

“Spiritual Regression”
Pastor Sam Richards
Sermon for 3 April 2022
Texts: Galatians 4:8-11 & Heb. 2:1-4

Regression. This is the key word for understanding the passage before us:

8 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless [a] elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11 I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored [b]over you in vain.

Regression here is captured in the parallel phrases: you turn back again and enslaved all over again. But regression is also a concern in Hebrews 2:1-4:

2:1 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to [a]what we have heard, so that we do not drift away *from it*. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved [b]unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just [c]penalty, 3 how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? [d]After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4 God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various [e]miracles and by [f]gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

Particularly in the phrase, **so that we do not drift away *from it***. Turning back, enslaved again and drift away all express the same concern for regression. In Heb. 2 it is **“what we have heard” (the gospel of God *from Jesus’ lips*: the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel of God!** The glad news of forgiveness of sins through faith in the Son (the efficacy of His sacrifice) resulting in righteousness, acquittal and “salvation.” (Mark 1:14-15) **What we heard, or our testimony of what was first spoken of by the Lord, was “heard” by the apostles confirming the gospel of our so great a salvation. *In the main, this declaration was in its main points identical to the message of John the Baptist.* I was particularly struck by verse 4: **God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various [e]miracles and by [f]gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.** This verse states that signs, wonders, miracles and the gifts of the Holy Spirit were testifying to the truth of the **so great a salvation**. These “testimonies” say nothing about apostolic authority of those who first heard Jesus—meaning the same crowd that Luke consulted for his gospel narrative, **an orderly account of eyewitnesses and ministers of the word**, just as they **delivered them unto us**. (Luke 1:1-4, the historian’s preface)**

No, these supernatural matters were used by God, **according to the will of God . . . testifying with them** (the apostles): attesting to the truth of the gospel as the very word of God. The need for such **confirmation** is established here in Hebrews 2 is very much without regard for time, or dispensation. *They weren’t ever about the apostles*. It was about **the message**, what we must not **drift away from**—that is, dilute or water down—what we must ever pay **closer attention**. Jesus’ word, **heard** and later transcribed into Scripture, the proclamation of **this glorious salvation**; signs, wonders

and miracles **and by gifts of the Holy Spirit** confirm that word. Now if, and I do not believe this is the case, if these “testifying” signs, wonders, miracles and the gifts of the Spirit were intended to cease, time out, lose their relevance(?) at any point in time, this would have been the ideal place in Scripture for that to have been established. It wasn’t, and one would search the Scriptures in vain for that explicit instruction. **Long ago, at many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets—**

1909 [e]	2078 [e]	3588 [e]	2250 [e]	3778 [e]	2980 [e]	1473 [e]	1722 [e]	5207 [e]	3739 [e]	5087 [e]
ep'	eschatou	tōn	hēmerōn	toutōn	elalēsen	hēmin	en	Huiō	hon	ethēken
2 ἐπ'	ἐσχάτου	τῶν	ἡμερῶν	τούτων	ἐλάλησεν	ἡμῖν	ἐν	Υἱῷ ,	ὃν	ἔθηκεν
in	last	-	days	these	has spoken	to us	in	[His] Son	whom	He appointed
Prep	Adj-GNS	Art-GFP	N-GFP	DPro-GFP	V-AIA-3S	PPro-D1P	Prep	N-DMS	RelPro-AMS	V-AIA-3S

2818 [e]	3956 [e]	1223 [e]	3739 [e]	2532 [e]	4160 [e]	3588 [e]	165 [e]
klēronomon	pantōn	di'	hou	kai	epoiēsen	tous	aiōnas
κληρονόμον	πάντων ,	δι'	οὗ	καὶ	ἐποίησεν	τοὺς	αἰῶνας ,
heir	of all things	through	whom	also	He made	the	ages
N-AMS	Adj-GNP	Prep	RelPro-GMS	Conj	V-AIA-3S	Art-AMP	N-AMP

is a truism. **But in these last days, he has spoken to us by the Son.**¹ I see an affirmation of continuity here, a statement that God speaks as He always has and the Son fits into this prophetic tradition seamlessly. But could be taken as meaning a contradiction, or as a clarification without contradiction. the second main clause need not taken as change in venue. It could be taken as “additionally,” or “as a more recent amendment,” God has added to the former prophets, the word of His Son.

