

How to Remain Faithful to Christ

a sermon in the series
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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Hebrews 10:23

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)

In an age where nothing is sacred and enduring we must “hold fast.” In a culture where we easily grow tired of things and desire something new, “let us hold fast.” When husbands grow tired of wives and wives grow tired of husbands, we must “hold fast.” The exhortation of our text today is what this generation needs, “Let us hold fast.”

Once the new and improved is available we are suddenly weary of the previous model. Although it is in fine working order, we suddenly have the uncanny ability to find a great many problems with it that were not there before the new model came out. It is amazing to me such problems, which were not there before the new and improved, could so quickly necessitate getting rid of the old in order to secure the new.

If ever there were a people who needed the message of this text, it is Americans. We are like the dog in Aesop’s fable that had a jaw-grip on an old bone. When he saw his reflection in the water, all he could think was there was another dog that also had an enviable bone, and in the effort to steal the reflection’s bone, he turned loose of his and lost it in the water. Our grip is tight until we see something else.

There is a considerable number of individuals who profess faith in Christ but do not “hold fast” their profession. They hear that Christ is able to keep them out of hell, and on top of that, give them a comfortable and prosperous life. In order for them to take advantage of this exquisite bargain all they must do is pray a prayer or sign a decision card saying that they believe in Jesus. Can you imagine all that for just a simple decision? But wait, there’s more. If you give money that meets or exceeds ten percent of your income you will make it to Forbes list of the top one-hundred wealthiest people. But that’s not all, there’s more. (Starting to sound like an infomercial isn’t it?) If you pray the right kind of prayer, you will never be sick again in your life. On and on and on the promises go. Promises of health, wealth and prosperity. Jesus has become just another commodity. This has to be one of the reasons why the dropout rate of Christians is so alarming!

For example, in the ranks of the Southern Baptists, nearly 16 million church members are recorded on the rolls throughout the United States. Yet, on any given Sunday you would be hard

pressed to find half of those 16 million members attending a local church service. In fact, you can't, because the hard data says only 32.8% attend. And it gets worse. On Sunday night less than ten percent will be in church. Evidently, people are hearing something that attracts them to Christ and His church, but with time they discover it is either bogus or the cost of discipleship is too demanding. You see, being a Christian is not some K-Mart blue light special that you can purchase. Being a Christian requires the committing of our lives to follow Christ. It is an expensive venture. It cost Christ the supreme sacrifice, His own life as payment of our sin debt. God gives salvation as a grace to the believer, and thus it is free. However, there is a cost in order to live the Christian life and believe in Christ. You are literally changed. You are now dedicated to His causes. Your desires have been changed and now the greatest passion of your life is pleasing Him. And following Christ can lead to suffering. It did for the Master Himself, and we should expect no less.

But some desire Christ for other reasons. Basically, they desire Jesus for what He can do for them. Their chief concern is how the Lord can best serve their whims and wishes. Forget about submission to God's will, especially if it is at the expense of what they want. When the cost of discipleship is felt much too severely by their soft and worldly spirits, they immediately begin to turn back and waver from their profession of faith. Oh, they usually continue to profess faith in Christ, but their lifestyle and devotion does not hold in sync with their mouths. We must live that which we profess. This is what Hebrews is saying we must do. This is holding fast the profession of your faith.

Perhaps some of you are not holding fast. You attend this place of worship to appear respectable. You surely want the best of both worlds, all that this present world offers and all that the world of religion will offer. You tell others that you are a Christian, but as far as holding fast your profession, you have long since thrown it aside. It interferes with your plans and goals. It has become too much of a hassle to try to live what you profess. Therefore, you have boiled Christianity down to basically attending church, and then only when it is convenient. Oh, if I could make you to know the fierce judgment that will suddenly come upon you, why, I would do so. If I could with words, as a painter does with a brush and canvas, I would paint you a picture of God's wrath in the starkest realism. If only I could be as severe in warning as the judgment of sin is in reality! Even the author of this epistle warns the reader in a few verses after our text what will be the outcome of those who do not hold fast their profession of hope. But not even this author, who was so gifted and had the inspiration of the Spirit, can be as severe in warning as the danger itself.

