

Hold Tight!

Colossians 3:1-11; Coast Community Church Pastor's Class; Earl Miles; November 17, 2013

Hold tightly to the Head: trust and obey what Jesus said!

We need to see what it looks like *not* to hold tightly to Jesus.

Sometimes it is helpful to our understanding to focus on what something is not, as in the incarnation and the union of Man and God in Christ. Last week, in Colossians 2:16-23, we saw that Paul was warning the believers in Colossae about various aspects of the false teaching they were being taught, all of which were various ways in which believers can be tempted to 'not' hold firmly or tightly' to Jesus.

1. Playing *God* in other peoples' lives: We can't hold tightly to Jesus if we are being told to believe or do things that Jesus hasn't told us to believe or do.
2. Focusing on '*shadows*' instead of 'substance': We can't hold tightly to Jesus if we are focusing on things that no longer are not a part of the New Covenant Jesus has established.
3. Depending on *self-denial* in place of self-sacrifice (love): We can't hold tightly to Jesus if we are focusing on ourselves and not doing 'little things' instead of loving like Jesus.
4. Worshiping the *creation* rather than the Creator: We can't hold tightly to Jesus if we are worshiping what Jesus created rather than Jesus Himself.
5. Trading Scripture for *subjective experience*: We can't hold tightly to Jesus and elevate something above His Word to us in the Scriptures.
6. Minimizing the *Person and work* of Christ: We can't hold tightly to Jesus and make who He is and what He did on the cross of little consequence in our everyday lives.

We need to know what it looks like to *hold tightly* to Jesus.

How do you hold tight to someone who isn't here? By holding tight to that in which they are most clearly seen and heard. All of the various aspects of the false teaching in Colossae are ways in which we do not hold to the revelation of Jesus. To hold tight to Jesus is to hold tight to His revelation – His written Word – so that we seek to trust and obey what it says in every situation and every relationship.

First, in every situation and relationship, I need to think/believe/trust in light of these truths:

1. *Jesus is my life.* (1-4) Jesus rules over all. Jesus gives me life and sustains my life. I can do nothing apart from Him.
2. *I am united to Jesus.* (1-4) The past and future of Jesus is my past and my future. God loves me like He loves His own Son.
3. *All that is anti-Jesus deserves God's wrath.* (6) God is determined to destroy all that is anti-Christ, in us and in this world. God created this world for His Son and He intends for all to bow to Him.

4. *I am not what I once was. (7-9)* I once was enslaved to sin and an enemy of God, a part of Adam's rebellious race. In Christ, I am free from sin's reign and the law's condemnation and I am indwelt by the Spirit of Jesus.
5. *I am not all that I'm going to be. (10)* I am now a member of the New Humanity in Christ. And I am being made into His likeness.
6. *I have all that I need right now in Jesus. (11)* No matter what my back-ground or earthly status, I have all of Jesus and all I need in Him.

Second, in every situation and relationship, I need to live/act or speak/love in these ways:

1. *Look to Jesus for Help and Happiness. (1-4)* Jesus is at the 'right hand of God' which is the ultimate place of authority and power (help) and fullness of joy (happiness).
2. *Think about everything in light of Jesus. (1-4)* We are to 'set our minds' on what is above, especially Jesus and to see all of life in light of Him. God works through the renewing of our minds to change our hearts and our lives.
3. *Refuse to use your body to pursue off-limit, idolatrous, unsatisfying desires. (5-7)* By grace through faith in God's promises in Jesus, we are to 'consider the members of our earthly body to be dead' to what will never satisfy. We must reject that which God says is 'off-limits.' We must fight our tendency to 'idolize' (worship as our supreme help and happiness) created things. We must exercise self-control and not use our bodies to pursue improper or excessive desires.
4. *Put off words and actions that show that you are living for what you can get from people and things. (8-9)* By grace through faith in God's promises in Jesus, we are to identify and restrain ourselves from words and actions that are evidence that we are looking to people or circumstances for the ultimate help we need or the ultimate happiness we desire. These relational sins are not simply the result of others' sins against us but the result of our 'demands' of others.
5. *Put on words and actions that show that you are looking to Jesus as your help and happiness. (10-11)* If we are looking by faith in God's promises to Jesus as our great and sufficient Help and Happiness then it will free us to obey God and love people in extraordinary ways. Paul expounds on this in the following passages.

