

1 Thessalonians 5:21-22

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Date: 10 June 2026

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[0 : 00] I thought about what would be good to teach and what would be appropriate at this time. I'm praying about it. And it's just, again, I don't watch to do so much, but I kind of look at what the headlines are.

You just see so much going on. And my only conclusion through this is that, is this true of you? I think the world is just rapidly turning more to wickedness than it ever has before. I mean, we don't have a great history as a mankind, but it just seems particularly in our time, especially in America, that it's just decaying. And so many of the former Judeo-Christian values and mores and the way we live has just declined.

And, of course, they call it the counterculture. And it's just a question, again, of our values and our way we behave, and opposed to the Christian morals that I was brought up with. I've gotten a feeling most of you have been brought up with. So this bothers me more of the pay and adultery than just seems to exist. It seems like mankind is just basically worshiping themselves and paying absolutely no attention to God.

[1 : 16] So anyway, the other problem I see is so many people are leaving church. I mean, it's just obvious that attendance is down, people are less saved, particularly young people.

And that troubles me a great deal. And I wonder, again, how many of those are affected by, again, all the craziness. Ricky and I were just talking a little bit about some of the controversy even at the Southern Baptist Convention.

And while that looks bad, even among us as believers on these issues, if you are an outsider and you're looking in at us, we're not looking good. That's troublesome, again.

So as I read about this, two phrases just kept coming through my mind. And again, when I was a kid, it was emphasized.

And I still remember. One is, be strong and courageous. I like that. Most of you think of Joshua, I think, who says those great words. And that's true.

[2 : 12] I think, again, as a believer today, folks, you really got to be strong and courageous. But the other one is this word called hold fast. Because I think that's something we need to really focus on as we see things, again, rapidly declining in our world.

And that really, again, bothers me. What's interesting, strong and courageous appears about 11 times in the Bible, depending on your translations and various of them.

But then hold fast at least eight times. And what that means, again, is secular definitions. Stick too firmly. Bear down.

Grit it out. I've heard that word for a while. Grit, you know. Except John Wayne in his famous movie, right? True grit, you know. But that says what we're supposed to do.

Just bear down and face it. And then stay the course. Stay the course. And I think that's what we're being called to be as believers. To have grit, to stay the course.

[3 : 14] No matter what else is happening out there. We have to, again, hold fast to the Lord. The actual phrase comes from a Dutch term where it was a command to those people with nautical terminology.

When there was a storm and the ship was under, you know, rocking around, that they would say hold fast. Everybody would grab the rigging and the ropes to hold on. Because obviously danger was ahead.

So what's that mean to us? Holding fast to keep our commitments. To consistently press forward and endure.

To stay dedicated to what we know is truth. To continue to build the body of Christ. To be faithful to one another and faithful to God's help. And I think, again, hold fast is important to you and I and to

the body of Christ.

I think you're aware of Charlie Hastie. The death of the four-month-old Patrick. And if you've not been to the YouTube video of the Celebration of Life for...

[4 : 24] How many have seen that? Anybody? Okay. Some of you have. And I just will encourage you. If anybody demonstrated hold fast. Patrick Hastie actually preached a sermon at his son's funeral.

And his words and his message is just, well, bless your heart. But he, to me, in my mind as I was preparing again, is he's really showing what it means to hold fast in the faith.

So we know persecution is going to come. We know there's going to be trials and tribulations. But we also need to make sure we hold fast to the fact God is still God. God is still faithful. He's going to take care of us.

I'm going to tell you something that will probably shock you. Being a Christian is not easy. Hey, you want to think about it. It's not for sissies.

It really is not. And I saw again, I read 2 Corinthians 4, 8, 10. Paul said it well. Can I read this to you? We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed.

[5 : 30] We are perplexed, but not in despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Struck down, but not destroyed. Always caring about in the body of the dying of the Lord Jesus.

That the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. True words. And that was many, many, many years ago. And it still holds true today.

So tonight, I'm going just to share some of God's word. With those words in there, hold fast. And what we should be holding fast to. Fair enough.

My text for this evening, if you want to turn to 1 Thessalonians. It will be chapter 5, verses 21 and 22. I'm going to read other good scriptures with those words in it as well.

But that will be the focus of the message. Fair enough? So before we talk more, let's go to Lord in the prayer. Would you pray with me? Heavenly Father, we thank you again for the gift of the day.

[6 : 28] We thank you, Father, for this time that we can gather in your presence. Because when you said two or three or more gathered in your name, you are among us. And we appreciate and thank you for that, Father.

We thank you for the opportunity to look into your word. Father, it is your word that is powerful. It cuts like a two-edged sword. And we ask tonight as we read the scripture, we hear your word, that you would do a work in our hearts.

So that you might transform us to be stronger, to hold fast, to be strong and courageous. But also, Father, be transformed by your great grace and mercy.

Tonight, Father, we pray for the other who are working tonight. Those who are doing the youth.

Those who are working with the children and teaching. Father, we pray that everything they say and do, again, would bring glory to God's name.

And you would be exalted through all of our efforts. Because, Father, we know that you are wonderful. You're awesome. And we just ask, God, that you would bless our time together.

[7 : 28] All these things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. So, 1 Thessalonians 5, 21, 22. Then examine everything.

Hold fast to that which is good. Abstain from every form of evil. That's Paul writing. And I like again, his quote, hold fast to that which is good.

Whatever is happening in our world, we are called to an degree to have complete faith in God. No matter what goes on in the world. No matter how confusing it does seem and how bad it seems.

The one who has the power, the one who has the wisdom, the one who has the authority, and the one who has love and mercy to take care of us is our Heavenly Father.

That's the foundation which we will hold fast. And yet, Paul is also asking us to discern and also carefully test all the things that we hear.

[8 : 32] Not only again, as I spoke Sunday morning about those who teach, but also what's going on in the world as people talk and they say they have the truth and what they're saying.

The point is, whatever is good needs to be fully embraced and carefully protected. Because anything that's evil, anything that's bad, we need to completely shun that and not have any of that in our lives.

So, unfortunately, what Paul didn't say is, what then is good? You know, what should we actually hold fast to?

And the question then becomes, what do you think people hold fast to? What are they facing their purpose and their reason for living on?

Now, I know you're going to not believe this, but years ago I went to college, and this was a long time ago. I had in my notes, for some reason, a poem. I mean, we're talking about 1970.

[9 : 37] I don't know why I put them in the notes, but I found it and I thought, that looks good. This is a poem by Langston Hughes. He was a black poet, activist, during the time of civil rights and arrest.

But listen to his words. Hold fast to dreams. For if dreams die, life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams. For when dreams go, life is a barren field, frozen with snow. Are you depressed yet?

I mean, it's like, what? But really think about that. Now, I know he's saying hold fast to dreams, but think about you and I and our relationship with God.

I had it, even back then, I had it written down. Hold fast to your relationship with God. For if your relationship with God dies, life is like a broken winged bird.

[10 : 35] Because that is really true. The only one we can truly hold fast to is our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. So let me share eight good things that we need to hold fast to.

That's fair enough? I'll go quickly. I don't want to have you looking up. I'll give you the scripture reading. But listen to the words. This is Paul writing in Philippians 2.16.

Again, some translations will use hold fast. Some translations will say hold firmly. Some will say cling to. Depending on your translation.

But the concept is still there. Holding firmly the word of life. That on the day of Christ, I can take pride. Because I did not run in vain. Or labor in vain.

And then John 1.1 says, In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God. And the Word was God. We are the whole form to the Word of God.

[11 : 34] Who is the Word of God? That's Jesus Christ. He is the Word. And why do we do that? Because folks, it is truth. And the mass media that we have today that's saying all kinds of things.

I mean, you don't want to know anything. It's out there. Somebody's telling you all kinds of stuff. And it's hard to really discern what is the actual truth. Only Christ has that truth.

And I found this. I should have had it last Sunday morning. But I like it. Charles Spurgeon, famous English preacher. In his sermon, Feeding the Sheep or Amusing the Goats.

I like that title for a sermon. But listen to what he said. A time will come when instead of shepherds feeding the sheep, the church will have clowns entertaining the goats.

And I think that's where we're at now. So many folks are just not feeding the sheep with God's truth and the Word. But they're tickling their ears. So hold fast to the Word of God.

[12 : 39] Number two. Hold fast to your faith. Hold fast to your faith. Hebrews 4.14. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

In 1 Corinthians 16.13, Be on your guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. And the commentary said that Paul has actually switched the metaphor here.

It's rather than this idea of the monocle terminology. But he was using the terminology that a soldier is standing on guard, protecting that which is valuable.

And our faith is extremely valuable. Why is faith important? Why is our faith important? Hebrews 11.6.

Without faith, what? It is impossible to please God. And that should be our heart. Our heart should be that we live in faith in Him, and that we would love Him, and obey Him, and that we would, again, do everything we can to please God.

[13 : 57] Galatians 3.11. The righteous will live by faith. Faith, folks, is the foundation of our holy walk in obedience to the will of God.

And faith is so important. If we're going to hold on and press on, we have to have a deep faith in what God's Word says, and obey it completely.

Number three, hold fast the peace of God. Hold fast the peace of God. Romans 5.1. Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you see that faith and peace are inseparable? The only way that you and I can truly have peace in our heart is that we have this steadfast faith in God and hold fast to that.

Isn't it good news? Our battle with Satan is over. Our battle with Satan is over. Yes, I know he tempts us.

[15:09] Yes, I know he still causes us to stumble. But folks, Jesus Christ said, it is finished. I have done the work. Once we come with faith to Christ and have that peace, we're taken care of.

And that is why, again, we need to hold on completely to him. And we can only have peace with God through Jesus Christ and what he has done on the cross.

Number four, hold fast your joy. Hold fast your joy. Philippians 4.4, rejoice in the Lord always.

