

See that you do not refuse Him who speaks (Hebrews 12:25–29)

The climax of the final warning in Hebrews challenges the reader not to refuse God who speaks from heaven. The possibility of a superficial profession of faith is real, just as Israel professed a commitment to obey God, but then quickly and terribly failed. There are really only two options: to refuse Him who speaks or to heed His word. The results of both and the obligation of the later are forcibly presented.

I. *Refusing Him who speaks has results (12:25–27).*

1. *There is no escape from judgment.*

- a. Israel initially “begged that no further word be spoken” to them by God (cf. v.19) which expressed a correct fear of God (cf. Deuteronomy 5:24–29). But they did not obey God, as they had promised, and the author uses this word “refuse” to represent their failure to obey, a failure which was judged by God.
- b. God spoke to Israel in an earthly setting, but now speaks to mankind from a heavenly setting. Unlike Sinai, heaven is now where the believer’s great High Priest is exalted, it contains the “original” from which the earthly tabernacle was copied, and is the place of the believer’s enrollment (4:14; 7:26; 8:1; 9:23–24; 12:23). It represents the completed work of Christ and therefore carries much more weight. If Israel did not escape when they refused God, how much more so people today who have heard and understood the good news of Jesus.

2. *There is no lasting inheritance.*

- a. The physical earthquake at Sinai (cf. Psalm 77:18) is less than the future, final shaking of the earth and the heavens (citing Haggai 2:6). At that time only the “unshakeable” will remain.
- b. The “created things” (NIV) or, probably better, the “things that have been made” (ESV) will be removed. Much of God’s creation will remain (e.g., heaven and hell, angels and mankind, etc.), but things that have been made by man and much that is wrongly adored by man will be removed. The man-made aspects of Judaism, which tempted the readers, would disappear, as well as those things which many people wrongly trust for their well-being. Even the believer’s works will be tried by fire (1 Cor 3:13; cf. 2 Cor 5:10).

II. *Heeding Him who speaks has obligations (12:28–29).*

1. *There will be gratitude for receiving an unshakeable kingdom.*

God’s kingdom will remain when this age is shaken and removed. The believer should respond in gratitude, knowing this, the believer’s participation in it, and the cost which God paid for the believer’s free participation in it.

2. *There will be worship in reverence and awe.*

- a. “Worship” (NIV) refers to service in the sense of carrying out religious duties. It includes thanks and praise, but is much more as chapter 13 will go on to show. The believer’s response to God is a life of service, not to earn the kingdom, but in grateful response to receiving eternal life.
- b. “With reverence and awe” or “with reverent fear” reminds the readers that God is holy. As a consuming fire He will not tolerate covenant breaking. It is both a warning that salvation is only through the good news proclaimed by God from heaven in Jesus Christ alone and it is a warning for true believers not to treat lightly the grace of God (cf. Galatians 5:1, 13).

This warning is intertwined with encouragement in the way the author includes himself and assumes a right heart condition in his audience. Nevertheless the danger of a false profession is real and he therefore warns and encourages. Do not refuse God who speaks, but heed His word.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- What are you trusting to be right with God? Does your trust fully align with the good news that God proclaims in Jesus Christ? What might tempt you to drift from that?
- Our materialistic culture can permeate our thinking. Evaluate your own hold on the “stuff” of this world versus appreciation for the unshakeable kingdom which believers are receiving.
- How thankful toward God are you? What shows it? How can you improve it?
- How do we rightly have a “reverent fear” in serving God while still knowing that perfect love casts out fear?