

Hold Fast

Hold Fast:

1. We all “hold fast” to something. (our affections)
2. Holding fast to something means you are not holding fast to something else.

Today’s Focus:

Are you “Holding Fast” or “Holding Casually”?

Are you Sailing or Drifting?

In your Christian walk, are you moving forward or are you stuck?

As we begin:

1. Our Reading: Hebrews 12:18-29

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2. The Context for our Reading: The people whom the writer is addressing were thinking of “going back.”

Why is going back such a big deal?

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Michael Kruger: “In effect...to reject Christ and return to the old covenant would be attempting to draw near to God in one’s own strength and on one’s own merits. This would enslave a person to law-keeping as a basis for their acceptance, which inevitably lead to a lack of assurance and peace.”

As we begin:

1. Our Reading: Hebrews 12:18-29
2. The Context for our Reading: The people whom the writer is addressing were thinking of “going back.”
3. As the writer compares and contrasts the old and new covenant as a way to **move forward** and pursue Jesus, we will consider our passage from the standpoint of **not moving forward** and not passionately pursuing Jesus.

Hebrews 12:18-29:

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” ...

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. ...

See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. ...

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

- Hebrews 12:18-29

If you find yourself “holding casually” and “spiritually stuck in a holding pattern”:

1. Questions to ask yourself and reflect on
2. In light of the gospel, how should you respond?

Questions to ask yourself if you are not spiritually moving forward but stuck in a holding pattern:

1. Do I have a truncated view of God?

Our passage compares:

- 1) Two covenants: Old and New
- 2) Two mountains: Mt Sinai (earthly) and Mt Zion (heavenly)
- 3) “Fear” vs “Festal”

The Old Covenant (Sinai):

Verses 18-21: For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.”

The New Covenant (Mt Zion):

Verse 22: But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering...

2 ways we can have a truncated view of God:

- 1) A truncated view of God that relates to God only on the basis of God’s holiness which leads to fear. This is what our writer is referring to with the Old Covenant.

“I must obey or God will punish me.”

“I never know if I am obeying enough and if God is pleased with me.”

“I have a problem with a God who is always angry and ready to punish.”

Tim Keller: “Tell me the God you don’t believe in because chances are I don’t believe in that God either.”

2 ways we can have a truncated view of God:

1) A truncated view of God that relates to God only on the basis of God’s holiness which leads to fear. This is what our writer is referring to with the Old Covenant.

2) A truncated view of God that highlights God’s mercy at the expense of God’s holiness, which leads to “cheap grace.”

“God is so kind and welcoming that he doesn’t really care if I take sin lightly. God forgives me anyway.”

“Since my salvation is secured, I can go about and enjoy my life the way I want.”

One more thought before moving on:

Our passage is not saying God’s holiness is bad and God’s mercy is good. Both God’s holiness and mercy are glorious attributes of God!

- Remember, the author is highlighting how “going back” to the Old Covenant and rejecting the New Covenant is no gospel at all.

- The gospel holds both together and it leads to joy (fear vs festal)!

Brennan Manning: “I want neither a terrorist spirituality that keeps me in a perpetual state of fright about being in right relationship with my heavenly Father nor a sappy spirituality that portrays God as such a benign teddy bear that there is no aberrant behavior or desire of mine that he will not condone. I want a relationship with the Abba of Jesus, who is infinitely compassionate with my brokenness and at the same time an awesome, incomprehensible, and unwieldy Mystery.”

Questions to ask yourself if you are not spiritually moving forward but stuck in a holding pattern:

2. Do I have the right situational awareness?

Verses 18-19: **For you have not come to what may be touched**, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.

Verse 22: **But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem**, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering...

The Already and Not Yet

Ephesians 2:4-6: But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— **and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...**

In the gospel, everything that happened to Jesus physically, has already happened to you spiritually!

