

Lesson 52
Fear in the New Covenant
Hebrews 12:25-29

Quite often I hear Christians say, “I don’t fear God, I just love Him.” They sometimes go on to say, “The God of the Old Testament was a God of wrath, but the God of the New Testament is a God of love; therefore, I don’t have to fear God any longer.” People who reason this way merely show their ignorance of Scripture. Now it is true that since the coming of Christ God’s grace and love have had a fuller revelation, but God in the New Testament is just as holy, righteous, and wrathful as He was in the Old Testament. It is still true that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, for we must learn to fear God before we can genuinely love Him.

These Hebrew-Christians to whom the author was writing were exhorted to serve God “with reverence and awe.” The King James Version says, “with reverence and godly fear.” It is impossible to understand this section of Scripture without placing it in the total argument of the Book of Hebrews. This is the last warning to some of these Hebrew-Christians who were contemplating leaving Christianity to go back into Judaism in order to avoid intense social persecution from the religious, unsaved Jews. The author warns them of the fatal consequences of abandoning Christianity for Judaism. Those who made this move would be apostatizing. Their mere profession of faith would result in more hardening of the heart until they would come to the place where they could never be saved.

The author of Hebrews was convinced that the great majority of those to whom he was writing were truly saved, but he was concerned about this small group who were on the verge of apostatizing. Because the author did not know everyone who was about to make this move, nor did he know the human heart, he gave this warning to the whole congregation, knowing that it would challenge true believers to go forward and would arouse false believers out of their lethargy.

THE FEAR OF REFUSING - Hebrews 12:25-27

“See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking ...” -- These Hebrew-Christians were to give careful examination to their own hearts to see whether they were true believers in Christ. They were not to refuse ***“Him who is speaking”*** and this must refer to God who in this new dispensation is now speaking to the world through His Son Jesus Christ.

“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world” (Heb. 1:1-2).

God has made a revelation of Himself in Christ to the world, and men are to be obedient to this revelation by accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. These professing Hebrew-Christians were not to refuse God’s revelation in Christ. They were responsible human beings and to leave Christianity was to refuse Christ, and this was the beginning step toward apostasy.

Notice carefully that these professing Hebrew-Christians had a choice to make. They were responsible to choose for Christ. They could obviously choose for or against Christ, for man does have the power of choice but not necessarily a free will. A decision had to be made about Christ, and so today a man may receive or reject Christ. To refuse Christ is a fatal mistake, for in so doing a person may give up any hope of being saved. God is speaking to you today. Will you accept His Son or reject Him? The decision is yours.

“For if those did not escape when they refused Him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.” -- The author refers back to the children of Israel, who repeatedly heard God’s voice at Mount Sinai when the Law was given. Yet they continued to exercise unbelief and God judged them. Many in Moses’ generation, in murmurings and rebellion, turned away from God’s guidance and revealed will. They did not escape judgment, for they died in the wilderness without ever seeing the Promised Land.

If it is true that a holy, righteous, and sovereign God judged Israel for refusing God before the Cross, how much more will He judge men who refuse Christ now that Christ has come in the flesh? God now speaks from heaven where Christ is seated at His right hand. God’s message of grace in His Son is greater than His message of Law through Moses; therefore, a person who rejects Christ now is more responsible and under greater condemnation for rejection. With greater privilege comes greater responsibility. To refuse Christ is to make a frightful and fatal decision which affects one’s eternal destiny.

“And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, ‘YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN.’” -- When God gave the Mosaic Law on Mount Sinai, the whole mountain shook. ***“Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently”*** (Ex. 19:18). But God will once again shake the earth at the second advent of Jesus Christ. This is a quote from [Haggai 2:6](#); ***“For thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land.’”*** The author uses this verse to point forward to when the age of grace shall come to an end at the second coming of Christ.

“And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. And you will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him” (Zech. 14:4-5).

When Christ returns. He will put His feet down on the Mount of Olives and the whole earth will quake.

The author of Hebrews brings in the Second Advent to remind these professing Hebrew-

Christians that judgment awaits them if they refuse Christ.

“For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed - for our testimony to you was believed” (2 Thess. 1:6-10).

“And this expression, ‘Yet once more,’ denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.”
-- While it is my personal conviction that there will be a thousand years between the second advent of Christ and the final end of history, the author seems to skip this millennial era to discuss the matter of eternal realities. At the end of time, the world will be destroyed by fire.

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth, and its works will be burned up. ... looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:10, 12-13).

At that time, God will establish a new heaven and a new earth. ***“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea”*** (Rev. 21:1).

When God’s plan for this world is over, certain things will be destroyed and certain things shall remain. Some things will be shaken and others will be unshaken and remain. What will remain? Only those things with eternal value will remain. God will remain; His Word will remain; and all those whom the Son has purchased by His blood will remain! The author of Hebrews is concerned that these Hebrew-Christians get their priorities straight - eternal things remain and only Christ can give eternal life to people. To go back into Judaism would be forfeiting any hope of eternal life.