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It's all about Jesus! I am to trust in Jesus. I am to love like Jesus.

When we are pulled in different directions, we need to know what to hold on to and how. That's what Paul begins to explain as he warns the believers in Colossae about the 'pull' of the false teachers and explains to them what it looks like to 'hold fast or tight to the Head' who is Jesus.

Hold tightly to the Head: trust and obey what Jesus said!

When I was in college, I worked one summer as an ironworker. I worked on a new basketball arena on the campus of Southeastern Louisiana University. I walked beams many stories off the ground ... praying and quoting Scripture. I was 'holding on' ... figuratively, not literally, but really!

Do you have a 'sense' that you are 'holding on'?

Is your focus on the Word of Jesus?

We need to see what it looks like *not* to hold tight to Jesus.

Sometimes it is helpful to our understanding to focus on what something is not, as in the incarnation and the union of Man and God in Christ.

Last week, in Colossians 2:16-23, we saw that Paul was warning the believers in Colossae about various aspects of the false teaching they were being taught, all of which were various ways in which believers can be tempted to 'not' hold firmly or tightly' to Jesus.

1. Playing *God* in other peoples' lives:

We can't hold tightly to Jesus if we are being told to believe or do things that Jesus hasn't told us to believe or do.

Can I grow by believing and doing what Jesus never said to believe and do?

2. Focusing on '*shadows*' instead of 'substance':

We can't hold tightly to Jesus if we are focusing on things that no longer are not a part of the New Covenant Jesus has established.

Can I grow by doing what Jesus no longer wants me to do?

3. Depending on *self-denial* in place of self-sacrifice (love):

We can't hold tightly to Jesus if we are focusing on ourselves and not doing 'little things' instead of loving like Jesus.

Can I grow by denying myself instead of doing something good for someone else?

4. Worshiping the *creation* rather than the Creator:

We can't hold tightly to Jesus if we are worshiping what Jesus created rather than Jesus Himself.

Can I grow by treating something like Jesus that isn't Jesus?

5. Trading Scripture for *subjective experience*:

We can't hold tightly to Jesus and elevate something above His Word to us in the Scriptures.

Can I grow by listening to someone or something other than Jesus?

6. Minimizing the *Person and work* of Christ:

We can't hold tightly to Jesus and make who He is and what He did on the cross of little consequence in our everyday lives.

Can I grow by thinking less of Jesus?

'You can't fight sin with sin!'

We need to know what it looks like to *hold tight* to Jesus.

What dangers are there for me as a Christian?

- Other opinions.
- Good experiences.
- Bad experiences.

What if ...?

- What if you go to college and hear something different?

‘I grew up in the Episcopal Church in Alaska, but my belief was superficial and flimsy. It was borrowed from my archaeologist father, who was so brilliant he taught himself to speak and read Russian. When I encountered doubt, I would fall back on the fact that he believed. Leaning on my father's faith got me through high school. But by college it wasn't enough, especially because as I grew older he began to confide in me his own doubts. What little faith I had couldn't withstand this revelation. From my early 20s on, I would waver between atheism and agnosticism, never coming close to considering that God could be real.’ (Kirsten Powers, Fox News)

- What if you inherit a lot of money?

‘What would you do for \$10 million?’

The Day America Told the Truth survey:

25% would abandon their entire family
 23% would be a prostitute for a week
 16% would leave their spouse
 3% would put their children up for adoption

Sergio Hernandez – arrested for looting during the LA riots – after winning \$3 million in the CA lottery

Kathleen Pizzi – bankrupt – after winning \$3.2 million in the Connecticut lottery

- What if you lose a loved one?

