

“You’re Playing With Fire!”

Hebrews 12:18-29

June 30, 2019

VIDEO 1: *“Grave”*

Song sings the heart of Hebrews; Christ-exalting exhortation!

The most crucial question for the human race is this, what are the distinguishing marks of the people who enjoy God's favor, those who are on their way to heaven? ...So much good and so much bad are mixed up in the church! ...This mixture of false religion with true religion has been Satan's greatest weapon against the cause of Christ. This is why we must learn to distinguish between true and false religion... ...We must separate between the wheat & the weeds. - Jonathan Edwards

CONTEXT: Sermon series = *“Hold On”*

➤ 5th of 5 “structural warnings

- Don't **DRIFT, DISCONNECT, DILLY-DALLY**
- Don't **DISOBEY** (Hebrews 10-12:3)
- Don't **DENY & DEFY Christ** (Heb. 12:25-29)

BIG IDEA: **Hebrews is here** (in part) **to**
scare the hell out of people!

PREVIEW: **1. Past** **2. Present** **3. Future**

I. PAST

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.”

II. PRESENT

In coming to Mount Zion—that is, by becoming a Christian—we come to seven other blessings...

²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to (1) the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to (2) innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³ and to (3) the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to (4) God, the judge of all, and to (5) the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ and to (6) Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to (7) the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

“You have come to see/BE the Church...” - JDP

God's people no longer identify with the place that God's law was given, but with the place that God's law was fulfilled.

OLD

Mount **Sinai**
Moses
Backwards
Physical
Fear
Worry
Animal-blood
Legalism
Hell
Religion
Judaism

NEW

Mount **Zion**
Messiah
Forwards
Spiritual
Faith
Worship
Almighty's blood
Love
Heaven
Relationship
Jesus

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.

"It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" ([10:31](#)).

- [Matthew 7:21ff](#)
- Seven churches of [Revelation 2-3](#) (video last week)
- [Luke 14:27](#) & Parable of the Talents...

VIDEO 2: *"The FEW"*

- Two will be _____ *I will be taken, I will be left*
- *Why do you call me Lord, Lord... but do not do...*
- They profess w/ their mouths & deny w/ their lives
- *You will know them by their fruit.* – Jesus, the Christ

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.

- Romans 1 “they will be **given over** to their desires”
- There will be **no cowards in heaven!** (Rev. 21:8)
- *Those who shrink back will be destroyed...*

III. FUTURE

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...

- **How important are these words in this verse:**
 - *Grateful; Receiving; Unshakable*
 - *Acceptable (worship); Reverence; Awe/Fear*

So.... *What is “ACCEPTABLE worship”?*

How do I know if I'm really a Christian?

That's an eternally important question, and yet, sadly, it's one that many Christians struggle to answer.... Thankfully, God doesn't leave us in the dark when it comes to our standing before Him...

The brief yet penetrating book of 1st John gives us evidences of eternal life to look for in our lives. Seeing these evidences should bring assurance and joy to God's children. At the same time, 1 John offers a much-needed warning to those who lack these evidences. It is entirely possible to think that things are okay between you and God when, in reality, you don't actually have eternal life. There are likely many people in our churches today who fit that description. Of all the things to be deceived about, nothing could be worse than being deceived about your eternal standing before God.

What could be more important? - **David Platt** (1st John Study)

Jonathan Edwards: *"The Experience That Counts"*

Faith's 12 potentially "false-positives"

It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual...

1. strong and lively.
2. produce great effect on the body.
3. produce a great warmth & readiness to talk about Christ

4. if we did not produce them
5. if they come via Bible vv.
6. if there seems to be love in them. ...*love can be imitated*
7. we experience many kinds...
8. Comfort & joy come too
9. if spend much time in the outward duties of worship.
10. if they cause us to praise God with our mouths.
11. if produce assurance...
12. If give a moving account

***How great the resemblance can be, then,
between a false and true Christian!***

SURELY, SOMETHING NEEDS TO CHANGE.

But how? ...Clearly, the change we need won't happen simply by our seeing more facts or listening to more sermons... I don't think we need more exposition and explanation. I think we need an experience – an encounter that takes exposed and explained truth to a deeper level in our hearts than it would ever go otherwise. - **Dr. David Platt** (*Something Needs To Change*)

Biblical worship is the full-life response... - head, heart, and hands... - to who God is and what He has done. - Austin Stone

See “*acceptable*” biblical worship in...

- Hebrews 12:1ff
- Romans 12:1ff
- Great C's

- What do you want?
- Do you LOVE Him?
- ***You're playing with FIRE!***
 - See Jesus & Rich Young Ruler

Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?
- Galatians 4:16

Jonathan Edward's 14 ***"true spiritual emotions..."***

1. Arise from spiritual, supernatural, & divine influences on the heart.
(MIRACLE of Gospel-Grace!)

2. Focus on the loveliness of spiritual things, **NOT our self interest.**

*Anything is lovely to a selfish person...
if it advances his or her self-interest.*

3. Based on the moral excellence of spiritual things.

4. Arise out of spiritual understanding.

*Spiritual understanding sees what is actually in
Scripture; it does not make a new meaning for it!*

5. Bring a conviction of the reality of divine/holy things.

6. Always exist alongside spiritual humiliation.

7. Always exist alongside a change of nature.

8. Contrast by promoting a Christ-like spirit of love, humility, peace, forgiveness & compassion.

9. Soften hearts, & exist alongside a Christian tenderness of spirit.
10. Unlike false ones, have a beautiful consistency & symmetry...
11. Produce a longing for deeper holiness vs false complacencies
12. Fruit of true spiritual emotions is Christian practice/obedience.
13. Christian practice is the chief sign to others of sincerity.
14. Christian practice is a sure sign of conversion to conscience.

*** Remember the importance of answering “Whose Who?”

Now ask: “Why’s he talking to ME this way?”

2 ANSWERS: #1 = Hebrews 12:29

²⁹for our God is a consuming fire.

(cf. Exod 24:17; Deut 4:24)

“Don’t be afraid of the fires of hell... No. BE afraid of the holy, consuming Fire that is our God!” - JDP

“You’re never more loving than when you’re sharing a hard truth with a soft heart.” - JDP

#2 = **VIDEO 3:** *Charo Washer*

- This is why our **Missional Manifesto** is critical!
- This is why the **Stickman Gospel** is essential!
- This is why our “**Fundamentals**” are foundational!

Remember:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...

AND

The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.

If an unconverted person tries to live a Christian life, it is like throwing a stone upwards. Nature finally prevails, and the stone comes down again. - Edwards

REMEMBER **John 3:36!**

Let's Pray!

VIDEO 4: *Church (Take Me Back)*

RESEARCH Notes:

Hebrews 12:18-29 (ESV)

*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.

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.

NOT on physical Mount Sinai & the Old Covenant:
vv.18-21 = “For you are NOT...”

RATHER, in Spiritual presence & New Covenant
vv.22-24 = “For you ARE...”

DON'T YOU DARE deny or defy God's Word, Will, & Ways!
v.25 = “See that you...”

To be CLEAR, eliminating any & all excuses...
vv.26-28 = “At that time... but NOW... Therefore, let us...”

You're playing with FIRE
v.29 = “Our God is a consuming fire!”

An Unshakable Kingdom

[Hebrews 12:18-24](#)

Main Idea: Those who endure in the faith come to Zion, the mountain of God's new and better covenant mediated through Jesus Christ. His blood satisfies God's wrath and permits God's people to enter God's presence freely and confidently.

- I. **Mount Sinai (12:18-21)**
 - A. The scene at Sinai
 - B. A dramatic scene change
- II. **Mount Zion (12:22-24)**
 - A. Reading eschatologically
 - B. Joining the angels and the firstborn
 - C. Hearing the better things of Jesus's blood

This passage is the climactic point the author has been building toward for the last eleven chapters. In Hebrews 13 the author makes closing application points and exhortations similar to the way Paul normally ends his letters, but the real culmination of the letter occurs in the final verses of chapter 12

Mount Sinai

[Hebrews 12:18-21](#)

The word *for* requires the reader to look backward. It grounds what the author is about to say in what he has just finished saying in [verses 12-17](#).

This section, therefore, provides the reason why Christians can strengthen their tired hands and weakened knees and make straight paths for their feet. They can do these things because they have not come to Sinai. They have come to a better mountain: Mount Zion.

The Scene at Sinai

The reference to Sinai also requires the reader to look backward, this time all the way back to the Old Testament.

The phrase “not come to what could be touched” points the reader back to the origin of the law at Mount Sinai (Exod 19). Mount Sinai was the mountain Moses climbed to receive God’s law on behalf of Israel. The Lord commanded Moses to warn the people of Israel not to go up the mountain or to touch it, lest they die (Exod 19:12). They could not touch the mountain because God’s presence consecrated the place and set it apart from the sinful people. If an uninvited sinner touched the mountain when God was present, he or she would be put to death. When the Lord was present on the mountain, it was consumed by a thick smoke, earthquakes, thunder, and lighting (Exod 19:16). It was wrapped in smoke and trembled greatly because the Lord had descended on it in fire (19:18). Furthermore, the mountain resounded with a very loud trumpet blast, one that grew louder with every blow (19:16,19). All of this demonstrated the presence of God on the mountain. It represented his incomparable power, might, and sheer holiness. Thus, this mountain was a place of awe and terror for Israel. As they stood before it, they trembled in fear. This was the mountain to which the people of Israel had come.

[Hebrews 12:19-20](#) continues expressing the terror related to the encounter and its effects on the people. When the Lord spoke from the midst of the smoke covering the mountain, the people begged for Moses to speak to them instead ([Exod 20:18-19](#); [Deut 5:24-27](#)).

The congregation was even commanded to stone to death any animal that touched the mountain (Exod 19:12-13).

The severity of this command demonstrated the costliness of uncleanness in the midst of God's holy presence. The Israelites feared for their lives.

The author of Hebrews uses the command to execute animals to show just how incomprehensibly terrifying God's presence on Sinai was for the people of Israel.

It was so fearsome that even Moses was afraid.

A Dramatic Scene Change

Israel had come to this terrifying place; they had come to Mount Sinai. But this is not the mountain to which Christians have come. The word "not" in verse 18 is key to understanding the radical difference between our experience with God and Israel's experience with him. "Not" draws a stark contrast between the old and new covenants, the law and grace, and the promise and fulfillment.