Again, I say rejoice. Who said that? Who said that? Philippians. Paul. Now, think a minute about Paul.

He had such an easy life, did he not? I mean, he just went, you talk about a nice man of roses he was with, right? No, the man was beaten.

[16:12] The man was shipwrecked. The man went through prison. The man was flogged. And yet he has the audacity to say, rejoice always.

Man, that is holding fast to the joy of knowing Jesus Christ as the Savior. Nehemiah 8.10, listen to what he says.

The joy of the Lord is my strength. That's why we hold fast to the joy. Number five, hold fast to your confidence.

Hold fast to your confidence. Hebrews 3.6, the Christ was faithful as a son over his house, whose house we are if we hold firmly to our confidence and the boast of our hope.

Again, at whatever trials and tribulations that we face, whatever comes in our way that looks so bad, we need to hold fast to the confidence we have in God.

[17:24] We need to hold fast in the confidence that all things will work together for good to those who are called by God. The saint is going to do everything to discourage us.

I mean, he's going to throw temptations our way. But we have to believe God's going to take care of it. He's sovereign. He's going to see us through that.

Do you have confidence in your walk with God? Let's be honest. Sometimes it's a struggle, is it not? Sometimes we question. Especially when we look at ourselves and say, I just don't know why God you love me.

that's amazing grace and amazing love. Because I know myself. And yet, despite that, I have confidence in the word of God that says, if you believe in me, you will be saved.

Number six, hold fast to God's promises. Hold fast to God's promises. It's interesting. I looked it up. Well, how many actual promises of God are in the Bible?

[18:29] And there are over 7,000 promises by God in the word of God. Psalms 145, 13. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.

Your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is trustworthy in all the promises and faithful in all He does.

Especially in the time of sickness, especially in the time of trials and tribulations, especially in the time of suffering, we can hold on to God's promises.

And we should be giving thanks each day for the promises that we read in Scripture. And a lot of my favorite promises in Deuteronomy 31, 8.

The Lord Himself goes before you and you will be with you. He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged.

[19:28] I'm holding on to that promise each day no matter what comes before me. Number seven, hold fast to your hope. Hold fast to your hope.

Hebrews 10, 23. Let's hold firmly to the confession of our hope without wavering for He who has promised is faithful. Never give up hope.

No matter how bad things seem, no matter how it looks like nothing's going to work out, we have a steadfast hope in Jesus Christ that He will take care of you.

Again, Jeremiah 29, 11 says it really well why we can have hope. God says, for I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord.

Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and future. Folks, we have hope because every morning we realize we serve God who loves us, who has mercy on us, who has compassion on us, and is showering us with undeserved grace.

[20 : 35] God's mercy is greater than all the sin. Not just yours and mine, but all the sin because that was what Jesus died for on the cross.

And finally, number eight, hold fast to His righteousness. Hold fast to His righteousness, not ours. We know the Bible says that our righteousness is like filthy rags. Philippians 1, 11 says it well. Paul writes, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

Aren't you thankful that has nothing to do with our righteousness? No matter how hard we work, how hard we try to be completely righteous, we still have this struggle with that sinful nature. And yet, we know because of Christ, Christ on the cross, we are now clothed with His righteousness. He has given us His robe of righteousness. When God looks at you and I, He doesn't see that sinful creature.

[21 : 51] He sees what Jesus Christ has done and made us righteous. Romans 3, 22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ.

So very simple that we can trust Him. So, conclusion. Amen. I'm going to encourage you every day, every hour, press on, hold fast.

To the Word of God, to our faith, to our peace, to our joy, to our confidence, to God's promises, to His righteousness.

Jesus? Why? Why? Well, we're in Job, and you'll hear it when the pastor gets to Job, 19. Job says, well, because I know my Redeemer lives.

And then, in the end, He will stand on the earth. He's already got it conquered. He's coming back. I'm holding on until that time. I have an emotional by D.

[23 : 06] Bonhoeffer, and I like what he said. He said, the Lord of the ages is God. The turning point of the ages is Christ.

And the right spirit of the ages is the Holy Spirit. Aren't we thankful for the Holy Spirit that dwells within us, who, if we ask Him to help us, will lead and guide us through each day?

I have collected over the years certain prayers, and I know a lot of people say, well, you shouldn't really recite prayers, you know, you ought to have the own. But sometimes, to get my heart in the right place and my mind in the right place, I have tried to memorize some.

And I can't remember the author of this, but I love what he said. Father, take all my memory, all my understanding, all my liberty, and my will.

Take and receive all that I have and call my own. Whatever I have or hold, Thou hast given to me. I return it all to You and surrender it wholly to be governed by Your will.

[24 : 26] Give me only Your love and grace. And I am rich enough. That's where we live as believers in Christ. And I love Daniel Webster on his deathbed.

You know what his last word said? I still live. Isn't that beautiful? That's faith.

That's a person who is holding on even as he faced death. Amen? Amen. Amen. Well, we think we've got a prayer list.

So, you