John Owen, the great Puritan theologian, on average had one child and lost one child in death every three years in his adult years and yet had a certainty of God's love for him.

‘The second crucial event in those early years in London was Owen's marriage to a young woman named Mary Rooke. He was married to her for 31 years, from 1644 to 1675. We know virtually nothing about her. But we do know one absolutely stunning fact that must have colored all of Owen's ministry for the rest of his life (He died eight years after she did.). We know that she bore him 11 children, and all but one died as a child, and that one daughter died as a young adult. In other words Owen experienced the death of eleven children and his wife! ***That's one child born and lost on the average every three years of Owen's adult life.*** We don't have one reference to Mary or to the children or to his pain in all his books. But ***just knowing that the man walked in the valley of the shadow of death most of his life gives me a clue to the depth of dealing with God that we find in his works.*** God has his strange and painful ways of making us the kind of pastors and theologians he wants us to be. (short biography on John Owen by John Piper)

How do you hold tight to someone who isn't here?

By holding tight to that in which they are most clearly seen and heard. (pictures/letters)

All of the various aspects of the false teaching in Colossae are ways in which we do not hold to the revelation of Jesus. To hold tight to Jesus is to hold tight to His revelation – His written Word – so that we seek to trust and obey what it says in every situation and every relationship.

- John Paton went to serve among the cannibals of the south sea islands by trusting the Lord Jesus' promise to be with us. (Matthew 28:20)

Without that abiding consciousness of the presence and power of my dear Lord and Savior, nothing else in all the world could have preserved me from losing my reason and perishing miserably. In his words, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," became to me so real that it would not have startled me to behold Him, as Stephen did, gazing down upon the scene. I felt His supporting power. . . . It is the sober truth, and it comes back to me sweetly after 20 years, that I had my nearest and dearest glimpses of the face and smiles of my blessed Lord in those dread moments when musket, club, or spear was being leveled at my life. Oh the bliss of living and enduring, as seeing "Him who is invisible"! (John Paton)

First, in every situation and relationship, I need to think/believe/ trust in light of these truths:

1. Jesus is my life. (1-4)

'Baseball is my life.'

What does that mean?

- It is the most important thing in my life.
- If this were taken away, I wouldn't have anything to live for.
- This is what nourishes me and moves me to do what I do.

Jesus rules over all.

Jesus gives me life and sustains my life.

I can do nothing apart from Him.

2. *I am **united** to Jesus. (1-4)*

Why did God make Siamese twins?

- Are distinct, yet united
- Share a unique existence
- Experience things together, though not in exactly the same way necessarily

The past and future of Jesus is my past and my future.

God loves me like He loves His own Son.

3. *All that is anti-Jesus deserves **God's wrath**. (6)*

Why would this be true?

- Only Jesus deserves our trust and obedience.
- This is the only way to love people.

God is determined to destroy all that is anti-Christ, in us and in this world.
God created this world for His Son and He intends for all to bow to Him.

4. *I am not what I **once was**. (7-9)*

'Before and After' Shots

What should looking at a 'before and after' shot do for you?

- Help you to see where you were.
- Remind of what not to do.
- Help you to see where you are.
- Remind you of what to do.

I once was enslaved to sin and an enemy of God, a part of Adam's rebellious race.

In Christ, I am free from sin's reign and the law's condemnation and I am indwelt by the Spirit of Jesus.

5. *I am not all that I'm **going to be**. (10)*

When you see a baby, what do you think about?

- How much it looks like its parents
- How big it is
- Wonder what it will be like in 20 years

I am now a member of the New Humanity in Christ.

And I am being made into His likeness.

6. *I have all that I **need** right now in Jesus. (11)*

Why doesn't this seem true so much of the time?

Like a 'virtual bank'

- We can't see Him or it.
- We often don't get what we think we need.
- We are not in control of how or when it is given.

