

Shaking of Things Made, And Firmness of Things Given

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And this word. Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. -Hebrews 12:27-28.

When God gave the law upon Mount Sinai it was with fearful accompaniments. Inanimate nature herself gave tokens of recognition of her Almighty Creator, and trembled at His fearful presence. "And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly."

To these visible tremblings of the earth before her awful Creator the Psalmist alludes, Psalm lxxviii. 8, "The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel." So also Psalm lxxvii. 18, "The voice of Thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook." To this fearful display of God's terrible majesty at Mount Sinai the Apostle Paul refers in the chapter before us: "Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words" (Heb. xii. 18).

Now these accompaniments, when Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke and flame, and the solid earth shook, were to denote God's majesty,

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holiness, and justice, in the giving of the law. But there was something more intimated in the shaking of the earth. It was typical and figurative of the shaking of the foundations on which men rested. When the stable earth itself was shaken, all hopes built upon that earth were shaken with it. It also denoted the shaking of that earthly idolatrous worship which was prevalent, in order to make way for the Levitical dispensation which was to last until the coming of the promised Messiah. We gather this from the remarkable prophecy of Haggai, to which the apostle refers in our text, and explains. As this forms the groundwork of our subject, and is the key to our text, we will devote a few moments to it.

In Haggai ii. 6, 7, we find the following prediction: "For thus saith the Lord of hosts: Yet once, and it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts." In these striking words Haggai refers to the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, when the voice of God shook the earth. "But now," says the apostle, quoting and explaining Haggai's words, "He hath promised saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven." When was this prophecy fulfilled? Clearly at the coming of Christ, for when God shook the heavens, "the desire of all nations should come," and the temple then building was to be filled with glory, which it was when the glorious Son of God, in human form, entered into its courts. But how were the heavens and earth then shaken? Were they not literally so at Christ's crucifixion, when the sun withdrew his light, when the earth quaked, and the rocks were rent? These visible commotions in heaven and earth were, to a certain extent, fulfillments of the prophecy. But the apostle takes a wider scope, and explains the prediction spiritually, as referring to the shaking and consequent removing of the Levitical dispensation.

This interpretation of the apostle will form the groundwork of our subject, in which there are five distinguishing features.

- I. The removing of those things which may be shaken.
- II. The remaining of those things which cannot be shaken.
- III. The receiving of a kingdom which cannot be moved.
- IV. The holding it fast by the power of divine grace.

V. The fruits and effects that spring out of receiving and holding an immovable kingdom.

I must ask your attention this evening. The links in this chain are so very closely connected, that unless you give me your attention you will perhaps be hardly able to see the beauty and blessedness of the subject brought by the apostle before us.

I. The apostle lays it down as a fundamental axiom that that which is shaken, or may be shaken, is to be removed. You will perceive that I adopt both the rendering of the text and the reading in the margin. The text reads, "are shaken:" the margin, "may be shaken." Both are good, but the latter is more extensive in meaning. Now, this principle is of great extent and wide application. It holds good in the things of time and sense. An earthquake takes place: buildings are shaken; a rent is made in the wall of some public edifice. That rent speaks to the eye, and says, "This wall must be taken down; it endangers the passers by." A bridge shakes as you pass over it. It is unsafe: it must be removed and a new one built. How simple, and yet how universal is the principle! Whatever is shaken or may be shaken is unstable; whatever is unstable may be, must be, removed. When God then shook the heavens they were to be removed. But what heavens? Where God dwells in glory? No. This heaven can neither be shaken nor removed. But the typical heaven, the temple with all its rites and sacrifices, the framework of the Levitical dispensation, could be both shaken and removed. The holy of holies was a type of heaven; and that sanctuary was shaken when the veil across it was rent asunder. Its holy privacy was then shaken, and its sacred contents laid bare. When Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, His train filled the temple, evidently showing that the temple was the type and representation of heaven, God dwelling mystically there between the cherubim. This typical heaven, therefore, was first shaken at the crucifixion of Christ, and by the Romans forty years afterwards removed by fire.

i. But we may extend the axiom laid down by the apostle and apply it to a variety of things, for it admits of a very wide application. Take it thus, "Whatever may be shaken is to be removed." Now apply this fundamental principle to every earthly good.

