessary intermediaries between God and humans. This position carried over into the early church and led to a dangerous tendency to worship angels. Some people thought Christ might be an angel. The author demonstrates without doubt, Christ is not an angel. He is incomparably superior to angels, and He is divine.

Hebrews 1:5-14: *“For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”? Or again, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”?⁶ And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God's angels worship him.”⁷ Of the angels he says, “He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.”⁸ But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”¹⁰ And, “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands;¹¹ they will perish, but you remain; they will*

all wear out like a garment, ¹² like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.” ¹³ And to which of the angels has he ever said, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”? ¹⁴ Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?”

Jesus is Better than Angels Because

- Hebrews 1:4-5, Jesus is the Son, begotten by the Father (Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14). Jesus' superior status is demonstrated by a **superior name**, which is not merely a title, but a description of His nature and character.
- Hebrews 1:6, Jesus is the firstborn who **receives worship from all God's angels** (Deuteronomy 32:43). Hebrews 1:7, angels function at God's bidding. They are often **His messengers**. See also Hebrews 1:14.
- Hebrews 1:8-9, **Jesus the Son is God enthroned and anointed** (Psalm 45:6-7).
- The author specifically points to the Son's divinity. Hebrews 1:10-12, **Jesus the Son is the eternal Creator** (Psalm 102:25-27). Jesus Christ, Creator of the old creation, will one day replace that creation with a new creation. Everything around us may change, but **He never changes**.
- Hebrews 1:13-14, **Jesus Christ is sovereign, and angels are ministering spirits**. (Psalm 110:1).

A Warning Exhortation: Having argued Christ is superior to all, the author warns his readers. **Hebrews 2:1-4:** *“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”*

The language is metaphorical, suggesting a ship whose anchor has broken loose from the seafloor allowing the vessel to dangerously drift. C.S. Lewis in **Mere Christianity** said “... if you examined a hundred people who had lost their faith in Christianity, I wonder how many of them would turn out to have been reasoned out

of it by honest argument. Do not most people simply drift away?” The answer is “yes.” Most people simply drift away. One significant reason is the simple passing of time without adequate attention to the things of God, failing to strive to obey Him. The press of daily affairs may cause God to seem irrelevant.

Familiarity with Christian truth can lead to neglect. It is a natural for repetitive actions to become unthinking responses. Continuing out of habit to attend church, pray, and read our Bible may become unthinking responses which is a form of drift. “Busyness” can be a problem. A multitude of daily duties and cares can keep us from finding time for communicating with God and studying His Word. Unfortunately, drifting is easy. The author says, ***“we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.”*** Christ is supreme. How do we keep Him supreme in our daily life?

The validity of information should always be judged by the trustworthiness of its source. God is a trustworthy source. He gave the Law to Moses through the mediation of angels. The Law has proved to be reliable and trustworthy. Willful disobedience or unwillingness to hear and obey the Law received just retribution. At times, punishment came directly from heaven, as when in one day 23,000 died, or on another occasion when many were killed by snakes (1Corinthians 10:5-10). At other times punishment came through legal process. The Law came from God through angels to Moses and was absolutely binding.

Our salvation was first declared by the Lord and ***“attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”*** The word of the Law mediated by angels and Moses was so binding that every infraction was punished. How much more accountable are those who have the word of salvation from Christ’s lips, plus confirmation of eyewitnesses, plus testimony of miracles, signs, wonders, and spiritual gifts? ***“How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?”***

Paraphrasing Calvin – it is much worse to sin against the love of God and His mercy than against the Law. The concern is not only for the act of rejecting the gospel but also for a negligent attitude ignoring or neglecting God’s loving mercy. The greatness of Christ in our life must not be allowed to slip away – no longer marveling

at the atonement or delighting in God's Word. Drift, almost by definition, occurs without being noticed. Recipients of the letter had not yet rejected Christ, but they were drifting.

What does "pay much closer attention to what we have heard" mean? It means focusing on living every day in the light of God's revelation. Deuteronomy 6:4-9: *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."*

Renewed Focus on Christ's Superiority: In chapter 1, the highlighting of Christ's divinity points to Christ's prophetic, cosmic, priestly, and angelic superiority. In Chapter 2:1-4 readers are exhorted to stand fast in the great salvation declared by the Lord. It is easy to lose focus and drift (prone to wander as the hymn says). Focusing on things of God and obedience to His commands prevents drift. In verses 2.5-18 the author returns to Christ's superiority using four points.

The premise is "Christ is greater than angels." The Son's true humanity made obvious in His suffering and death is a possible obstacle to this argument. Angels cannot die. The Son of Man died. In four steps, the author uses this apparent weakness to strengthen his argument. He argues Christ's humanity was necessary to enable Him (1.) To regain man's lost dominion over creation, verses 5-9. (2.) To purchase salvation for lost sinners, verses 10-13. (3.) To defeat "the one who has the power of death ... and deliver all those who fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery" (verses 14-16), and (4.) to be a sympathetic High Priest to His people (verses 17-18).

Hebrews 2:5-9: *"For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. ⁶ It has been testified somewhere, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? ⁷ You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and*

honor,⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet.” Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.⁹ But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”

Not Angels but Christ will Rule: In verse 5 the author makes a surprising statement. Angels, who in a sense, co-administrate the present world under God’s direction, carrying out God’s bidding including ministering to God’s people, are extremely powerful. But they will not rule in the world to come. “Who then will rule?” The answer is Christ will rule as King. “Believers” will rule under His kingship. The author establishes God’s intention for man as co-administrators of the world to come by showing this ultimate intention is in accord with God’s original intention. He begins with a quote from Psalm 8. To help understand the argument about dominion given, dominion lost, and dominion regained, consider Psalm 8.

