

## **Hold Fast!**

### **By David Feddes**

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, <sup>25</sup> not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:19-25)

The main message of Hebrews is this: Jesus is greater. It speaks of angels and says Jesus is greater. It speaks of Moses and says Jesus is greater. It speaks of the old priesthood and the sacrifices and says Jesus is greater as a priest and as a sacrifice. Again and again, Hebrews insists that Jesus is greater, and his blood has made us right with God through faith.

### **Respond**

- Draw near
- Hold fast
- Stir up

As Hebrews emphasizes again and again the greatness of Jesus, it also urges us again and again to respond. For instance, "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3). Here in chapter 10, we have one of those calls to respond. Since God has done such things for us in Jesus, what do we do? We draw near. We hold fast. We stir up.

We're going to focus especially on "hold fast," but I want to put that in the context of the larger passage.

### ***Draw near***

Since we have someone so wonderful as Jesus and since we have confidence in him, we are invited to draw near. We should come to God in worship and prayer and come right into the throne room, into the holy places, into the Holy of Holies. His body like the veil or curtain of the temple that was torn. Jesus' body was torn, and in the tearing of his body, Jesus opened up the heavenly Holy of Holies so that you and I can go in and have confidence that God welcomes us, and know that God receives us.

In Christ we have a way into God's presence, and we have a great priest over the house of God. So let us draw near with a true heart, a sincere heart, with full assurance of faith. We don't have to worry that God is going to drive us away. When we come to God on the merits of Jesus and his blood, God welcomes us and says, "Come on in."

Our hearts have been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience. Our bodies have been washed with pure water, a reference to baptism: baptism of the body with water, but more than that, baptism of the heart, a sprinkling that cleanses the heart.

Since we have all of that, draw near. When we draw near to God, that has a tremendous impact on us. Holding fast depends on first drawing near. The instruction to draw near to God comes before the urgent summons to hold fast to him, to the confession, to the faith. We've got to get close to God. So a life of prayer, a life of worship, a life of seeking God and of coming closer and closer to him through Jesus is the key to holding fast.

You're going to get weak. Your grip will weaken severely if you're not long in God's presence. And your ability also to help other people to walk with God depends so much on your own walk with him.

What happened in Old Testament times when a priest went into the Holy of Holies? One thing that happened when he went into the Holy Place and then the Most Holy Place, the Holy of Holies, was that he picked up the smell of holiness. He was in a room full with smoke from a special sacred incense. That incense was not allowed to be made anywhere else in Israel. Nobody could use that formula except for the making of that special incense. So when a priest went in and then came again, he had that smell about him, the aroma of the holy.

Or when Moses himself went into the tent of meeting, the Bible says that God would come down and meet with him there. When Moses came out, he not only had a word from God—he had the glory, the Shekinah, of God shining from his face when he would come out of that tent.

Similarly, when we draw near to God, something of the scent of holiness, something of the shining of God's glory is upon us. Not only have we enjoyed nearness to him, but also people will sense that there is something different about us when we've spent time in the presence of God.

Again, that invitation to draw near is possible only because we have a true heart and full assurance of faith because of what Jesus has done through his blood. When we do spend time in that Holy of Holies with God, in his very presence as he invites us to, then we're able also to hold fast to the confession of the hope that we have.

We're going to spend most of our time here thinking about what it means to hold fast. For now, though, I want to jump ahead to the third part of the passage, and then we'll focus in on holding fast.

### ***Stir up***

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:24-25). Hebrews is telling us that there are some who are in the habit of neglecting to meet together. We need to meet together. We need to meet together for

weekly worship. We need to meet together with other people who share like-precious faith, because we stir each other up to love and to good works.

A lot of my research for my doctorate was on the decline of the church in Western Europe, and especially in England. A couple of the major factors in that were that people said they still believed Christian things, but in their homes, they stopped daily devotions. There also arose a motto among them that "you don't need to go to church to be a good Christian." So they neglected meeting together. They neglected drawing near to God.

And what happened? They didn't stand fast. Their faith starved. Maybe a few of those older people who thought that way still had some remnant of faith, and maybe some of them even went to heaven. I'll leave that to God. But I can tell you, their kids did not walk with God. They did not have faith, because faith is something that needs to be nourished by time in God's presence and by stirring each other up to love God and others and to do good works. Parents who neglected family devotions and church attendance brought up children who had no faith at all.