1. Let it be health. Cannot that be shaken? Broken health, shattered nerves, a shaken frame; these are words in everyday use. The shaking of the tent pole and the flapping of the canvas show that it is not a fixture. Thus Paul speaks of the present body as a tent or tabernacle;

but of the future, the glorified body, as a "building" (2 Cor. v. 1). Every ache, twinge, or pain, every sickness or sore is a shaking of the tent pole, a flapping of the canvas, certain marks that it is to be removed.

2. Look again at property of every kind, little or much, from the wealthy capitalist to the toiling stitch-woman. It is all shaking, fluctuating, wavering with every breath. A bank failing ruins hundreds; a change of fashions, a factory burnt down, a sudden rise of prices, throws thousands out of employment.

3. Take again our dearest natural comforts, our social ties, wife and children, house and home. What a shaking of these idols, these household gods, when death comes in at the door and bears away our own flesh and blood to the cold, silent grave. But what is there which may not be shaken? Long friendships, family connections, mutual confidence, the highest natural integrity, and the finest moral character, aye, the noblest intellect and the most powerful mind may all become a wreck and a ruin, fit only to be removed and taken away like the rubbish of a fallen house.

ii. But we may carry the axiom a step further still. The apostle applies it to the shaking and consequent removal of the Jewish heaven, the temple at Jerusalem, and that form of ritual and ceremonial worship which Moses introduced. So now there is a legal religion, a ceremonial lip-service, a pharisaic self-righteousness, a form of godliness which, in the case of God's children, He first shakes, then removes and takes away this legal religion. He shakes as He shook Mount Sinai, by the law. The wall built upon a sandy foundation and daubed over with untempered mortar is rent by the stormy wind and overflowing shower, and brought down to the ground (Ezek. xiii. 10-14). What is the rubbish then fit for but, like the leprous house, to be carted away?

iii. But carry the principle farther still. Natural faith, high or low, Calvinistic or Arminian, sound in the letter of truth or unsound, if it be but natural can be shaken, and is to be shaken that it may be removed. It will do for fair weather, but not for foul; stands firm in a calm, but gives way in a storm. So with natural hope. It is with it as Bildad describes, Job viii. 14, 15: "Whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be a spider's web. He shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand: he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure." The same is true of the whole of a fleshly religion, root and branch. When the Lord takes the soul in hand, He shakes the whole tree, shivers the

stem, breaks off the branches, overthrows it from the roots, hacks up the stump, and carries it away.

But why all this? Because there must be a removing of the "things that are made." A made religion—man's own handiwork, manufactured to order by earthly fingers, has no place in the kingdom of God. Vital godliness, the religion which saves the soul, is not made but given; the donation of God, not the fabric of man. It is like the temple at Jerusalem, and the temple of Christ's body. The one was made by human hands, therefore to be shaken and taken away. The other was not made by hands and therefore eternal and immortal. So there is a religion made by hands, and a religion not made by hands; the one is shaken, the other immovable; the one falls, the other stands; the one is taken away, the other lives throughout eternity.

II. We pass on, therefore, to consider that branch of our subject which stands in diametrical opposition to the point we have been thus far handling, the remaining of those things which cannot be shaken.

The foundation of this vital truth rests on an axiom as broad and as wide as the foregoing. There are things which can be shaken, and there are things which cannot be shaken; the things which can be shaken are to be removed, the things which cannot be shaken are to remain. It is true in nature as in grace. To be shaken implies inherent weakness, therefore decay, therefore removal; not to be shaken implies inherent strength, therefore firmness, therefore fixedness. But what are the things in divine matters which cannot be shaken? We will, with God's blessing, look at a few of them.

i. "The everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure" is one of those things which cannot be shaken. The counsels of the eternal Three in One, with the fixed decrees before the world had a being or time an existence, cannot be moved to and fro by the restless waves of chance or change. As well might a mountain be moved by the mists round its head as the eternal purposes of God by the breath of man. "He is in one mind, and who can turn Him? "I am the Lord; I change not."

ii. The finished work of Christ is another of those things which cannot be shaken. Did He not say with expiring lips, "It is finished"? Almost His last words were, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." Hence it was prophesied of Him that He should "bring in everlasting righteousness," which He did when He obeyed the law and died under its curse. Of this finished work of the Son of God we may

indeed say, "Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever; nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it." It is a perfect work, a finished salvation, a complete redemption. Nothing can shake, alter, or disannul it, and therefore it remaineth.

