

THE GOD OF CONSUMING FIRE

Heb. 12:18-29

***What's the appropriate way to draw near to the living God?
What should our attitude be, when we come near to "the God
of consuming fire?"***

Written to Hebrew Christians, facing affliction because of their faith.

Some have about decided to throw it all overboard and go back to Judaism.

10 chapters demonstrate that Jesus is better than Judaism.

In His Person and work He is greater than anything Judaism has to offer.

God sent Jesus to accomplish what the old system could never accomplish—salvation

True Judaism looked forward to His coming.

Now that He has come, Judaism has nothing to offer.

Heb. 10-13 affirms appropriate response to Jesus and what He offers us.

We have direct access to the Father through Him.

He sits at the Father's right hand to intervene on our behalf.

Therefore, draw near to Him; hang on to our hope; encourage one another.

If they turn back to Judaism, they'll face God's judgment on that generation of Israel.

Hebrews already compared judgment they face to judgment of Israel in O.T., when they failed to trust God and heed His warnings.

2:2-3: *“if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?”*

3:12 (based on Ps. 95): *“See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily ...”*

3:19 looks back: *“So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.”*

Then he looks at us in **4:1**: *“Since the promise of entering His rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.”*

4:11 *“Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of unbelief.”*

10:26-32: *“ . . . [28] Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died [physically] without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot [who has treated Him with disrespect]. . . . It’s a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”*

God’s judgment is coming on the generation that turned its back on the Son. *They don’t want to go back and identify with them again!*

They separated from that generation when they identified with Jesus by baptism.

Why would they go back, and re-identify with those under judgment?

He concludes, comparing terror associated with rejecting the old covenant, to the terror associated with rejecting the new covenant:

Consequences are greater than those due to Israel's unbelief in the desert.

To take God lightly at Sinai was a frightening thing.

If that was true of Sinai, how much more frightening is it to take God lightly now?

THE TERROR OF THE CONSUMING FIRE AT SINAI 12:18-21

Giving the law at Sinai involved an awesome display of power and glory.

We haven't come to that kind of terrifying place!

We have come to a far greater place than Sinai.

This is far more serious!

THE TERROR/JOY OF THE CONSUMING FIRE AT ZION 12:22-24

We have a superior revelation,
a superior High Priest, and
a superior priestly ministry.

Therefore, we have greater responsibility

This is the heavenly mount—the city of the Living God!

NEGATIVE aspect of the fire: God of consuming fire produces TERROR

It's *still* terrifying to come into the presence of the Living God!

Now we're dealing with a *heavenly* scene where God is seated on His throne overseeing events on earth *and* in heaven. The earthly Jerusalem is about to be destroyed by Roman armies, but the heavenly Jerusalem endures forever. He draws attention to the awesome specter of coming directly before the living God, as opposed to the awe-inspiring, but less glorious, scene at Sinai.

It was terrifying to come before the Sinai-glory of God due to the law,

It's more terrifying to come before the heavenly glory of God due to the Son!

The *positive* aspect of the contrast between the old covenant and the new.

Not only is it true that the heavenly scene is *more glorious* and awe-inspiring . . .

Not only is it true that the expected *judgment is greater* if we reject the living Word of God revealed in the New Covenant . . .

Positive difference is also acknowledged:

Participants in the Old Covenant were *afraid* to draw near, to touch the mount.

We're encouraged to draw near; participants gather around His throne *rejoicing*.

POSITIVE aspect of fire:

God of consuming fire produces JOY/PRAISE

Zion—identified with heavenly Jerusalem—reminds us of earthly Zion —identified with earthly city of Jerusalem—where God dwells among men.

It's a shadow of the real thing, the heavenly mount, the true dwelling of God.

Now we have the privilege of drawing near to God.

Look at the constituents of the heavenly Jerusalem: *Who's there?*

* **Multiple thousands of angels**

* **Multitudes from every nation – “the church of the firstborn”** —whom God promised the inheritance—names recorded in heaven.

* **God, the Judge** —We have access to the very presence of God.

* **Those declared righteous and made perfect** in Christ

* **Jesus, the Mediator**—who made it all possible.

Grace of God is evident. His blood is present as a reminder of how we got there!

He died—shed His blood—so we could be there for this great celebration.

APPROPRIATE RESPONSE TO GOD OF CONSUMING FIRE 12:25-29

They face a decision dealing with God Himself, the Judge of the Universe.

TWO SPECIFIC COMMANDS

1. Be careful NOT to reject the speaker. 25-27

If it was important to obey God's Word then, how important is it to obey now?

It must be MORE important to obey Him now!

In the historical event, when God's voice literally shook the earth at Sinai, He spelled out the commandments with a thunderous voice.

Imagine how terrifying to feel the ground tremble in response to God's voice!

They weren't sleeping through the service when God spoke at Sinai!

But a greater shaking is coming, a shaking of the universe, at the end of the age, that will also be triggered by God's voice.

