

**Hebrews 4: 14-16; “Holding Fast Your Confession”, Sermon # 17 in the series –
“Holding Fast Our Confession”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
June 25th, 2016, in the Morning Worship Service.**

What does it mean to hold fast your confession of Christ? That is what we want to think about together at this hour. Why is that some people receive this exhortation and hold Christ fast, and others do not hold it fast, and they fall away from Christ? From these verses that I have just read to you, it appears that those who fell away did not realize the importance of their continuing to trust in Jesus as their great High Priest. But those who did see the importance were able to hold Him fast. These, by grace, were able to persevere in their faith, all the way from the moment of that they were saved, to the end of their life. As the Hebrews who Paul was writing to, it is very important for you to understand what it means to hold fast your confession of Jesus. If you will hold fast to the Lord Jesus as your great High Priest, in the Lord Jesus, you will be able to persevere in faith to the end of your life rejoice forevermore in the blessedness of being with Him. This is not to say that there will not be great temptations which will come to you at times. But the believer who would be faithful, will remember these 3 precious truths which will enable them to hold fast their confession. 1st – As believers we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens. 2nd – As believers we have a High Priest who can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities. And 3rd – As believers we have a High Priest who hears and answers our prayers. Let us consider together the importance of holding fast our confession.

1st – If you would hold fast your confession of Christ, you must remember that you have a High Priest who has passed through the heavens.

Verse 14 says – “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.” In the King James, it reads “let us hold fast our profession.” I want you to take notice of the fact that there is a very subtle difference between a making a profession of faith and confessing Christ. These two words, profession and confession are intimately linked together and certainly they should not be pitted against each other, but nevertheless, I would like us to think about them for a moment so that we might better understand the implications of them for ourselves. A profession is an open declaration; it is a public avowal or an acknowledgment of Jesus, the One whom you have believed in. And further it is an open declaration of what you have believed concerning His work in your life. Making a profession of faith in Jesus Christ usually means that you will draw up a written testimony or stand up in front of the church, telling of the Lord’s dealings in your life, and your dealings with the Lord; how you came to know the Lord. It is what you are doing publicly to show forth what Christ has done for you; that you have believed in Him for salvation and you are now going to follow Him because of the new spiritual life that He has given to you.

A confession is also a public avowal; it is something that you are doing and saying. However, it is the acknowledgement, in particular, of the doctrinal truth of the Bible; that you most certainly have come to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that you have believed in His finished work of having fulfilled the law of God and His having died for you the sinner. And you are further confessing that you have believed in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, and so you are confessing that it is His resurrection which is the basis of the new spiritual life you have found working in your own heart. This spiritual life in your soul, you confess, did not come from yourself; it came from God. The Ethiopian Eunuch wanted to be baptized. He wanted Philip to baptize him. And Philip said to him: “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ And it was upon this confession of His faith that Philip baptized him.

So a profession of faith is your own response to what Jesus has done for you, and a confession is a more doctrinal public declaration of who Jesus is, and what He has done for you, and continues to do for you as you live your Christian life unto Him. In 1st Timothy 6: , it says, “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” But in the King James it says – “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold of eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.” And then in the next verse both translations say: “I urge you (I give you charge) in the sight of God who gives life to all things (who quickens all things) and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing.” And so we find that in these two translations the words are used pretty much synonymously.

But I would like to make this simple distinction which I think will hold Biblically. It is evident from a study of the word profession, that a profession of faith can be either genuine or counterfeit. This is the case of those who “profess that they know God; but in works they deny him”. (Titus 1: 16) In other words, just saying aloud that you love Jesus does not necessarily mean that you really love Jesus. You have made a profession, but it was not sincere, and God did not honor because it simply came from your own heart’s analysis of your own life. This profession was made from the standpoint of self-righteousness and self-justification because you did not think that your life would have to change at all in your becoming a Christian. You could continue to be worldly, you could continue to be selfish, and you did not weep or mourn over your sins, or see your need to confess them and forsake them. You did not see your need to pray and set your mind on things above, and yet you thought that you could still be a true Christian. But this is simply not the case because you were not holding fast your confession of Christ in the sense of your on-going need of Him and His grace in order to obey God’s word and keep Christ’s commandments. A person can “professing themselves to be wise, and they can still be a fool”. (Romans 1: 22)

Marvin Vincent in his “Word Studies says: “Etymologically, confession is the literal rendering of ὁμολογία, which is from ὁμόν – together, and λέγο – to say; in Latin, con – together, and fateor – to say. Confession is you saying together what the Scriptures have first told you. The fundamental idea is that you and the Scriptures are saying the same thing as one another. While, on the other hand, profess (Latin – pro which means “forth”, and fateor – to say) is to declare openly.” “Hence, to profess Christ is to declare Him publicly as your Lord: to confess Christ is to declare your agreement with all that He says.” “When Christ confesses His own followers before the world, He makes a declaration in agreement with what is in His heart, concerning them.” “Similarly, when He declares to the wicked “I never knew you” (“then will I profess, ὁμολογήσω”), a similar agreement between His thought and His declaration is implied.” (end of quote)

