

Hold Fast

The SS Daniel J. Morrell was the second-to-last shipwreck on the Great Lakes, torn apart by a fierce blizzard on Nov. 28, 1966. Dennis Hale was the sole survivor of that wreck. He had been sleeping when, around midnight, the 60-year-old ship started to break up amid 25-foot waves. Hale had just enough time to grab a lifejacket and pea coat—though no pants—before the life raft launched. But before it was clear the pulverized ship slammed into the raft, knocking everyone into the water. Only four made it back into the life raft. By the morning, two of them were dead, and the third man died a few hours later, with the life raft just 200 yards from shore. Hale held on to life over the next 34 hours in that life raft, in the freezing storm, before the Coast Guard finally found him, 25 pounds lighter than when the ship had sunk. (thanks to www.newser.com)

Now Hebrews 11 describes faith as the “*evidence of things unseen*”. But the scriptures admonish us, especially in these last days, to hold fast or cling tightly to, our faith. How does that work? How do you hold on to what you cannot see?

King David showed us how. He said in Psalms 42:5,6,

*“Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him
For the help of His countenance.
O my God, my soul is cast down within me;
Therefore I will remember You...”*

Even as things break up around us, perhaps as the ‘sole survivor’ of a messed up life, we can and must remind ourselves of what we still know to be true, what God has promised. We hold to faith, hold to eternal life, even as everyone else lets go and as we are being hammered to do the same.

You see, ultimately, no Christian is defeated in God’s eyes by sin or moral failure; those things lead to defeat. Defeat is when you let go of your faith. It’s when you cease to trust in God’s grace, love and forgiveness.

David confessed, *“From the end of the earth I will cry to You,
When my heart is overwhelmed;
Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”*

Amidst the ashes of Ziklag, he was challenged to let go. If you read the story in 1 Sam 30, you see that David was truly tested. All his cherished family were taken as slaves, his men were about to stone him to death, he

was already an utter outcast and fugitive from his people – nevertheless, he held on to his faith. He *“encouraged himself in the Lord”*.

Why is this important to us generally?

As I sat alone in the hotel room in a hot muggy Dallas, my heart was broken, no, shattered. For years, we had fervently labored both in prayer and by law to keep our granddaughter in our son’s care after his former wife went off the deep end morally with a number of other men and disavowed any faith in God but rather a new ‘belief in lust’. Afterwards, she had abandoned her kids and her husband for years and then came around with a law suit, serving him and his new bride on his wedding day to take them away. She had lost the very same suit two times previously but had clearly made ‘arrangements’ with certain members of another court and smugly told us that this case was basically sewn up for her.

Indeed, she won. The judge was emotionally reacting to our son from the outset, refusing his testimony and declaring him to be (while nearly screaming), against all evidence and two previous rulings, an incompetent parent. She awarded care of both children to a person who we knew would make all efforts

to crush their young faith in Christ.

How could God let this happen? Where was He in our time of need? I felt abandoned. That night, for the first and only time in my life, I yelled at God. I told him I didn’t understand and that I was mad. This was so utterly wrong and it was the little ones who would be hurt the most. This tantrum and loss of faith continued for hours until late at night/early in the morning my heart held on by the tiniest thread to a hope.

Every lawyer we found told us that nothing could be done to reverse the decision. There were many years of California legal precedents that stood in the way as an immovable wall. Nevertheless, a small seed of faith convinced me to not give up.

We took the case to the 5th Court of Appeals and after a lengthy process, gained an almost unheard of unanimous decision from the court that overturned the decision. It effectively rewrote California Family Law. Though there is much more to the story, suffice it to say that God won in the end and the kids are now growing and indeed flourishing in His Love.

Holding on or “holding fast” implies that there is an opposing

force – something that either tries to forcibly take away what you're holding on to or tries to get you to let go. That opposing force is both sin and the one who uses it to destroy.

The harsh reality of our world is that it's a war zone –not just in the Middle East but in the middle of our lives daily. Jesus put it this way – *“If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you.”* (Jhn 15:18) and, *“In the world you will have tribulation”* (trouble, persecution) (Jhn 16:33)

That means that every sincere believer in Christ will deal with these ‘opposing forces’ including, sometimes, mind-jarring difficulties that may cause you to say, “Where are you, God?”

But even then, we need to hold on to our faith, if for no other reason than to strengthen our spiritual ‘muscles’. For generally speaking, life’s trials and tribulations are both battles and basic training – they test us in the present and prepare us for the future. You see, stronger, more experienced faith leads to greater relationship with God. That’s shown in Hebrews 11 which, in speaking of the faithful believers in the past, says, *“...others were tortured, not accepting deliverance that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial*

of cruel mockings and scourgings, yes, moreover of bonds and imprisonment...” (11:35,36)

Wow! A better resurrection! Now, that’s the most wonderful of relationships with our Father.

What do you sense – was Job stronger in faith before his trials or after? How about Joseph or David? Even Jesus benefitted – Heb 2:10 says He was made perfect (or complete) through sufferings. In fact, I’ll suggest that each believer is made stronger, more complete in God because of struggles, even as they sometimes weaken us outwardly, they compel us to rely on divine strength to finish our lives well. You remember the story of Samson, right? It’s a principle as true today as it was then.