The claim that Christians have come to Mount Zion would have shocked the original audience. Jews defined themselves and their history through Sinai. That mountain is where the Israelites met God, but it's not where Christians meet God in the new covenant.

That's the point...the author is trying to make by portraying the horror and dread the Israelites felt at the foot of Mount Sinai. **He paints this terrifying picture of Sinai for his readers in order to make the contrast with the radiant, glorious, and gracious new covenant.**

The awful terror of Sinai, which is not the mount to which we have come, shows the radical mercy of Zion.

At Zion God embraces us with his grace and administers to us a covenant where he does not merely write the law on tablets of stone but on the tablets of our hearts.

Mount Zion

[Hebrews 12:22-24](#)

In the Old Testament we find that the earthly Zion was part of Jerusalem, captured by David ([2 Sam 5:7](#)). **Mount Zion eventually was so identified with Jerusalem that it became synonymous with the city. Here, however, the author is not connecting Zion with the earthly Jerusalem; he's connecting it with the eschatological new Jerusalem.**

One of the reasons the author contrasts Zion with Sinai is to emphasize what Zion represents. As we have already noted, the Jews saw Zion as synonymous with Jerusalem. Zion was the city of promise and peace.

The distinction drawn between Sinai and Zion shows us that Christ perfectly fulfilled what Sinai represented.

Christians do not come to Sinai, since Christ fulfilled the law of Sinai. Jesus did not nullify or invalidate the Old Testament law. Rather, he did what no sinful human could do: he perfectly obeyed and fulfilled the law. He fulfilled it in its letter and its spirit, which means that he obeyed it externally and internally, with his behavior and in his heart. **Thus, because of Christ's work Sinai now stands as a mountain of fulfillment. And this fulfillment, of course, occurred on Zion, in Jerusalem, for Jesus accomplished his saving work and resurrection from the dead in the vicinity of Jerusalem.**

Thus...

God's people no longer identify with the place that God's law was given, but with the place that God's law was fulfilled.

Reading Eschatologically

A proper reading of verses 22 and 23 requires that we interpret them through the lens of the already-not yet tension we find throughout the New Testament.

The kingdom of God is inaugurated (already) though not consummated (not yet). In other words Christians can experience, in part, the fulfillment of God's promises even as they await the complete experience of those promises in the new creation. This is the tension we feel between this age and the age to come.

We have already seen the author speaking in terms of the already-not yet in [Hebrews 2:8](#). The writer speaks in similar terms here in [Hebrews 12:22-23](#).

Coming to Zion hasn't been fully actualized in our experience, but it is a certain and promised reality. We've already come to the city of the living God in one sense, but that reality is not yet fully consummated.

In other words,

**we've already come to Zion,
but we're still waiting to get there.**

Thinking in eschatological terms also helps us understand the word *city*. **The word *city* is significant because it reveals an important point about God's kingdom. God reigns in his kingdom, but he doesn't just reign from any old place; he reigns from "the city of the living God."**

Speaking of the city reminds us that it will be the seat of the kingdom. Even as Jerusalem was the capital of Israel, so the heavenly Jerusalem will be the capital of God's kingdom. In coming to Zion, we have come to the chief city of God's kingdom and reign.

Joining the Angels and the Firstborn

Whom will we join there? We will join innumerable angels in festal gathering. This is something we can't possibly imagine. **The city of the living God is filled with countless angels shining in the glory of God. Such a picture is indescribable, but it is nonetheless a picture of what awaits those who endure until the end.**

Remember how Hebrews began. It opened with the author identifying Christ as the One superior to angels and the One with a name more excellent than theirs (1:4). But this doesn't mean that angels should be considered worthless in light of Christ. Angels are still superlative creatures in that they radiate the glory of God and testify to God's saving acts in Christ. **In the heavenly Jerusalem, myriads of angels will joyfully gather to celebrate and worship the Lord. We've come to a city populated with tens of thousands of angels in festal gathering. We will join them in eternal citizenship and in the eternal worship of God.**

Who are “the assembly of the firstborn whose names have been written in heaven”? In one sense, the author is referring to those he held up as examples of faith in Hebrews 11, those who trusted Christ even before his incarnation. But in another sense the assembly of the firstborn is much more than that. In Hebrews 12:1 the writer tells his readers that a great cloud of witnesses surrounds them. As we have already seen, those who were faithful to God and his promises even before Christ came make up this great cloud of witnesses. As we also saw, the author tells his people then—and believers today—that they are united in faith with those who have gone before them, with the firstborn enrolled in heaven. **Because we are a part of the heavenly Jerusalem, we are a part of this congregation. We have already joined in eternal membership with the congregation of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven. This is the church eternal and the church universal, and it is the church to which we have come.**

Coming Before the Judge and to the Spirits of the Righteous

Verse 23 also tells us that we have come to God himself, the Judge of all. Just imagine the day in which all human beings in the history of humanity will be judged. For those who are righteously judged on account of their sin and never knew salvation in Christ, the day of judgment will be a day of unmitigated horror. Eternal hell stands on the other side of that day. But for those who have turned to Jesus Christ in faith and repentance and trust in his condemnation in their place, the day of judgment will be a day of unmitigated glory.

Eternity with the only infinitely righteous, gracious, and merciful God stands on the other side of that day.

The author of Hebrews talks about this day as if we're already there. We're already standing before God, the Judge of all. We're already standing before his throne.

Finally, the writer says that his readers have come to *“the spirits of righteous people made perfect.”* **This is speaking of all who come to Zion. There will be no one who is imperfect in heaven. No unrighteous or imperfect person will be in the heavenly assembly.**

We will not be righteous or perfect by our own accord.

Our righteousness and perfection depends entirely on the imputed righteousness of Christ. His perfection is our perfection. His righteousness is our righteousness. There is no human righteousness in Zion. There is only Christ's righteousness.

Hearing the Better Things of Jesus's Blood

The author's list of things to which we've come climaxes with Jesus Christ.

Now we've come to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that says better things than the blood of Abel.

Jesus's priestly work is the foundation of this city, so it is fitting that the writer caps this list by drawing our attention back to the blood of Jesus.

As we have already seen, the triumphant list of the faithful in [Hebrews 11](#) begins with Abel ([v. 4](#)). God evidently ordered Abel's sacrifice of blood, and Abel obeyed. His obedience testified to his faith in God and his word, but his sacrifice of blood could not save him.

The blood spilled through the animal sacrifices restrained the wrath of God for a time, but those sacrifices did not satisfy the wrath of God forever. The blood of Christ, however, accomplished what the animal sacrifices never could.

His blood is sufficient to forgive sin and to save us from the judgment that sin deserves.

Therefore, Jesus is the mediator of a new and better covenant. By his sacrifice and his sacrifice alone, we come to Zion and to the sprinkled blood that says better things than the blood of Abel (his sacrifice's blood AND/or his personal blood). Christ's sprinkled blood says better things than Abel's because Jesus's blood saves. It completely washes away our sin and satisfies God's wrath once and for all.

This paragraph is the crescendo of the book of Hebrews.

It reminds us in both poetic and prosaic terms that we are not going to that old mountain ever again. Sinai has been displaced and the old covenant has been fulfilled. We've come to a new mountain and a better covenant. We've come to Zion. God does not call us to a mountain we're not allowed to touch. He calls us to a Savior, the same Savior who told Thomas to place his finger in the holes of his hands and to place his hand on the wound in his side (John 20:27). In Christ, the old law has been annulled and a new one has been ratified. This new law does not condemn or judge us. Rather, by Christ's better blood, it guarantees for us an eternal inheritance and secures final forgiveness of sins. His blood brings us to Zion and into the glorious presence of the living God. These are better things indeed.

God's Impending Judgment

[Hebrews 12:25-29](#)

Main Idea: God has spoken to us in the person and work of his Son, Jesus Christ. If we, like the Israelites, reject his merciful Word, we will not escape his coming judgment.

- I. **He Who Speaks and Warns ([12:25](#))**
 - A. Do not reject his words.
 - B. Those who reject will not escape.
- II. **All That Remains ([12:26-27](#))**
- III. **An Unshakable Kingdom and Its Holy King ([12:28-29](#))**

Certain passages in the Bible are particularly vivid, either in promise, judgment, or warning. [Hebrews 12:25-29](#) is one of these vivid passages. It gives a stern word of caution. The warning advises against neglecting the gospel of Christ and refusing to hear God's Word. It is a sobering warning and one we must heed and take to heart.

He Who Speaks and Warns

[Hebrews 12:25](#)

The author begins [verse 25](#) similarly to [12:18](#). By placing the command in the negative rather than the positive, he gives greater emphasis to the following directive. **The writer urges us to listen intently to the one who is speaking—that is, not to ignore God's Word.**

He goes on to explain the serious eternal consequences that arise by rejecting the one who is speaking.

Do Not Reject His Words

The idea of God speaking is essential to the entire passage and even the entire letter—indeed to all of Scripture. From the beginning of Hebrews, the author establishes God as a speaking God (1:1). In the Old Testament, God speaks directly to Israel. In [Deuteronomy 4](#) God spoke through Moses to tell the children of Israel that he is their God. Thus, Israel belonged to God precisely because God spoke to them. They were God's people because God told them so. Furthermore, Israel knew God existed because they heard his voice.

*The verb **reject** is important to note. Our modern cultural context as well as general lack of attentiveness to the text often causes us to present the gospel in terms of consideration rather than command. This verse, though, helps us see that the gospel is never presented solely as an offer to be considered. It is presented as an ultimatum, as something to be either received or rejected.*

Presenting the gospel always produces a response. One either hears the gospel and believes it unto salvation or hears the gospel and rejects it unto eternal judgment.

Those Who Reject Will Not Escape

This passage also contrasts God speaking the old covenant to Israel with God now speaking to all peoples in all places through Jesus Christ. This is what the heaven-earth contrast insinuates.

It is an argument from the lesser to the greater. If the consequences of disobedience under the old covenant given on earth through Moses were severe, imagine the consequences for rejecting the new covenant spoken from heaven through Christ!

If those on earth did not escape God's judgment, how can those who turn away from him who speaks from heaven escape his judgment?

Again, the author's choice of words is significant.

Why does he choose to use the word *escape*? Escape what? God's wrath against those who reject his Son. The Bible is straightforward about the certainty of God's holy wrath against sinners. Those who reject the word God has spoken through Jesus Christ will not escape his wrath. This is an essential part of the gospel, a part Christians should not be embarrassed to proclaim. Our rebellion against God merits his wrath. Praise God that he has placed that wrath on his Son for all those who repent and believe—for those who do not reject his word and do not turn away from his warning. If we reject Jesus, we will not escape wrath.

