

## **Hold Fast!**

**By David Feddes**

I want to think about holding fast, because we need to know the basics—the foundational truths and realities—and then we need to hang on to those very tightly. We're going to focus on Hebrews 10:19–25, and especially on verse 23. So let's hear what God says:

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:19–25).

The book of Hebrews speaks of Jesus, and if you had to summarize the whole message of the book, it would be 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 whole priesthood and the sacrifices and says Jesus is greater—as a priest, and as a sacrifice. As the whole book unfolds, it says again and again: Jesus is greater, and his blood has made us right with God through faith.

But when it speaks of the greatness of Jesus, then you have again and again throughout Hebrews an urgent call to respond. It'll say things like, "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" and it urges us again and again to respond. Here in chapter 10, we have one of those response sections. 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. We're invited, first of all, since we have someone so wonderful as Jesus and since we have confidence in him, we should 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 is kind of like that veil or curtain of the temple that was torn—his body was torn—and in the tearing of that body, he opened up the heavenly Holy of Holies so that you and I can go in and know that God welcomes us, and know that God receives us.

So the Bible says we have confidence in him by the blood of Jesus, by that new and living way through the curtain—that is, his flesh. 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, and a sprinkling that cleanses the heart, according to Hebrews.

Since we have all of that, draw near. And when we draw near to God, that has a tremendous impact on us, and holding fast depends on 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 on.

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 of the things that happened when he went into the holy place and then the most holy place was that he was in an environment where there was a special sacred incense. That incense, that smell, was not allowed to be made anywhere else in Israel. Nobody could use that formula except for the making of that incense. So when a priest went in there and came out of there and had that smell about him, you knew there was this 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.

So when we draw near to God, something of the scent of holiness, something of the shining of God's glory is upon us. We have enjoyed 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. That's what we're going to spend most of our time on.

But now I want to get to the third part of the passage, and then we'll get back to holding fast. There's that encouragement: let's consider how we can stir each other up to love and good works—not forsaking the gatherings. The book of 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—they largely let that slide. There also arose a model 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 do you know? 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 to decide. 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—for each other, love for God, good works.

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.

Now I want to focus especially on that middle one: 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.

You see that throughout Hebrews. I'll give you some examples from Hebrews and from the broader New Testament:

"Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess" (Hebrews 3:1). There you have it—almost identical to what we're reading in the verse now. You have the heavenly calling, which is our hope. You have Jesus. And you have our confession.

"Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast" (Hebrews 3:6).

So this is a preacher who's not afraid to repeat himself—he does so often throughout this book, changing the wording just a little bit:

"See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily... We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first" (Hebrews 3:12–14).

And then we hold fast to the Word, for "the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12).

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess" (Hebrews 4:14).

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—he swore by himself, says Hebrews—"so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Hebrews 6:18–19).

Your soul is anchored. You're steadfast. You have a confession. You have a hope.

"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. 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 carried away by all kinds of 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—and they say, "New revelations! The Holy Spirit is leading us into this!"—and lo and behold, he's leading us into *that*—you say, "Well, knock me over, but if Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever, and it didn't appear in the Bible, and no Christian prior to our time ever saw that in the Bible, I think I'll take a hard pass on that. I'm not going that direction, along with diverse and strange teaching."

What does Jesus himself say in one of his parables? He speaks of seed that fell in good soil. He says that seed stands for "those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop" (Luke 8:15).

You see, there were different kinds of soils. In some of those soils, the seed got started, but it didn't wind 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, in other words, a born-again heart—is holding fast to the Word and then bearing fruit with perseverance.

"Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:21–22).

The apostle Paul says, "Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:1–2).

So you see that throughout Hebrews and the rest of Scripture: you hold fast to something and to somebody. You hold fast to Jesus. You hold fast to the Word. You hold fast to the gospel.

Sometimes it's phrased "the traditions":

"I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you" (1 Corinthians 11:2). That's the word for traditions.

"So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

He talks again and again and again about holding fast. You've seen the word "confession" come up many times. Sometimes a slightly different word is used, but the word for confession throughout those passages is *homologia*—to say the same thing. A confession means saying the same thing as God. It can mean saying the same thing as God's people who know the Word will say it. "They will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ" (2 Corinthians 9:13).