Ah, dear friends, we must "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering." Today we wish to examine this text and teach from its warning what it means to keep on keeping on in the profession of our faith. It does not mean to continue to confess Christ with our mouths, but truthfully means that we continue to live in line with our profession of faith in Christ. We want to show you how you can do this. In fact, I have entitled today's message, "How to Remain Faithful to Christ."

Just last week I heard about a young preacher on the West Coast with phenomenal gifts and with a thriving and growing church who had lost his testimony because of an immoral relationship. Friend, every one of us in this room needs to know how to remain faithful to Christ. If you have ever professed faith in Jesus Christ, then the test of the validity of your profession will be your continuing in that same profession. How do you keep that; how do you maintain this; how do you remain being faithful to God?

TO KEEP OUR PROFESSION REQUIRES CONTENTMENT

Let us hold fast the profession of [our] faith without wavering; (for he [is] faithful that promised) (Hebrews 10:23).

The writer is commanding us to hold fast, to keep our profession of faith. In order for us to do this without wavering we must understand the relationship between contentment and continuing in faith. So first, under this heading, I want us to see contentment's antagonist. There is an enemy to contentment.

The writer of Hebrews bucks the spirit of the age with these words, "let us hold fast." What kind of people are they who are quick to quit something in search of something new, and what does that say about the character of that people? It indicates a deep level of dissatisfaction in the heart. This is the fuel of materialism, a spirit of dissatisfaction that keeps looking for something else to satisfy. In other words, it is called covetousness. The root of the sin of covetousness is a heart that cannot find satisfaction and believes things or people can provide it. Covetousness is a heart that does not delight in God's being the most satisfying person and the answer to the longing of the heart. I want to tell you that the spirit of covetousness is affecting Christians more than they realize.

A man who is content needs absolutely nothing! But a discontented heart is never fulfilled. It searches for something but doesn't really know what it is looking for. It wouldn't know it if it found it. Nothing satisfies it. It tries something, but, in time, it must search for either more of the same or something completely different. It just cannot be satisfied. I ask you, are you content with Jesus? Could you be content with Christ alone if you were stripped of everything?

What is the answer to the sin of covetousness? It is love. Love is to be satisfied with something or someone. It is to find in a person a delight of the soul that would make one cease to look elsewhere. In other words, love has within it the quality of contentment. The perfect example of this is marriage. Why do people stop dating, having several relationships with other people, and finally settle on one person? It is supposedly because they love that person and they have found a sense of contentment or satisfaction in that relationship so that they are willing to say no to all other relationships. What would motivate a person to be unfaithful to their spouse and pursue someone else? Discontent, which translates into a lack of love. We can say that a lack of love can be explained as a lessening of the value we place upon an individual.

Do you remember when we were children and someone would say something like, "Boy, I love my bike"? Or "I love chocolate cake"? And invariably there would be at least one comedian in the group who would teasingly say, "Are you going to marry your bike?" And everyone would giggle. When we were young we associated the idea of love with value. But when we got older, we supposedly got wiser. We came to think that love was something much more profound than value, and we strained at trying to define love in some metaphysical terminology. But the truth of the matter is, as children we were closer to correctly defining love as a degree of value or importance we placed on something or someone.

It works this way and it is very simple to understand. The more I value something the more I enjoy it and it brings satisfaction, or a sense of contentment and well-being. We do not nor can we love something that does not bring this sense of contentment and satisfaction. The more I find satisfaction in something or someone the more it can be said I love it.

Now the first reaction one may have in hearing this is that it sounds like love is very selfish. We only love if we can get something out of it. This is a perversion of what I am teaching. Certainly the world's view of love would be like this self-centered definition. But it is a moral impossibility to love something and not gain value or satisfaction from it. This is in no way suggesting that we use people, but rather just the opposite. If you are going to really love people, you must first begin to value people. Again the more you treasure someone, the more you will love them. Why is it you could say you love your brother or sister in Christ, but you cannot say you love them to the degree that you love your own child? Why? Because you place more value on your own child than you do that brother or sister in Christ. Now don't feel bad about that. That is natural. The degree of love is determined by the degree of value.

Therefore the answer to the problem of discontent and covetousness is to love Jesus Christ supremely. If I should find Jesus so complete and lacking nothing in His nature and character, I ask what need should I have to look for another. If He means more to me than my life, why, I will hold on to Him with my very life.