We need what God has given as his means of grace. So God invites us to respond: to come near to him, to stand fast in his truth, and to stir each other up in how we can walk with him more closely.

### **Hold fast**

Now that we heard the call to draw near and to stir up, let's focus especially on the call to hold fast. "Let us **hold fast the confession** of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23).

That theme of holding fast runs through Hebrews and throughout all the Bible. Hebrews is addressing people who have been tempted to fall away. They're discouraged because opposition is increasing, and some of the people they know, who are of similar background and even of similar descent, being Jewish people, are not walking with Jesus. So it seems easier to fit in with the people who are closest to them and to stay out of trouble with the rising trend against Christians—to back off and let go. They need this urgent encouragement to hold fast without wavering. Here are some examples from Hebrews and from the broader New Testament:

"Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a **heavenly calling**, consider **Jesus**, the apostle and high priest of **our confession**... Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we **hold fast** our confidence and our boasting in **our hope**" (Hebrews 3:1,6). That is almost identical to what we read in Hebrews 10:23 about holding fast to the confession of Jesus our hope. The author of Hebrews is a preacher who's not afraid to repeat himself. He does so often throughout this book, changing the wording just a bit.

"Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day... For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we **hold** our original confidence **firm** to the end" (Hebrews 3:12-14).

"For the **word** of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword... Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, **Jesus**, the Son of God, let us **hold fast our confession**" (Hebrews 4:12,14). You hold fast the confession when you're holding the Word of God and when you're holding on to Jesus.

"God guaranteed his covenant with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to **hold fast to the hope** set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" (Hebrews 6:17-19). Your soul is anchored. You're steadfast. You have a confession. You have a hope.

"Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the **word of God**. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. **Jesus Christ** is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings" (Hebrews 13:7-9). So if you've heard the Word of God proclaimed to you, and if you know that Jesus doesn't change, then if something comes along that Christians have never taught or practiced or thought was right for two thousand years, you don't fall for it. If people say, "New revelations! The Holy Spirit is leading us into this! Lo and behold, he's leading us into *that!*" you reply, "If Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever, and your view didn't appear in the Bible, and no Christian prior to our time ever saw that in the Bible, I'll take a hard pass on that. I'm not going that direction. I'm not going to be led away by diverse and strange teaching."

What does Jesus himself say? In one of his parables he speaks of seed that fell in good soil: "As for the seed in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the **word, hold it fast** in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with perseverance" (Luke 8:15). You see, there were different kinds of soils. In some of those soils, the seed got started, but it didn't end up bearing fruit because those soils didn't hold it fast. The hearts that don't hold fast the Word don't bear the fruit of the Word. So the mark of being a truly saved person, a person who has a "true heart" as Hebrews puts it, or, as Jesus puts it, "an honest and good heart," a born-again heart, is that you hold fast to the Word and bear fruit with perseverance.

The apostle Paul says, "**Hold fast** what is good. Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22). "Now I would remind you, brothers, of **the gospel** I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you **hold fast to the word** I preached to you—unless you believed in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:1-2). "Now I commend you because you ... **hold fast the traditions** even as I delivered them to you. (1 Corinthians 11:2). "Stand firm and **hold** to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our **word** or by our **letter**" (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

Hebrews and the rest of Scripture repeatedly urge: Hold fast to something and to somebody. Hold fast to Jesus. Hold fast to the Word. Hold fast to the gospel.

Hold fast the **confession**. The word "confession" come up many times in Hebrews and elsewhere in Scripture. The Greek word is *homologia* (ὁμολογία), which means "to say the same thing." This word *confession* means saying the same thing as God says. It means saying the same thing as God's Bible-directed people say. people who know the Word will say it. It's a body of God-given truth that you believe and that you declare.

"They will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your **confession of the gospel of Christ**" (2 Corinthians 9:13). "Fight the good fight of the faith. **Take hold** of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you **confessed the good confession** in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:12). So you take hold of a confession, and you stick with that confession no matter what.

Another important word is **doctrine**. "If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the **good doctrine** that you have followed... Keep a close watch on yourself and on the **doctrine**. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:6,16).

A preacher like me needs to hear this. Stick with the good doctrine. Keep a close watch on your own life and on the doctrine, because so much of what you say and do has an impact, either to bring salvation or ruin to others. False teachers and false living bring ruin and spread disaster. So all of us who have a position of influence, whether that be a pastor or an elder, whether that be a parent, or any of you who have ties and relationships where you influence others, your life and doctrine closely, because your life and doctrine are contagious.

