

Hold Fast

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References: **Revelation 2-3**, Revelation 2:1-3; Revelation 2:10; Revelation 2:13; Revelation 2:25; Revelation 3:2-3; Revelation 3:11; Revelation 3:19

Introduction: The Repeated Call to Hold Fast

Well, you might turn with me, please, to the book of Revelation. Chapters 2 and 3 is what we'll consider this evening—Revelation chapters 2 and 3. You'll remember that these chapters are the subject of the contents of the seven letters that the Lord Jesus wrote to those seven churches in Asia at the beginning of Revelation. Revelation. Okay.

The letters were sent to John to be sent to those seven churches. And I think the seven churches got pretty excited when they read it, because they read a letter to themselves, and then they probably read the rest. I'm not sure. Did they read the rest of Revelation too? Quite probably they did. I'm not sure. But they must have thought, this is wonderful. The God of heaven has opened His voice and spoken to us specifically. If an angel walked in here right now and said, "Just got a letter from heaven, from Jesus for you," would you say to make sure that you read it? And the answer is, of course, marvelous. Yes.

I was reading through these two chapters the other day, and I was impressed by the repetition that I saw. And I'm going to read you that repetition and see if you can pick up on it, and then we'll give it some greater thought.

I want you to turn first to chapter 2 and verse number 12, I believe. 2 and 12. Actually 2 and 13:

[Revelation 2:13 NKJV] - "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

And the little phrase is, thou holdest fast my name. When you get down to the church in Thyatira, verse 25, and you read:

[Revelation 2:25 NKJV] - But hold fast what you have till I come.

Hold fast. That's an interesting word. Chapter 3 now, and verse number 3: "Remember, therefore, how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast and repent." And now over to chapter 3—sorry, we're in chapter 3—chapter 3 and verse 11. Chapter 3 and 11:

[Revelation 3:11 NKJV] - Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

That's interesting. Four verses, and they all include that little phrase, hold fast. It's a good phrase, but it's not one frequently used throughout the New Testament or the Old Testament. But it's chosen by the Lord for these seven churches. Hold fast. What does that mean? Well, it's probably not that hard to understand. It means to hold it and hold it fast and firm so it doesn't slip.

So I said, well, if those four verses are there to encourage four of the churches, what about the other churches? So go back to Ephesus now. Chapter number one [two] and see what we've got here. Verse 3 says, you've borne and you've had patience, and for My sake you have labored and have not fainted. That's almost similar in logic, isn't it, to holding fast: don't faint, hang in there, hold it fast. Down to chapter 2, sorry, chapter 2 and verse 10, just over to verse 10. And this now is talking to the church in Sardis [Smyrna]. And verse 10 says, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Behold, the devil shall come to thee, and he shall come to thee, and he shall come to thee; he shall cast some of you into prison that you may be tried, and that you may have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful"—I would say hold fast—"until death, and I will give you the crown of life." And you go over to Laodicea at the end of chapter 3, and you read another interesting line in verse number 19. It says, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous, therefore"—almost sounds like hold fast, doesn't it?—"and repent."

So you've got seven letters. And in the seven letters, you've got the repeated hold fast and parallel, somewhat similar phrases in the other three. So I thought, well, now, Harold, maybe that would make an interesting study, just to see what it is that they were to hold fast and what they were to fight against. There appears to be a great potential in the Christian life to fail to hold fast, to slip back, to say, "I've decided to follow Jesus, but I'm going to turn back." And we certainly wouldn't want to do that. What were the issues that were confronted in

each of these seven churches that should make sure that they should keep an eye on so that they don't fall fast or so that they don't slip away?

Ephesus: Guarding Against Error from Within

So back now to Ephesus, we're just going to take them quickly, one church at a time. I'm going to skip over a lot of detail. You'll have to remember a little, and you might even go back and read the chapters again to fill in the detail. But in chapter 2, the question is to Ephesus. We'll just read the first few verses:

[Revelation 2:1-3 NKJV] - ¹ "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, "These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: ² "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; ³ and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.

What was wrong there? A good church doing a great work, but something was wrong. And what was it that was wrong? Well, verse 2 says, "You've tried those who say they're apostles, and they are not." There were some in that church who basically said, "Listen, we are pretty good Christians. We're apostolic. We've got special power, special abilities, and you must follow us."

Could that ever happen in a church? Yep. What would you do if you found in this church that there was theological trouble within? Somebody says, "I know what the truth of God is, and you should follow me. And it's just a little different from what you might have heard elsewhere, but remember, I am an apostle, and therefore, you should follow me." That ever happen? Yep. Over and over and over again. One of the main problems in Christianity is trouble from within: people in the church getting others to follow them because they say, "We—I have more authority than others. I know what—you should follow me into error."