iii. The work of God upon the soul, the kingdom of grace set up in the heart, is one of those things which cannot be shaken. But you say, "I am very often shaken as to the reality of the work of grace on my soul." That may be, but your being shaken as to the reality of it does not shake the thing itself, that is, assuming the work to be real. Your apprehensions do not alter divine realities. If there is a work of grace begun upon your soul, it is begun; if it is being carried on, it is being carried on; and if God the Holy Spirit has planted His fear in your soul, He has planted it. These may seem commonplace truisms, but they are not. I merely put them in this form to set the matter in a clearer light. What I want to show you is that the work of grace is for eternity, and therefore cannot be shaken by the storms of time. Doubts and fears, therefore, which spring out of an unbelieving heart, as mushrooms from a meadow or fogs from a fen, cannot destroy what God has wrought. "I will work," He says, "and none shall let (or hinder) it." "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible."

iv. But not only does the work of grace, viewed as a whole, remain unshaken and unremoved, but its component parts also cannot be overthrown and taken away. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance," that is, on His part; in other words, He never repents of having bestowed a gift, and therefore never recalls it.

1. Take for instance faith. This is the gift of God, therefore never taken away. Nay, more, it is never really shaken—at least, never shaken as false faith is shaken, so as to be removed. Let me explain my meaning a little more clearly and fully by a figure. Here are two trees in a park; the one dead, root and branch; the other living, stem and bough. A storm comes—the one falls with a crash: the other is shaken, but not moved from its place. It bows for a moment before the wind, but leaps back uninjured when the storm has passed by. The dead tree is now chopped up and taken away; the living tree remains clothed with foliage and fruit. Or it may be that the fruit is shaken off, and only the tree remains firm. So the fruits of faith, as joy, peace, confidence, assurance, communion, may be shaken and seem to fall off their parent tree, and yet faith itself be unmoved. This is a nice point and

requires delicate handling; but I believe my assertion is substantially true. Look at it a little more closely, and I think you will see it must be so.

Say a man has false faith. It is shaken. Who has shaken it? God. Why? That He may take it away. Say a man has true faith. It is shaken. Who shakes it? Not God, but unbelief. God tried Abraham's faith, but did not take it away. If true faith could be shaken in the same way that false faith is shaken, how would they differ, and how would a living faith be superior to a dead one? We read of some that "they believe for a time and then fall away;" of others, that they "receive the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls." Saul and Judas had the faith of the former; David and Peter the faith of the latter. They all were shaken; but the two first, like the dead tree, fell to rise no more; the two latter, like the living tree, sprang back to their place.

2. So with a good hope through grace. It may be deeply tried, and the heart may be moved, like Israel's of old, "as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind." Nay, under fits of despondency and unbelief, a child of God may say with Jeremiah, "My hope is perished from the Lord;" or with Job, "My hope hath He removed like a tree." But it is not really so. It is a fruit and grace of the Spirit, and therefore abideth; as Paul says, "Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three."

3. Love, therefore, for the same reason cannot be shaken. It may be most sharply tried; nay, at times seem almost extinct, be covered up with ashes; but it never can perish out of a believer's heart. The apostle therefore says, "Charity," or, as the word means, love, "never faileth."

4. So the testimonies which God bestows on the soul, the promises which He applies, the tokens that He gives for good, the smiles of His countenance, the visitations of His presence, are things which abide. They are not shaken by the earthquakes of the law. If they could be thus shaken, it would show they were "things which were made." But they are not made, but given. Fleshly hands never wrought them; earthly fingers never wove them; the hammer of creature strength never forged them on the anvil of human merit.

Can you not see the line which thus divides the things that are shaken from the things which are not shaken? The things shaken are those which are made; the things not shaken are those which are given. To sum up the whole in one word, the religion of man is made, therefore

shaken, therefore taken away; the religion of God is given, therefore unshaken, therefore abiding for evermore.

III. But we pass on to our third point—The way in which this unshaken kingdom is received.

I am always very unwilling to drop a word against our translation, it is so excellent; but I think if our translators had preserved the same word here, as is the case in the original, it would have been better.

Suppose we read it thus—"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken;" what a sweet connexion there now is with the preceding verse! Now take the whole connexion—"And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken." There is the connection at once—it is "the kingdom" which cannot be shaken. And what kingdom? The kingdom of grace here, the kingdom of glory hereafter; the kingdom which is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;" the kingdom of which the Lord Jesus Christ is Head and Sovereign. This is the kingdom which cannot be shaken.

Earthly crowns fall from the heads of monarchs; worldly comforts wither and die; temporal prospects are beclouded; all that the world calls happiness how rent it is to the very foundations, and how soon all we see will be removed like a shepherd's tent! But there is a kingdom which cannot be moved, a kingdom of present grace in the heart established there by the hand of God, and a kingdom of future glory in which the kingdom of grace opens up and terminates.