The confession, the doctrine, can also be called the **deposit**. "Guard **the deposit** entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge," for by professing it some have swerved from the faith" (1 Timothy 6:20) There is this great deposit of truth that God gives, and then there's the other stuff that is falsely called knowledge.

### **What Jesus tells churches**

Jesus speaks to various churches in Revelation, and he tells them to hold fast. To the church at Pergamum, he says, "You **hold fast** my name... But you have some there who **hold** the teaching of Balaam [and] eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who **hold** the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth" (Revelation 2:13-16)

Jesus speaks to the church at Thyatira in a similar vein: "You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead. But to the rest of you who **do not hold this teaching**... I do not lay on you any other burden. Only **hold fast** what you have until I come. (Revelation 2:20-25)

Some people today call themselves "red-letter Christians." That phrase alludes to the fact that in many Bibles, the words Jesus spoke while he was on earth are printed in red letters, and those words are supposed to be more important than the black letters. Many who call themselves red-letter Christians nowadays take that to mean that there's a lot in the Bible you don't really need to listen to, but you do need to listen to the words of Jesus, particularly those related to social justice.

Of course, being kind and having justice in society are important themes. But there are a couple of major problems with red-letter Christianity. One is that it's heresy. Do you believe that only some parts of the Bible are the Word of God? That is the ancient heresy of Marcion, who took only his favorite parts of the Bible and eliminated the rest. If you say some of the Bible—but not all of it—is the Word of God, then you're not holding to the deposit.

There's another problem if you're a red-letter Christian. Are you saying that the words of Yahweh in the Old Testament are not the words of Jesus? Think about that. Exactly what are you saying? That the words of Jesus are not the words of Yahweh? Well, then you are saying that Jesus is not God—which is the arch-heresy. If God said something and you're insisting Jesus didn't say it, you've just bought into the arch-heresy that Jesus is not God.

Red-letter Christians tend to portray Jesus as nice and meek and mild. Some will say, "I like how Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount gave us fine advice on how to live. I really don't like the more difficult parts of the Bible." If you talk that way, I know right away that you don't really know the Sermon on the Mount. Because in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery,' but I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell" (Matthew 5:27–29).

Thrown into hell? That didn't sound very nice. But Jesus words in Revelation to Jezebel don't sound very nice either, do they? "I will strike her children dead." If you are a red-letter Christian, please notice that Jesus' words in Revelation are red letters; they are the voice of Jesus speaking to the seven churches. He condemns sexual immorality and warns of death and hell, the very subjects red-letter Christians try to downplay.

Some red-letter Christians insist, "Jesus didn't really define marriage or say anything about sexuality." Oh yes, he did! "Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:4–6). Marriage is a lifelong union between a male and a female. That's what Jesus said positively about marriage. And then he warned against deviations from that. So in our own time, in the midst of a sexual revolution, where people are drowning in contrary messages, we need to understand that the red letters themselves are plenty clear and so is the rest of Scripture.

### **Hold fast the confession of our hope**

- Unchanging Christ
- Unerring Bible
- Unstoppable future
- Unwavering witness

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23). We've seen a lot of the passages that talk about holding fast and about the confession. Let's just zero in now on some of that: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope."

Who is the hope? The **unchanging Christ**. The one who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The one whose blood makes a way into the Holy of Holies for us. He is the one to whom we must hold fast.

We do not want to do what the apostles warned against: don't follow another Jesus, another spirit, another gospel, other apostles. We have the apostles of Jesus in the Scriptures. We have Jesus himself. We have his Holy Spirit. Don't follow a different one.

This is one of the reasons why we must hold fast to the confession. Because if you know the confession, if you know the Scriptures and the fundamental truths of the Bible, then you will also have an ear for truth and also an ear that can detect baloney. You will recognize it. You can open a book and read it for ten pages and say, "That does not sound like the Bible. That doesn't sound at all like Jesus." You'll develop an ear for it.

As we hold fast the confession of the unchanging Lord Jesus Christ, we hold to an **unerring Bible**. We don't take the parts we like and ditch the parts we don't like. We can be honest if there are parts we don't like. But instead of saying, "There are some parts I don't like, and therefore something is wrong with the Bible," we say, "There are some parts I don't like, so something must be wrong with me." Then we start dealing with what God is showing us about ourselves that may be out of tune with him.

The Bible itself says, "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible says, "Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). Hebrews says, "It is impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18).

So it is not helpful to have people telling us, "The Bible contains some very fine things about God, and I'm going to exercise my outstanding discernment to decide which parts are good and which ones to toss." We don't have that option.

Here are some areas of biblical truth that are most contested today. One is the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement: that Jesus died in our place to take the punishment for our sins and remove God's wrath from us. They'll emphasize other things about Jesus' death: showing that Jesus loves us or that he's a wonderful example for us. And that's true—he loves us and he's a wonderful example for us. But that does not replace the fact that he died to take away our sins.

Another often-denied truth of the Bible these days is the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible. If Satan can get you to doubt the Word of God, then just about everything will be fair game, in doctrine or in living.

Some deny that truth that Jesus is the one way to God, that his blood is the entrance into the Holy of Holies, and that people without Christ will perish. Some Christians (or at least some claiming to be Christians) saying that there are many paths to God. It's called pluralism. Some are

universalists, where they believe that everybody is saved. So a denial of Jesus as the only way, and the denial of the consequences of not having Jesus, are among the things that are very commonly denied today—even in churches, and even by prominent teachers of religion. You can tell a great deal by how much or how little someone talks about the consequences of not believing in Jesus as Savior. Many preachers will not flatly deny that hell is real; they simply won't talk about it. They let that doctrine die from neglect. And then, after a while, after they've neglected it for a generation or so, bolder souls will come forward and say there is no hell.

A prominent person in my own denomination did that. He was the editor of the denomination's magazine for a dozen years. Then he decided he was going to leave the church and join a more liberal one. He ended up saying Jesus isn't coming again and there is no hell. But long before he came into the open and said these things, I always knew there was something off about the guy. He was always on that fringe, pushing against sound doctrine, pressing to new views, and he ended up denying that Jesus is coming again. At any rate, we need to realize that some doctrines die of silence. Long before direct attacks, the first step is never to preach the doctrine.

Another doctrine under attack is biblical sexuality. There were some in our denomination who were pushing for a revisionist view. At the national gathering, the Synod overwhelmingly declared, "No, we hold to the traditional, biblical view of sexuality, and we are not going to change. And those who do not hold that view had better get in line with it if they want to keep teaching and ministering in this denomination." There is great pressure in many denominations to change the church's historic, biblical view of sexuality.

Another common contemporary deviation from sound doctrine is the Prosperity Gospel, that if you have enough faith and if you behave properly, all will always go well with you. That's a disastrous error that leads many astray.

I don't want to spend too much time on these errors. I want to talk about holding fast the confession, not just point out deviations from the confession. But if I'm talking to soldiers and we are in a battle, you'd better know where the attacks are coming from. They don't all come from the same place all the time. You need to understand the times in which you live, and then know where those attacks are coming from, because if you let the enemy through at one point, all those hostile forces are going to come pouring through and you're going to get encircled. You do need to hold out where the point of attack is.

For instance, if you don't hold fast at that point of attack in the area of sexuality, other errors will flood in. Almost all who call the church to change its teaching on sexuality are silent about eternal judgment or openly deny it. They do not believe there are any eternal consequences.

We believe in an unchanging Christ, in an unerring Bible, and we hold fast to an **unstoppable future**. Of course, there is the negative side of that future, where God will punish those who reject Christ and will not repent of sin and wickedness. But we hold fast to the positive future that Jesus' blood has purchased for us: eternal life and a new creation.

We have to think about things differently than is often typical. When there are debates among Christians these days, I sometimes hear, "What will Christians in 20 years think of us? They'll

think we were so old-fashioned and outdated.” And I say, “You think I care what people in 2040 think of me? When you stand before the Judge who determines your eternal destiny, you’re not going to be worried about what people in 2040 thought of you. You’re going to be worried about what God thinks of you forever.”

"Progressive" Christians say that we’re always on a progressive journey, and wouldn’t it be nice to be on the leading edge of the curve? People who talk that way are usually 30 years behind the curve. Those "progressive" church people are just doing whatever the culture was already doing 20 or 30 years ago. They’re always running to catch up. And you get kind of tired doing that. You know the saying: “The one who marries the spirit of the age always ends up a widow.”

