

THE CONSUMING FIRE

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Hebrews 12:18 For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest 19 and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. 20 For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” 21 Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Based on the indication vv.18-24, here comes the command, mandate:

Observe: A Final Warning in the book of Hebrews.

Passage for today: 25 See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. 26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” 27 This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore **let us be grateful** for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus **let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe**, 29 for our God is a consuming fire.

A. GOD’S WARNING

12:25, See that you do not refuse him who is speaking.

- ❖ **Three times is this phrase repeated in the book of Hebrews**, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb. 3:7-8; 3:15; 4:7)
- ❖ **2:1**, Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

Who is the one speaking here?

- ❖ **Hebrews 1:1** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...

How does Christ speak to us today?

- ❖ **2:3** 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...**

Note: The Holy Scripture is the voice of God spoken to the Son and given to us through His prophets and apostles, particularly the New Testament.

Remember: Anyone (pastor or believers) who brings God's word to you is God speaking to you.

- God is speaking through His Word for salvation...
- God is speaking through His Word for sanctification...

12:25, See that you do not refuse him who is speaking.

A fortiori argument (Latin): An argument that argues that what is true in the lesser case will be even more true in the greater.

12:25, See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth [the exodus generation], much less (even more unlikely) will we escape IF WE REJECT HIM who warns from heaven.

Rejection happens in two ways:

1. Not believing in the gift of salvation God offers through the redemptive work of Christ Jesus.
2. Not submitting to the authority and lordship of Christ Jesus as His disciples.
 - ❖ **Luke 6:46**, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?"
 - ❖ **2:2**, 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?
 - ❖ **10:28**, Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. [29] **How much worse punishment**, do you

think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

Note: The judgment under the New Testament is much more severe than the judgment under the Old Covenant. **The consequence of refusing God's grace is more severe than disobeying God's law.**

B. GOD'S JUDGMENT

12:26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." **27** This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—

26 At that time his voice shook the earth—**Exodus 19:18**, Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln (furnace), and the whole mountain trembled greatly.

The shaking of the earth and the heavens speaks about God's fierce and final judgment on the entire universe:

Haggai 2:6, For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land.

2 Peter 3:10, But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

C. GOD'S CALL

12:28, Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, **29** for our God is a consuming fire.

Negative command: See that you do not refuse Him who is speaking...

Positive commands:

i. Let us **BE GRATEFUL** for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken (eternal kingdom).

ii. Let us offer to God **ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP**, with reverence and awe...

Receiving the kingdom: What kind of a kingdom?

- ❖ **12:22**, But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.
- ❖ **12:28**, “receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken...” [eternal]

Attitude: Be grateful

Gratitude speaks about two things: Contentment despite lack and **thankfulness** despite difficulties.

- **What is the opposite of gratitude?** Grumbling. Instead of grumbling about earthly lack and afflictions, be grateful for receiving the eternal kingdom.

People of Israel: They were not grateful for receiving the promised land but often grumbled that their life in the wilderness was not comfortable.

- You may have to suffer sickness on earth but be grateful for receiving the eternal kingdom.
- You may have to lose your dear ones on earth but be grateful for receiving the eternal kingdom.
- You may have to suffer hurt and rejection from people but be grateful for receiving the eternal kingdom.
- You may have to suffer earthly loss but be grateful for receiving the eternal kingdom.
- You may have to go through various kinds of afflictions on earth but be grateful for receiving the eternal kingdom.

Comment: No pain of suffering is comparable to the eternal suffering in hell from which God has saved you, and no pleasure on earth is comparable to the eternal joy which God gives you in heaven.

Remember: God never promised that your temporal life on earth would be painless and comfortable, but He promised that your eternal life would be eternally joyful without pain.

Quote: Life on Earth is like a drop in an ocean of eternity. Don't be obsessed with the drop. Dive in the ocean.

Note: You will learn perseverance in your faith only when you cultivate a heart of gratitude for the eternal kingdom.

Who will receive this eternal kingdom?

- IT COST CHRIST'S BLOOD TO OFFER YOU THE KINGDOM.
- Only those who genuinely trust in Christ's death and resurrection for their salvation and evidence their genuineness by bearing the fruit of salvation.

Be grateful for RECEIVING the unshakable kingdom: This receiving speaks about the acceptance of God's gracious gift of salvation. We don't deserve it, nor can we earn it.

If we are in anyway receiving God's eternal kingdom, then why is this severe warning?

Believers' hearts are prone to lukewarmness, and God uses warnings to warm our hearts towards Him.

Daniel Fuller (professor and theologian), "One of the ways God causes us to persevere in faith and be saved is by warning us that we could make shipwreck of our faith and be lost."

Caution: We must not disregard God's warnings in the Scripture because of our firm belief in eternal security. WE MUST POSSESS ASSURANCE AND FEAR!

Word-shaped attitude:

- Encouraged by words of **comfort**.
- Encouraged by words of **caution**.

12:28, Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and **thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe...**

II. I will preach on acceptable worship next Sunday...

Why? 12:29, for our God is a consuming (devouring) fire.

Taken from Deuteronomy 4:23, Take care, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make a carved image, the form of anything that the LORD your God has forbidden you. [24] For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

The consuming fire speaks about the fiercest and uncompromising judgment of God.

- God shaking the created world speaks about God's judgment.

Compare both the verses:

12:28, Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire.

4:15, For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. [16] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Question: Is God a consuming fire or merciful and gracious? BOTH.

Two extremes about the nature of God:

- Reverence and awe toward God in the absence of God's love and grace. A legalistic attitude.
- Focus on God's love and grace in the absence of reverence and awe towards Him. A libertine attitude.

John Newton expressed the same idea in his well-known hymn, "Amazing Grace": "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved."