



“The Final Warning Against Apostasy” (Hebrews 12:25-29)

Introduction: The author to the Hebrews has been using the analogy of a race to urge his readers to press forward toward Christ, and the Holy Spirit has been using it, hopefully, to do the same. The book as a whole has been pushing us forward, giving us reason after reason why we should look to Christ and to Him alone for our salvation, and not to anything else. But the author has also been telling us that to do so requires a forward movement, a growth, a sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. There is effort involved. God doesn’t work in us automatically. It’s the same thing Paul tells us in Philippians, where he writes, “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (2:11-12). God works, and we work. His work in us produces both our desire to work and our work itself. If God is at work in us, we will work. Therefore, the author tells his readers, “Work. Labor. Run the race with endurance. Fix your eyes on Jesus. Resist sin unto death. If you run out of the way, straighten out your path again. Pursue peace. Pursue holiness. Don’t fall short of the grace of God, or let any of your brethren do so.” He warned us of the consequences last time. To turn away from Christ is to face God as Judge. It is to face His full wrath, as it was revealed on Mount Sinai. But to press on to Christ is to experience the full revelation of His love and mercy as it is revealed in heaven. It is to join the angels in festal assembly, and to be perfected among a host of innumerable saints. Christ stands ready to help. His blood pleads on your behalf. But for your part, you must continue to press forward.

Tonight, the author gives his readers, and us, one last exhortation to keep moving forward through a very sobering warning again not to turn back. And in essence, what he tells us here is that

It is a far more serious sin to turn away from Christ now that He is fully revealed, than it ever was to turn away under the shadows. This is again to say, where there is more light, there is greater blameworthiness to sin against that light.

I. Notice first the command the author gives his readers, “See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking.”

- A. Literally, he says, “Beware! Beware that you do not refuse Him who is speaking.”
 - 1. Now who is it that is speaking?
 - a. It is Christ. He is speaking through His Word. He is speaking through the words which the author to the Hebrews is writing to them. He is speaking through the Gospel, through the blood of His atonement, the blood which speaks better than the blood of Abel (v. 24).
 - b. Christ is the One who, the author says, speaks from heaven. But He does not speak through an audible voice. He speaks through a printed and preached Word.
 - 2. Christ is speaking, and for our part, we are to listen to what He says.
 - a. He speaks to us the same way today. As a matter of fact He is speaking to us now.
 - b. He speaks to us through His written Word. He speaks to us through the sacraments. He speaks to us through the preaching of His Word. This is why Christ ordained preaching in His church. He desires to speak to us week by week. He will speak to us daily, if we will read His Word. And His message is always the same in all its parts: He exhorts us to move forward all the way to heaven, and not to turn back.
- B. But now what motive does the author give us here to listen to Christ? He says, “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” (v. 25b).
 - 1. There were those who heard Him speak on earth. They refused to listen to Him. And they did not escape His judgement.
 - a. Now who was it that warned on earth? Some say it was Moses. He is the one who stood in the place of God and spoke His word. Others say it was God, speaking through the angels. The Lord gave the Law from Mount Sinai, but yet the author tells us it was spoken through the angels (Heb. 2:2).
 - b. But still others say, and I think rightfully so, that it was the preincarnate Christ who spoke, the same one who now warns from heaven.
 - (i) I believe that Christ is the best option, for that voice which is speaking now from heaven, is the

- same voice which shook the earth in the past.
- (ii) Notice the end of verse 25 and the beginning of verse 26, “Must less shall we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven. And His voice shook the earth then.” The One who warns from heaven is the One whose voice shook the earth. In the Greek, the connection is much clearer. Literally it reads, “Much less shall we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven, whose voice shook the earth then.”
 - (iii) Christ is the One who warns from heaven. Therefore, He is the One who warned them from earth on the Mount. He was the One who spoke through the angels.
- c. But they refused to listen to Him.
- (i) When Israel stood at the foot of Mount Sinai and heard the words of God, they begged that no further word be spoken to them. They would not listen to any more.
 - (ii) And even though they asked that Moses would speak His Word, they still refused to listen to him.
- d. And they did not escape.
- (i) These are the same people, remember, that all died in the wilderness, because they refused to listen to God and obey Him, because they refused to believe that God was able to do what He said He would do.
 - (ii) And so they did not press forward into Canaan, that land which was a type of heaven. They failed to enter into God’s rest, because in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, which is a type of the world.
2. Now if they did not escape when they refused to listen to Him on earth, how much less will they now that He warns from heaven?
- a. Now that Christ has come, has fulfilled the Old Covenant types and shadows, has died, has risen, and has been exalted over all principalities and powers and every name which is named, not only in this age, but also in the age to come; now that He has all power and authority entrusted to Him, if they turn from Him now, how will they escape?
 - b. Back then His voice shook the earth only as a warning, to strike fear in their hearts, so that they would walk in the ways of righteousness. “But now He has promised,” says the author to the Hebrews, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven” (v. 26). There is a day coming when the Lord Jesus will arise for judgment. On that day the heavens and the earth will pass away with a roar, and the elements will melt with fervent heat (2 Pet. 3:10). He will remove the things which can be shaken, that is, created things. And what will remain will be those things which cannot be shaken, those things which will last forever, the things which are not of this creation (Heb. 9:11).
 - c. When Christ arises to judgment, no one who has not already taken refuge in Him will escape. The author has been emphasizing this again and again throughout the book to warn them to press forward to Christ. Let me read some of the warnings to remind you.
 - (i) In 2:1-3, he wrote, “For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away *from it*. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?”
 - (ii) He said in 3:12-14, “Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called ‘Today,’ lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.”
 - (iii) He said in 4:1-2, “Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.”
 - (iv) In 6:4-6, he wrote, “For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.”

