

Hebrews 12:18-24 Law before Grace

Intro: Someone once challenged my approach to evangelism.

- He said consider that, “It does no good introducing someone to Christ unless you first introduce God’s Law.”
 - Winning someone with *Christ’s beauty* - Winning someone with the *gift of grace* - Before *recognizing someone’s need for grace* is futile.
 - There is truth to this.
- Grace without repentance labeled by Bonhoeffer as “cheap grace.”
- Meaningless grace.
- Saving grace falls from heaven *when* someone first understands they are in violation of God’s Law.

[KEY] First grasp you are lost then you will be found.

[Illus] A child walking aimlessly in woods will not stop to turn around until he or she recognizes they are traveling the wrong direction.

[Illus] Someone with failing vision will not ask for glasses without first being diagnosed as going blind.

[Point] You need to know something is wrong before you will make it right.

[Key] This all *seems harsh* if you have an unclear picture of God.

- The lower your view of God the harsher this approach seems.
 - Offending a personal friend who knows your weaknesses is one thing.
 - Offending a police officer, recklessly cutting him off is quite another.
 - Offending a judge, being rude will land you in contempt.
 - Offending the President of the United States, in the oval office saying something smacking of treason would bring the severest of consequences.
- [Point] The higher the authority the greater the offense.

[Question] “What about offending a holy, eternal, Creator God?” “How grave are your circumstances now?”

[KEY] In the past quarter century, *preachers* have preached a small God.

- Palatable, non-threatening, obliged to bless you.
- When life feels easy this smaller God is very marketable.
- *Non-threatening circumstances* make a smaller God is preferable.
 - Zero accountability now or and zero for the future.
 - The “Cheapest Grace.”

- God, reduced to **genie-size; someone you summon**, time to time, according to whims.

[Appl] **Suddenly, life in world feels very fragile.**

- **A world scale virus, people you know are now getting sick.**
 - **Threatening circumstances make a Bigger God seem Better.**
 - **Your job security. Our economy. Our supplies at home come to mind.**
 - **“When will I restart my job?” “When do things go back to normal?”**
- **The world is nervous.**

This makes a smaller God, impotent to answer our problems.

We need a Big God not Small God.

God is Big, it is our vision of God that needs to grow.

[Point] **God gets Bigger when we come to grips with his, “Holiness.”**

- **Holiness sets God apart** from you and me.
 - Wholly other.
 - Essentially different from everything else.

[KEY] **God’s Law** is the **ultimate expression** of **God’s holiness**.

- An **extension** of this attribute.
- God’s holiness **written down**.
- **His Law is absolute** leaving **no margin for error**.
 - A **standard** with no grey area.
 - The **opposite** of post-modern thought.
 - It does **not bend** around culture.
 - **Not fluid** like mercury.

[KEY] **Looking into the Law** is like **looking into a mirror**.

- Being **face-to-face God’s Law** reflects **our sin back to us**.
- **God’s Law cuts us down to size**.
- **Seeing ourselves for who we really are and God for who he really is**.

[Question] **“Does this sound cruel?”**

- **Yes, if you do not want to engage a Big God!**
- **No, if you know you need a God this Big!**
 - **Getting to God’s grace demands we first be cut down.**
 - **Law before Grace.**

[Appl] **This pandemic** has revealed **how risky and fragile** our world really is.

- However, something will bring your life to an exponentially higher risk and vulnerability.
- Coming face to face with God in Heaven
- God's holiness is not survivable apart from grace.

[Question] "By what standard will you be judged?"

- Either by Law or by Grace.
- If by Law, you fall short. If by Grace, acceptance.
 - The *difference* between these two outcomes could not be anymore stark.
 - Paralyzing terror verses extraordinary joy.

Heaven has two sets of books. Names of those judged by Law. Names of those judged by grace.