But this kingdom is to be received. "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved." It is not worked for, nor worked into, but received as God's own gift. This throws a light upon what I have been endeavouring to establish—the difference between a made religion and a given religion, between works and grace. The people of God are, therefore, called by the Lord "the children of the kingdom," and by James, "heirs of the kingdom." This kingdom they receive by faith. How did our queen [Victoria] receive her kingdom? Her uncle died; she was the legal heir, and she succeeded to the kingdom by way of right. But when did she receive it? Tidings were brought her—"the king is dead;" she believed the message, and by believing it she received the kingdom which was now hers, into her heart. So in grace. God's children are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. But though heirs

they are often kept out of the kingdom by their unbelieving fears. They cannot rise up into the dignity and privilege of being kings and priests unto God. But a message from the Lord breaks in upon their hearts. There is some discovery and manifestation of the Lord Jesus. He is received into the soul as the Christ of God. In receiving Him there is a receiving of the kingdom.

Look at the prodigal. He returned to his father's house barefooted and in rags. What did his father do? Did he turn his face away as justly incensed at his base conduct? No; but he fell on his neck and kissed him, and said to the servants, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." But how passive in all this was the prodigal! All he did was to receive what was given. His shoulders received the robe; his finger received the ring; his feet received the shoes; and when the fatted calf was dressed, his mouth received the meat. So a child of God receives the kingdom which cannot be shaken. But how? By faith. Faith embraces what God reveals, takes hold of what God applies, and receives what God gives.

But do you not see how needful it is for the things which are shaken to be removed that the kingdom which cannot be shaken may remain? There is no room in the heart for the kingdom of grace whilst Self sits on his lordly throne. Legality, self-righteousness, and fleshly holiness are as great barriers to receiving Christ into the heart as sin and profanity. But let proud pharisaic self be shaken to the very centre; let the sinner quake before God; let the condemning law come into the conscience burning up all his righteousness; let him tremble at the wrath to come; and under a sense of condemnation let his legal hopes flee away like smoke out of the chimney, or chaff from the summer threshing-floor; then let there be some discovery of the Lord Jesus, how he receives the Saviour!—receives Him, as Hart says, "in his best room." Christ is King and Head in Zion; therefore, in receiving Christ, His precepts are received as well as His promises. A kingdom without laws is as great an absurdity as a king without subjects. There is an "obeying the gospel" as well as a believing it; receiving a Lord to rule as well as a Saviour to save. The dew and rain which water the earth make it bring forth and bud; and the same grace which pardons sin subdues it.

This, then, is the kingdom which cannot be shaken. We may be shaken, and are; but that is not the shaking of the kingdom. You may have all your money in a bank, and may have some apprehension whether the bank be secure. Do your fears make the bank insolvent? No more than your confidence makes it safe. So it is in grace. You may

have fears, misgivings, and apprehensions; but the kingdom remains the same. Misgivings and suspicions do not alter facts. If God has wrought a work in your soul He has wrought it; and if He has given you faith, and hope, and love, He has given you these graces of the Spirit. These are decisive realities. What I may feel, or what I may fear, does not alter them. The soul may be in darkness, love cold, and the things of God out of sight. But they are there. I may stand upon Hampstead Heath and look towards St. Paul's; but it is so covered with smoke and fog that I cannot see it. My not seeing the dome does not sweep it into the river. Let the sun break out, the dome stands forth in all its noble proportions. So if the Lord has ever done anything for your soul, be it much or little, if He has given you one grain of grace, raised up one ray of hope, or shed abroad one beam of love, the kingdom is there; your eye may be dim, mists and fogs may obscure your view; but when the Sun shines, as shine it will, it will stand forth in all its reality and beauty.

IV. We pass on to the fourth point—the way in which the kingdom is held fast. I adopt the marginal reading, which is often most correct, and certainly best here: "We receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us hold fast grace." There is a holding fast grace, as the Lord speaks to the church of Philadelphia: "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." "Hold fast," says the apostle, "that which is good." If we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope "firm unto the end." So here—"let us hold fast grace." Why? Because if we have grace, though we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, yet we shall find many, very many things, which will try that grace, and seem as though they would take it utterly away. The same grace, then, whereby the kingdom is received is needful to hold that kingdom fast. The same favour of God that bestowed the gift is needful to retain the gift; and the same blessed Spirit who brings the kingdom into the soul must maintain that kingdom which He has set up.