It's a body of truth that you believe and that you declare.

"Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your 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.

"If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed" (1 Timothy 4:6). "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:16).

A preacher like me needs to hear that. You have to stick with the good doctrine. You 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 just have ties and relationships—watch your life and doctrine closely, because it might be contagious.

"Guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith" (1 Timothy 6:20–21).

There is this great deposit of truth that God gives, and then there's the other stuff that is falsely called knowledge.

Jesus speaks of holding fast in his words to the churches. To the church at Pergamum, he says, "You remain true to my name"—or in other words, "you hold fast my name." But there are some in Pergamum who don't. "You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth" (Revelation 2:13–16).

And then he speaks to the church at Thyatira in a similar vein. He says, "You tolerate that woman Jezebel," some sort of woman he just names after the wicked queen of the Old Testament. "You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they

repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds" (Revelation 2:20–23).

"But to the rest of you... who do not hold to her teaching... I will not impose any other burden on you. Only hold on to what you have until I come" (Revelation 2:24–25).

Let me just take a breath a minute and mention that there are some people today who call themselves "red-letter Christians." That phrase alludes to the fact that in many Bibles, the words of Jesus while he was on earth are printed in red letters, and those words are supposed to be more important than the black letters. Those 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 the words of Jesus, particularly those related to social justice, you do.

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 parts of the Bible are the Word of God? That is the ancient heresy of Marcion, who took only certain parts of the Bible and eliminated the rest. (By the way, he eliminated a lot of the red letters too.) But when 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 with that. Are you saying that the words of Yahweh in the Old Testament are not the words of Jesus? Think about that now. 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 it and you're saying Jesus didn't say it, you've just bought into the arch-heresy that Jesus is not God.

There is this approach where Jesus is portrayed as quite nice and meek and mild. Again, it comes from not reading the Bible. Some will say, "I like that Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount who gave us fine advice and guidance on how to live. I really don't like the more difficult parts of the Bible." Well, right there I know that they are not people who have read 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).

Boy, that didn't sound very nice. But his words to Jezebel don't sound very nice either, do they? "I will strike her children dead." By the way, these are red letters. If you are a red-letter Christian, these are red letters, because they are the voice of Jesus speaking to the seven churches.

So again, I'm warning you that there is that sort of teaching out there. They want to say, "Well, Jesus didn't really say anything about sexuality." Oh yes, he did. "Haven't you read," he replied, "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).

That's what he said positively about marriage. And then he warned against many other deviations from that. So in our own time, when we're in the midst of a sexual revolution, where people are being smothered and drowning in contrary messages, we need to understand that the red letters themselves are plenty clear—and so is the rest of Scripture.

"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."

What is the hope? Well, I didn't even phrase that right. We first have to ask not what is the hope—though that's true: heaven and eternal life, that is what the hope is—but who is the hope? Who is the hope? The unchanging Jesus 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 that is attuned to 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.

So we need to realize that we hold fast the confession of the unchanging Lord Jesus Christ—the one who never changes—and 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 about the parts we don't like. And then, 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, and 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). We heard just a few moments ago from Hebrews: "It is impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18).

So it is not helpful to have people telling us, "Well, the Bible is an excellent book. It 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.

If I'm to mention what are some of the areas most contested today, here are some that I would identify. One area is people challenging or trying to undermine the doctrine of the atonement—

the doctrine of the 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 certainly true—that he loves us and that he's a wonderful example for us. But it does not substitute for the fact that he died to take away our sins.

Another often-denied truth of the Bible these days is simply 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.

The idea that Jesus is the one way to God, that his blood is the entrance into the Holy of Holies—you will find some Christians (or at least those claiming to be Christians) saying that there are many paths to God. It's called pluralism. Some are universalists, where they simply believe that everybody is saved. So a denial of Jesus as the one 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 sometimes by just how much or how little someone talks about the consequences of not believing Jesus. 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 I always knew there was something off about the guy. He was always on that fringe—pushing against sound doctrine—and he ends up denying that Jesus is coming again. So we need to realize that some doctrines die of silence. Somebody's not saying it anymore.

Another doctrine under attack is related to sexuality. There were some in our denomination who were pushing for a revisionist view. At the national gathering, the Synod said 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 church. But that is—as you well know, with whole months devoted to these issues—a place where there is great pressure to change the sexual stance of the church.

Another of the most challenged ideas—though more subtly—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 this—we want to talk about holding fast the confession, not just all the things that deviate 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 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.

I would just tell you that if you don't hold out at that point of attack in the area of sexuality, you will find that almost all of those who are teaching wrong on that point are also teaching—or failing to teach—anything about eternal judgment. They do not believe there are any consequences.

Well, 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 that 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're going to 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."

This idea that we're always on a progressive journey and wouldn't it be nice to be on the leading edge of the curve—the people who talk that way, by the way, are always 30 years behind the curve. They're just doing whatever the culture was 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 claims people forever in the new kingdom of God.

That is the unstoppable future that we hold on to. And 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. By all means, go for it.

But it is a deadly thing in missions—and that’s what my doctorate is in—in missions, when churches get all caught up in government advocacy and in simply 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 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 fine to make life a little better for the unconverted, but it is no substitute for bringing them the message of eternal salvation.

And then we just have to not waver. 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, of course, “be open to the possibility that they’re right and that the Bible has been wrong for two thousand years.” That’s what humble means?

Read 1 John again. 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 it.” 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? That’s what the Bible says. If you’re just mumbling, nobody is going to get saved. If you’re just pretending that you don’t know—or maybe you don’t know—well, for those who don’t know, 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 on some of the cardinal truths of the faith, then don’t advertise it—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 that 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 a great statement of humility.

“Don’t know” is often the ploy of a false teacher. I’ll just say that I have nothing against doubters, or people who are still searching, or who honestly don’t know. But I have found that people who have thought about something for twenty years and do know—when they’re trying to undermine the historic faith of the church—will try to introduce the old “don’t know.”

We’ve got to help our youthful exploring, searching people. But there are people in their seventies who’ve had plenty of time to think about it and have doctorates and are teaching the opposite of what the church teaches. So we need to, in the face of 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.

And 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—it might not mean there’s something precisely wrong with me all the time. It might mean that I just didn’t quite understand it yet. That’s okay—explore a little more.

Sometimes, as I’ve already mentioned, there’s something about us that clashes 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 them. 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. And 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.

Sometimes we have to hold fast in spite 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.” And he 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 him.

I’ve read some of the books on sexuality, and I have found that it’s quite efficient to skip to the paragraph or two where they talk about their child or grandchild—and then skip the other 400 pages of rationalizing. Because always there is a story: “Yeah, I thought the traditional way, but then one of my kids or grandkids or somebody I know... 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."

Well, that's when you have to say, "Even if someone I love very much—even if one of my bestest buddies—is having different urges or different desires or making 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. And 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 convictions. And when you don't change, it may feel difficult or harsh initially, but then you're standing as a beacon for 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 learn to ignore. That's always dangerous when you're a preacher—to say "Ignore the preachers." Or when you're a professor—to say "Don't put too much stock in the profs." But don't. Hebrews says, "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you" (Hebrews 13:7). Ignore the ones who didn't.

That means in our day and age, more than ever, 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 strong?

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.

So we need to learn to discern—and then find leaders we can learn from, without being misled by.

And then, of course, there's the societal pressures. Do I need to talk about 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. We saw some of it come out quite blatantly during the whole challenge of COVID. I know—I didn't want churches dividing over it. We need to have a lot of charity with each other. But there were still some churches a year and a year and a half in who were saying, "Well, as long as the government says we shouldn't be worshiping together, the Bible says that you're supposed to submit to the governing authorities."

And you say, aren't you the governing authority of the church? Aren't you pastors and elders? Don't you have any authority? Do you just do whatever Caesar says—on the assumption that Caesar wants what's best for the church? Come on.

At the recent Synod that I mentioned, where it was decided to uphold the biblical view of sexuality, I watched part of that. One of the delegates said, "But if we make this decision—if we stick with the traditional position—it might be illegal in Canada." Oh no. The Canadian government might not approve! We should by all means change church doctrine to suit Justin Trudeau?

But that's the sad situation you can get into when you say, "Well, my bosses and the big corporation I work for seem to have a certain position. The government is this way. The media is that way." You are going to 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 Jesus is worth holding fast to, because the Bible is the truth, because heaven is real and it's glorious.

And we need to hold fast simply because we're striving for the good of others as well. We want to reinforce the saints. Sometimes when I preach, I'm preaching to the choir. The choir needs it, okay? We always act like 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 and again. I need to hear that message again and again and again and again. Because we're nourished by the Word of God. The choir needs the gospel over and over again. The choir needs to be built up in its most holy faith, or the choir itself will start losing faith.

So we need to do it, and 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 also do it because when we hold fast, then 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 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).

So part of the purpose of holding fast is simply that there are doubters and strugglers. Jude says, “Be merciful to those who doubt” (Jude 1:22).

When I talk about being sure, and holding fast, and being strong, I'm not saying be mean and nasty to everybody who's struggling. 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 in a certain way—very mercifully and tenderly.

And then, when you see a wolf's head emerging from under the wool on one of them—who happens to be a teacher—you deal with them a little differently. Then out comes the staff and the club. Because you have to respond very strongly to those who are harming the sheep—but not to the wounded themselves.

So we need to hold on to the truth to restore strugglers.

And then there are those who are perishing. Jude says, “Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them” (Jude 1:22–23).

If that makes anybody uncomfortable—especially a church leader—that we're called to snatch people from the fire and save them, we need a different line of work. Because we are called to snatch people from the fire and save them. There are people who are perishing without Christ. Not all roads lead to heaven, and so we need to help them.

Some of you may remember the prophet Ezekiel. God said to 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 remain with zipped lips or mumbling.

We need to repel the 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 ticked off preachers get at the very thought or suggestion that you might think any of your colleagues could possibly be a wolf in sheep's clothing, could possibly be a false teacher.

I'm sorry, but the Bible says again and again that some from your own number are going to sneak in and do this stuff. So we can't just let collegiality and trust of people who—yeah, they went through the same schools I did, they did this, they did that—well, if they're not teaching the truth, then they're likely to be 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). That’s why I hold fast. Even those attackers—there’s still hope for them. Those opponents—even they, you might have to respond to them just a little more strongly than you would to just a wounded sheep, but even they—don’t deal with them too harshly or as just somebody who’s a perpetual enemy. But instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance too.

So we have this invitation to serve as watchmen for God’s people. I have a special obligation as a pastor, but those of you who are parents—you 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.

And in all of this, sometimes it can get a little lonely. But we need to remember that even when you’re feeling a little lonely in standing for what’s right—you’re not alone. Think of Elijah. Remember that great prophet? He was having a pity party, and he said, “I alone am left.” And 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.”

Sometimes it’s hard when you’re standing up and others seem to be in retreat—even if they are the godly. I am sometimes impressed by the stories of David’s mighty men. They’re just listed in a short passage. Most of them are people whose names you don’t even know, because they appear only there. But wow—when they appear, they appear in a big way.

One of the things that strikes me about those mighty men is what they were like when almost everybody else was fleeing. 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, 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. The Bible says when others fled, he stood there and he fought. He clung to his sword, and by the time it was over, he was still fighting with his sword. Everybody else had turned back around and fought again. The Lord gave a great victory, but his hand clung to his sword—they had to pry his fingers off of that thing. He fought so long and so hard, but he stood there when everybody else was bailing out.

And the third of the Three, Shammah—it says he was in a field, and the Philistines were coming, and everybody else turned tail. But he stood in the middle of that field, and he didn’t budge. And when everybody else saw that he didn’t budge, they all turned around—and the Lord gave them a great victory.

The thing I love about each of the Three is that they stood when even their pretty brave colleagues didn’t. And because they stood, it gave courage to their colleagues. 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.

Again and again, when it talks about the Three, it says the Lord gave a great victory. See, 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.

So 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**

Father, 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. And when we come out, Lord, may we have that shining of your glory—that scent of your holiness upon us.

And then, Lord, may we be people of great courage and determination, who hold fast that precious confession, the deposit of truth in the Bible, against all odds, against all attacks. By your grace, may we prevail. May many 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**

### **Slide Contents**

<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)