The “apostolic gifts,” I would note are not so designated as “apostolic” in Scripture! That is a man-made label—a theological label, I suppose, useful perhaps for indexing things. This label lends itself to confusion. The pertinent passage is 1 Cor. 12:27-31a:

27 Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it. 28 And God has [has set some in] appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then [works of power] miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. 29 All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of [c]miracles, are they? 30 All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? 31 But earnestly desire the greater gifts.

All are not prophets does not mean “none” are, it does mean that some are—that prophecy is *ongoing* as a part of body life (the same with teachers, workers of miracles and the gifts of healings). **Seek the greater gifts** is an endorsement of the gifts. How did this get turned on its head? Indeed, outside the liberal, intellectual (secular) Western world, infatuated as it is with so-called “scientific authority” which dismisses all of these “testimonies” as irrelevant, we hear of signs, wonders, miracles and the gifts of the Spirit continuing. That is because, according to Hebrews 2 signs, wonders, miracles, and the

gifts of the Spirit are about **God also testifying with them**, the apostolic witness (i.e. **what we have heard**)—conveyed to us through the word.

Regression is about drifting away from that, as well as **turning back**, reverting to **spiritual slavery to weak and worthless “elemental things.”** (Gal. 4:9) Regression is spiritual decline, reversal, going from good to bad, the superior to the inferior, or exchanging the spiritual for the fleshly. We can understand Paul’s cry: **Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, and you now being perfected by the flesh?!** (Gal 3:3) It is an embrace of the **elemental things** as if they were what they are not. No one is saved by keeping the law. That doesn’t mean keeping the law is a bad thing; it remains a good thing—Paul is saying that it is not the “saving thing.”

Hebrews 2:2 reads: **For since the message declared by angels** (nothing less than the Law once delivered to Moses which he “heard” from God and faithfully and fully delivered to Israel!) **proved to be reliable.** How did it prove reliable? In that **every transgression or disobedience received just retribution.** How significant it is that Jesus in dying for our sins was the just retribution for our sins! We are acquitted because He paid for them in full—and did not dismiss them, or brush them aside *as if they didn’t matter at all!* The Jews had a message declared **by angels** (*which is likely a euphemism for God*) for which Moses was the intermediary—yes, that’s true enough!—but the message we have received **from the beginning of the preaching of the gospel of God by Jesus, that message, is declared to us by the Son of God Himself.** That’s better, superior, yes, greater by far! Now the reason Mosaic law is referred to as **elemental** is uncovered here. It doesn’t work. No man can keep it entirely, or perfectly; no man, save one, has ever done so. That He did so is to our everlasting benefit! **All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.** (Rom. 3:23)

That Paul is in substantial agreement with this stand on the reliability of the Mosaic message is found here:

Rom. 3:3 **What then? If some [a]did not believe, their [b]unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? 4 May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, Where the NASB has not believe, a more literal reading suggest unfaithful. It is inescapable: liberalism, as I experienced it, was blatant faithlessness. And so it remains to this day.**

**“That You may be justified in Your words,
And prevail when You [c]are judged.”**

5 But if our unrighteousness [d]demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) 6 May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world? 7 But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? 8 And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), “Let us do evil that good may come”? [e]Their condemnation is just.

Regression is our theme here: **When you did not know God, you were enslaved.** (Gal. 4:8) Personally, as long as I was charmed by the idea that biblical revelation was dismissible, I was personally enslaved to radicalism, to atheism, to leftist ideology, to cultural relativism, to immorality and error. But when **by grace God decided to reveal His Son to me . . . the One who called me by name, in order that I might preach Him** then I was *liberated, set free*. (Gal 1:15) Then as the truth of Scripture was revealed and explained to me by the Holy Spirit (which is His proper office and function in this present age), faith became clearer to me. **May God be true and every man a liar!**

Frankly, it doesn't require faith to declare that the spiritual gifts have ceased. Any of them, or even just a select few of them. Even the so-called "apostolic gifts"—the speaking gifts, prophecy, wonders and signs are effectual in solidifying the testimony of the church. Rather it takes faith to affirm that they have not ceased and in fact, are operative in a secularized, man-centered world! Indeed, they are our only hope.

Amen.