All That Remains

[Hebrews 12:26-27](#)

The author continues drawing out the contrast between heaven and earth in verses 26 and 27.

At first he considers what happened on Sinai when God shook the earth with his voice and caused an earthquake on Sinai (Exod 19:18; Judg 5:5). Then the author quotes from Haggai 2:2-9. Here the Lord promises to shake both the heavens and the earth.

“Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to the high priest Joshua son of Jehozadak, and to the remnant of the people: ‘Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Doesn’t it seem to you like nothing by comparison? Even so, be strong, Zerubbabel—this is the LORD’s declaration. Be strong, Joshua son of Jehozadak, high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land—this is the LORD’s declaration. Work! For I am with you—the declaration of the LORD of Armies. This is the promise I made to you when you came out of Egypt, and my Spirit is present among you; don’t be afraid.’”

For the LORD of Armies says this: “Once more, in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all the nations so that the treasures of all the nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,” says the LORD of Armies. “The silver and gold belong to me”—this is the declaration of the LORD of Armies. “The final glory of this house will be greater than the first,” says the LORD of Armies. “I will provide peace in this place”—this is the declaration of the LORD of Armies.

The Lord’s word is crystal clear in [Haggai 2](#). He is verbally ensuring the restoration of his temple. The Lord affirms that he owns all things and that his Spirit is in the midst of the people. He will do what is necessary to restore the temple to its former glory. He also claims that he will shake both the heavens and the earth and all nations, which means that he will judge the world.

The expression *yet once more* serves as a reminder that God’s shaking has happened before and will happen again.

God's judgment is looming. He shook the earth once at Sinai, and he will shake it again in such a way that encompasses all creation. Thus, the author picks up the words of Haggai in order to continue emphasizing the certainty of God's coming wrath and judgment of the world.

In [verse 27](#) the writer seeks to explain his usage of the expression *yet once more*.

The phrase signals the removal of the present world and pictures all its idols crushed, broken, and cast down. God will destroy all that man has made. All that remains will be that which belongs to the Lord. We should not put our hope in this present world, for nothing in it will continue. As the author of Hebrews will tell us in the next verse, let us indeed be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

An Unshakable Kingdom and Its Holy King

[Hebrews 12:28-29](#)

The kingdom that remains is the kingdom of God's purchased people, who by virtue of their union in Christ will not be shaken. All other kingdoms, however, will ultimately face God's coming judgment. They will crumble and fall. For this, God's people should respond with reverent gratitude and worship.

What brings us together and causes us to worship every Lord's Day? *Gratitude to God for giving us the gospel and a kingdom that cannot be shaken. While everything around us may look permanent now, it will pass away in an instant. Yet God's people will remain. Nothing can stop God's kingdom from triumphing over the kingdoms and rulers of this world. His kingdom and its citizens will prevail. It cannot be shaken. This is why the author exhorts his people to be grateful to God.*

Additionally, he exhorts them to offer acceptable service to God. The idea behind acceptable service is the same one we find behind [Romans 12:1](#), where Paul states we are to submit ourselves as a living sacrifice to God. All of life is worship and is to be a response to the One who redeemed us by the blood of the Lamb.

When we present our whole selves to God in this kind of worship, it pleases the Lord. Acceptable service is about being a living sacrifice.

“Reverence and awe” must characterize true Christian worship. We should not flippantly and haphazardly approach the One who will shake the heavens and the earth. We worship him with reverence and awe. This simply means that we worship him with humility and holy fear, not with arrogance and carelessness. We worship him as those who know we do not deserve his mercy and grace. We worship with awe that we are citizens of his unshakable kingdom.

We live our entire lives with God's impending judgment in the future.

Those who reject his Word will not escape this consuming fire. Only those in Christ will remain unshaken.

This is the reason we worship with reverence and awe.

Describing God as a consuming fire draws on the language Moses uses to describe God on Sinai ([Exod 24:17](#); [Deut 4:24](#)).

The gospel isn't merely fire insurance. The gospel is Christ's abundant mercy saving us from the holy wrath we rightfully deserve.

Remembering that God is a consuming fire stokes our reverence and awe of him and reminds us of the severe and eternal consequences of failing to turn to him in faith and repentance. We must not fail as the Israelites did. We must persevere until the end.

- Christ-Centered Exposition

**Mount Sinai and Mount Zion
([Hebrews 12:18-29](#))**

For you have not come to a mountain that may be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word should be spoken to them. For they could not bear the command, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned." And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. 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. 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." 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. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire. ([12:18-29](#))

In addition to the pressures of neglect, unbelief, tradition, and impatience, which were keeping many Jews from fully trusting in Christ, was the pressure of fear. They were afraid of persecution—criticism, ridicule, economic loss, imprisonment, and perhaps even martyrdom (see [Heb. 10:32-39](#)). Some had already gotten a taste of persecution just from being associated with the church. **All of them could see first-hand the suffering that many true and faithful believers were going through. It was evident that being godly in a godless society was costly.**

This passage gives a warning of something far more fear-inspiring than what any human persecution can inflict—God's judgment. Every man will be judged on one of two bases. He will either be judged by the law or by grace, by his own works or by Christ's work, by the provisions of Sinai or by the provisions of Zion. God has two sets of books. In one set are recorded the names of those who have rejected God, in the other the names of those who have accepted Him through His Son, Jesus Christ ([Rev. 20:12](#)).

The saved are in the book of life, sometimes called the Lamb's book of life ([Rev. 13:8](#)). Those whose names are in this book will be judged by what Christ has done on their behalf. Because they have trusted Him in faith, they will be measured and judged by His righteousness instead of their own. Those who have not trusted Him will be measured and judged by their own righteousness, which is of no more value before God than a "filthy garment" ([Isa. 64:6](#)).

The fear of those on the verge of accepting Christ should not be of persecution they might receive for believing in Him, but the judgment they will inevitably receive for rejecting Him. Their fear should not be of coming to Mount Zion but of turning back to Mount Sinai. The contrast is vivid.

Mount Sinai—The Fear of the Law

For you have not come to a mountain that may be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word should be spoken to them. For they could not bear the command, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned." And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling." ([12:18-21](#))

The Old Covenant was associated with Mount Sinai because that is where God spoke to Moses when that covenant was instituted. It was a covenant of law, and it was also a covenant of judgment and of fear. It said, "Do this, or do not do that, or you will be judged." In some cases it said, "Do not do this, or you will die." That is not the place to which the New Covenant brings us. To that mountain **you have not come.**

As God was preparing to establish that covenant, the people were forbidden so much as to set foot on the mountain, under penalty of death. **May be touched** does not refer to permission but possibility. That is, Sinai was a physical mountain, and therefore was able to be touched, seen, and walked on. The earthly mountain symbolized the earthliness of that covenant, as contrasted with **the heavenly Jerusalem** ([v. 22](#)). The Old Covenant was the foundational covenant, the kindergarten covenant, which gave the rudiments, the elementary principles, of God's nature, will, and standards. It was therefore given and was to be obeyed in more physical, tangible, picturesque, and symbolic ways.

[Exodus 19](#) describes the requirements and restrictions God gave in preparation for His giving the law. The people were to consecrate themselves by washing their clothes ([v. 10](#)) and by abstaining from sexual relations ([v. 15](#)) and were forbidden permission to touch even the edge of the mountain ([v. 12](#)). **God was so concerned that none of the people break those restrictions that He sent Moses back down the mountain to give them a final warning ([vv. 21-22](#)).**

God was going to demonstrate His awesome holiness, and no defiled sinner could come near and witness His holiness and live. It was to be a day unique in human history. The demonstration of power was through the physical means of thunder, lightning, thick clouds, loud trumpet sounds, fire, smoke, and violent trembling of the earth ([vv. 16-18](#)). The primary purpose of all these signs was to convince the people of the absolute unapproachableness of God. Sinful man could not come near Him and live.

Understandably, the people were terrified; they were gripped with fear. "They trembled and stood at a distance," and pleaded with Moses, "let not God speak to us, lest we die" ([20:18-19](#)). At this, Moses assured them that they had no reason for being terrified unless they disobeyed. "Do not be afraid; for God has come

in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin" (v. 20). In other words, if they had the proper fear of God by honoring His holiness and obeying His law, they had no reason to fear His wrath. God intended that His people have a reverential fear of Him "so that [they] may not sin."

The God of Sinai is truly a God to be feared, a God of judgment and of punishment.

Sinai, representing the Old Covenant, was a mountain of fear and of judgment.

The writer of Hebrews is saying to his readers, "If you go back to Judaism, you are going back to a covenant of law, fear, judgment, and death."

Paul described it as:

"the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones"
[\(2 Cor. 3:7\)](#).

To stand at the foot of Sinai, even without touching it, is to stand under judgment and doom. It demands and it punishes. **Since no man in himself can fulfill its demands, no man in himself can escape its punishment.**

At Sinai, sinful and unforgiven man stands before an infinitely holy and perfectly just God. Guilty, vile, and undeserving of forgiveness, he has nothing to expect from Sinai but God's condemnation.

The symbols of Sinai are darkness, fire, trembling, and trumpets of judgment. For an unforgiven sinner, *"It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God"* ([Heb. 10:31](#)). There is good reason to fear at the foot of Sinai.

God gave Israel the covenant of law in the middle of the wilderness, away from all distractions, all interference, and all hiding places. They had nothing to focus on but God, and in doing so became terribly aware of their own sinfulness. **The first thing that leads a person to repentance and dependence on God for deliverance is the awareness of his sinfulness. Apart from seeing his sinfulness, a person has no reason to seek salvation.** Only seeing our sin can make us see our need for salvation from sin and from the judgment it brings. **This was the purpose of Sinai, to bring the people face to face with their own sinfulness, with no place to hide.**

The law is God's great mirror.

*When we look into it, we see ourselves as we really are—*immeasurably short of God's standard of righteousness. There is not a single commandment that we have kept perfectly or can keep perfectly, in either act or attitude. **The law makes no exceptions and no allowance for less than perfect obedience. The law overwhelms us, slays us.**

No sinner can endure Sinai.

Every sinner who stands at the foot of Sinai is paralyzed with fear. **So terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling."** Even Moses, to whom God had spoken through the fiery bush and through whom He had challenged Pharaoh, could not stand at Sinai fearless.