ESV Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and ^abooks were opened. Then another book was opened, which is ^bthe book of life. And ^cthe dead were judged by what was written in the books, ^daccording to what they had done. (Rev 20:12 ESV)

ESV Revelation 13:8 and all ^awho dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in ^bthe book of life of ^cthe Lamb ^dwho was slain. (Rev 13:8 ESV)

[TRANS] Eventually, everyone is judged either by Law or Grace.

- Our text this morning is an encouragement to be sure you are judged by Grace!

[TRANS] Hebrews 12:18 is the call not to compromise!

- Do not be Esau!
- Do not fall into hardhearted unrepentance, in this case, "immorality" (v. 16).
- Do not allow unresolved guilt to take you away from God altogether.

[TRANS] Verse 18 picks right back up with someone facing this spiritual crisis.

- They want God! They need God! And, they need a Big God.
- Struggling *not* to be Esau.
- Fleeing compromise means facing God's holiness again.
- The way back to grace!

1. Judged by Law (vv. 18-21)

Verse 18 throws back to when the first generation wilderness children received the Law at Mt. Sanai.

- "Mt. Sanai" unnamed is applied!
- When God came to meet Moses and the Jews to give them the 10 Commandments.

[Note] Verse 18 begins building the difference between approaching God at Mount Sanai compared to approaching God at Mount Zion.

- The point is that the for the **1st generation Jews, God was unapproachable!**
- **Verse 18** says New Covenant Believers, come to God by way of a different mountain.
 - God has made himself approachable.
 - We have gained access.
- **Mt. Sanai** is a **physical mountain.**
- No one knows its location.
- The Bible's account was early in their 40-year wanderings.

[Note] The Jews could **"touch"** this physical mountain, however, touching it would mean instant death.

- **Execution** by stoning or being shot with an arrow.
- God's majestic holiness was **terrifying.**
- **"Fire"** and **"Darkness."**
- **"Gloom"** and **"a tempest."**

[Note] Additionally, **verse 19** brings up the increasingly loud "trumpet" blasts, I take as supernatural ones!

- God's voice accompanied with thunder and angels
- cf. Dt. 33:2 **"the ten thousand of holy ones, with flaming fire"!**
- The Law of Mount Sanai was a **physical display of God who his Holy!**

[TRANS] Turn over to Exodus 19.

Exodus 19:1-9 sets the stage for God's arrival!

^{ESV} **Exodus 19:5** Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be ^amy treasured possession among all peoples, for ^ball the earth is mine; (Exo 19:5 ESV)

- Notice, **there is grace in the Law!**
- **Zero** in on the **LORD's condition** for grace.
 - **"If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant."**
 - Grace is God's voice. Grace is the Word of God. God is speaking and faith comes by hearing!

The people's respond in verse 8.

^{ESV} **Exodus 19:8** ^aAll the people answered together and said, **"All that the LORD has spoken we will do."** And **Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD.** (Exo 19:8 ESV)

- In the next verse, the LORD inserts the key element for their obedience, “**faith.**”

ESV **Exodus 19:9** And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am coming to you ^ain a thick cloud, that ^bthe people may hear when I speak with you, and may also ^cbelieve you forever." When Moses told the words of the people to the LORD, (Exo 19:9 ESV)

- Still, what they heard they needed to heed.
- The call was for consecration.

ESV **Exodus 19:10-14** the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and ^aconsecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them ^bwash their garments
¹¹ and be ready for the **third day**. For on the third day ^athe LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.

¹² And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. ^aWhoever touches the mountain shall be put to death.

¹³ No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; ¹whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When ^athe trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain."

¹⁴ So Moses ^awent down from the mountain to the people and ^vconsecrated the people; ^band they washed their garments. (Exo 19:10-14 ESV)

- **Verses 16-19** describes, three days later, the physical assault of God's holiness!

¹⁶ On the morning of the ^a**third day** there were ^c**thunders and lightnings** and ^ba thick cloud on the mountain and **a very loud ^ctrumpet blast**, so that all **the people in the camp ^dtrembled.**

¹⁷ Then ^a**Moses** brought the people **out of the camp to meet God**, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.