When we believe in an unerring Bible, we do need to hold on to it. Not just talk about it, but read it, and immerse ourselves in it. Meditate. Memorize. Those of us who have the calling to teach and preach need to teach and preach from the Bible and help people to hold fast to that truth. And then, hold fast to that unstoppable future of eternal glory.

One of the deadliest things that can infect the church is to think that what we do on this earth, in terms of changing the conditions of our society for the next few years, is the most important thing we do. It may be somewhat important for some Christians to be involved in that. But it is not the main agenda for Christians, and it is certainly not the main agenda for all Christians.

We bring the message of eternal life. There will be ebb and flow in how particular societies do. Some of them will be disastrously bad, and the gospel can still flourish in them. Some of them will be influenced in wonderful ways by the gospel and make some improvements for at least a time. There may be ups and downs in how society does, in how governance does. Christians who are involved in governance or involved in various social things can make their impact. But the main message of the church is the one that makes an eternal impact, that leads people forever into the new kingdom of God.

That is the unstoppable future that we hold on to. If we can make a positive impact on our neighbors here and now, if we can improve things somewhat for at least a time, go for it. But it is a deadly thing in missions when churches get all caught up in government advocacy and in trying to change social conditions, and they neglect the actual gospel of how to be forgiven and saved and receive eternal life. You’ll find mission agencies that pour 80 or 90 percent of their budget into things that don’t help people come to know Christ as Savior, that don’t plant churches, that don’t lead the unconverted to Christ, but instead try to use certain principles and practices to make life a little bit better for the unconverted. It’s good to make life a little better for the unconverted, but it is no substitute for bringing them the message of eternal salvation.

We need **unwavering witness**. We need clear, confident proclamation of gospel truth. I know that's unpopular. I know that when I'm discussing things with some people—even fellow pastors—they say, "Well, you act so sure of yourself. You need to learn to be more humble." And “be more humble” means to be open to the possibility that they’re right and that the Bible has been wrong for two thousand years.

Read 1 John. Humility is not equated with fogginess. There's nothing humble about not knowing. If you don't know, fine—say so. But don't say you're humble—just say, “I don't know. I really would like to; I'm looking for the truth.” There's nothing arrogant about saying “I know” if you do. The person who says two plus three is five is not more arrogant than the one who says, “Two plus three is four—at least I think so.”

We need to have a witness that doesn't waver. We need to witness with assurance, with clarity, with authority. If the trumpet doesn't sound a clear sound, who's going to line up for battle? (1 Corinthians 14:8) If you're just mumbling, nobody is going to get saved.

For those who don't know gospel truth, here's a word of advice: be quiet. Just be quiet. “Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue” (Proverbs 17:28). If you honestly don't know some of the cardinal truths of the faith, then don't advertise it or brag how humble you are or tell people who do know how arrogant they are. Be quiet and listen, and ask God to bring you to fuller knowledge.

I've mentioned before that those who are agnostic about the things of God sometimes consider agnosticism to be a very humble and even very intellectual approach. The Greek word *agnostic* means “don't know.” The Latin word is *ignoramus*. One seems to sound a little better than the other, but they both mean the same thing.

“Don't know” is not always a great statement of humility. “Don't know” is often the ploy of a false teacher. I have nothing against doubters, or people who are still searching, or who honestly don't know. But I have found that some people who have thought about something for twenty years and really do know exactly what they think, and what they think is at odds with the church's biblical confession—when they're trying to undermine the historic faith of the church, they will try to introduce their anti-biblical conviction under the guise of “we don't know.” We've got to help youthful, exploring, searching people struggling with doubts or seeking greater clarity and certainty. But there are church leaders in their sixties and seventies who've had plenty of time to think about their position, who are preachers or professors with doctorates, and are teaching the opposite of what the church teaches. Although they think they know, they often say that nobody can really know, and they want to undermine what biblical believers do know.

In the face of all that, just hold fast. Have an unwavering witness. Make no apology that you know. “We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. We know that we are the children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:18–21). That's how the apostle John ends his first epistle. “We know. We know. We know.” Unwavering witness.