- Jesus was crucified physically; you were crucified with Him spiritually. (Gal 2:20)
- Jesus was resurrected physically; you were resurrected with Him spiritually. (Eph 2:5-6)
- Jesus is currently present in heaven physically; you are currently present in heaven spiritually. (Heb 12:22)

Why is this so significant?

A large reason why we are spiritually stuck in a holding pattern is because we are focused on the earthly here and now.

Questions to ask yourself if you are not spiritually moving forward but stuck in a holding pattern:

3. As I struggle with things I want or feel that I need, have I forgotten my inheritance in Christ?

Verses 22-23: But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, **and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven...**

1 Corinthians 3:21-23: So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

Questions to ask yourself if you are not spiritually moving forward but stuck in a holding pattern:

4. As I struggle with evil and injustice taking place both personally against me and against others in the world, do I realize that God is the Almighty Ruler and Judge?

Verse 23b: and to God, **the judge of all...**

NT Wright: "If what we want is God's justice, coming to sort things out, we will do better to get entirely out of the way and let God do his own work, rather than supposing our burst of anger (which will most likely have all sorts of nasty bits to it, such as wounded pride, malice and envy) will somehow help God do what needs to be done."

Justice is the restoration of every violation of love.

- Anonymous

Questions to ask yourself if you are not spiritually moving forward but stuck in a holding pattern:

5. As I struggle with on-going sin, do I recognize how God views me in Christ?

Verse 23c: and to the spirits of the **righteous made perfect...**

Michael Kruger: "Mount Sinai may remind you of how unholy you are, but Mount Zion is where you find you have been made perfect. You have been made perfect because Christ has redeemed you and changed you."

Martin Luther: “The law says, ‘Do this,’ and it is never done. Grace says, ‘Believe in this,’ and everything is already done.

Questions to ask yourself if you are not spiritually moving forward but stuck in a holding pattern:

6. As I find myself drifting along, are my ears attuned to hearing the message of grace?

Verse 24: ...and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that **speaks a better word** than the blood of Abel.

What are your ears hearing?

Abel's blood that speaks, “Justice alone!”

- “I have failed to hold fast and deserve to be punished.”
- “Hold fast or you will be punished!”

Jesus' blood that speaks, “Mercy triumphs over judgment!”

- “Hold fast because God's mercy is more!”
- “Even as I have failed to hold fast, Christ will always hold me fast!”

Before moving on:

Which question do you need to bring to Jesus and apply the gospel to your heart today?

1. Do I have a truncated view of God?
2. Do I have the right situational awareness?
3. As I struggle with things I want or feel that I need, have I forgotten my inheritance in Christ?
4. As I struggle with evil and injustice taking place both personally against me and against others in the world, do I realize that God is the Almighty Ruler and Judge?
5. As I struggle with on-going sin, do I recognize how God views me in Christ?
6. As I find myself drifting, are my ears attuned to hearing the message of grace?

If you find yourself “holding casually” and “spiritually stuck in a holding pattern”:

1. Questions to ask yourself and reflect on
2. In light of the gospel, how should you respond?

1. Humbly heed God's warning.

Verses 25-27: See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.

2. Gratefully receive God's unshakeable kingdom.

Verse 28a: Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken...

John Stott: "When we look at the cross we see the justice, love, wisdom and power of God. It is not easy to decide which is the most luminously revealed, whether the justice of God in judging sin, or the love of God in bearing the judgment in our place, or the wisdom of God in perfectly combining the two, or the power of God in saving those who believe. For the cross is equally an act, and therefore a demonstration, of God's justice, love, wisdom and power. The cross assures us that this God is the reality within, behind and beyond the universe."

"Thou who hast given so much to me, give me one more thing – a grateful heart."

– George Herbert

3. Worship the Lord with reverence and awe.

Verses 28b-29: and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

"We should be astonished at the goodness of God, stunned that He should bother to call us by name, our mouths wide open at His love, bewildered that at this very moment we are standing on holy ground."

- Brennan Manning

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Hold Fast

 REDEEMER