Haggai 2:6: *"Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."*

Isaiah 13:13: *"I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the Lord almighty, in the day of his burning anger."*

Hebrews tells us why: 27b *"So that what cannot be shaken may remain."*

God's people belong to the "things that are unshakable and will survive."

God promises to shake up the shakable so we will cling to what is unshakable.

Contrast: the shakable will be removed/taken away.
the unshakable will remain

Hebrews thought their lives were being shaken—thought they wouldn't survive.

Writer wants to change our perspective. We belong to an *unshakable* kingdom.

God is going to shake the universe so that the
unshakable may remain;
while the unstable society trying to destroy them will
be removed.

We're on winning side! Don't turn back now!

Hang on to His grace!

Have you survived an earthquake?

T-shirts tout survival of San Francisco quake.

I grew up in So. Calif. I *used to say: They follow me wherever I move!*

It's always an eerie feeling when the ground begins to move
under your feet.

My mother-in-law's reaction to her first earthquake.

She always resisted airplanes because she wanted to keep both
feet on solid ground.

When she went up in airplane she'd assure us she wouldn't take
her feet off the ground!

But when that first earthquake came, she was most mightily
moved.

She always thought that as long as both feet were on solid
ground she was safe, but when even the ground began to
move, her whole foundation was shaken.

God is going to shake up *everything*, not just on earth, but the
universe—earth and heaven.

You won't have anything to cling to—*except HIM!*

We belong to an *unshakable* kingdom.

We can cling with confidence to God, to His kingdom, to His
grace.

Everything else is temporary. Everything else is shakable.

Everything passes away.

Don't cling to things that can be shaken!

Cling to the unshakable.

Cling to God; cling to His kingdom; cling to His grace.

2. Be grateful (graceful) and worship God acceptably 28-29

“Cling to grace” *“Gratitude”* literally means *“grace.”*

Either meaning fits here *“let us have gratitude or grace”*

In this context, *“grace”* fits better.

“Let us have grace.”— cling to that! Hang on to grace!

We don't have to tremble before His shaking!

Clinging to His grace, we come with confidence into God's presence, without fear, yet with appropriate reverence, to worship or serve Him appropriately.

“Let us offer acceptable service to God.”

Parallel **Rom. 12:1**: *“I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, pleasing to God, which is your logical service.”*

Three parallels to Hebrews:

- 1) Our service or worship is a logical response to God's mercy and grace.
- 2) Our service or worship is pleasing to God. It is acceptable.
- 3) Same term describes our response: combines service with worship.

We worship or serve God, in response to what He has done for us.

Since by His grace we've received a permanent relationship with God and a kingdom that cannot be shaken, we can keep clinging to His grace!

But His shaking of the universe should motivate us to approach Him as He *deserves* to be approached—with reverence and awe.

We aren't to come flippantly, or take Him lightly—a supernatural "buddy"

When we abuse grace and take Him lightly, something dies—*fear of God*.

Christians ought to laugh. We ought to enjoy life and *ENJOY GOD!*

We also understand our God is still a consuming fire. That hasn't changed.

Acceptable worship only takes place with authentic "reverence and awe."

Everything depends on how we see God.

If we see Him biblically, we enter His presence with reverence.

We're overwhelmed as we encounter the living God, a consuming fire.

Have you watched the newscasts of forest fires?

You can quickly be trapped and killed. Forest fires aren't something to trifle with.

It's impressive to watch fancy homes suddenly explode into flame.

You can't play around with that kind of explosive, consuming fire, and not get burned.

The awe-inspiring nature of God should drive us to worship with reverence.

OT, they tremble when they talk to God; *“no one could see God and live.”*

He’s a consuming fire. He hasn’t changed.

When we treat holy things casually, when we stop taking our shoes off before the burning bush, we’re the ones who change—not the bush!

God *is* a God of grace, but He’s not to be trifled with.

He merits *reverence*, for He *still* is “a consuming fire.”

God is the same awe-inspiring God that frightened Hebrews at Sinai.

If God deserved reverence then, He deserves it even more now.

God is still a consuming fire!

He demands an appropriate response.

For 1st century Hebrew Christians, that means to trust God, draw near to Him, cling to Him in their affliction, and keep encouraging each other.

How should WE respond to the awe-inspiring God of the universe?

What does appropriate worship look like, when you worship a God who is a consuming fire?

Are we taking God lightly, or do we come with appropriate reverence into His presence?

Too many modern Christians have lost sight of *“the God of consuming fire”*

We correctly focus on His grace. We delight in that.

But we lose sight of His glory and greatness to our own detriment.

We need to be reminded that *“our God is a consuming fire”*

So we respond appropriately and worship as He deserves, with reverence and awe.

**The awe-inspiring nature of God
should motivate us to worship with reverence.**

Danger that we, like the Hebrew Christians might fear the wrong thing.

They're afraid of what *people* might do to them.

We're to fear *God*; NOT what man might do to us.

Do WE fear Him properly?

Proper fear of God produces appropriate worship!

When we truly realize what a mighty God we serve,
it will motivate us to worship Him in spirit and in truth—

Bowing before Him.

Submitting our will to His.

Serving Him appropriately.