## Hold fast in spite of:

- Urges and concerns
- Family and friends
- Church leaders
- Societal pressures

We need to hold fast in spite of certain things. We need to hold fast in spite of our own **urges and concerns**. Sometimes we come across things in the Bible that bug us. That might be due to a misunderstanding. That's okay; explore a little more. Or it may be that something in us really does clash with what's in the Bible, and then we have to come to terms with that. Sometimes we have urges, and we wish we could just say those are fine, but if the Bible tells us they aren't, then we don't act on those urges. Instead, we deny ourselves and follow Jesus Christ. Sometimes we have various concerns and questions. Whatever they are, don't let your urges and your concerns trump the reality of Jesus or trump the reality of biblical truth. The truth is above all. The reason we discover and seek truth is so that we can become shaped by it, not so that we can twist it in our own likeness.

We have to hold fast regardless of the opinions of **family and friends**. Sometimes family and friends can be a support, but sometimes not. Jesus said, "Don't think I came into the world to bring peace. I didn't come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). Jesus said he would divide family members against each other. Some are going to react to him one way, some the other way; and if they react in different ways, they're going to clash with each other. When that point comes, you have to be prepared to love those family members less than you love Jesus.

I've read some of the books by church leaders who call for approval of homosexuality. If you want to know their real reason, it's quite efficient to skip their 400 pages of rationalizing and just go to the paragraph or two where they talk about their gay child or grandchild. That is almost always the real story: "I thought the traditional way, but then one of my kids or grandkids or somebody I know came out as gay... and blow me over, it turns out the Bible wasn't saying what it was saying all along because I have a family member who is different from that." That's when you have to hold fast, even if someone close to you has different urges or desires or makes different choices.

If you have a good friend who abandons the faith and becomes an atheist, that's sad—but don't follow along. The only way they're ever going to be helped is if you hold fast. You can love them, but you've got to hold fast. As the Lord told the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel: whatever they do, you're here to change them; they're not there to change you. "I'm going to make you like a bronze wall." You don't change in your biblical convictions. It may feel difficult or harsh initially, but you're standing as a beacon for the time when the Lord, in his arrangement, is bringing them back to himself.

As I've already warned, **church leaders** are some of those we've got to ignore. As a preacher myself, it's dangerous to say, "Ignore the preachers." As a professor myself, it hurts to say, "Don't put too much stock in the professors." But don't. Hebrews says, "Remember your

leaders, who spoke the word of God to you” (Hebrews 13:7). Listen to those who teach the Bible; ignore the ones who don’t.

That means you need to be people who know the Word of God, because you can’t take it for granted that the Word of God is respected and admired and treasured by all those who are pastors or professors nowadays. It’s incumbent on you to know it well enough to recognize when they’re deviating from the Word of God. We can’t be basing everything on what somebody with an advanced degree says or somebody who holds an important position says.

I mentioned before the doctrine of hell, and the problem of false teachers. A pastor who never warns of false teachers is one. A pastor who never warns of hell is going there. Is that too harsh to say? If somebody never warns of false teachers—the Bible warns of them repeatedly—that’s not a biblical preacher. A person is called to warn people and help save them from the wrath to come. If you never try to do that, get out of the pulpit.

We must learn to discern, and then find leaders worth listening to.

And then, of course, there are **societal pressures**. Do I need to talk about the influence of government, and schools, and business, and media? Do you think that our government is a friend to the Christian faith? Do you think that our schools are a friend to the Christian faith? Do you think that our big businesses are a friend to the Christian faith? Do you think that our media—our movies, our TV, our music—are friends to the Christian faith, that they’re all out there to cultivate your walk with God?

You have to be aware of those societal pressures. At the recent Synod that I mentioned, where it was decided to uphold the biblical view of sexuality, one of the delegates objected, “But if we stick with the traditional position, it might be illegal in Canada.” Oh no! The Canadian government might not approve! We must change church doctrine to suit the Canadian government! No, hold fast to the confession.

You’re not holding fast if you say, “My bosses and the big corporation I work have a certain position. The government is this way. The media is that way. I have to go along with society.” You have to develop a brain and a backbone to survive as a Christian in this culture.

You need to hold fast in spite of your own urges and concerns, in spite of what family and friends may do or think, in spite of what some church leaders have to say, in spite of government and schools and corporations and media. And in all of that, we need to hold fast because the unchanging Jesus is worth holding fast to, because the unerring Bible is the truth, because the unstoppable future is real and glorious, and because the world needs unwavering witness.

### **Hold fast while striving to:**

- Reinforce saints
- Restore strugglers
- Rescue perishing
- Repel attackers

We also need to hold fast simply because we're striving for the good of others.