¹⁸ Now ^a**Mount Sinai** was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had **descended on it in fire**. The smoke of it went **up like the smoke of a kiln**, and ^bthe **whole mountain trembled greatly.**

¹⁹ And as the ^a**sound of the trumpet** grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and ^f**God answered him in thunder.** (Exo 19:16-19 ESV)

- **Verse 21** again points to God's grace in the midst of his tempest!
- God warns them with becoming fascinated with God's holiness.
 - Being drawn like a moth to the flame.
 - If they touched the mountain both they and/or their animals would die.

ESV **Exodus 19:21** And the LORD said to Moses, "**Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD ^ato look and many of them perish.**" (Exo 19:21 ESV)

ESV **Deuteronomy 4:11** And ^ayou came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while ^bthe mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom. (Deu 4:11 ESV)

[TRANS] Hebrews 12:19 highlights “a voice” (v. 19).

- This was God's voice to check them on the temptation to draw near.
- God's voice was God's grace.
- God's voice at the same time overwhelmed them!

ESV **Deuteronomy 5:23-27** And ^aas soon as you **heard the voice** out of the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes, and your elders.

²⁴ And you said, 'Behold, the LORD our God has shown us his glory and ^agreatness, and ^bwe have heard **his voice** out of the midst of the fire. This day we have seen God speak with man, and man ^cstill live.

²⁵ **Now therefore why should we die? For this great fire will consume us. ^aIf we hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, we shall die.**

²⁶ ^aFor who is there of all flesh, that has **heard the voice of the living God speaking** out of the midst of fire as we have, and has still lived?

²⁷ Go near and hear all that the LORD our God will say and ^aspeak to us all that the LORD our God will speak to you, and we will hear and do it.' (Deu 5:23-27 ESV)

[Question] God's "voice" represented God's presence. "What was this like?"

- Perpetual seismic tremors.
- Sky black with deep darkness.
- Lightening and fire rising from the top of Sinai "to the heart of heaven" (Dt. 4:11).
- Celestial shofars blaring!
- Moses speaks and God answers him with thunder!

[KEY] The people trembled at the LORD's presence.

[KEY] God's presence caused "trembling" (cf. Ex. 19:16) but according to Hebrews 12:19-21 they trembled at the Law's standard!

- Implications of disobeying it!
- One false move meant death!

[Note] Verse 19 says, "the hearers [begged] that no further messages be spoken to them" (v. 19).

- The reason in the next verse says, "they could not endure the *order* that was given..." (v. 20).
- The point was **how severe and precise this law was!** "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned" (v. 20).

Taken from Exodus 19:12-13, if someone comes too close, too curious, to see God, too far up the mountain or even touches the edge, they shall be put to death...and if someone goes up to grab him away ("touches him) they are to be stoned or shot (through with an arrow).

Same with your animal. If your animal goes up and touches the mountain and you touch your animal you likewise will be executed!

[Point] The point is that God's Law was strict and inviolable! This is God's "terrifying" nature!

[Note] "Moses said, 'I tremble with fear.'" (v. 21).

[Question] "When was Moses afraid?"

- Undoubtedly, here. but later

- **When this generation rebelled and Moses found them worshipping the golden calf.**
- **Deuteronomy 9:19** Moses testified he was “**afraid of the anger and hot displeasure of the LORD...**” (Dt. 9:19).

[Point] God’s Law creates insecurity!