Psalm 8: *“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.² Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?⁵ Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.⁶ You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet,⁷ all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,⁸ the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.⁹ O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”*

This as a messianic psalm. But when David wrote it, he wrote to celebrate God’s majesty, to declare His worthiness of praise, and to wonder about man’s place in God’s creation. Perhaps awed by the starry sky on a dark night, David realized man was totally insignificant in comparison to the heavens. How does mankind fit into God’s awesome creation? What is man’s position relative to angels and animals?

Animals have a material body but no spirit. People have a material body and a spirit. Angels are spirit but have no material body. In a sense mankind is positioned midway between animals and angels. David says man was created a little lower than angels. That is interesting. Why do you suppose David says, “a little lower than angels” rather than “a little higher than animals?” After all, either statement is true.

But the implications are different. It is the privilege and duty of humans to look up, focusing on God, striving to be like Him. Yet, though made in God’s image and intended to become increasingly like Him, people who reject God tend to look down toward the animals and become increasingly like beasts in behavior. We see the proof around us every day.

What about dominion? When God created the first man and woman, He gave them dominion over His creation (Genesis 1:26-31). In Psalm 8, David marveled that God would share His power and glory with Adam and Eve. Though created a little lower than angels, man was given dominion and privileges far higher than angels, but that dominion was degraded by sin. ***“At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him”*** (Hebrews 2:8b), but, in the end, at the proper time Christ will have dominion over all things.

We see Jesus (Hebrews 2:9) crowned with glory and honor. Jesus is God’s answer to man’s dilemma. The Second Person of the Trinity became man so that He might suffer and die for man’s sin and, in so doing, restore the dominion and life that was lost because of sin. During His incarnation, our sinless Lord exercised dominion over fish-Matthew 17:24-27, Luke 5:1-11, Jn 21:1-11. Over fowl-Luke 22:34, 60. Over wild beasts-Mark 1:12-13, and over domesticated beasts-Mark 11:1-7). As the last Adam, Christ regained man’s lost dominion (1Corinthians 15:45). Ultimately, everything will be under Christ’s feet (Ephesians 1:20-23).

Man was crowned with honor and glory (Hebrews 2:7). Through disobedience, it was lost. Man became the slave of sin. Christ Jesus regained the lost “glory and honor” (Hebrews 2:9) and believers will share His kingly dominion (Revelation 1:5-6). In His kingdom, we shall reign with Him. Why did Christ do all this for us – for lost sinners? He did it because of “God’s love and grace” (Hebrews 2:9).

Look up to God and strive to live up to the image of God within you.

Why Did the Son Become a Man? Hebrews 2:9, *“But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”* Had the Son not become God-man, He could not have died and experienced death for everyone. Angels cannot die and angels cannot save sinners or restore man’s lost glory, honor, and dominion. Beginning with verse 10, the author focuses on how the humanity of Christ was essential to enable the salvation.

Hebrews 2:10-13: *“For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. ¹¹ For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, ¹² saying, ‘I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.’ ¹³ And again, ‘I will put my trust in him.’ And again, ‘Behold, I and the children God has given me.’”*

Christ the Author of Salvation: Christ is the author (or founder) of salvation. As a man walking the earth, the Son voluntarily put aside His visible divine glory. When He arose from the dead and ascended to heaven, He reassumed that glory. He shares glory with all who trust Him for salvation (John 17:22-24). Salvation through the birth, life and death of Jesus was apt and proper to the circumstances.

What Does Made Perfect Through Suffering Mean? The phrase saying it was fitting God should make Jesus *“perfect through suffering”* does not imply Jesus was imperfect while on earth. The word translated as “perfect” means complete, effective, or adequate to the purpose. Moral or ethical perfection is not the issue. Jesus was always morally and ethically perfect. Suffering made Him “complete” for His task. He shared humanity’s suffering to the point of death, conquering death so human beings might become children of the Living God.

Human beings come from God through Adam. In His human nature, Jesus shares the same human race. Those Jesus sanctifies, He is pleased to call brothers.

Identification with His People: The author uses three quotes from the Greek Old Testament to clarify Christ's identification with His people. The quotes are from Psalm 22:22, Isaiah 8:17, and Isaiah 8:18. Psalm 22 is a messianic Psalm. Its opening words "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" were quoted by Jesus as He neared death on the cross (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34). The first 21 verses of the psalm closely describe Christ's crucifixion. But in verse 22, the crucifixion is over, Jesus is resurrected and exalted. He triumphantly speaks to the Father, "*I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise*" (Hebrews 2:12). To tell of the Father's name means to declare and extol the character and being of the Father. It is to Christ's brothers and sisters that He tells of the Father. Today, as congregations gather, Christ joins His brothers and sisters in singing praise to God. Christ identifies with His church.

The second quote is from Isaiah 8:17b, "*I will put my trust in him.*" Isaiah declared he would wait for the Lord's timing and trust in Him. Likewise, Christ during His incarnation trusted and depended on the Father. As He endured persecution in the frail flesh of humanity, Jesus exercised faith. Even Christ's final words on the cross were words of dependence, "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!*" As Jesus on earth depended on the Father so the church on earth must depend on Christ.

The third quote is from Isaiah 8:18. "*Behold, I and the children God has given me.*" When Isaiah wrote these words he was referring to himself and his two sons. Isaiah means "Yahweh is salvation." His sons were given prophetic names. One name signified the enemies of Judah would be removed. The other name signified that, when scattered, a remnant would return. Thus, Isaiah's statement signifies he, his sons, and all his people have a future. Applied to Christ these words have a like meaning. Christ and His children are prophetic signs and symbols that in the future, whatever else happens, the blessed remnant will survive.

What is Next? More on why the Son of God came to us in the flesh.