For many years the apostle Paul had been a student of the law. He knew the Old Testament as few men of his time knew it. Yet, until Jesus confronted him on the Damascus road, he had never really confronted the law of Moses. He had studied it, memorized it, and probably taught it. But he had never confronted it. He had never looked squarely into it to see himself. He had thought he was alive. In fact he had thought he was alive because of his obedience to the law. But in seeing Jesus Christ, he also saw the law—and himself reflected in the mirror of the law.

Consequently, "When the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me" (Rom. 7:9-11).

Though he had been active in Judaism all his life and was a scholar of the Old Testament, he had never before stood at the foot of Sinai. He had eyes, but had not seen, and had ears but had not heard (Jer. 5:21). He had not understood the clear and unmistakable declaration of Deuteronomy 27:26. But in Christ he came to understand it, and he quotes it to some Galatians who were beginning to fall back into Judaism: "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them'" (Gal. 3:10).

Mount Zion—The Grace of the Gospel

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. ([12:22-24](#))

*The mountain of the New Covenant is
Mount Zion, representing the
heavenly Jerusalem.*

The opposite of Sinai, it is not touchable, but it is approachable.

Sinai symbolizes law and Zion symbolizes grace.

No man can be saved by the law, but any man can be saved by grace. The law confronts us with commandments, judgment, and condemnation. Grace presents us with forgiveness, atonement, and salvation.

*Ever since David had conquered the
Jebusites and had placed the ark on Mount
Zion, this mountain had been considered
the special earthly dwelling place of God.*

"For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. 'This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it'" ([Ps. 132:13-14](#)).

When Solomon moved the ark to the Temple, which was built on nearby Mt. Moriah, the name Zion was extended to include that area as well. Before long, Zion became synonymous with Jerusalem, and Jerusalem was therefore the city of God and the place of sacrifices.

Isaiah, who spoke often and hopefully of Zion, says that God will "grant salvation in Zion" ([46:13](#)).

Whereas Sinai was forbidding and terrifying, Zion is inviting and gracious. Sinai is closed to all, because no one is able to please God on Sinai's terms—perfect fulfillment of the law. Zion is open to all, because Jesus Christ has met those terms and will stand in the place of anyone who will come to God through Him.

Zion symbolizes the approachable God.

Sinai was covered by clouds & darkness; Zion is the city of light

"Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shone forth" ([Ps. 50:2](#)).

Sinai stands for judgment and death; Zion for forgiveness and life, "for there the LORD commanded the blessing—life forever" ([Ps. 133:3](#)).

The Jews to whom Hebrews is speaking at this point are clearly believers, for they are told, you have come to Mount **Zion**. They were already on the gracious mountain of God, already in **the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem**. As Christians, we are already citizens of heaven, where we now spiritually dwell ([Phil. 3:20](#)).

In coming to Mount Zion—that is, by becoming a Christian—we come to seven other blessings: **the heavenly city; the general assembly; the church of the first-born; God, the Judge of all; the spirits of righteous men made perfect; to Jesus; and to the sprinkled blood.**

1. The Heavenly City

The city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, is heaven itself. Coming to Christ is coming to heaven, the only way to come to heaven. When we come to Mount Zion, we come by grace to the city Abraham looked for, ***"the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God"*** (**Heb. 11:10**).

From the moment of salvation, heaven is our spiritual home—where our heavenly Father and our Savior are, and where the rest of our spiritual family is. That is where our treasure is, our inheritance is, our hope is. Everything we have of any value is there and all that we should want is there.

Until the Lord takes us there to be with Himself, however, we cannot enjoy its full citizenship.

For now we are ambassadors on earth. As ambassadors we have full citizenship in our home country, but we are away from it for a while and

cannot enjoy its full blessings. In the meanwhile we are to be faithful emissaries of our Savior and our heavenly Father, reflecting their nature before a world that does not know them.

And Paul encourages us not to lose our perspective of the incomparable value of our heavenly inheritance ([Rom. 8:17-18](#)).

And like the writer of Hebrews, Paul uses Sinai and Jerusalem as figures of the Old and New Covenants and, consequently, of the old and new relationships to God that they represent. "Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother....So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman" ([Gal. 4:25-26, 31](#)).

Sinai is the mountain of bondage. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, is the mountain of freedom.

2. The General Assembly

I believe the general assembly (*panēguris*, "a gathering for a public festival") refers to the myriads of angels, rather than to the church of the first-born. The translation could be, "But you have come to... an innumerable company of angels in festal gathering." [When we come in Jesus Christ to Mount Zion, we come to a great gathering of celebrating angels, whom we join in praising God](#). Daniel gives us an idea of just how many angels we will be joining in heaven: "Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him" ([Dan. 7:10](#); cf. [Rev. 5:11](#)).

Innumerable angels were also present at Sinai, as mediators of the Mosaic covenant ([Gal. 3:19](#)), the covenant of law and judgment. But men could not join them there. Like the God they served, at Sinai they were unapproachable. The angels were not celebrating at Sinai; they were blowing the trumpets of judgment.

Contrary to what some churches teach, **we are not to worship angels.**

We join them in worshipping God, and God alone. "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize," Paul warns, "by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels" ([Col. 2:18](#)).

During his vision on Patmos, John once was so awestruck that he fell at the feet of an angel and would have worshiped him. But **the angel forbid him, saying, "*Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God*"** ([Rev. 19:10](#)). In heaven, we will not worship angels, but will worship *with* angels. We will join them in eternal celebration and praise of God.

3. The Church of the First-Born

The church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven is the Body of Christ. The first-born are those who receive the inheritance. As believers, we are "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ," who is "the first-born among many brethren" ([Rom. 8:17, 29](#)).

Jesus tells us that we should not rejoice in the great works that God may do through us but that our "names are recorded in heaven" ([Luke 10:20](#)). **Our names are enrolled in heaven in "*the Lamb's book of life*"** ([Rev. 21:27](#)).

4. God, the Judge of All

On Mount Zion we can come into God's own presence, an incomprehensible concept to a Jew who knew only the God of Sinai. But at Jesus' crucifixion, "the veil of the temple was torn in two" ([Luke 23:45](#)), and the way into God's presence forever made open for those who trust in the atoning work of that crucifixion. ***To come into God's presence at Sinai was to die; to come into His presence at Zion is to live*** (cf. [Ps. 73:25](#); [Rev. 21:3](#)).

5. The Spirits of Righteous Men Made Perfect

The spirits of righteous men made perfect are Old Testament saints, those who could only look forward to forgiveness, peace, and deliverance.

When we come to heaven we will join Abel, Abraham, Moses, David, and all the others in one great household of God (cf. [Matt. 8:11](#)).

They had to wait a long time for the perfection that we received the instant we trusted in Christ. In fact, they had to wait for us ([Heb. 11:40](#)), in the sense that they had to wait for Christ's death and resurrection before they could be glorified.

In heaven we will be one with them in Jesus Christ. We will not be inferior to Abraham or Moses or Elijah, because we will all be equal in righteousness, because our only righteousness will be our Savior's righteousness.

6. Jesus

Supremely we come **to Jesus**, in the fullness of His beauty and glory **as the mediator of a new covenant**. Our Lord is here called by His redemptive name, Jesus, which He was given because He would "save His people from their sins" ([Matt. 1:21](#)). **When we come to Mount Zion, we come to our Savior, our Redeemer, our one and only Mediator with the Father.**

[First John 3:2](#) sums up the ultimate end of this truth: "we shall be like Him."

7. The Sprinkled Blood

To come to Christianity is to come to the sprinkled blood, the atoning blood, through which we have redemption, "through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace" ([Eph. 1:7](#)), and by which all who "formerly were far off have been brought near" ([2:13](#)).

The sprinkled blood of Jesus far surpasses the sacrifice of Abel ([Heb. 11:4](#)) and **speaks better than the blood of Abel. Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God because it was offered in faith, but it had no atoning power**—not even for Abel, much less for anyone else.

Jesus' blood, however, was sufficient to cleanse the sins of all men for all time, to make peace with God for whoever trusts in that blood sacrifice ([Col. 1:20](#)).

Responding to the Gospel

See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. 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 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." 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. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire. ([12:25-29](#))

After giving the contrasts between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion, the writer says, in effect, "Here is what you must do. You must not ignore *Him who is speaking.*"

"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" ([Heb. 1:1-2](#)). If men were held accountable for heeding God when He warned them on earth, from Mount Sinai, how much more will they be held accountable now that He warns from heaven, from Mount Zion?

The unbelieving Israelites who ignored God at Sinai did not enter the earthly Promised Land, and unbelievers today, Jew or Gentile, who ignore God when He speaks through His Son from Mount Zion will not enter the heavenly promised land.

Whether God speaks from Sinai or from Zion, no man who refuses Him will escape judgment.

The blessings of receiving the second covenant are immeasurably greater than those for receiving the first. And the consequences for refusing the second are also immeasurably greater.

"Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?"
([Heb. 10:28-29](#)).

At Sinai, God shook the earth. From Zion He is also going to shake the very heavens, the entire universe. If unbelievers did not escape when the earth was shaken, how much less will they escape when both heaven and earth are shaken?

The writer quotes from what the Lord had predicted through Haggai, "Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land" ([Hag. 2:6](#); cf. [Isa. 13:13](#)).

The sun will become black, the moon will become like blood, stars will fall to earth, the sky will split apart like a scroll, and every mountain and island will be moved out of its place ([Rev. 6:12-14](#)).

Commenting on the Haggai passage, [Hebrews 12:27](#) explains that the 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.

*Everything physical (**those things which can be shaken**) will be destroyed. Only the eternal things will remain.*

Peter tells us that at that time, which *"will come like a thief,...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" and "the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!"* ([2 Pet. 3:10, 12](#)).

This will constitute the "shaking" *of those things which can be shaken*, the total destruction of the physical universe by the wrath of God.

But some things are unshakable, and these will *remain*.

God has prepared "a new heaven and a new earth," which will include "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" ([Rev. 21:1-2](#)).

*This is the kingdom **we receive**. It is **a kingdom which cannot be shaken**. It is eternal, unchangeable, immovable. We will never be taken from it, and it will never be taken from us.*

For this amazing blessing in Christ, we should **show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe**. The right response, then, is a worshiping life offering holy service to our worthy and awesome God.

The closing verse of chapter 12 is perhaps the severest warning in the book of Hebrews:
for our God is a consuming fire.

