

Hold Fast

by J.C. Ryle

The sermon emphasizes the importance of holding fast the truth and contending earnestly for the faith, and encourages believers to be zealous for the Gospel and to unite with all who hold the truth.

Scripture: Proverbs 19:27, Matthew 24:24, Romans 12:2, Galatians 1:8, Ephesians 6:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:21, 2 Timothy 4:2, Hebrews 10:23, 1 Peter 5:8, Jude 1:3

Topics: "Contending for the Faith", "Holding Fast to Truth"

Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the critical importance of holding fast to the truth of the Gospel amidst the challenges and controversies faced by the Church. He warns against the temptation to seek peace at the expense of truth, urging believers to contend earnestly for their faith and remain vigilant against false teachings. Ryle highlights the historical and ongoing threats to the integrity of the Church, particularly from Roman Catholicism, and calls for unity among Protestants to resist these challenges. He stresses that personal faith in Christ is essential, and encourages individuals to actively engage in preserving the truth of the Gospel. Ultimately, Ryle reassures that those who hold fast to Christ will find peace and eternal life, regardless of external circumstances.

Transcript

"Hold fast that which is good."--1 Thessalonians 5:21

There are few things in religion which men are so ready to forget as the duty of "contending earnestly for the faith," and holding fast the truth.

Controversy is seldom popular. Most men like a quiet life in religion. They dislike anything like strife, trouble, contest, and exertion. They will give up much for the specious pretext of securing peace. They are apt to forget that peace procured at the expense of truth is not worth having. In short, they need reminding of St. Paul's golden words: "Hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. v. 21).

Reader, when St. Paul said, "Hold fast," he wrote as one who knew what the hearts of all Christians are. He knew that our grasp of the Gospel, at our best, is very cold,--that our love soon waxes feeble,--that our faith soon wavers,--that our zeal soon flags,--that familiarity with Christ's truth often brings with it a species of contempt,--that, like Israel, we are apt to be discouraged by the length of our journey,--and like Peter, ready to sleep one moment and fight the next,--but like Peter, not ready to "watch and pray." All this St. Paul remembered, and, like a faithful watchman, he cries, by the Holy Ghost, "Hold fast that which is

good."

He wrote as if he foresaw by the Spirit that the good tidings of the Gospel would soon be corrupted, spoiled, and plucked away from the Church. He wrote as one who foresaw that Satan and all his agents would labour hard to cast down Christ's truth. He wrote as if he would forewarn men of this danger, and he cries, "Hold fast that which is good."

Reader, the advice is always needed--needed as long as the world stands. There is a tendency to decay in the very best of human institutions. The best visible Church of Christ is not free from this liability to degenerate. It is made up of fallible men. There is always in it a tendency to decay. We see the leaven of evil creeping into many a Church, even in the Apostle's time. There were evils in the Corinthian Church, evils in the Ephesian Church, evils in the Galatian Church. All these things are meant to be our warnings and beacons in these latter times. All show the great necessity laid upon the Church to remember the Apostle's word: "Hold fast that which is good."

Many a Church of Christ since then has fallen away for the want of remembering this principle. Their ministers and members forgot that Satan is always labouring to bring in false doctrine. They forgot that he can transform himself into an angel of light,--that he can make darkness appear light, and light darkness; truth appear falsehood, and falsehood truth. If he cannot destroy Christianity, he ever tries to spoil it. If he cannot prevent the form of godliness, he endeavours to rob Churches of the power. No Church is ever safe that forgets these things, and does not bear in mind the Apostle's injunction, "Hold fast that which is good."

Reader, if ever there was a time in the world when Churches were put upon their trial, whether they would hold fast the truth or not, that time is the present time, and those Churches are the Protestant Churches of our own land. Popery, that old enemy of our nation, is coming in upon us in this day like a flood. We are assaulted by open enemies without, and betrayed continually by false friends within. Roman Catholic churches, and chapels, and schools, and conventual and monastic establishments are continually increasing around us. Month after month brings tidings of some new defection from the ranks of the Church of England to the ranks of the Church of Rome. Already the Pope has parcelled our country into bishoprics, and speaks like one who fancies that by and by he shall divide the spoil. Already he seems to foresee a time when England shall be as the patrimony of St. Peter's, when London shall be as Rome, when St. Paul's shall be as St. Peter's, and Lambeth Palace shall be as the Vatican itself. Surely now, or never, we ought all of us to awake, and "hold fast that which is good."

We supposed, some of us, in our blindness, that the power of the Church of Rome was ended. We dreamed, some of us, in our folly, that the Reformation had ended the Popish controversy, and that if Romanism did survive, Romanism was altogether changed. If we did think so, we have lived to learn that we made a most grievous mistake. Rome never changes. It is her boast that she is always the same. The snake is not killed. He was scotched at the time of the Reformation, but was not destroyed. The Romish Antichrist is not dead. He was cast down for a little season, like the fabled giant buried under Ætna, but his deadly wound is healed, the grave is opening once more, and Antichrist is coming forth. The unclean spirit of Popery is not laid in his own place. Rather he seems to say, "My house in England is now swept and garnished for me; let me return to the place from whence I came forth."