- **Guilt creates fear.**

^{ESV} **Proverbs 28:1** ^aThe wicked flee when no one pursues, but ^bthe righteous are bold as a lion. (Pro 28:1 ESV)

- **God’s Law leaves no margin for error!**

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 3:7** Now if ^athe ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory ^bthat the Israelites could not gaze at Moses’ face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, (2Co 3:7 ESV)

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:10** For all who rely on works of the law are ^aunder a curse; for it is written, ^{bc}“**Cursed be everyone who does not ^cabide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.**” (Gal 3:10 ESV)

- The **Apostle Paul’s** testimony **was one who was a master of the Law.**
- **Paul’s Damascus** experience was his version of **Mt. Sinai** where the **Law crushed him.**

^{ESV} **Romans 7:9-11** I was **once alive apart from the law**, but when the commandment came, **sin came alive and I died.**

¹⁰ The very commandment ^athat **promised life proved to be death to me.**

¹¹ For sin, ^a**seizing an opportunity through the commandment**, ^bdeceived me and **through it killed me.** (Rom 7:9-11 ESV)

- The **force of God’s Law** is the way it **makes God bigger to us!**
 - Big enough to crush our pride.
 - God’s Law should break us to lead us to grace.

[TRANS] Verse 22 transitions from Mt. Sinai to Mt. Zion.

- From meeting **God in terms of his Law** to **meeting God in terms of his Son.**
- From meeting **God in terms of judgement** to meeting **God in terms of grace found in heaven!**

2. Judged by Grace (vv. 22-24)

[TRANS] The **author’s perspective** is that these believers “**have come to**” (v. 22) ***a different Mountain.***

[Note] Coming to “**Mount Zion**”, they have **come to God by grace.**

- **Mount Sinai** pictures the **Law** and **Mount Zion pictures grace!**

- In the **Old Testament** we learn that **Zion was a Jebusite** stronghold.
 - **King David conquered it.**
 - **Zion was where David brought the ark,** representing **God’s Holy habitation!**

^{ESV} **Psalm 132:13-14** For the LORD has ^achosen Zion; he has ^bdesired it for his dwelling place: ¹⁴ "This is my ^aresting place forever; here I will ^bdwell, for I have desired it. (Psa 132:13-14 ESV)

- **Solomon would move the ark to the Temple** built nearby on **Mt. Moriah** extending the name **“Zion.”**
 - Ultimately, **Zion became synonymous with Jerusalem!**
 - **Prophecies ensured salvation would come through Zion!**

^{ESV} **Psalm 50:2** Out of Zion, ^athe perfection of beauty, ^bGod shines forth. (Psa 50:2 ESV)

^{ESV} **Isaiah 46:13** ^aI bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; ^bI will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory." (Isa 46:13 ESV)

- **Salvation** came through **the Son who met the terms of the Law** with **perfection through his life and death.**
 - **Mt. Sinai** represents our **unapproachability to God** and **Mt. Zion** represents our **complete approachability!**
 - **Sinai** stands for **judgement** and **death** while **Zion** stands for **forgiveness** and **life.**
- Coming to **Zion** is coming **to Christ, becoming a Christian.**

^{ESV} **Psalm 133:3** It is like ^athe dew of ^bHermon, which falls on ^cthe mountains of Zion! For there the LORD ^dhas commanded the blessing, life forevermore. (Psa 133:3 ESV)

[TRANS] Zion is **more than a physical place**, by coming to **Mount Zion** we are taken **“to the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem”** (v. 22).

- This is the **city of heaven** that **we anticipate.**
 - **Grace flows from what happened in physical Jerusalem but grace is flowing from the throne of heaven mediated to us by Christ our Advocate!**
 - **Heaven is sure, so we should learn more about heaven!**

[Question] “What is heaven like?”

- **Heaven** is described as a **“city”** where **God is central.**
 - **With everything else that could be said about heaven, it is important to recognize that heaven’s focus is God.**

[Appl] **It has been very conspicuous with the past 20 year trend of people having visions or encounters in heaven how much God is missing in what people “saw.”**

- Certainly, there are references to God but not the God described from these last few verses not to mention Exodus 19.

[KEY] When you come to heaven by grace, you encounter the God who is as big and awful as described at Mt. Sinai but without being a threat!

- Big God, No Threat!