Here is the mystery; here comes the trial of faith. The soul says, "Have I not received Christ? Was there not a time, a blessed time in my experience, when He was manifested to me? Then I received Him as the Christ of God. I felt Him precious, and He was near and dear to my heart. But now He is gone; His presence is not enjoyed; the manifestations of His love are withheld." Now, what need of faith to believe that the Lord did reveal Himself! Unbelief says, "It was all a delusion." Infidelity whispers, "It was all mere excitement of the natural mind." Doubts suggest themselves; fears begin to work;

misgivings haunt the soul; Satan distresses the mind; and all well-nigh seems gone.

Now what do we need? Grace, and especially the grace of faith to hold fast what has been received. This is the fight, the conflict, the trial of faith. In receiving, faith is as it were passive; but in holding fast, it is active. There is no trial of faith in taking what God gives; the trial is to keep it when sin and Satan would snatch it out of the hand.

Some allow that grace is freely given, but that when given, it is, as it were, self-sustaining. When I see a stone suspend itself in the air, I shall credit the self-sustaining power of grace. Faith is said in Scripture to be "of the operation of God;" and those who are kept, are "kept by the power of God." The same grace which gave faith must maintain faith. The same grace which inspired hope must maintain hope. The same grace which shed abroad love must keep that love warm in the heart. All is of grace from first to last. Did Satan never tempt you to give up all, to abandon your profession, desert your place of worship, resign your church membership, if you are a member of a church, and cast away your very hope? But why have you not done all this? You would have done so if God had not given you grace to withstand the temptation. Have you not been tempted to plunge into sin? Have you not been tempted a thousand times to believe that there was nothing done in your soul by the power of God? What has kept you so long to the word of the testimony, to the throne of mercy, to hearing the truth, to a profession of the holy name of Jesus? Grace. As Paul says: "By the grace of God I am what I am." Now what is the main point? To believe in spite of unbelief; to hope in spite of despondency; to love in spite of coldness and even enmity; to pray though no answer come; to hear, though rarely blessed; to search the Scriptures, though you rarely find comfort in them. Here is the trial of faith, still to go on faint yet pursuing, and holding fast by grace that which grace has bestowed.

V. But see the fruits and effects which spring out of all this. The child of God cannot always, nor often, see his own grace; he can see it in others, and they may see it in him; but he seems more ready to believe in the reality of their religion than of his own. Why is this? Because there is so much in him opposed to grace; and looking at this, he says, "Can I have grace? Should I be what I am'? Should I act as I do'? Would my heart be so carnal and sensual? Would my lusts and passions be so strong? Would my temptations be so powerful, had I grace'?" Here then to help poor doubters we need some marks and evidences of the inward possession of grace. Two are specially

mentioned here—"Reverence and godly fear." Can you not find these sister graces in your heart? Have you no reverence towards God? When you come before Him in secret prayer is there no reverence of His Great Majesty? Here is a mark of grace. Does it never wound your heart to hear God's name blasphemed? Is presumption a sin which you very much dread? Would you be anything sooner than be a hypocrite? Do you see and feel the infinite disparity between you, a vile and polluted sinner, and Him, a pure and holy Jehovah?

And have you no godly fear? Fear of offending the great God of heaven? Search and sound your heart to the bottom, and see if there be not godly fear working in your soul. If you have backslidden, is there no contrition, sorrow, repentance? These are the fruits of godly fear; and God is served acceptably when He is served reverently, and when godly fear is in exercise. If you have one grain of holy reverence, one spark of godly fear, you are a Christian, a child of God, an heir of glory, and have received a kingdom which cannot be moved.

But you say, and I say with you—"Would to God I were more spiritual, heavenly-minded, and that my heart was more set on things above where Jesus sits at the right hand of God." Well, these things are very desirable. I can speak for myself and some of you, that we have enjoyed these things and felt their sweet reality. But we are not always nor often here. We have an earthly heart, a corrupt flesh which lusts against the Spirit, so that we cannot do the things that we would. Still with all this there may be in a child of God features and marks of grace. Now just trace out if you can the work of grace upon your soul, and see whether there be not a chain with these several links. First a shaking; then a removing; then a receiving; then a holding fast; then a serving God from whom all these come with reverence and godly fear—five precious links and all closely joined together.

Thus grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, and all redounds to the praise, honour and glory of a triune Jehovah.