The writer is warning again by saying, "Some of you have come to the edge of full acceptance of Christ. Don't go back to Judaism now. Only judgment awaits you at Sinai, and even worse judgment in refusing the offer of Zion.

Don't be consumed in God's fierce, unrelenting fire of judgment."

To live under Judaism is to come to Sinai and its judgment, wherein all who trust in the works of the law, even God's own law, will be condemned.

To go back to Judaism, after hearing the gospel, after seeing Zion, brings even greater damnation.

Those Jews who had "been enlightened" and had "tasted of the heavenly gift," and even "been made partakers of the Holy Spirit" (Heb. 6:4) could not simply revert to Judaism. They could not pick up where they had left off. If they turned back now, they would be subject not only to Sinai's judgment but to Zion's as well.

For every man the choice is the same.

Whether we are Jew or Gentile, to try to approach God by our works is to come to Sinai and to discover that our works fall short and cannot save us.

Whether we are Jew or Gentile, to trust in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ is to come to Zion, where our heavenly High Priest will mediate for us and bring us to the Father, and where we find reconciliation, peace, and eternal life.

And if you have truly come to Zion and received all its blessings, it is inconceivable that you would want to hold on to Sinai in any way.

The Enablement of God's Grace

(Heb. 12:14-29)

As we run the Christian race, what is our goal? The writer explained the goal in [Hebrews 12:14](#): **Peace with all men, and holiness before the Lord.** (Remember "*the peaceable fruit of righteousness,*" [Heb. 12:11](#).) These two goals remind us of our Lord's high priestly ministry—**King of peace and King of righteousness** ([Heb. 7:1-2](#)). It requires diligence to run the race successfully lest we "*fail of the grace of God*" ([Heb. 12:15](#)).

God's grace does not fail, but we can fail to take advantage of His grace. At the end of the chapter, there is another emphasis on grace ([Heb. 12:28](#)).

In this section, the writer encouraged his readers to depend on the grace of God by urging them to look by faith in three directions.

1. Look back—the bad example of Esau ([vv. 15-17](#)).

Esau certainly failed to act on God's grace. The account is given in [Genesis 25:27-34](#); [27:30-45](#).

Esau was "a profane person," which means "a common person, one who lives for the world and not God." (Our English word literally means "outside the temple," or not belonging to God.)

Esau despised his birthright and sold it to Jacob, and he missed the blessing because it was given to Jacob. (It was supposed to go to Jacob anyway, but it was wrong for Jacob to use trickery to get it. See [Gen. 25:19-26](#).) Afterward, Esau tried to get Isaac to change his mind, but it was too late. Even Esau's tears availed nothing.

What sins will rob us of the enabling of God's grace? These verses tell us: lack of spiritual diligence, bitterness against others (see [Deut. 29:18](#)), sexual immorality, and living for the world and the flesh. Some people have the idea that a "profane

person" is blasphemous and filthy; but Esau was a congenial fellow, a good hunter, and a man who loved his father. He would have made a fine neighbor—but he was not interested in the things of God.

God's grace does not fail, but we can fail to depend on God's grace. **Esau is a warning to us not to live for lesser things.**

2. Look up—the glory of the heavenly city (*vv. 18-24*).

The writer of Hebrews contrasts Mt. Sinai and the giving of the Law with the heavenly Mt. Zion and the blessings of grace in the church (see [Ex. 19:10-25](#); [20:18-21](#); [Deut. 4:10-24](#)). He describes the solemnity and even the terror that were involved in the giving of the Law ([Heb. 12:18-21](#)). The people were afraid to hear God's voice, and even Moses feared and trembled! God set boundaries around the mount, and even if an animal trespassed, it was slain with a spear ("dart"). Of course, God had to impress on His people the seriousness of His Law, just as we must with our own children. This was the infancy of the nation, and children can understand reward and punishment.

What a relief it is to move from Mt. Sinai to Mt. Zion! Mt. Sinai represents the Old Covenant of Law, and Mt. Zion represents the New Covenant of grace in Jesus Christ (see [Gal. 4:19-31](#)). The heavenly city is God's Mt. Zion (see [Pss. 2](#); [110:1-2, 4](#)).

This is the city that the patriarchs were looking for by faith ([Heb. 11:10, 14-17](#)).

The earthly Jerusalem was about to be destroyed by the Romans, but the heavenly Jerusalem would endure forever.

He described the "citizens" that make up the population of this city. Innumerable angels are there. The church is there, for **believers have their citizenship in heaven** ([Phil. 3:20](#)) and their names are written in heaven ([Luke 10:20](#)).

"Firstborn" is a title of dignity and rank. Esau was actually Isaac's firstborn, but he rejected his privileges and lost his blessing and birthright.

God is there, of course, and so are the Old Testament saints ("spirits of just men made perfect"). Jesus Christ the Mediator is there, the One who shed His blood for us.

We learned that Abel is still speaking ([Heb. 11:4](#)); and here we discover that Christ's blood speaks "better things than that of Abel" ([Heb. 12:24](#)). Abel's blood spoke from the earth and cried for justice ([Gen. 4:10](#)), while Christ's blood speaks from heaven and announces mercy for sinners. Abel's blood made Cain feel guilty (and rightly so) and drove him away in despair ([Gen. 4:13-15](#)); but Christ's blood frees us from guilt and has opened the way into the presence of God. Were it not for the blood of the New Covenant, we could not enter this heavenly city!

"Why is there so little preaching and teaching about heaven?" a friend asked me. And then he gave his own answer, which is probably correct. "I guess we have it so good on earth, we just don't think about heaven."

When the days are difficult and we are having a hard time enduring, that is when we should look up and contemplate the glories of heaven.

Moses "endured, as seeing Him who is invisible" ([Heb. 11:27](#)). The patriarchs endured as they looked ahead to the city God was preparing for them. One way to lay hold of God's grace is to look ahead by faith to the wonderful future He has prepared for us.

[3. Look ahead—the unshakable kingdom](#) ([vv. 25-29](#)).

God is speaking to us today through His Word and His providential workings in the world. We had better listen! If God shook things at Sinai and those who refused to hear were judged, how much more responsible are we today who have experienced the blessings of the New Covenant! God today *is* shaking things. (Have you read the newspapers lately?) He wants to tear down the "scaffolding" and reveal the unshakable realities that are eternal.

Alas, too many people (including Christians) are building their lives on things that can shake.

The "shaking" quotation is from [Haggai 2:6](#) and refers to that time when the Lord shall return and fill His house with glory. As events draw nearer to that time, we shall see more shaking in this world.

But a Christian can be confident, for he shall receive an unshakable kingdom. In fact, he is a part of God's kingdom today.

What shall we do as we live in a shaking world? Listen to God speak and obey Him. Receive grace day by day to serve Him "with reverence and godly fear." Do not be distracted or frightened by the tremendous changes going on around you. Keep running the race with endurance. Keep looking to Jesus Christ. Remember that your Father loves you. And draw on God's enabling grace.

While others are being frightened, you can be confident!

- Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Confident (Hebrews).

BARNES N.T. Notes

[Verse 18](#). *For ye are not come.* To enforce the considerations already urged, **the apostle introduces this sublime comparison between the old and new dispensations, [Hebrews 12:18-24](#).**

The object, in accordance with the principal scope of the epistle, is to guard them against apostasy. To do this, he shows that under the new dispensation there was much more to bind them to fidelity, and to make apostasy dangerous, than there was under the old.

The main point of the comparison is, that under the Jewish dispensation everything was adapted to awe the mind, and to restrain by the exhibition of grandeur and of power; but that **under the Christian dispensation**, while there was as much that was sublime, there was much more that was adapted to win and hold the affections.

There were revelations of higher truths.

There were more affecting motives to lead to obedience.

There was that of which the former was but the type and emblem. There was the clear revelation of the glories of heaven, and of the blessed society there, all adapted to prompt to the earnest desire that they might be our own. **The considerations presented in this passage, constitute the climax of the argument so beautifully pursued through this epistle, showing that the Christian system was far superior, in every respect, to the Jewish.**

In presenting this closing argument, the apostle first refers to some of the circumstances attending the former dispensation, which were designed to keep the people of God from apostasy, and then the considerations of superior weight existing under the Christian economy.

The mount that might be touched. Mount Sinai. The meaning here is, that *that* mountain was *palpable*, material, touchable-in contradistinction from the Mount Zion to which the church had now come, which is above the reach of the external senses, [Hebrews 12:22](#). The apostle does not mean that it was permitted to the Israelites to *touch* Mount Sinai-for this was strictly forbidden, [Exodus 19:12](#); but he evidently alludes to that prohibition, and means to say that a command forbidding them to "touch" the mountain, implied that it was a material or palpable object. **The sense of the passage is, that every circumstance that occurred there was fitted to fill the soul with terror.**

Everything accompanying the giving of the law, the setting of bounds around the mountain which they might not pass, and the darkness and tempest on the mountain itself, was...

adapted to over-awe the soul.

The phrase, "the *touchable* mountain"-if such a phrase is proper—would express the meaning of the apostle here. **The "Mount Zion" to which the church now has come, is of a different character. It is not thus visible and palpable/touch-able.** It is not enveloped in smoke and flame, and the thunders of the Almighty do not roll and re-echo among its lofty peaks as at Horeb; yet it presents *stronger* motives to perseverance in the service of God.

And that burned with fire. [Exodus 19:18](#). Comp. [Deuteronomy 4:11](#), [33:2](#).

Nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest. See [Exodus 19:16](#).

(*) "voice" "sound"

(*) "which voice" [Exodus 20:18,19](#)

Verse 19. *And the voice of a trumpet.* [Exodus 19:19](#). The sound of the trumpet amidst the tempest was fitted to increase the terror of the scene.

And the voice of words. Spoken by God, [Exodus 19:19](#). It is easy to conceive what must have been the awe produced by a voice uttered from the midst of the tempest so distinct as to be heard by the hundreds of thousands of Israel, when the speaker was invisible.

Which voice they that heard, etc. [Exodus 20:18,19](#). **It was so fearful and overpowering, that the people earnestly prayed that if they must be addressed it might be by the familiar voice of Moses, and not by the awful voice of the Deity.**

(*) "voice" "sound"

(*) "voice" [Exodus 20:18,19](#)

Verse 20. *For they could not endure that which was commanded.* **They could not sustain the awe produced by the fact that God uttered his commands himself.** The meaning is not that the commands themselves were intolerable, but that the manner in which they were communicated inspired a terror which they could not bear. **They feared that they should die.** Ex. 20:19

And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned. Exodus 19:13. The prohibition was, that neither beast nor man should touch it on pain of death. The punishment was to be either by stoning, or being "shot through."

