

Text: Hebrews 12:28-29

Title: Serving God Acceptably

Truth: Do not reject God; rather, render grateful service to Him.

Date/Location: Sunday January 1, 2012 at FBC

Introduction

These two verses are structured like a sandwich:

Reason/why

Be and do something

Reason/why

The “bread” of the sandwich gives plenty of motivation for conducting ourselves in the way specified in the “meat” of the sandwich. The meat is this: instead of refusing God, **we ought to render thankful service to Him.**

I. Why: God is providing for us an unshakable kingdom.

A. Notice the “we are receiving” a kingdom. This is a present tense verb whose action is not yet completed.

B. The “kingdom” that Christians will receive is the kingdom of Christ.

You might recall from our earlier studies that the kingdom of God is a topic that is found throughout the Bible and it encompasses all of human history in the sense that God is working history toward His grand goal of establishing a Messianic kingdom on earth. We are still waiting for that part of history!

We are citizens of that kingdom.

The kingdom will be manifested during the 1000-year reign of Christ spoken of in Revelation 20:1-6.

It will be a fulfillment of the idyllic conditions pictured in the Old Testament prophets, such as Isaiah 11, 35, and 55, among others.

It will be disturbed at the end by a rebellion led by Satan, but this rebellion will be put down and the eternal state will be ushered in.

C. The kingdom “cannot be shaken.” The kingdom is not temporal or ephemeral. It will stand forever. It is better than a diamond! It is unlike the things about which verse 26 spoke, quoting from Haggai 2:6.

This motivates us to...

II. Serve With Grace

A. Serving God is the main idea

1. The phrase “saved to serve” is a good one. Instead of serving our sinful desires, or the world or the devil or some idol, we are rescued from sin in order that we might serve God.
2. We should think about the nature of this service. The Greek term has to do with service in religious duties. It can be translated as *worship*.

Matthew 4:10 – worship and *serve* God only

Luke 1:74 – to *serve* God without fear

Luke 2:37 – *servicing* God with fasting and prayers

Acts 7:7 – after that they shall come out and *serve* Me in this place

Romans 1:25 – they worshipped and *served* the creature

Phil. 3:3 – who *worship* God in the Spirit

2 Tim. 1:3 – God, whom I *serve* with a pure conscience

The word seems to be more general than “worship” in a restricted sense of coming to a worship meeting or singing or praying. It encompasses all of life.

The mundane things of life may seem hard to fit into this category of “service” to God. But, even in sweat labor you are doing what God said way back in Genesis, that by hard work we would earn our keep. We can serve God in all of it.

B. We are to serve “with grace.”

1. What does it mean for us to “have grace”? Doesn’t grace come from God? How can we “have” it? Some translations have “let us be grateful” (ESV, NAS, NET, NIV).

BDAG and most modern translations classify the verb under the heading of a response of thanks or gratitude for generosity.

Many verses indisputably use the phrase in that way and I believe it is the best translation here. See Luke 17:9 (to have grace = to thank), 1 Tim. 1:12, 2 Tim. 1:3, Romans 7:25, Rom 6:17, 2 Cor. 9:15, 2 Cor. 2:14, 8:16, 1 Cor. 15:57, 1 Cor. 10:30, Col. 3:16.

In other words, “to have grace” is a Greek idiom for “to be thankful.”

2. The thanksgiving is because we are receiving an unshakable kingdom. Thanks to God for what He is giving to us, far beyond what we deserve.

3. Lack of thankfulness is a strong mark of an unbeliever (Rom. 1:21). Without it, a person cannot serve God acceptably, that is, in a way that pleases God.

C. We are also to serve with reverence and godly fear.

1. Reverence and godly fear are basically synonyms that convey the idea of respectfulness, humility, and deep and solemn respect. There is an element of fear that is less than abject terror because of our relationship to God as Father and with His love for us and our love for Him (1 John 4:18). There is a combination of fear and love that we must have in balance, as in Deut. 10:12.
2. We are greatly privileged, as we saw in 12:22-24, to be joined with the angels and saints of past ages with the Father and Christ. But that has to be balanced with the understanding that God is the same God that Israel met at Sinai. He is one who is due reverence and fear because of His utter holiness. He is separate from sin, He is far mightier than we are. There must be no “trifling” with God.

III. Why: God is a consuming fire

- A. “God is a consuming fire” is a quote from Deut. 4:24. See Deut. 4:11-15 for a recounting of what happened at Sinai.
- B. It is no coincidence that God is going to destroy the world by means of a fiery judgment in the last day (2 Peter 3:10).
- C. To repeat what Hebrews said earlier, it is a dreadfully fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God apart from Christ (10:31). We could profitably read Jonathan Edwards’ sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” just to think about this a little more deeply.

Conclusion

- A. So we serve **with thankfulness** because God is providing us such great blessings, and we serve **with reverence and godly fear** because of God’s fearful holiness and judgment. Twin motivations drive us: gratefulness and godly fear.
- B. Any violation or refusal of what God has said is subject to the judgment of God, because it is sin. Sin causes objective guilt, and guilt is the liability for punishment. See to it that you do not do that! So the point is to serve God out of thankfulness and with reverence. Do that rather than refusing to hear Him!

C. How can we do this?

1. Don't mope around in life—be bright because of the things for which you ought to be thankful.
2. Don't be lazy—have a work ethic in all of life and cultivate an interest particularly in religious duties instead of being soaked up in careerism or hobby-ism.
3. Don't be Biblically illiterate. Get to church meetings to learn about the Bible and read it for yourself.
4. Don't treat God like a buddy-buddy or in a foxhole religion kind of way. He is a consuming fire all the time, not just at final judgment, and He is providing us an unshakable kingdom right now—outfitting us for it—all the time, not just at some ethereal point in the future.
5. Be an active member of the church. We'll be trying to ask you this year to do some service and some gifted ministry for the Lord to help us all accomplish the Great Commission. Who would *not* want to be involved in a work as great as that?!

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