And, reader, the question is now, whether we are going to abide quietly, sit still and fold our hands, and do nothing to resist the assault. Are we really men of understanding of the times? Do we know the day of our

visitation? Surely this is a crisis in the history of our Churches and of our land. It is a time which will soon prove whether we know the value of our privileges, or whether, like Amalek, "the first of the nations," our "latter end shall be that we perish for ever." It is a time which will soon prove whether we intend to allow our candlestick to be quietly removed, or to repent and do our first works. If we love the open Bible,--if we love the preaching of the Gospel,--if we love the freedom of reading that Bible, no man letting or hindering us, and the opportunity of hearing that Gospel, no man forbidding us,--if we love civil liberty,--if we love religious liberty,--if these are precious to our souls, we must all make up our minds to "hold fast," lest by and by we lose all.

Reader, if we mean to hold fast, every parish, every congregation, every Christian man, and every Christian woman, must do their part in contending for the truth. Each should work, and each should pray, and each should labour as if the preservation of the pure Gospel depended upon himself or herself, and upon no one else at all. The bishops must not leave the matter to the priests, nor the priests leave the matter to the bishops. The clergy must not leave the matter to the laity, nor the laity to the clergy. The Parliament must not leave the matter to the country, nor the country to the Parliament. The rich must not leave the matter to the poor, nor the poor to the rich. We must all work. Every living soul has a sphere of influence. Let him see to it that he fills it. Every living soul can draw some weight into the scale of the Gospel. Let him see to it that he casts it in. Let every one know his own individual responsibility in this matter, and all, by God's help, will be well.

If we would hold fast that which is good, we must not tolerate or countenance any doctrine that is not the pure doctrine of Christ's Gospel. There is a hatred that is downright charity: that is the hatred of erroneous doctrine. There is an intolerance which is downright praiseworthy: that is the intolerance of false teaching in the pulpit. Who would ever think of tolerating a little poison given to him day by day? If men come among you who do not preach "all the counsel of God," who do not preach of Christ, and sin, and holiness, of ruin, and redemption, and regeneration,--or do not preach of these things in a Scriptural way, you ought to cease to hear them. You ought to act upon the injunction given by the Holy Ghost in the Old Testament: "Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge" (Prov. xix. 27). You ought to carry out the spirit shown by the Apostle Paul, in Gal. i. 8: "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached, let him be accursed." If we can bear to hear Christ's truth mangled or adulterated,--and can see no harm in listening to that which is another Gospel,--and can sit at ease while sham Christianity is poured into our ears,--and can go home comfortably afterwards and not burn with holy indignation,--if this be the case, there is little chance of our ever doing much to resist Rome. If we are content to hear Jesus Christ not put in His rightful place, we are not men and women who are likely to do Christ much service, or fight a good fight on His side. He that is not zealous against error, is not likely to be zealous for truth.

If we would hold fast the truth, we must be ready to unite with all who hold the truth, and love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. We must be ready to lay aside all minor questions as things of subordinate importance. Establishment or no establishment, liturgy or no liturgy, surplice or no surplice, bishops or presbyters,--all these points of difference, however important they may be in their place and in their proportion, all ought to be regarded as subordinate questions. I ask no man to give up his private opinions about them. I wish no man to do violence to his conscience. All I say is, that these questions are wood, hay, and stubble, when the very foundations of the faith are in danger. The Philistines are upon us. Can we make common cause against them, or can we not? This is the one point for our consideration. Surely it is not right to say that we expect to spend eternity with men in heaven, and yet cannot work for a few

years with them in this world. It is nonsense to talk of alliance and union, if, in a day like this, there is to be no co-operation. The presence of a common foe ought to sink minor differences. We must hold together: depend upon it, all Protestants must hold together, if they mean to "hold fast that which is good."

Last of all, if it be right to "hold fast that which is good," let us make sure that we have each laid hold personally upon Christ's truth for ourselves. Reader, it will not save you and me to know all controversies, and to be able to detect everything that is false. Head knowledge will never bring you and me to heaven. It will not save us to be able to argue and reason with Roman Catholics, or to detect the errors of Pope's bulls, or pastoral letters. Let us see that we each lay hold upon Jesus Christ for ourselves by our own personal faith. Let us see to it that we each flee for refuge and lay hold upon the hope set before us in His glorious Gospel. Let us do this, and all shall be well with us, whatever else may go ill. Let us do this, and then all things are ours. The Church may fail. The State may go to ruin. The foundations of all establishments may be shaken. The enemies of truth may for a season prevail; but as for us, all shall be well. We shall have in this world peace, and in the world which is to come life everlasting, for we shall have Christ.

Reader, if you have not yet laid hold on this hope in Christ, seek it at once. Call on the Lord Jesus to give it to you. Give Him no rest till you know and feel that you are His.

If you have laid hold on this hope, hold it fast. Prize it highly, for it will stand by you when everything else fails.

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