Or thrust through with a dart. Exodus 19:13. "Or shot through." This phrase, however, though it is found in the common editions of the New Testament, is wanting in all the more valuable manuscripts; in all the ancient versions; and it occurs in none of the Greek ecclesiastical writers, with one exception. It is omitted now by almost all editors of the New Testament. It is beyond all doubt an addition of later times, taken from the Septuagint of Exodus 19:13. Its omission does not injure the sense.

(*) "And if" Exodus 19:13,16

Verse 21. *And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said,* etc. This is not recorded in the account of the giving of the law in Exodus, and it has been made a question on what authority the apostle made this declaration respecting Moses. In Deuteronomy 9:19, Moses indeed says of himself, after he had come down from the mountain, and had broken the two tables of stone that were in his hand, that he was greatly afraid of the anger of the Lord on account of the sin of the people. "I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure wherewith the Lord was wroth against you to destroy you;" and it has been supposed by many that this is the passage to which the apostle here alludes. But it is very evident that was spoken in a different occasion from the one which is referred to in the passage before us. That was after the law was promulgated, and Moses had descended from the mount; and it was not said in view of the terrors of the scene when the law was given, but of the apprehension of the wrath of God against the people for their sin in making the golden calf. I know not how to explain this, except by the supposition that the apostle here refers to some tradition that the scene produced this effect on his mind. In itself, it is not improbable that Moses thus trembled with alarm, (comp. Exodus 19:16,) nor that the remembrance of it should have been handed down among the numerous traditions which the Jews transmitted from age to age. There must have been many things that occurred in their journey through the wilderness which are not recorded in the Books of Moses. Many of them would be preserved naturally in the memory of the people, and transmitted to their posterity; and though those truths might become intermingled with much that was fabulous, yet it is not irrational to suppose that an inspired writer may have adduced pertinent and true examples from

these traditions of what actually occurred. It was one method of preserving the truth, thus to select such instances of what actually took place from the mass of traditions, which were destined to perish, as would be useful in future times. The circumstance here mentioned was greatly fitted to increase the impression of the sublimity and fearfulness of the scene. **Moses was accustomed to commune with God. He had met him at the "bush," and had been addressed by him face to face; and yet so awful were the scenes at Horeb, that even he could not bear it with composure.**

What may we, then, suppose to have been the alarm of the body of the people, when the mind of the great leader himself was thus overpowered!

(*) "quake" "tremble"

Verse 22. *But ye are come unto mount Sion.* You who are Christians; all who are under the new dispensation. The design is to contrast the Christian dispensation with the Jewish, and to show that its excellences and soul; advantages were far superior to the religion of their fathers. It had more to win the affections; more to elevate the more to inspire with hope. **It had less that was terrific and alarming; it appealed less to the fears and more to the hopes of mankind; but still apostasy from this religion could not be less terrible in its consequences than apostasy from the religion of Moses.**

In the passage before us, the apostle evidently contrasts Sinai with Mount Zion; and means to say that there was more about the latter that was adapted to win the heart, and to preserve allegiance, than there was about the former. Mount Zion literally denoted the southern hill in Jerusalem, on which a part of the city was built. That part of the city was made by David and his successors the residence of the court, and soon the name Zion was given familiarly to the whole city.

Jerusalem was the centre of religion in the land; the place where the temple stood, and where the worship of God was celebrated, and where God dwelt by a visible symbol, and it became the type and emblem of the holy abode where He dwells in heaven.

It cannot be literally meant here that they had come to the Mount Sion in Jerusalem, for that was as true of the whole Jewish people as of those whom the apostle addressed; but it must mean that they had come to the Mount Zion of which the holy city was an emblem; to the glorious mount which is revealed as the dwelling-place of God, of angels, of saints.

That is, they had "come" to this by the revelations and hopes of the gospel. They were not, indeed, literally in heaven, nor was that glorious city literally on earth;

but the dispensation to which they had been brought was that which conducted them directly up to the city of the living God, and to the holy mount where he dwelt above. The view was not confined to an earthly mountain enveloped in smoke and flame, but opened at once on the holy place where God abides. **By the phrase, "ye are come," the apostle means that this was the characteristic of the new dispensation, that it conducted them there, and that they were already, in fact, inhabitants of that glorious city. They were citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, (comp. [Philippians 3:20](#)), and were entitled to its privileges.**

And unto the city of the living God. The city where the living God dwells-the heavenly Jerusalem. Comp. [Hebrews 11:10](#). **God dwelt by a visible symbol in the temple at Jerusalem-and to that his people came under the old dispensation. In a more literal and glorious sense his abode is in heaven, and to that his people have now come.**

The heavenly Jerusalem. Heaven is not unfrequently represented as a magnificent city, where God and angels dwell; and the Christian revelation discloses this to Christians as certainly their final home. **They should regard themselves already as dwellers in that city, and live and act as if they saw its splendour, and partook of its joy. In regard to this representation of heaven as a city where God dwells, the following places may be consulted: [Hebrews 11:10,14-16, 12:28, 13:14](#) [Galatians 4:26](#), [Revelation 3:12](#) [Revelation 21:2,10-27](#).**

It is true that Christians have not yet seen that city by the bodily eye, but they look to it with the eye of faith.

It is revealed to them; they are permitted by anticipation to contemplate its glories, and to feel that it is to be their eternal home. They are permitted to live and act *as if* they saw the glorious God whose dwelling is there, and were already surrounded by the angels and the redeemed. The apostle does not represent them *as if* they were expecting that it would be visibly set up on the earth, but as being now actually dwellers in that city, and bound to live and act as if they were amidst its splendours.

And to an innumerable company of angels. The Greek here is, "to myriads [or ten thousands] of angels in an assembly or joyful convocation." The phrase, "tens of thousands," is often used to denote a great and indefinite number. The word rendered "general assembly," ([Hebrews 12:23](#))—*πανήγυρις*—refers, properly, to "an assembly or convocation of the whole people in order to celebrate any public festival or solemnity, as the public games or sacrifices." *Rob. Lex.* It occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, and refers here to the angels viewed as assembled around the throne of God, and celebrating his praises. It should be regarded as connected with the word *angels*, referring to *their* convocation in heaven, and not to the church of the first-born. This construction is demanded by the Greek. Our common translation renders it as if it were to be united with the church—"to the general assembly and church of the firstborn;" but the Greek will not admit of this construction. The interpretation which unites it with the angels is adopted now by almost all critics, and in almost all the editions of the New Testament. On the convocation of angels, [Job 1:6](#). The writer intends, doubtless, to contrast that joyful assemblage of the angels in heaven with those who appeared in the giving of the law on Mount Sinai.

God is always represented as surrounded by hosts of angels in heaven. See [Deuteronomy 33:2](#), [1 Kings 22:19](#), [Daniel 7:10](#), [Psalms 68:17](#); comp. [Hebrews 12:1](#); see also [Revelation 5:2](#), [Matthew 26:53](#), [Luke 2:13](#).

The meaning is, that under the Christian dispensation...

Christians, in their feelings and worship, become united to this vast host of holy angelic beings. It is, of course, not meant that they are visible, but they are seen by the eye of faith.

The argument here is, that as, in virtue of the Christian revelation, we become associated with those pure and happy spirits, we should not apostatize from such a religion, for we should regard it as honourable and glorious to be identified with them.

(*) "city" [Revelation 3:2](#)

(*) "angels" [Psalms 68:17](#)

Verse 23. To the general assembly. [Hebrews 12:22](#).

And church of the firstborn. That is, you are united with the church of the firstborn. They who were firstborn among, the Hebrews enjoyed peculiar privileges, and especially pre-eminence of rank. [Colossians 1:15](#). The reference here is, evidently, to those saints who had been distinguished for their piety, and who may be supposed to be exalted to peculiar honours in heaven-such as the patriarchs, prophets, martyrs. The meaning is, that by becoming Christians we have become, in fact, identified with that happy and honoured church, and that this is a powerful motive to induce us to persevere. It is a consideration which should make us adhere to our religion amidst all temptations and persecutions, that we are identified with the most eminently holy men who have lived, and that we are to share their honours and their joys. The Christian is united in feeling, in honour, and in destiny, with the excel. lent of all the earth and of all times, he should feel it, therefore, **an honour to be a Christian; he should yield to no temptation which would induce him to part from so goodly a fellowship.**

Which are written in heaven. Marg. enrolled. The word here was employed by the Greeks to denote that one was enrolled as a citizen, or entitled to the privileges of citizenship. Here it means. that the names of the persons referred to were registered or enrolled among the inhabitants of the heavenly world. [Luke 10:20](#).

And to God the Judge of all. **God, who will pronounce the final sentence on all mankind.**

The object of the reference here to God as Judge does not appear to be to contrast the condition of Christians with that of the Jews, as is the case in some of the circumstances alluded to, but to bring impressively before their minds the fact that they sustained a peculiarly near relation to him from whom all were to receive their final allotment.

As the destiny of all depended on him, they should be careful not to provoke his wrath.

The design of the apostle seems to be to give a rapid glance of what there was in heaven, as disclosed by the eye of faith to the Christian, which should operate as a motive to induce him to persevere in his Christian course.

The thought that seems to have struck his mind in regard to God was, that he would do right to all.

They had, therefore, everything to fear if they revolted from him; they had everything to hope if they bore their trials with patience, and persevered to the end.

And to the spirits of just men made perfect. Not only to the more eminent saints-the "church of the firstborn"- but to all who were made perfect in heaven. They were not only united with the imperfect Christians on earth, but with those who have become completely delivered from sin, and admitted to the world of glory. This is a consideration which ought to influence the minds of all believers. They are even now united with all the redeemed in heaven. They should so live as not to be separated from them in the final day. Most Christians have among the redeemed already not a few of their most tenderly beloved friends. A father may be there; a mother, a sister, a smiling babe. It should be a powerful motive with us so to live as to be prepared to be reunited with them in heaven.

Verse 24. *And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.* This was the crowning excellence of the new dispensation, in contradistinction from the old. They had been made acquainted with the true Messiah; they were united to him by faith; they had been sprinkled with his blood.