And the fact is that many years ago I had the privilege of visiting a local assembly like ours, and there were several people in the assembly. I said to them, "How did you get here?"

They said, "Well, we were in an assembly something like this, and somebody said, 'Listen, I am the boss. I am an apostle. You all should follow me.' And he started leading in the wrong

direction, and the group of them, a large number, left that congregation and went over to the assembly that I was familiar with."

Why did they do that? Answer: they did that because they did not want to faint in the midst of error. We've got to watch out for error. What would happen here at 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel if somebody were to get on the platform and teach error? What would you do? We would go up to him afterward and you'd say, "Brother So-and-so, that's interesting, but you know, you were wrong. That's not what the Bible teaches. Why would you teach us? Why would you attempt to lead us?" And you would say no. That's what the Ephesians did. They were strong enough to try those which said they were apostles, find out that they were liars, and carried on in the truth and expelled those who were in error. Is that pleasant? No. Is it agonizing? Yes. Would it be a terrible problem if it arose? Yes. What is the possibility? It could arise. And we must stand strong for God. We've got to hold fast what we've been taught and don't allow error to be taught. All right, so that's the story of Ephesus.

Smyrna: Remaining Faithful Through Persecution

When you get over to Smyrna, you've got a different story. You'll remember the problem in Smyrna was that they had great persecution. They were—where are we? Verse 10:

[Revelation 2:10 NKJV] - Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

What is this? This is a situation of error, not from within, but persecution, error from without. And everything's fine in the Christian life, and all of a sudden, not just you, but the entire congregation are being attacked by some things from without. Happens all the time. All over the world. We've been very, very fortunate here in Canada. Do you realize we've been through two world wars in Canada, and there wasn't a single shot fired in our country? We were protected. And the same is true regarding the proclamation of the gospel. Many in other parts of the world, many of our Christian brothers are under great persecution.

And if you don't believe it, have a long conversation with Amir, and he'll tell you that being a Christian in Iran is not a welcome thing. He was never a Christian in Iran. But if he were to go back to Iran today, he would find real problem. What do you do? You say, "Lord, this could be a terrible problem." What do you do if there was persecution from without? Well, you

might just say, "I think I'm going to hide around the corner. I may not go to the meetings anymore. I may just—I probably aren't going to talk about the Lord Jesus very much anymore. I'll just—I'll think of some way to—" Don't do that. Be faithful. Be faithful. How far? Be faithful unto death.

"I have decided to follow Jesus." How many people said that and subsequently died? We live in the age, as I've often said, of the casual. And the churches in Asia, these seven churches that the Lord wrote to, He never encouraged them to be casual. He encouraged them to hold fast. So those are two churches.

Pergamos: Holding Fast to the Name of Jesus

The third church you'll remember was Pergamos. And verse 12 is an interesting verse. It says—where are we?

[Revelation 2:13 NKJV] - "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

What is the issue here? Hold fast His name. Whose name are we talking about? It's the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, isn't it? Have you ever noticed that some people don't use that name very often? It's possible to hold fast, but without holding fast the name. I marvel. Some people ask me what happened to me. I say, "I got saved. Jesus saved me from my sin." Other people, when you ask them, say, "What happened to you?" And they say, "Well, I came to faith. I came to faith." What's that mean? Well, if you know the gospel thoroughly, you know that you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. But if you don't know the gospel that well, it maybe isn't that offensive. Most people find that when they talk about Jesus, their problems get greater. What should you do? Talk about Jesus. Keep talking about Jesus.

Have you ever noticed the Jehovah's Witnesses? What's wrong with the Jehovah's Witnesses? They don't talk about Jesus. They talk about Jehovah. They talk about all kinds of other things. If you push them, they will sometimes even come up with a good answer. They just don't talk about Jesus. The Lord says, hold fast My name. Talk about Jesus.

If you ask about the Roman Catholics, what will you find? Well, they'll probably talk about Mary. And they'll talk about wonderful things about Mary. The Bible doesn't talk about them,

but they believe that they're true. What should they be doing? Should be talking about Jesus. Keep talking about Jesus.

So a while ago I had the opportunity and the need to look up the website of a particular church that I was aware of. I think, frankly, it's a pretty good church. They've got a very effective website, and it's up to date and thorough and complete and very good. With this exception: it talks a lot about how good the church is, but very little about God, and not a single verse of Scripture on their website, and not a single reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. What do you think about that church? Well, frankly, I don't give it much of a future. It's going to crash sooner or later. They've stopped talking about Jesus, and they say good things about the church, and it's probably true, and they say good things about the Bible, I guess, but it's just they don't quote the Bible.