Where are your values? Where are you building your security? Is your security in numbers, and you feel that if the majority is with you, you must be right, even if the Bible says you are wrong. Security in numbers will not cause you to remain when the earth is destroyed. Is your security in money? Are you thinking that if you could just get more money you would be happier, but yet you find that money does not satisfy and brings only emptiness and meaninglessness. Money will not cause you to remain. Is your security in government? Do you pray, “Our Father which are in Washington”? Government will not cause you to remain. Are you trusting in science? Science has brought us much blessing and much cursing. The wisdom of science is now threatening the very destruction of the whole human race – not only from atomic and hydrogen bombs, but from pesticides and pollution. Science will not cause you to remain. Security is only found in Christ and those who are in Christ will remain when the whole world is destroyed by

fire.

THE FEAR OF DISPLEASEING GOD - Hebrews 12:28-29

“Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken ...” -- The author now shifts his thinking. He stops warning the false believers in the assembly and gives a general exhortation to those who are true believers, but he still does not know the heart of some of the Hebrew-Christians.

Christians have received a kingdom which is unshakable and immovable. Christians as eternal people are part of the eternal kingdom which has the eternal Christ as King.

Notice carefully that God’s kingdom is received in grace; it is a gift from God and eternal in nature.

“... let us show gratitude ...” -- The Christian is to have a spirit of gratitude, thankfulness and appreciation for the eternal kingdom which is his in Christ Jesus. We are not to be despising and refusing Christ, but to be grateful for all that God has done for us in grace. All that a Christian is he owes to the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

“...by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe (godly fear) ...” -- The one goal of a Christian should be to be well-pleasing (acceptable) unto God in his service. Our gratitude must be shown in our service for God, and the only service that is acceptable to God is a life of dedication to God.

“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:1-2).

God wants devotion in service to Him, and He will be pleased with nothing less. This service is to be done ***“with reverence and awe (godly fear).”***

Believers in the New Covenant are to have a healthy appreciation of God’s holiness, righteousness and sovereignty and realize that God does not tolerate sin anywhere, especially in His very own children. Each and every Christian should have a fear or abhorrence of disobeying the will of God.

The kind of fear a true believer shows towards God is different from that of an unbeliever. An unbeliever has terror in his heart because he fears God’s wrath, but a Christian has reverence and awe of God because he fears displeasing God and being disciplined as a child of God. God does discipline all of His children for disobedience and is much harder on His children than on the unsaved world. He disciplines Christians because He loves them and not because He hates them. God hates sinners, and His holy wrath comes upon them, but He loves His children and longs to do good for them.

Any person who has ever loved his or her father also had a great respect and even a certain fear of the father. We do not love someone we do not respect!

“... for our God is a consuming fire.” -- God hates sin and must deal with it wherever He finds it. This is a quote from Deuteronomy 4:24. **“For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God”** (Deut. 4:24). This verse deals with Moses after he warned the Jews not to forget the Covenant and fall into idolatry after they crossed the Jordan River. Many of them fell into idolatry and apostatized, and some of these professing Hebrew-Christians were on the verge of doing the very same thing.

God is a consuming fire to the person who leaves Christianity to go back into another religion or to return to paganism, and this should strike terror into his heart, for he must meet a wrathful God in eternity. However, such fire has no terror for the true child of God, for once he is saved he does not need to fear God with terror. **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”** (Rom. 8:1). The Christian does not fear God’s wrath, but he does respect God’s holiness and hatred of sin; he does fear the discipline of his loving Heavenly Father. God’s rod of discipline can sometimes be severe, but whatever He does for us He does because He loves us and wants us to push on in holiness and spiritual maturity.

God is a consuming fire both to the believer and the unbeliever. Fire destroys what it cannot purify, and purifies what it cannot destroy. God destroys the lost but purifies the saved!

CONCLUSION

If you are without Christ, whether a rank rejecter or a mere professor, a Christian in name only, I must warn you that God is a consuming fire and He will bring His holy, eternal wrath down upon you in eternity if you do not turn to Christ and receive Him as your Lord and Savior.

Do not be duped by the teaching that God was a God of wrath in the Old Testament and is a God of love in the New Testament. No, God does not change. He is a consuming fire yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Upon those who refuse His grace in Christ, the fire of judgment will fall forever. Then God will say to you, **“Depart from Me, ye accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels”** (Matt. 25:41). At the judgment of the Great White Throne, the Bible says, **“And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire”** (Rev. 20:15)

Rejecter, mere professor of Christ, unsaved churchman, see that you do not refuse Christ, for He is your only hope of salvation. He is the only way to God. **“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me’”** (John 14:6). Do not refuse Christ, or you shall make a fatal decision that will affect your eternal destiny!