[Hebrews 7:22](#), and [Hebrews 8:6](#). **The highest consideration which can be urged to induce any one to persevere in a life of piety is the fact that the, Son of God has come into the world and died to save sinners. Comp. [Hebrews 12:2](#), seq. of this chapter.**

And to the blood of sprinkling. The blood which Jesus shed, and which is sprinkled upon us to ratify the covenant. [Hebrews 9:18](#), seq.

That speaketh better things than that of Abel. Or, "than Abel; "the words "that of" being supplied by the translators. In the original there is no reference to the blood of Abel shed by Cain, as our translators seem to have supposed; but the allusion is to the faith of Abel, or to the testimony which he bore to a great and vital truth of religion. **The meaning here is, that the blood of Jesus speaks better things than Abel did; that is, that the blood of Jesus is the *reality* of which the offering of Abel was a type.** Abel proclaimed by the sacrifice which he made the great truth, that salvation could be only by a bloody offering-but he did this only in a typical and obscure manner; Jesus proclaimed it in a more distinct and better manner by the reality. The object here is to compare the Redeemer with Abel, not in the sense that the blood shed in either case calls for vengeance, but that salvation by blood is more clearly revealed in the Christian plan than in the ancient history; and hence illustrating, in accordance with the design of this epistle, the superior excellency of the Christian scheme over all which had preceded it. There were *other* points of resemblance between Abel and the Redeemer, but on them the apostle does not insist. Abel was a martyr, and so was Christ; Abel was cruelly murdered, and so was Christ; there was aggravated guilt in the murder of Abel by his brother, and so there was in that of Jesus by his brethren-his own countrymen; the blood of Abel called for vengeance, and was followed by a fearful penalty on Cain, and so was the death of the Redeemer on his murderers-for they said, "his blood be on us and on our children," and are yet suffering under the fearful malediction then invoked;-but the point of contrast here is, that the blood of Jesus makes a more full, distinct, and clear proclamation of the truth, that salvation is by blood, than the offering made by Abel did. The apostle alludes here to what he had said in [Hebrews 11:4](#). [Hebrews 11:4](#). Such is the contrast between the former and the latter dispensations; and such the motives to perseverance presented by both. In the former, the Jewish, all was imperfect, terrific, and alarming. In the latter, everything was comparatively mild, winning, alluring, animating. Terror was not the principal element; but heaven was opened to the eye of faith, and the Christian was permitted to survey the Mount Zion—the New Jerusalem—the angels—the redeemed—the blessed God—the glorious Mediator—and to feel that that blessed abode was to be his home. To that happy world

he was tending; and with all these pure and glorious beings he was identified. Having stated and urged this argument, the apostle, in the remainder of the chapter, warns those whom he addressed in a most solemn manner against a renunciation of their Christian faith.

(*) "mediator" [Hebrews 8:6](#)

(*) "covenant" "testament"

(*) "blood" [Exodus 24:8](#)

(*) "of Abel" [Genesis 4:10](#)

Verse 25. *See that ye refuse not.* That you do not reject or disregard.

Him that speaketh. That is, in the gospel. ***Do not turn away from him who has addressed you in the new dispensation, and called you to obey and serve him.***

The meaning is, that God had addressed them in the gospel as really as he had done the Hebrews on Mount Sinai, and that there was as much to be dreaded in disregarding his voice now as there was then.

He does not speak, indeed, amidst lightnings, and thunders, and clouds, but he speaks by every message of mercy; by every invitation; by every tender appeal He spake by his Son, ([Hebrews 1:2](#);) he speaks by the Holy Spirit, and by all his calls and warnings in the gospel.

For if they escaped not. If they who heard God under the old dispensation, who refused to obey him, were cut off. [Hebrews 10:28](#).

Who refused him that spake on earth. That is, Moses. The contrast here is between Moses and the Son of God, the head of the Jewish and the head of the Christian dispensation. Moses was a mere man, and spake as such, though in the name of God. The Son of God was from above, and spake as an inhabitant from heaven.

Much more, etc. [Hebrews 2:2](#), [Hebrews 2:3](#); [Hebrews 9:28](#).

(*) "spake" "uttered the divine oracles"

[Verse 26](#). *Whose voice then shook the earth.* When he spake at Mount Sinai. The meaning is, that the mountain and the region around quaked, [Exodus 19:18](#). **The "voice" here referred to is that of God speaking from the holy mount.**

But now hath he promised, saying. The words here quoted are taken from [Haggai 2:6](#), where they refer to the changes which would take place under the Messiah. The meaning is, that there would be great revolutions in his coming, *as if* the universe were shaken to its centre. The apostle evidently applies this passage, as it is done in Haggai, to the first advent of the Redeemer.

I shake not the earth only. This is not quoted literally from the Hebrew, but the sense is retained. In Haggai it is, "Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come." The apostle lays emphasis on the fact that not only the *earth* was to be shaken, but also *heaven*. The shaking of the earth here evidently refers to the commotions among the nations that would prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah.

But also heaven. This may refer either

(*) to the extraordinary phenomena in the heavens at the birth, the death, and the ascension of Christ; or

(*) to the revolutions in morals and religion which would be caused by the introduction of the gospel, as if everything were to be changed-expressed by "a shaking of the heavens and the earth;" or

(*) it may be more literally taken as denoting that there was a remarkable agitation in the heavens-in the bosoms of its inhabitants-arising from a fact so wonderful as that the Son of God should descend to earth, suffer, and die. I see no reason to doubt that the latter idea may have been included here; and the meaning of the whole then is, that while the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, fearful and solemn as it was, was an event that merely shook the earth in the vicinity of the holy Mount, the introduction of the gospel agitated the universe. Great changes upon the earth were to precede it; one revolution was to succeed another preparatory to it, and the whole universe would be moved at an event so extraordinary. The meaning is, that the introduction of the gospel was a much more solemn and momentous thing than the giving of the law-and that therefore it was much more fearful and dangerous to apostatize from it.

(*) "saying" [Haggai 2:6](#)

Verse 28. *Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved.* **We who are Christians. We pertain to a kingdom that is permanent and unchanging. The meaning is, that the kingdom of the Redeemer is never to pass away.**

It is not, like the Jewish dispensation, to give place to another, nor is there any power that can destroy it.

Matthew 16:18. It has *now* endured for eighteen hundred years, amidst all the revolutions on earth, and in spite of all the attempts which have been made to destroy it; and it is now as vigorous and stable as it ever was. The past has shown that there is no power of earth or hell that can destroy it, and that in the midst of all revolutions this kingdom still survives. Its great principles and laws will endure on earth till the end of time, and **will be made permanent in heaven. This is the only kingdom in which we can be certain that there will be no revolution; the only empire which is destined never to fall.**

Let us have grace whereby we may serve God. Marg. **"let us hold fast."** The Greek is, **literally, *let us have grace***; the meaning is, ***"let us hold fast the grace or favour which we have received in being admitted to the privileges of that kingdom."***

The object of the apostle is to keep them in the reverent fear and service of God. The argument which he presents is, that this kingdom is permanent.

There is no danger of its being overthrown. It is to continue on earth to the end of time; it is to be established in heaven for ever. If it were temporary, changeable, liable to be overthrown at any moment, there would be much less encouragement to perseverance. But in a kingdom like this there is every encouragement, for there is the assurance

- (1.) that all our interests there are safe;
- (2.) that all our exertions will be crowned with ultimate success;
- (3.) that the efforts which we make to do good will have a permanent influence on mankind, and will bless future ages; and

(4.) that the reward is certain. A man subject to a government about whose continuance there would be the utmost uncertainty, would have little encouragement to labour with a view to any permanent interest. In a government where nothing is settled, where all policy is changing, and where there are constantly vacillating plans, there is no inducement to enter on any enterprize demanding time and risk. But where the policy is settled; where the principles and the laws are firm; where there is evidence of permanency, there is the highest encouragement. The highest possible encouragement of this kind is in the permanent and established kingdom of God. All other governments may be revolutionized—this never will be; all others may have a changeful policy—this has none; all others will be overthrown—this never will.

With reverence and godly fear.

With true veneration for God, and with pious devotedness.

(*) "have grace" "hold fast"

Verse 29. *For our God is a consuming fire.*

This is a further reason why we should serve God with profound reverence and unwavering fidelity.

The quotation is made from [Deuteronomy 4:24](#):
***"For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire,
even a jealous God."***

The object of the apostle here seems to be, to show that
***there was the same reason for fearing the
displeasure of God under the new dispensation
which there was under the old.***

It was the same God who was served!

There had been no change in his attributes, or in the principles of his government. He was no more the friend of sin now than he was then; and the same perfections of his nature which would then lead him to punish transgression would also lead him to do it now. His anger was really as terrible, and as much to be dreaded, as it was at Mount Sinai; and the destruction which he would inflict on his foes would be as terrible now as it was then. The fearfulness with which he would come forth to destroy the wicked might be compared to *a fire* that consumed all before it. [Mark 9:44-46](#). The image here is a most fearful one, and is in accordance with all the representations of God in the Bible, and with all that we see in the Divine dealings with wicked men, that punishment, as inflicted by him, is awful and overwhelming. So it was on the old world; on the cities of the plain; on the hosts of Sennacherib; and on Jerusalem;-and so it has been in the calamities of pestilence, war, flood, and famine, with which God has visited guilty men. By all these tender and solemn considerations, therefore, the apostle urges the friends of God to perseverance and fidelity in his service. His goodness and mercy; the gift of a Saviour to redeem us; the revelation of a glorious world; the assurance that all may soon be united in fellowship with the angels and the redeemed; the certainty that the kingdom of the Saviour is established on a permanent basis, and the apprehension of the dreadful wrath of God against the guilty, all should lead us to persevere in the duties of our Christian calling, and to avoid those things which would jeopardize the eternal interests of our souls. (*) "our God" [Deuteronomy 4:24](#)

- Barnes' Notes on the New Testament.

WORSHIP – A BIBLICAL DEFINITION

Chris Collins

WORSHIP



480

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This post comes from material from the Austin Stone [Worship Leader Development Program](#). Click [here](#) to learn more about developing as a worship leader.

I believe worship is one of the fundamental things every Christian is called to do.

I think it's important to start with a definition of worship. **Biblical worship is the full-life response-head, heart, and hands- to who God is and what He has done,**

Tweet This: [Biblical worship is the full-life response-head, heart, and hands- to who God is and what He has done. @asworship](#)

I get this definition from Matthew 22:37:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

Notice that I included the word “biblical” in my definition. When we worship, we ascribe worth to something. We worship many things that are not God. We can worship money, status, sports teams... But biblical worship turns that affection to God.