The reason people who profess faith in Christ begin to waver in their commitment and devotion to Christ is because they devalue Christ in their life. Have you ever walked into a store and seen something you might be interested in purchasing and picked it up to look at the price tag and said, "Whew, they are really proud of this!?" You simply meant that they valued their product more than you were willing to pay for it. They valued it more than you did.

A professing believer who is wavering from his testimony is simply no longer valuing Christ to the degree he or she once did. We place upon Him a price far smaller than His real worth. What is the worth of Christ? Well, dear sir, can you count infinity?

Think of the beauty of a sunrise or sunset on an ocean. What value would you ascribe to it? What about the towering mountains of Colorado or the Grand Canyon of Arizona? What value would you say they are worth? My dear friend, remember that the Lord God made them all. Now then, what is the worth of Christ?

Look up into the realm of the black heavens of night. On a cloudless night with a full moon, what price would you adhere to the moon's beauty? And of the stars above—just what would you say is their fair value? I remind you the Lord made them also. Everything derives its value from Him. The Bible says that all things are from Christ and that He fills all things. How can we place a numerical price or value on Christ? For the moment you do, you have cheapened Him. I guarantee it will be far less than He really is. Why, He is worth more than all the lives of all humanity; therefore, He is worthy of our lives lived to His glory.

But the man or woman who is wavering from their profession has forgotten this. The God of the universe whose only legal response to the sinner, apart from the legal death of Christ, is eternal judgment, has highly favored them with grace and reconciled them to Himself. Oh how soon, as Peter says, such a man has become blind and has forgotten the sins that God has forgiven him of. When he should find Christ the treasure of all treasures, he has devalued the worth of Christ.

Are you wavering in your profession of hope? Then my, dear friend, you are wavering in your love for Christ. You have ceased to find Christ your joy. You have devalued His worth. You must understand, you could never devalue the real worth of Christ but you can devalue His worth to you. Why do you think Jesus said the greatest of all commandments was loving Him? This is our profession, that none are more lovely and rare in value than our Lord.

How then do we resist the ever-present enemy of discontentment with Christ? How do we keep our hearts beating passionately in thirst for Him? The same way a husband or wife who has taken their spouse for granted must do, they must stop and once again take a real look at the value of their spouse. They must rehearse in their minds the qualities that they first found admirable about them. They must ponder and cherish those attributes that bring them the most joy. The greatest joy I have, second only to the joy I have in my Lord, is Karen, my wife. Often we spend time just talking about each other and our relationship. The week before we left for vacation, we spent until one o'clock in the morning just talking about us and discovering the joy that is in our relationship.

It shouldn't be any surprise that the Bible exhorts us throughout its pages to reflect and meditate upon God. It is through thoughtful meditation on Christ's superiority and unequalled beauty that our hearts are transported into the heavenly. It is through the exercise of mental reflection that we fuel love for Jesus. Where can you search and find one who is as perfect as He? He is, as we desire to be ourselves, without error and perfect in every way.

Some of you need to stop and just cherish Jesus a little while. Think about it. Once you begin to do this you will discover a contentment that will be so beautiful and so satisfying that other attractions are diminished. This contentment is so powerful it makes everything else less attractive. For all of my adult life until a few years ago, I was taught that the spirit of discipleship was the spirit of self-denial. Certainly Jesus said to deny yourself. But the spirit of self-denial is not the spirit of the Christian life. Rather it is enjoying God supremely. God did not say deny yourself joy or pleasure, He said deny yourself the joys and pleasures that distract from His being the great-

est source of your joy and satisfaction. God means for us to have joy and pleasure. Self-denial is simply denying yourself lesser joys in order to have the best joy—Jesus Christ. When you begin to focus and meditate on Him, there will be a contentment that will swell in your heart that will make the most prized and cherished possessions not as important.

TO KEEP OUR PROFESSION REQUIRES CONFIDENCE

“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith”

We must turn our attention to a second requirement for keeping our profession of hope. If we are to keep holding onto something, not only must we value it, but we must also have confidence in it. If your car cannot get you from point A to point B, then no matter how much you like the car you will replace it. You would not take off to California in it because you have no confidence it could get you there.

The word “faith” in our text is not the Greek word for faith rather it is the word “hope.” The same word is found in Romans 8:24, “For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?” Also in Galatians 5:5, “For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith”. Many misunderstand this word “hope.” In our culture we most often use the word “hope” to mean a wish or a longing that is uncertain. But that is not the biblical meaning. It means a confident anticipation of a joyous event. I am not only saved by a faith in a past historical event, the death and resurrection of Christ, but I am also saved by a faith in a future event. I am as certain that Christ will return and receive me unto Himself, as I am that He came the first time.

So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation (Hebrews 9:28).

I do not say, “I hope He will return and deliver me,” as if I am not sure that He will. Oh no, it is as certain as the sunrise this morning. It would be easier to travel back in time and erase the Civil War than to keep our Lord from coming again. Biblical hope is that certain. And faith is the foundation of hope. In order to have hope, you must first have faith. If we hope in the return of Christ, it means we first believe Christ’s promise to return.

The text says we are to “hold fast” which means to hold tightly in possession of something. We are a peculiar people in that we hold most securely to something that neither we nor others can see. Today, people consider expensive material possessions the only things worth holding onto tightly. But the Christian is not to hold on tightly to these things.

We are a people that find our greatest possession a hope in a person. The person is Jesus Christ. Ask us what we are living for and we will tell you we are living for a hope. Ask to see visible and tangible results and we cannot show any. Yet, we will respond and say ours is not of things seen but unseen. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”

(Hebrews 11:1). We say our possessions lie in a country whose citizenship is not registered on this earth. Demand title of this country from us and we cannot present it. Once again our only title to these things is hope. But this hope is as certain as you are that you are hearing my voice.

Now such confidence has an enemy. The enemy of confidence is unrealistic expectations. If you expect one thing from someone and get another, then your confidence in that person will be challenged. Often our confidence or hope in Christ wavers simply because we place unrealistic expectations upon Him.

Someone recently said to me, “How can you maintain faith when it seems God has abandoned you?” They went on to explain, “I have been enduring a trial for nearly two years. Why hasn’t He delivered me yet? Why is He allowing this to continue?” It is obvious that this person’s faith was wavering because they had a concept of how God works that was not completely in harmony with the Bible. They believed that as soon as a trial threatened them, God was to deliver them if they had enough faith.

This type of disillusionment is common among Christians today. We are disciplined by a culture that wants to forget about suffering and hails prosperity as the only success. Today’s mindset is, if David by God’s power can kill a giant, so can we. But they forget about the ten years of David’s life that he lived as a fugitive, running for his life. We want Joseph’s elevation to power without first being a slave and a prisoner. Therefore, when the Lord does not respond miraculously or allows things to go from bad to worse, our faith can seriously waver.

Who are we to tell the Lord when and how He must work in us His perfect will? Who am I that I should direct His hand? Who are you that you should order the Lord’s time like a boss or a foreman? But you ask, “Has not the Lord promised to deliver us? Didn’t He teach us to pray, ‘Deliver us from evil?’” Oh, my dear friend, certainly He taught us to pray such, but being tried and tested is not evil. The evil we need deliverance from is the wavering from our profession of faith when we are tested and tried. This is the evil the Lord taught us to pray against. He never insinuated in the least the idea that we would not be tested, nor that such tests are evil. Why, each test comes from the hand of our God. Shall we call His refining work evil? No way!

How else is our faith to grow? Without these trials and challenges our faith would atrophy and die. Faith must have resistance in order to grow. A man confined to a bed because of lingering illness had on his sun lit window a cocoon of a beautiful species of butterfly. As nature took its course, the butterfly began its struggle to emerge from the cocoon. Its struggle was long and arduous. The man watched for hours as the insect seemed to make little progress. Finally, the man went over, thinking the powers that created this situation had erred. He took a pair of scissors and cut the cocoon, releasing the butterfly. It crawled out, and that is all it ever did—crawl.

The pressure of the struggle of getting out of the cocoon was created by God to strengthen the colorful, beautiful wings so that the butterfly can fly. But this butterfly was destined to a short life of crawling because the man in his wisdom thought he was helping the insect.