So it's possible to have trouble within. It's possible to have trouble without, and it's possible to take the truth of God and not change it—just don't talk about those things. You can talk about lots of things. Just don't talk about Jesus.

One other example: I knew of a person a while ago, a good man. And I couldn't quite understand what was wrong. I knew something was wrong. Anyway, I ran across something that he had written. And it said all kinds of good things about all kinds of good men and all kinds of good people. And it was all true. Just never a verse of Scripture. And never a comment about Jesus. What are we here for? To tell people about Jesus. Keep filling your name, your voice with the word Jesus.

Some of you will remember Frank Haggerty. He's a great missionary who, by the grace of God, spent his last years right here in this building. And we appreciated him so very much. And everywhere you went, he kept on talking about the Lord Jesus Christ. "The Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ." And one day we were talking to him and we said, "Frank, why do you always use the name the Lord Jesus Christ?"

And he said, "That's His full name. And I don't just want people to talk about Jesus. I want them to know that He is the Lord Jesus and He's the Christ who's going to come." And so when you listened to Frank Haggerty, he was repetitious on that lovely name, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, I haven't learned the lesson that he taught me as well as I should, but we can all learn it. Keep telling people about the Lord Jesus Christ.

What do you know about 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel? Well, you can say there's some nice people here. And frankly, if you didn't believe it, just look around and you'll say, okay, that's true. There are nice people here. You come on Sunday morning and they're friendly people here. You come on Sunday noon and what do you get? A really good fellowship lunch. Why do

people come to 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel? You tell them why: because of the Lord Jesus Christ. You might get a good lunch, but if you don't get the Lord Jesus Christ, it won't do you any good. You might meet some nice people, but if you don't meet their Savior, we can't do you much help. Keep telling people about the Lord Jesus.

What are these words again? It says, verse 13: "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is, and thou holdest fast my name." Pergamos: big problems in the community around them, terrible pressures for them to compromise. And they said, "We are going to continue to tell the name of Jesus." Thank you.

Thyatira: Holding Fast Till He Comes

All right. Well, Thyatira is next. Verse 25 of chapter 2. See what it says:

[Revelation 2:25 NKJV] - But hold fast what you have till I come.

The problem with Thyatira is that they had a lot of pressures, both from within—lots of evil within—and they had pressures on the outside in that a lot of persecution. Many of them died because of the persecution. And so what do we have about them? They had a responsibility to hold fast till Jesus came. That's a long time.

So the question is, what's going to happen to 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel? In... eighty years? What? Yeah, 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel opened the doors just about eighty years ago. Okay, some of the elders who were here first, I think they wondered and said, "What do you think 16th is going to be like in the year 2026?" So we said, what is 16th Avenue going to be like in the year—what's 2026 plus 80 years? 2306, is that right? 2306? 2021, I can't even remember my numbers now. 2206. Somebody say that's right. Okay, 2206. Okay. What's going to happen? 2106. 2106? It's twenty now, that's right, 2106. Okay. Some of you are very cooperative. You even agree with me when I'm wrong. That's very nice. We like that.

Are we going to be strong for God? When they open the doors here in eighty years, will they see people who are holding fast still? Well, that's certainly what we hope. That's what we're praying. Hold fast till I come. How are we going to do that? We're going to do that by holding fast. But if we compromise, if we fall, if we cripple under persecution, we won't get there.

Sardis: Remembering, Holding Fast, and Repenting

Chapter 3 and verse 3 is about Sardis:

[Revelation 3:2-3 NKJV] - ² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. ³ Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

Three things: hold fast, preceded by remember and followed by repent. How do you hold fast? Well, you remember yesterday what was, and you say, "Oh, I'm not really sure that we're doing things exactly the way they should have been done. Maybe they were done here at 16th Avenue Chapel better eighty years from now—eighty years ago than they are now." What would happen if we concluded that? We would have to say, "I repent. We repent, and we're going back to what we remember to be the truth, and we're going to hold that fast." That's a marvelous thing.

The context of the church in Sardis was that they had basically a pretty good theological foundation, but they didn't really care about the details of their theological foundation. Does it really matter whether you hold this or that on a particular Bible verse? Yeah, it does. How many of the Bible verses do we follow? By the grace of God, we like to follow them all. What about that particular chapter that preaches that? We believe it too. A lot of other churches don't believe it. Should we follow a particular biblical stand, or do we just sort of go along with all the other churches? And that's basically what Sardis was doing. They were just drifting along with everybody else. "Oh yeah, we all agree. Don't worry about the detail. We all agree." And the Lord says, "Sardis, you've got a problem. You don't remember that you have fallen, and you don't really repent about it. You don't even hold it fast. You don't really seem to care."