- (v) In 10:26-31, "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. 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? For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."
- (vi) And in 10:36-39, "For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY. BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul."
- (vii) To turn away from Christ is to turn away from life itself, it is to turn to everlasting destruction. To fall away from Christ is to fall into the hands of an angry God.
- (viii) We must not refuse the One who is speaking, the One who is warning from heaven. To do so is to put our eternal souls in great danger.
- (ix) From these passages we can see that it is far worse to fall away from Christ after He has been revealed than before. It will be more tolerable in the day of Judgment for the city of Sodom, than it will be for Capernaum, for Capernaum had more light. How guilty would we be then, if we turned away?

II. So then, what are we to do? We are not to refuse, but listen and obey.

- A. First, realize why Christ is rising to shake the heavens and the earth once and for all: it is to rid His creation of sin.
 - 1. The removal of the things which can be shaken, is to remove the things which have been corrupted by the curse.
 - 2. But Christ is coming to renovate the whole of His creation. And He will do so with fire.
 - a. Jonathan Edwards believed that this burning of the old creation is the creation of the eternal lake of fire. In one of his miscellanies entitled "Hell Torments," he wrote, "Hell is represented by fire and brimstone, and if by that is meant such fire as lightening, then without a doubt the torments of hell are inconceivable great. For the fire of lightening is many degrees hotter than the fire of the hottest furnace, as appears by the effects of it: that it will in a moment, by only touching, in the twinkling of an eye dissolve the solidest and hardest metals.... It is probable that this earth, after the conflagration, shall be the place of the damned. We read that the heat of the conflagration will be so violent as to melt the very ground (2 Pet. 3:10, 12).... many thousand times hotter than ordinary fire..." (275). After this, the New Heavens and the New Earth will appear where the saints will forever dwell with the Lord.
 - b. Others believe that the creation will be burned up only to purge it of its sin and corruption, and out of it, the New Heavens and the New Earth will appear.
 - c. But either way, once the creation has been renovated, and those things removed which can be shaken, all that will be left is God's eternal kingdom which can never be shaken. This is the inheritance of the saints.
- B. And since we are to receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, he tells us, "Let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and fear."
 - 1. More literally, the author is tells us, "Therefore . . . let us have grace, by which we may serve God in an acceptable way with godly fear and awe."
 - a. What he means is, Let us have our hearts filled with grace, with God's Spirit, the same thing Paul commands us to do in Ephesians 5:18, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." Let us not be under the control of the flesh, but under that of the Spirit of God.
 - b. Let us use the means God gives us for the receiving of His Spirit, the means of grace. Let us stop doing the things which quench the work of the Spirit in our lives, our sins.
 - c. It is only in this way that we may be able to serve God acceptably. It is the Spirit's work to give us

- strength and to produce in us godly fear and reverence.
- d. But what is this except pushing forward in the race or pursuing sanctification, as he has been exhorting us? If we have grace, we will serve the Lord acceptably, and if we do this, we will make progress in the race to heaven.
2. But what if we turn aside, or go back? Well, he reminds us again of the reality of God's wrath, "Our God is a consuming fire" (v. 29).
- a. God is a God of wrath. This is how He revealed Himself on Mount Sinai.
 - b. Edwards believed that God is the fire which burns in hell. It is God revealing His perfect justice and wrath against sin for all eternity.
 - c. God is love, as our bulletin reminds us this evening. But it is equally true that God is wrath. If this were not true, what would we have to fear?
 - d. God is the same God who revealed Himself on Sinai so many years ago. He does not change, neither does His hatred for sin.
 - e. Let us press on then to Christ. Let us trust in Him. Let us love Him. Let us pursue Christ-likeness. For in doing so, we are running to the only place of refuge, the only escape from the coming judgment. Christ is the ark of safety from the coming wrath. Let us run to Him and be safe. Amen.