No matter what my back-ground or earthly status, I have all of Jesus and all I need in Him.

Second, in every situation and relationship, I need to live/act or speak/love in these ways:

1. *Look to Jesus for **Help** and **Happiness**. (1-4)*

What does that look like?

- Puritan: 'All this and Jesus too!'

- Prayer for help.
- A life of giving thanks in all and for all.

Jesus is at the 'right hand of God' which is the ultimate place of authority and power (help) and fullness of joy (happiness).

What is the fastest growing religion?

'The American Religious Identification Survey gives Wicca an average annual growth of 143% for the period 1990 to 2001 (from 8,000 to 134,000 – U.S. data / similar for Canada & Australia). According to The Statesman Anne Elizabeth Wynn claims "The two most recent American Religious Identification Surveys declare Wicca, one form of paganism, as the fastest growing spiritual identification in America". (Michael Synder, thetruthwins.com)

2. ***Think*** about everything in light of Jesus. (1-4)

How can we do this?

- Illus: Drinking orange juice to the glory of God (Piper) = How would Jesus drink orange juice?
- WWJD = What would Jesus do?
- WWJS = What would Jesus say?
- WDJD = What did Jesus do?

We are to 'set our minds' on what is above, especially Jesus and to see all of life in light of Him.

God works through the renewing of our minds to change our hearts and our lives.

Rudiments of the world = 1,2,3 or A,B,Cs of worldly viewpoints (Colossians 2:20):

- The key to happiness is the worship of the creation (self-worship). Worship what you see!
- The key to having happiness is keeping rule-keeping (self-righteousness). Earn what you want!

- The key to rule-keeping is coming to my own conclusions (self-determination). Make up your own mind! Or Do your own thing!
3. *Refuse to use your **body** to pursue off-limits, idolatrous, unsatisfying desires. (5-7)*

How do we do this?

- Learn to say 'no'!
- Focus on the promise.
- Pray.

We are to avoid unnecessary 'severe treatment of the body':

...that as a young monk in Erfurt Luther was obsessed with atoning for his sins and went to ridiculous lengths to punish himself. This ranged from extreme self-denial and self-flagellation. One night, at the height of winter, he was found lying in the snow and had to be carried back inside the convent. (welcometohosanna.com)

But by grace through faith in God's promises in Jesus, we are to 'consider the members of our earthly body to be dead' to what will never satisfy.

We must reject that which God says is 'off-limits.'

We must fight our tendency to 'idolize' (worship as our supreme help and happiness) created things.

We must exercise self-control and not use our bodies to pursue improper or excessive desires.

4. *Put off words and actions that show that you are living for **what you can get** from people and things. (8-9)*

How do we try to manipulate people?

Norm: 'carving tools'

- kindness
- killing with our words

- withdrawal

By grace through faith in God's promises in Jesus, we are to identify and restrain ourselves from words and actions that are evidence that we are looking to people or circumstances for the ultimate help we need or the ultimate happiness we desire.

These relational sins are not simply the result of others' sins against us but the result of our 'demands' of others.

5. *Put on words and actions that show that you are looking to Jesus as your help and happiness. (10-11)*

Is our greatest problem that we think too little of ourselves?

- Isn't the problem that we think too little of Jesus?

Psychology of self-esteem (fighting pride with pride)

What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew about Women:

"In fact, low self-esteem is a threat to the entire human family, affecting children, adolescents, the elderly, all socioeconomic levels of society, and each race and ethnic culture." (Dr. James Dobson)

If we are looking by faith in God's promises to Jesus as our great and sufficient Help and Happiness then it will free us to obey God and love people in extraordinary ways.

Paul expounds on this in the following passages.

- *Look to Jesus and show it in word and action in the Church. (12-17)*
- *Look to Jesus and show it in word and action in the home/workplace. (3:18-4:1)*
- *Look to Jesus and show it in word and action in the world. (4:2-6)*