I consider that a problem of the evangelical community around the world today, especially some of the major denominations, which earlier held fast to some things, but now don't really hold fast to very much. All right.

Philadelphia: Guarding the Crown in Revival

What about the church in Philadelphia? Chapter 3 and verse 11:

[Revelation 3:11 NKJV] - Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

What do we know about the church in Philadelphia? Well, frankly, it was outstanding. Marvelous things were happening. Souls were getting converted. Lives were being changed. Probably we would say they were a church in revival. Frankly, I think I would have liked to attend that church. It'd be fun. And they'd look around and say, "See what God did? See that? Oh, hit, and—and all the good things happening."

What is the possibility for the church of Philadelphia? The people could say, "Do you know who we are? Do you know what's going on? This is marvelous. Everything is wonderful. I'm just going to sit back and enjoy it."

The Lord says, hang on. If you're Philadelphia, what is your responsibility? Your responsibility is to keep on working flat out that the revival isn't a five-day wonder, but that it carries on. The easiest thing for Christians is to say, "It's wonderful. Look what God has done. I'm going to take a vacation and everything will be fine." And God says, don't do that. When you see that the Lord has been successful, the easiest thing is for the devil to tempt you to relax. Yes, it's true. And even to fall into sin.

Probably one of the times when you are most successful could be one of those times when you're most temptable. Certainly that was the case with David. David should have been out to war and he stayed home, had a nap in the afternoon, got up in the evening, saw Bathsheba. Don't be like that. Philadelphia, God's doing a marvelous work. Don't stop. Keep going. Fire it out.

Laodicea: The Danger of Lukewarm Casualness

And lastly is Laodicea. And the word there is not hold fast. But for Laodicea, chapter 3 and verse number 19:

[Revelation 3:19 NKJV] - As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

Is it possible in the day of relaxation to be something less than zealous? You may have read it; I've read it often over the last few years. It goes something like this. The pastor of a great church somewhere, often in the United States, says, "My congregation is amazing. They're one mile wide and they're one inch deep." All kinds of teaching, doctrine, words, and so on. And the congregation are there, and they smile at you on Monday morning—sorry, on Sunday morning. But they're only one inch deep. Lukewarm. Okay. Zealous? No, they're not zealous. What are they doing? "We're going to heaven. We're going to heaven."

And the same theme is here: hold fast. Take it seriously. Don't let any of these problems come into the church. Don't let any of them come into your life. If they don't come into your life, what are the chances of them going from your life into the church? Pretty low. But if they come into your life, what are the chances that you're going to pollute others in the church? Pretty high. And if you see it in others in the church and you don't do something about it, what are chances that it's going to affect you? Pretty good.

Conclusion: Holding Fast by the Grace of God

So an interesting thought, just what's it say? It says, "Hold fast." God has given to us wonderful things. I marvel at the grace of God to 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel. I've said it often, God has sent to 16th, to us, some of the greatest preachers that the world has ever known. Oftentimes we'll quote somebody and say he used to preach here. Frank Haggerty—imagine, Frank and Blanquita Haggerty were here in this assembly. How often have missionaries made 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel their home? Well, many of them down through the years. We say, "What?"

I'll tell you a little calculation I went through the other day. It goes like this: Harold, how many missionaries have prayed earnestly for you? Now, do you consider missionaries to be pretty outstanding? Yeah. Would you like a missionary to pray for you? Well, yeah, I'd like Joe or Waldo. I'd like them to pray for me. But can you imagine a missionary praying for me? How many missionaries could I name who have prayed for me? Not just casually, but in a most important way. Three of those missionaries were my Sunday school teachers. So I clicked their names off.

And then I said, "Harold, they're not the only missionaries who have prayed for you. Are there others?" I can't remember the precise number. It was thirty or more. Thirty or more missionaries praying for me. How did that happen? Well, in part it happened because I was at 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel. And lots of missionaries came through here. And after a while they got to know my name, and they added me to their prayer list.

Has God given us a great privilege? Has He given us great responsibility? Yes. What are we going to do? By God's grace, we're going to hold fast till He comes.

Lord, thank You for Your blunt encouragement to each of these seven churches. The tragedy is, Lord, that none of them did. And all of those seven churches ultimately collapsed, because they didn't heed the counsel of their Savior who wrote to them. Lord, would You please be gracious to 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel. We want to thank You for all the good people in the past. Lord, I thank You for the thirty missionaries who prayed for me. Lord, would You keep us faithful, please? Could it be said of 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel, they hold fast the name of

the Lord Jesus Christ, and they remember and hold fast and repent when they wander? Lord, we want that. We pray that You'll help us each individually, collectively, and in our outreach. Lord, may we hold fast to our Savior. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.