

**Text: Heb 10.23**

Last week we discussed the difference between command and exhortation. Both express will, both express desire for a particular response, but an exhortation involves recruitment to join a cause rather than demand for obedience.

To exhort (OED): “To admonish earnestly; to urge by stimulating words to conduct regarded as laudable”<sup>1</sup>

The OED gives this example from 1515, “He soo exorted me that at the houre of mydnyghte he made me to aryse hastely.”

*Lord Berners, translation of Boke of Duke Huon of Burdeux (1882–7) lxxxi. 247*

Responding to a command involves first of all submission, but responding to an exhortation involves a change of mind, a willingness to go along with the exhorter.

The first exhortation of the passage was, “Let us draw near (to God) with a sincere heart...” (22)

The Hebrew Christians were wavering. They were uncertain. The first part of their necessary cure was to draw near to God.

The second exhortation calls for a commitment:

**Let Us Hold Fast**

The text is Heb 10.22

Read Heb 10.19-25

Notice the words, “without wavering” in our text. The wavering has to do with what they believed.

What might cause you to waver on your Christian hope?

- The Hebrew Christians faced persecution for their faith, ostracism from their relatives. Do you face any of that?
- What about the pressures of life — suppose you have severe money problems, and you wonder if your hope is worth it? What about health problems?

<sup>1</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “exhort (v.), sense 1.a,” March 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5235624994>.

- What if you are discouraged by those who challenge your faith, demand reasons for what you believe, and you feel inadequate to answer?
- What if you look at the headlines, see all the horrible news going on, and wonder, “when, oh when, will my hope come?” — do you waver then?

There are many things that can shake our hope in Christ. The book of Hebrews exhorts us, “Let us hold fast...”

**Proposition:** We are all called to join the host of faithful saints who looked to Jesus as their hope, and joining them, to hold firm without wavering.

## I. The rock to which we cling (“the confession of our hope”)

### A. A word of clarification on the phrase

1. The KJV has “confession of our faith” here
2. The Gk has “hope” – the text underlying the KJV also has hope
3. The reading “faith” is found in three obscure manuscripts, none available to the KJV translators

### B. Defining a confession of faith

1. We sometimes call our doctrinal statement a “confession of faith”
  - a. A formal set of doctrines
  - b. One agreed to by the “confessors” — *i.e.* the church members
2. Some uses of the word “confession” in the NT seem to refer to such a confession

<sup>1</sup> Tim 6.12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Heb 4.14 ¶ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

### C. Contemplating a confession of hope

1. The key word in our text is “hope,” used several times already in Heb

Heb 3.6 but Christ *was faithful* as a Son over His house-- whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

Heb 6.11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end,

Heb 6.18-19 so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.<sup>19</sup> This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil,

Heb 7.19 (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

2. When we confess hope, we have a forward look
  - a. A confession of faith forms the foundation
  - b. A confession of hope looks to the future

“The Apostle substitutes for the more general word ‘faith,’ that word which gives distinctness to special objects of faith to be realised in the future. Hope gives a definite shape to the absolute confidence of Faith. Faith reposes completely in the love of God: Hope vividly anticipates that God will fulfil His promises in a particular way.”<sup>2</sup>

#### D. A simple confession of hope

Jesus Christ, the son of God, who died for my sins, is coming again to take me to himself, where I will ever live with God.

1. The bedrock is the faith in Christ

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<sup>2</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1903), 325–26.

## 2. The forward look is the hope in Christ

Based on all the teaching of Hebrews to this point, the author urges his readers to hold on to this one truth: Jesus is coming again.

## II. The way by which we hang on (“hold fast ... without wavering”)

### A. Holding fast

1. If you want to prevent someone from going somewhere, you “hold him fast”

Lk 4.42 ¶ When day came, Jesus left and went to a secluded place; and the crowds were searching for Him, and came to Him and tried **to keep Him** from going away from them.

2. If you are in the grip of illness, you are afflicted, held fast

Jn 5.4 for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted .

In pagan Gk religions, a person ‘possessed’ by the spirit of ecstasy was ‘held fast.’

3. If you want to possess a property, or seize a property from someone else, you want to hold it fast

Mt 21.38 “But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and **seize** his inheritance.’ [seize = we will hold fast]

4. If you are a disciple, you are called to hold fast the truth to which you are called (or the hope of your confession as here)

Lk 8.15 “But the *seed* in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.

1 Cor 11.2 ¶ Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.

<sup>1 Th 5.21</sup> But examine everything *carefully*; hold fast to that which is good;

## B. Without wavering: adds a little extra to the exhortation

### 1. This word occurs only here in the Bible

- a. There is a verb that means, “cause something to incline or bend”
- b. This word is an adverb with the negative attached

*“So that it do not bend.”<sup>3</sup>*

### 2. Now I’d just like to give some comments from commentaries

“Holding fast ‘without wavering’ is itself an act of confession, even when no words are spoken...”<sup>4</sup>

“The factor of uncertainty lies exclusively with the community, in their tendency to waver in their commitment to the gospel (cf. vv 25*b*, 35–36, 39).”<sup>5</sup>

“if the confession wavers it is because the confessors waver”<sup>6</sup>

### 3. How do we hang on? — Without wavering

“When you reach the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on.” [attr. to FDR, Theodore Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln]

## C. The Hebrew Christians: tempted to waver

### 1. Under pressure

### 2. Is it worth it?

### 3. Plausible alternative: “could still worship the true God the old way...”

The author of Hebrews: “Let us hold fast without wavering...”

<sup>3</sup> F. W. Farrar, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, With Notes and Introduction.*, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), 132.

<sup>4</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, vol. 47B, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991), 289.

<sup>5</sup> Lane, 47B:289.

<sup>6</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 256.

### III. The reason for our commitment (“for faithful is the one promising”)

- A. The final phrase gives us the ground of our determination: “for”
- B. The word order puts “faithful” first, emphatic
  - 1. The New Covenant rests in the character of God
  - 2. The Old Covenant likewise rested in the Character of God
  - 3. In the Old, God pledged his life to Abram for the fulfillment
  - 4. In the New, God *gave* his life for sinners so they could receive it

Heb 6.18-19 so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. <sup>19</sup> This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil,

- a. The first impossible thing: that God would lie to Abraham
- b. The second impossible thing: that God would lie to us
- C. The long-delayed promise is as sure as the God who made us

#### Conclusion:

**Proposition:** We are all called to join the host of faithful saints who looked to Jesus as their hope, and joining them, to hold firm without wavering.

Philip P. Bliss wrote many hymns, some we don't sing anymore. Here is one that fits our theme, “Follow Me”

Hear the blessed Saviour say,  
 Follow me, follow me,  
 In the darkness and the day,  
 Follow me, follow me.  
 Follow, tho' the torrents pour:  
 Follow, tho' the lions roar;  
 Follow, I have gone before;  
 Follow, follow me.

When the tempter's voice is heard,  
Follow me, follow me.  
Rest upon my Holy Word,  
Follow me, follow me.  
All thy doubts and fears I know,  
All thy weariness and woe,  
Forward humbly, boldly go,  
Follow me.

Never shall thy foes prevail,  
Follow me, follow me.  
Never shall thy promise fail,  
Follow me, follow me.  
Follow me, let naught allure;  
Follow me, thy rest is sure;  
Follow me, it shall endure;  
Follow, follow me.