

## God, a Consuming Fire (Hebrews 12:25–29)

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### Introduction

1. The great problem in the contemporary Christian culture: ignorance of who God really is.
  - a. “If God is slow to anger and patient, why, then, when men first sinned, was His wrath and punishment so severe and long-lasting?”—a question posed to R.C. Sproul.
  - b. Such ignorance shows that we don’t know who God is and we don’t know who we are. The question ought to be, “Why wasn’t His wrath infinitely more severe?”
2. The Hebrew believers were teetering on the brink of apostasy.
  - a. This temptation was due to their being worn down through suffering.
  - b. The apostles countered with stern warnings and solemn exhortations against any who would spurn so great a privilege as the New Covenant work of Jesus Christ.
  - c. Although Paul does not say so, the response of the apostles is clearly, “What is wrong with you people?”
  - d. Compared to the glories of the Old Covenant, the New Covenant under Jesus infinitely exceeds in glory.
3. This final exhortation (vv. 25–29) is the apostle’s last effort to return them to right thinking.

### I. Perseverance of Faith

1. The pressures of opposition from the world and the suffering that resulted had a twofold objective.
  - a. Severe trials separate the goats from the sheep as Jesus testified in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:20, 21).
  - b. Suffering encourages true believers to hope in the Lord and to cling to His promises (Heb. 10:32–39).
2. God was treating them as sons: it was for discipline that they had to endure (Heb. 12:7).
  - a. *Child training* is designed to promote holiness and provoke the peaceable fruit of righteousness in those so trained (12:10, 11).
  - b. They were reminded that saints must pursue peace with men and holiness with God through His grace (12:14, 15).
  - c. Failure to submit to this process leads to a root of bitterness—the danger of becoming a barren and worthless piece of ground that bears no fruit for the kingdom (12:15).

### II. Motivated by the Fear of God

1. God does not encourage the true believers with affirmations of His love and grace only but with the reality of His awful wrath and judgment in order to provoke *fear* in them (Heb. 10:26–31; see 4:1; 12; 28, 29).
  - a. Fear is a very healthy response when it involves the right things, but we are never to fear what God tells us not to fear (Rev. 1:17).

- b. There are dozens of references that warn believers to *fear* God (Deut. 10:12, 20; Jer. 2:19).
- 2. Defined, *fear* is the mental and emotional response to perceived danger. God is dangerous.
  - a. False teaching seeks to deny or soften this truth.
  - b. However, we are to listen and properly respond to Him, or we will find Him justifiably displeased.
- 3. Our tendency is to forget who God is and that He is not like us (see v. 29, citing Deut. 4:24).
  - a. *Fire* refers to His just anger over creatures who defy His will and refuse to obey His directives.
  - b. Two adjectives are used to govern what constitutes *acceptable worship*.
    - 1) *Reverence*—a *carefulness* in one’s attentiveness to God’s instructions; to be pious
    - 2) *Awe* carries the fundamental idea of caution and timidity in the apprehension of danger.
    - 3) The difference between *awe* and *fear* is the proximity of danger. We fear in the face of danger present; whereas, *awe* is *apprehension* of danger not immediately present. So, is there danger to fear?

### III. Awful Judgment

- 1. The main issue facing this broken, fallen, and still-rebellious world is that God’s wrath hangs over all human history as a pervasive pall of impending tempest (2 Pet. 3:10–13).
  - a. The overall theme of this final exhortation is warning of that judgment (vv. 25, 26).
  - b. Those who refuse this warning will not escape the shaking that is coming, one far more terrible than that which overtook those who refused at Mount Sinai.
- 2. Nevertheless, as appalling as the threat is, the outcome is to be greatly desired.
  - a. The removal of that which can be shaken establishes the unshakeable realities of the kingdom that will eternally remain (v. 27).
  - b. Our present trials are part of the shaking and removal of all that is false and sinful. Those in Christ will survive because they are part of what cannot be shaken and what must eternally remain. Therefore—

### Application

Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us—

- 1. Be *grateful* (KJV, *grace*, both thankfulness and grace are from the same root word)—the attitude of a believer who understands that all he has of eternal value has been given to him as a gift from heaven
- 2. Offer to God acceptable worship (the service of worship—the performance of the duties of a priest; see Rom. 12:1, 2).