We want to **reinforce saints**. Sometimes when I preach, I'm "preaching to the choir." The choir needs it! Let's not think the only people who need a message are those who haven't already believed it. You need to hear the same message again and again and again. I need to hear that message again and again and again. We are nourished by the Word of God. I often "preach to the choir" because the choir needs the gospel over and over again. The choir needs to be built up in its most holy faith, or else "the choir" itself will start losing faith. We need to preach so that they can persevere, so that they hear God's promises and God's warnings, the biblical Word of Christ.

We must hold fast so that we're in a position to **restore strugglers**. If we don't even know when someone has fallen into sin because we've got such a foggy definition of sin, how are we going to help them toward repentance? If we don't know what truth is, how are we going to help doubters? But if we hold fast, we can restore the strugglers. The Bible says, "If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). James says, "Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins" (James 5:20). "He who wins souls is wise" (Proverbs 11:30). "Be merciful to those who doubt" (Jude 1:22). Part of the purpose for holding fast is simply that there are doubters and strugglers who can't be restored without someone who held fast long enough to help others.

When I talk about being sure, and holding fast, and being strong, I'm not saying to be mean and nasty to everybody who's struggling and to say, "Wise up, you bozo!" No. When you're a shepherd, you sometimes have to deal with hurt and wounded sheep, and you deal with them very mercifully and tenderly. If you're dealing with a leader and you see a wolf's head emerging from under the sheep's wool, you deal with them firmly and drive away those wolves who are harming the sheep. Be tough against the wolves, but be gentle to the wounded sheep themselves.

We must hold fast in order to **rescue the perishing**. Jude says, "Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them" (Jude 1:22–23). There are people who are perishing without Christ and headed for hellfire. Not all roads lead to heaven, so we need to rescue as many as we can. God told Ezekiel, "I have appointed you a watchman. If you see disaster coming toward the city and you warn that city, and they don't listen to you, then their blood is on their own heads. They'll perish, but at least it's not your fault. But if you see disaster coming and you say nothing, and they perish, their blood is on your head. I've made you a watchman; now act like it" (Ezekiel 33:7–9, paraphrased). When people are perishing, we can't just look the other way or mumble. And we certainly can't let go of the faith and take the road away from Christ to hell. We must hold fast for the sake of the perishing.

We need to **repel attackers**. Jesus said, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (Matthew 7:15). He said there are going to be people who say to him on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" And he will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Matthew 7:22–23).

The Bible speaks of false teachers and false prophets and false apostles. I've been a preacher long enough to know how angry preachers get at the very suggestion that a colleague in ministry could possibly be a wolf in sheep's clothing, a false teacher. I'm sorry, but the Bible tells church leaders that "from your own number men will arise and distort the truth" (Acts 20:30). So I can't just rely on collegiality and trust of people who went to the same college or seminary or doctoral program as I did. If they're not teaching the truth, then they're a wolf in sheep's clothing.

The Bible says, "Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:25–26). Even those attackers—there's still hope for them. You must respond more forcefully to opponents than to a wounded sheep, but even when dealing with false teachers, don't just hammer them or regard them as a perpetual enemy. Gently instruct opponents, in the hope that God will grant them repentance.

I have a special obligation as a pastor to be a watchman, but those of you who are parents also have an obligation to watch and guard your children and encourage them in the faith. Those who are elders are urged by God to be very aware of the possibility of false teachers and to guard the flock from them.

### **Hold fast**

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23). Sometimes this can get lonely. But even when you're feeling lonely standing for what's right, you're not actually alone. Think of Elijah. He was having a pity party, and he said, "I alone am left." But God said, "I already have your replacement in mind, and there are seven thousand who have never bowed the knee to Baal. So you're not as alone as you think" (see 1 Kings 19:14-18).

Sometimes it's hard when you're standing fast and others are retreating. Think of David's mightiest men, the Three. One thing that strikes me about those mighty men is when everybody else was fleeing, they stood fast. There's Josheb-Basshebeth (that's a mouthful). He was the chief of the Three. How do you get to be the chief of the Three, who are greater than the Thirty most elite special, who are greater than the rest of the army? Well, the chief of the Three withstood 800 Philistines and beat them all with his spear. That's a tough guy!

Next among the Three was Eleazar. When others fled, he stood firm and fought. He clung to his sword and kept fighting. When his fleeing comrades saw that, they turned back around and attacked the enemy. The Lord gave a great victory. Afterward, Eleazar's hand clung to his sword, and his fellow soldiers had to pry his fingers off of the sword hilt because he fought so long and so hard. He held fast when everybody else was bailing out.