[Note] God is “living” and you are “alive” in heaven.

- He is dynamic.
 - “The heavenly Jerusalem” filled with “innumerable angels in festal gathering” (v. 22).
 - In Revelation, “angels” are “myriads” upon “myriads” meaning **10,000 times 10,000.**
- This is an overwhelming number, galaxies upon galaxies of stars.
 - **Angels** on a lesser scale can be threatening.
 - Not to Christians.
 - Innumerable Angels, No Threat!
 - The opposite is true.
- They are celebrating.
- The angels in heaven rejoicing over new birth!

^{ESV} **Luke 15:10** Just so, I tell you, there is joy before ^athe angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Luk 15:10 ESV)

[KEY] Verse 23 makes sure we are not left out.

[Note] “to the assembly [ekklesia] of the firstborn” this is the *church* or believers from every age.

- The **identity** of the **church** is under the title of “**the firstborn**” (v. 23).
 - The “**firstborn**” is title of privilege.
 - Typically given to the **oldest son or inheritor of family wealth.**

Christ is given this title in Colossians 1:15.

^{ESV} **Colossians 1:15** ^aHe is the image of ^bthe invisible God, ^cthe firstborn of all creation. (Col 1:15 ESV)

- Christ owns heaven and earth because he created it all.
- All of it worships him!

[Note] Here **Hebrews** is saying we are under Christ as co-heirs, inheritors in heaven.

- We are “enrolled in heaven” on the registry.
- This means you are supposed to be there.

[Illus] Like a little boy inquiring whether you made the team. Yes, your name is there!

^{ESV} **Romans 8:17** and if children, then ^aheirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, ^bprovided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom 8:17 ESV)

- Many fabricate being accepted by God by dumbing God down.
 - Your acceptance by God becomes based on how you feel about yourself more than what God thinks about you.
 - Acceptance in heaven is based on one source, “**God**”.
- What he thinks about you is all that matters.

[Note] He is the **standard** and as “**the judge of all**” he has made the way for believers, “the spirits” to be “righteous” by being “made perfect.”

[Question] “How are you made perfect?” One way! “Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant” (v. 24).

- Christ’s death.
- Christ’s “sprinkled blood” on our behalf.
- Christ’s blood “speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (v. 24).

[KEY] Both deaths speak.

- Abel’s blood speaks “**vengeance**” against the sin of Cain.
 - You might even say, Abel’s blood is reverberates Cain’s guilt.
 - A bloodstain that would not wash out!

[Illus] I remember sitting with a couple who were living in sin. The woman was visibly distressed and I asked her what the problem was and suddenly through tears she cried out, “Guilt!”

- Christ’s blood speaks a different word. The word, “GRACE!”
- Mercy – Justice – Peace – Acceptance - Hope!

Conclusion: Heaven boasts of a BIG GOD.

[KEY] But, in heaven we are not judged by this BIG GOD so we have no need to shrink back in fear or terror.

- **Christians, not judged by Law but by grace.**
 - We need this **Bigger God**, real **God of Scripture** because we need his **Big GRACE!**
 - When the world is nervous.
- **When the world is fearful.**
 - **A lesser, smaller, casual God will not solve life anymore.**
 - **Sinai's God is the Christian's God, our God.**
 - **With one difference, we are not anymore under God's Law!**
 - **We are under GRACE.**

[KEY] Our Father truly can beat up all of his enemies!

- **And he will.**
- **If you are still under the Law's judgement, God's judgment.**
- **If you have not yet allowed the Law to cut you down.**
- **Repent. Believe. Receive.**
- **Receive God's mercy and Grace.**

Abel's blood speaks guilt. Christ's blood speaks grace. Come to grace.

Our Father truly is the God you can rest secure in! Rest in God now!

Our Father views believers through grace.

He is for us, for you! Rely on this Big God, which is your God.

He will see us through our trial and meet us now and save and keep us through eternity!