This should give us an idea that God knows what He is doing, friends. It is a fact that you can depend upon Him even when it seems the struggle is too hard and meaningless. Sometimes, if not most of the time, a trial never makes sense. Our trials are mysteries that we cannot figure out with our minds, but listen to me, God's not working to develop your intellect—He is working to develop your faith. Reject the temptation to impose upon His wisdom the expectations of your mind. Quit telling God what He ought to do. He seldom works according to your expectations. That is why he is God and you are not. Sometimes the hand of God seems to sting us rather than strengthen us. Kiss the hand that stings you because in His mercy He is doing exactly what you need, when you need it. I will tell you this. His hand will never be wrong. If we receive the blessings of life from this God, then we should also receive the trials and tests of God that come in this life. They are as much a token of his love as is the sunshine and the beauty.

TO KEEP OUR PROFESSION REQUIRES COMMITMENT

“without wavering”

Thirdly, note who it is that is to hold fast. Why, it is you and me. We must secure our grip and not turn loose. I emphasize this point because all too often folks who heartily believe in God's sovereignty minimize human responsibility.

God's sovereign design is not to be confused with the idea of fate. Fate is some impersonal force that determines all things. But there is no truth concerning fate. God rules and not chance. Yet God's sovereign rule incorporates human choices and responsibility. We have a duty to obey and must not wait around for God to motivate us to obey. We are responsible to follow Him wherever He leads, and God's not providing any energy or desire to help us does not diminish our responsibility. Too many Calvinists are like the student who wrote in his class evaluation, “I think this is an excellent class, but I am concerned that the professor puts too much responsibility for learning on the students.” They act as if God must do everything and until He does it there is nothing for them to do. What a deadly poison that has rendered many paralyzed.

We are to pray. We are to study. We are to witness and preach. We are to love our neighbor, and we are to “hold fast our profession of faith without wavering.” We should work as if all depended on us while believing that without Him we can do nothing.

TO KEEP OUR PROFESSION REQUIRES CHRIST

“for he is faithful that promised”

I am to work as if everything depended on me, but, oh thank God, it doesn't. The Bible is a balanced book. It does not promote one truth over another. It does not emphasize one principle above another. You cannot read the Bible a little here and a little there. You must take in the whole if you are to walk wholly before the Lord in righteousness. Here the author of Hebrews quickly shows us how we can keep our profession. Left to me, I will waver. Left to myself, I will

falter. “But faithful is He who promised.” What has He promised? Why, He has promised to get us home safely. He has assured us that He will help us stand, and by doing all to stand, we will stand.

Fourthly, the author, by Holy Spirit inspiration, is telling us how we can hold on and not turn loose. He is giving us the very key and joy of the Christian life. The joy of the Christian life is not us trying to live for Jesus. It is Jesus living in and through us. I know we could spend another hour on this because it can be confusing with what I said before concerning our responsibility. I am responsible to live for Christ. I am responsible, but ultimately there is a divine force called the Holy Spirit of God, a person who is living within me. It is He who works in me both the will and the power to do God’s pleasure. God is the one who does the motivating. He is faithful to His promises. What are His promises? To get us home safely. He has assured us that He will help us stand, if we are truly His. I tell you with all confidence, if you are truly a child of God, you will make it. You are going to make it. There are no “maybes” in His promises. There are no probabilities or Las Vegas odds in His word. If God said it, it is done. He promised that we would persevere. He said He would present us faultless before His throne. He said He would sanctify us. What good would He be to us if He couldn’t guarantee what He promised?

You may be weak in your faith, but you have One on your side whose faith is never weak. You can trust Him. Oh, the joy that is in the blessed thought that His hand is securely gripping my hand and He will not turn loose. Friends, we are to hold fast our confession of faith without wavering.

I know life is difficult, and there are trials and there will be more trials following the trial you now endure. Some may be even more severe than what you are enduring right now. But listen to me; God has invested His trustworthiness and veracity in you. How shall He let you perish? He has given you His Son, why would He withhold any good thing from you? Hold fast your grip to His hand, knowing that in the end it will be His grip that keeps you safe and secure. Fight the fight, yet never forget that is God who wins the battle for you. Our God will see us through to the very end. Amen.