Then there's the third of the Three, Shammah. He was in a field, and the Philistines were coming, and everybody else turned tail. But Shammah stood in the middle of that field, and he didn't budge. When everybody else saw that he didn't budge, they all turned back around and joined him, and the Lord gave them a great victory (see 2 Samuel 23:8-12).

The thing I love about each of the Three is that they stood fast when even nobody else did. And because they stood, it gave courage to their fellow soldiers, who, instead of retreating and running, turned back and found out, "We can win this thing." And they did.

Each time the Bible describes a member of the Three, it says *the Lord* gave a great victory. When you stand alone, you're not going to beat 800 Philistines by yourself. You've got your spear and it's you against 800. The only way you're going to win is if the Lord is with you. When we think of those Three mighty men, their might came from the Lord. "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might" (Ephesians 6:10). Or as our text says, "He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23).

The reason you hold fast is because there's Somebody holding fast to you. The reason you can be strong is because he is all-powerful.

### **Prayer**

O Lord, we pray that we may ever draw near to you with a true heart and full assurance of faith, rejoicing that the blood of Jesus has brought us into the Holy of Holies. When we come out of the place of worship, Lord, may we have the shining of your glory and the scent of your holiness upon us. Then may we be people of great courage and determination, who hold fast the precious confession, the deposit of truth in the Bible, against all odds, against all attacks.

By your grace, may we prevail. May many, Lord, be snatched from the fire and saved. May many who were losing their nerve but were still your people recover their courage and their faith. And may even some of the most determined and wicked enemies be saved and transformed and become yours.

Lord, help us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, because you are faithful. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Hold Fast!**  
**By David Feddes**  
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<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, <sup>25</sup> not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:19-25)

**Respond**

- Draw near
- Hold fast
- Stir up

**Hold fast**

Let us **hold fast the confession** of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. (Hebrews 10:23)

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a **heavenly calling**, consider **Jesus**, the apostle and high priest of **our confession**... Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we **hold fast** our confidence and our boasting in **our hope**. (Hebrews 3:1,6)

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day... For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we **hold** our original confidence **firm** to the end. (Hebrews 3:12-14)

For the **word** of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword... Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, **Jesus**, the Son of God, let us **hold fast our confession**. (Hebrews 4:12,14)

God guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to **hold fast to the hope** set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. (Hebrews 6:17-19)

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the **word of God**. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. **Jesus Christ** is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings. (Hebrews 13:7-9)

As for the seed in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the **word**, **hold it fast** in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with perseverance. (Luke 8:15)

Hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22)

Now I would remind you, brothers, of **the gospel** I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you **hold fast to the word** I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:1-2)

Now I commend you because you ... **hold fast the traditions** even as I delivered them to you. (1 Corinthians 11:2)

Stand firm and **hold** to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our **word** or by our **letter**. (2 Thessalonians 2:15)

### **Confession (ὁμολογία)**

They will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your **confession of the gospel of Christ**. (2 Cor 9:13)

Fight the good fight of the faith. **Take hold** of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you **confessed the good confession** in the presence of many witnesses. (1 Timothy 6:12)

### **Doctrine**

If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the **good doctrine** that you have followed... Keep a close watch on yourself and on the **doctrine**. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Timothy 4:6,16)

### **Deposit**

Guard **the deposit** entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge,” for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. (1 Timothy 6:20)

### **Hold fast**

You **hold fast** my name... But you have some there who **hold** the teaching of Balaam [and] eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who **hold** the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. (Revelation 2:13-16)

You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. I will throw her onto a sickbed, and

those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead. But to the rest of you who **do not hold this teaching**... I do not lay on you any other burden. Only **hold fast** what you have until I come. (Revelation 2:20-25)

### **Hold fast**

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. (Hebrews 10:23)

### **Hold fast the confession of our hope**

- Unchanging Christ
- Unerring Bible
- Unstoppable future
- Unwavering witness

### **Hold fast in spite of:**

- Urges and concerns
- Family and friends
- Church leaders
- Societal pressures

### **Hold fast while striving to:**

- Reinforce saints
- Restore strugglers
- Rescue perishing
- Repel attackers

### **Hold fast**

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. (Hebrews 10:23)