We were created to worship God, but once sin comes into the world we started to worship anything but God. Listen to how Paul describes it in Romans 1.

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things... They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised.

We started (and continue today) ascribing worth to other things besides God.

Worship is a Response

Notice that I also use the word “response” in my definition. Before the fall, we were primarily responders. God is the actor, displaying His love for us, and we responded in worship. This is the natural order of things. Today, we attempt to be the actors, and we hope that others will respond to us.

We act hoping to be thanked, seen as powerful or cool or whatever else we may be striving after, and we are trying to be the object of worship, instead of the worshiper. As worship leaders, our primary job is to shift people’s focus

from trying to be the object of worship, to worshipping the proper object.

Worship is Our Whole Life- Head, Heart, and Hands

Notice also that I said it was our “full-life” response. Even when we’re not directing our worship at ourselves, we direct it to other things.

Matt Chandler writes in his book [The Explicit Gospel](#) that during March Madness, with victory comes elation, with defeat comes destitution, before each game there is a nervousness in our stomachs, and after each one there are hours spent going over the details. He writes “Every bit of that passion was given to us by God for God. It was not given for basketball...Where is the elation over the resurrection? Where is the desolation over our sins...It’s on basketball. It’s on football. It’s on romance.”

We must make the object of worship God.

Worship is More than Music

We don’t just worship through music. Worship is much more than that. Worship should be our entire life. As worship leaders then, we’re not just leading them in song but directing their daily lives.

Tweet This: [Worship should be much more than music. Worship should be our entire life. @asworship #worship](#)

Prior to coming to the Austin Stone, I led worship for several years at different churches and always used to say that worship was more than just music.

I was tested in this truth when, while leading worship at a church in Columbus, Ohio, I began losing my voice intermittently during Sunday mornings. I went to several doctors and there was no medical cause that could be found.

My wife began asking me what I wanted to do if I couldn’t lead on Sundays. The job description we talked out ended up being the exact same need that my old youth pastor Matt Carter needed at his church plant, the Austin Stone. Even though I lost my voice, this new job would have me pastoring worship leaders, and leading worship – just not from the stage. At some point every worship

leader will lose his ability to sing on stage, but we are all called to lead others toward God, at all times.

Tweet This: [Every worship leader will lose ability to sing on stage, but we are called to lead others toward God, at all times. @asworship](#)

As worship leaders, I challenge you to lead others in the full-life response-head, heart, and hands- to who God is and what He has done.

Jonathan Edwards (excerpts from: [*The Experience That Counts*](#))

The most crucial question for the human race is this, what are the distinguishing marks of the people who enjoy God's favor, *those who are on their way to heaven?*

So much good and so much bad are mixed up in the church!

This mixture of false religion with true religion has been Satan's greatest weapon against the cause of Christ. This is why we must learn to distinguish between true and false religion, between emotions and experiences which really come from salvation, and imitations which are outwardly attractive and plausible, but false.

They destroy Christianity far more effectively than outright enemies can do, under the illusion that they are advancing it.

When false religion passes for true religion, the minds of Christians become unsettled. Many doubt whether there is anything real in Christianity at all.

How great the resemblance can be, then, between a false and true Christian!

The right way is neither to reject all emotions, nor to approve all, but to distinguish between them. We should approve some, and reject others. We must separate between the wheat and the weeds.

- Jonathan Edwards

Faith's 12 potentially "false-positives"

- 1. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual... if they are strong and lively.**
- 2. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual... if they produce great effect on the body.**
- 3. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual... if they produce a great warmth & readiness to talk about Christianity**
- 4. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual... if we did not produce them by our own efforts.**

5. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual... if they come to us accompanied by a Bible verse.

6. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual... if there seems to be love in them.

Unfortunately, love can be imitated.

7. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual... if we experience many kinds of them.

8. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual... if comfort and joy seem to follow in a certain order.

9. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual... if they cause us to spend much time in the outward duties of Christian worship.

10. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual... if they cause us to praise God with our mouths.

11. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual... if they produce assurance of salvation.

12. We cannot know that someone's emotions are spiritual or unspiritual... just because they give a moving account of them.

***How great the resemblance can be, then,
between a false and true Christian!***

Jonathan Edward's 14 signatures of the Holy Spirit:

1. True spiritual emotions arise from spiritual, supernatural, & divine influences on the heart.

The Holy Spirit within Christians produces results which are in harmony with the Spirit's own true nature.

The effects which the Holy Spirit produces in true Christians are different from anything men can produce by natural human powers. True spiritual emotions arise from supernatural influences.

2. The object of spiritual emotion is the loveliness of spiritual things, not our self interest.

Men may love a God of their own imaginations, when they have no love at all for the One true God!

Anything is lovely to a selfish person... if it advances his or her self-interest.

In all the joys of false Christians, their eyes are on themselves. Their minds are occupied with their own experiences, not the glory of God or the beauty of Christ.

3. Spiritual emotions are based on the moral excellence of spiritual things.

What a true Christian loves about spiritual things is their holiness. He or she loves God for the beauty of God's holiness.

It is holiness that makes qualities lovely.

4. Spiritual emotions arise out of spiritual understanding.

We need to understand Scripture intellectually, and taste the holy beauty of that meaning with our hearts.

Spiritual understanding sees what is actually in Scripture; it does not make a new meaning for it!

The true spiritual meaning of Scripture is the meaning it originally had when the Spirit first inspired it.

5. Spiritual emotions bring a conviction of the reality of divine things.

A person can only see and feel the desperate depravity of his own heart, if the Holy Spirit gives him the ability to taste the sweetness of holiness and the bitterness of sin.

6. Spiritual emotions always exist alongside spiritual humiliation.

Dear reader, be careful, lest you become proud of your humility! Examine yourself...

7. Spiritual emotions always exist alongside a change of nature.

The converted person becomes the enemy of sin.

A person who says he has experienced conversion, but whose religious emotions soon die away, has his actions speak against him much louder than

any religious experiences or claims may speak for him.

8. True spiritual emotions differ from false ones, in promoting a Christ-like spirit of love, humility, peace, forgiveness and compassion.

All real Disciples of Christ have this spirit in them.

Scripture is quite clear about the absolute necessity of forgiveness, love, and mercy, as qualities in the character of every Christian.

9. True spiritual emotions soften the heart, and exist alongside a Christian tenderness of spirit.

False emotions may seem to melt the heart for a time, but in the end they harden it.

Such people do not accept Christ as their Savior FROM sin. They trust in him as the savior OF their sins!

They think Christ will allow them the quiet enjoyment of their sins..., and protect them from God's displeasure.

(Jude 4 & Ezekiel 33:13)

10. True spiritual emotions, unlike false ones, have a beautiful symmetry and balance.

A Christian's love must be universal!

Christ's compassion for the people's souls moved him to teach them, and his compassion for their bodies moved him to feed them.

11. True spiritual emotions produce a longing for deeper holiness, but false emotions rest satisfied in themselves.

The more a true Christian hates sin, the more he desires to hate it, and grieves that he still loves it so much.

The best sign is a longing for a holier heart and a holier life.

12. The fruit of true spiritual emotions is Christian practice.

Christian practice means 3 things:

A. The true Christian directs all aspects of his behavior by Christian rules.

B. He makes holy living the main concern of his life.

C. Perseveres to the end.

This commitment to total obedience does not mean a mere negative avoidance of

evil practices. It also means positively obeying God's commands.

The sign of the genuine Christian is that he perseveres through these problems and difficulties, and remains true to Christ.

“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Revelation 2:10)

People have a defective Christianity because they are seeking their own interests and not God's.

Consequently, they accept Christianity only to the extent that they think it serves their interests. A person's private interests may after a time clash with Christianity. So a person who accepts Christianity from selfish motives is liable to abandon it from selfish motives.

Humility before God inspires obedience, just as pride inspires rebellion.

Until the tree is good, the fruit will not be good.

If an unconverted person tries to live a Christian life, it is like throwing a stone upwards. Nature finally prevails, and the stone comes down again.

The softened heart & tender spirit of the true Christian make him painfully sensitive to sin,

creating a profound influence & impact on the way he lives his life.

Christian practice is the most important of all the marks and signs of conversion, both to the believer and to others.

13. Christian practice is the chief sign to others of a convert's sincerity.

Words are cheap.

It is by costly, self-denying, Christian-practice that we show the reality of our faith.

We cannot be certain how far an unconverted person can go in an outward appearance of Christianity.

14. Christian practice is a sure sign of conversion to a person's own conscience.

This is clear from 1 John 2:3... by this we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

John says we can have assurance of salvation if our consciences testify to our good works. See also 1 John 3:18 and 19. Paul also tells the Galatians to examine their own behavior in Galatians 6 verse 4. Moreover, **when Christ says, by their fruits you will know them, this is in the 1st place a rule for judging others, but Christ also wants us to judge ourselves by this rule, as the next verse makes clear.** Listen to Matthew 6 verse 21: "not everyone who says

to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father in heaven.”

The Christian has to judge his own practice, not just by what he does outwardly with his body, but by the inward motives of his soul.

Holy motives produce an obedient lifestyle.

Christian practice includes both the inward motives and the outward actions!

Our practical obedience perfects our love for God.

Christian practice perfects faith and love.

If we ignore God's clear emphasis on Christian practice, and stress other things as tests of sincerity, we are on our way to delusion and hypocrisy.

The evidence on which the Judge will accept or reject us will be our practice!

“Healthy churches produce true disciples who engage in & win the battles of spiritual warfare.”

Introduction:

Has it ever seemed as though supernatural forces were doing everything possible to keep you or your church from growing? (the explanation can be found in Matthew 16:18)

God's people will win, but not before first wrestling against the forces of darkness. (Ephesians 6:12) The enemy wars against any church that seeks to grow for God's glory. Regrettably, he often wins battles simply because we are unprepared for the conflict.

I fear that church growth principles sometimes are being abused to produce something other than a biblical church. The inherent danger... they might grow a crowd rather than a church. Church members, if biblically and theologically ill-equipped, often don't recognize the difference between the two.

The most basic component of congregational health is a biblical understanding of Christianity & the church.

Because so few churches offer solid biblical and theological training, we have produced generations of believers who have a weak foundation for their faith.

Qt: *Only the church that accepts and follows God's Word as authoritative will ever be healthy.*

- Dr. Chuck Lawless
The Discipled Warrior