And so, to bring it home, in our time why is holding on important?

While hardships tug at our faith, deceptions and ease ‘grease’ our grip. The Bible foretold that a prevailing characteristic of our day would be deception. Indeed, people are being deceived into blowing themselves up for a false god. People are deceived into sending their savings to TV hucksters posing as evangelists. People are deceived by

advertisers, politicians and even spouses. The list is lengthy.

And the dangerous dynamic behind this sad state of affairs is that for deception to be effective it must be believable. Of course, this takes us back to the beginning. After listening to the serpent’s lies in the garden, Eve *“...saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes and a tree to be desired to make one wise...”* (Gen 3:6) She got deceived because the deception LOOKED believable.

What this illustrates and amplifies for us is that the only way to discern and dump deception is to have a strong connection to or grasp of the truth. Believe God and you’ll see clearly; believe the lies of Satan and you’ll be blind-sided.

In Revelation, Jesus told the Philadelphian church, a group prophetically identified with faithful believers in the last days, to HOLD ON. He said, *“Behold, I come suddenly: hold tightly that which you have so that no man takes your crown”* (Rev 3:11) In other words, He’s warning us that the ‘opposing force’ we mentioned earlier will take the crown(s) if allowed to. What men of the opposing force would do such a thing? Deceivers.

“... and all who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer

persecution and evil men and seducers will wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.” (2 Tim 3:12,13)

So what’s happening to contemporary faith and how does this play into Satan’s plans? Bob Beltz, author of “Real Christianity”, writes: *I fear for the future of authentic faith in our country. We live in a time when the common man in our country is thoroughly influenced by the current climate in which the cultural and educational elite propagates an anti-Christian message. We should take a look at what has happened in France and learn a lesson from it.¹ In that country, Christianity has been successfully attacked and marginalized by these same groups because those who professed belief were unable to defend the faith from attack, even though its attackers’ arguments were deeply flawed. We should be alarmed that instruction in authentic faith has been neglected, if not altogether eliminated, in our schools and universities.*

Is it any wonder then that the spiritual condition of our country is of little concern to those who don’t even educate their own children about true Christianity? Their conduct reflects their absence of concern, not only for the state of Christianity in our own country,

but also for the need to communicate the message of Christ to those in other parts of the world who have not heard this truth.

Some might say that one's faith is a private matter and should not be spoken of so publicly. They might assert this in public, but what do they really think in their hearts? The fact is, those who say such things usually don't even have a concern for faith in the privacy of their interior lives. If you could see their hearts, you would find no trace of authentic faith. God has no place among the sources of hopes, fears, joys or sorrows in their lives. They might be thankful for their health, success, wealth and possessions, but they give no thought to the possibility that these are all signs of God's provision. If they do give credit to God, it is usually done in some perfunctory way that reveals that their words have no sincerity.

When their conversations get really serious, you will see how little of their Christianity has anything to do with the faith taught by Jesus. Everything becomes subjective. Their conduct is not measured against the standard set by the gospel. They have developed their own philosophies, which they attempt to pawn off as Christian faith.

One critic of the modern church writes,

According to the Hartford Institute of Religion Research, more than 40 percent of Americans "say" they go to church weekly. As it turns out, however, less than 20 percent are actually in church. In other words, more than 80 percent of Americans are finding more fulfilling things to do on weekends.

Furthermore, somewhere between 4,000 and 7,000 churches close their doors every year. Southern Baptist researcher, Thom Rainer, in a recent article entitled "13 Issues for Churches in 2013" puts the estimate higher. He says between 8,000 and 10,000 churches will likely close this year.

Between the years 2010 and 2012, more than half of all churches in America added not one new member. Each year, nearly 3 million more previous churchgoers enter the ranks of the "religiously unaffiliated."

All that to say that a greatly increasing number of believers today are deceived and their faith, if it exists, is tepid. Consequently, large portions of the Church corporate are in retreat or in hiding. Thus, the void created is allowing an

ascent of evil in every aspect of our societies.

And this is yet one more signpost of our age for Paul wrote to his protégé, Timothy, *"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves (self-absorbed), lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers (speaking against God), disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy (literally, wicked), unloving (hard-hearted especially toward family), unforgiving (literally, without devotion), slanderers (literally, devils), without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors (or surrenderers), headstrong, haughty (conceited), lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness (an appearance of piety) but denying (rejecting) its power..."* (2Tim 3)

So what did the Apostle admonish his follower to do? He told him, *"But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."* (2 Tim 3:14, 15)

He told him to 'hold on', to not back down, to keep the faith.

Dear friends in Christ, we are living in the midst of what Paul projected in this passage and just like Timothy, we must continue to believe the Scriptures, to hold fast to our faith, to press ahead in spite of the opposing forces, to follow the lead of our Savior, Jesus Christ. This is our calling. We were placed in this time and situation for this very purpose, to fight the good fight. Don't cave in or retreat; don't despair or be fearful. The King is coming. Stand strong even if you're the last one standing because eternity is at the doors. God bless you as you hold to Him!