I would urge you to think of it this way. Christ’s confession of us is always sure. Our confession of Christ is always sure as long as it agrees with what the Bible says concerning Christ and concerning ourselves, and our response to what He has done for us. We will believe and we will continue to hold fast our confession. But a profession of faith in Christ is not always made from the vantage point of a person’s having come to saving faith in Christ. A person may profess and not really know the Lord. It may not be a good profession. They have come to the place where they say that they know Him, but the truth of whether theirs is a good profession will be born out in time in relation to their holding fast to the sound doctrine of the Bible, and their continuing to deal with all of their sins; in confession of them, repentance from them, and forsaking of them. And most especially it will involve their holding fast their confession of their

need of Christ Himself as their High Priest. Let me ask, dear listener, whether this is you? Are you holding fast your confession of your need of Jesus as your High Priest?

You see, when you believe in Jesus all of your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. But your confessing your need of Him is daily, and moment by moment in your heart. And we can say most surely that if you will confess with your mouth, the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you most certainly shall be saved. But if you have truly found Christ's grace to be precious and real and powerful to save, you will be holding fast your confession of Him as a regular ongoing practice, both in your heart, and with the words that come from your mouth, and the prayers that you will pray when you seek for His all-important enabling grace to be able to do the will of God in all the various situations of your life. The evidence that you truly have come to know the Lord must be more than the declaration that you have believed. Your heart must be so changed that you will see your need of Christ's grace and the Spirit's working, in all that you do and say. You will hold fast your confession and thereby make good your profession of faith.

What will you confess concerning Christ? You will confess your need of Him as your High Priest; your need for him to have shed His blood for you and to intercede on your behalf to God. In the Old Covenant times, the Hebrew people had priests who were appointed by God. This began in the time of Moses, in the giving of the law, when his brother Aaron and Aaron's sons were appointed priests to minister in the tabernacle. They offered the sacrifices which were prescribed in the law. But neither Aaron nor any of his sons, or any of his descendants were qualified to be our great High Priest, for they had to first offer sacrifices for their own sins before they could go about to offer them for the people's sins. But it is said of our Lord Jesus Christ in Hebrews 7: 26 – “For such a High Priest (as Jesus) was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.” “For law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.”

That word of the oath refers to Psalm 110, verse 4 – “The Lord has sworn and will not relent, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’.” Jesus is from a whole different order of priests, and as such, is the surety of a better covenant. To be a surety, in this case, was the Lord Jesus' paying the ransom price to purchase us, as sinners, back and out from under, our slavery to sin. He was the only perfect Man, and thus He was able to do this; to render a perfect sacrifice unto God on our behalf. This is a part of what it means for you to hold fast your confession. You confess that it was only the Lord Jesus Christ who was perfect; righteous, and holy, and upright in all of His thoughts, words, and deeds. He alone was born of a virgin and entered this fallen world pure and sinless, and not corrupt as we are, from our mother's womb. He alone is the God-Man, in whose one Person, existed both the nature of God and the nature of man; two natures in His One blessed Person. Your confession is that you daily draw strength from His purity in the grace that He gives you, and from the fact that His purity is imputed to your person and all of your works as a righteous covering, an atonement for all of your sins, both before and after you became a Christian.

And thus you should see, that all that was necessary for your salvation was only found in Him. He alone being God made manifest in the flesh, could bear your sins in His own body on the tree, and have those sufferings become meritorious on your behalf. How thankful we ought to be to be able to hold fast this confession, for in holding fast this confession we shall most certainly be saved, and our profession of faith will be established and upheld by Him, and by Him alone. Remember Jesus said to Peter – “Peter, I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail, and once you are turned, strengthen your brethren.” Peter was not able to hold fast His

confession of Christ during that awful time of Christ's crucifixion, for He denied His Lord three times, but after he confessed this sinful fall, and had personal dealings with the Lord after Jesus was raised from the dead, he was restored and was able to strengthen his brethren and to feed Christ's sheep.

Again I will ask the question: How is it with you, dear Christian? Is Christ the One who is upholding your faith so that you confess your need of His mediation and His intercession every day? This is how it ought to be with you; that you ought never to be ashamed of your confessing your need of Him, as though you think that you ought to be able to uphold yourself in your perseverance in faith. No, holding fast your confession of Him is really a part of your perseverance. And, it is a good witness to others around you, for it speaks both to yourself, and to people around you, of who your strength is, and who it is who keeps you, and who it is who is watching over your soul. Jesus has passed through the heavens, when He ascended after His resurrection. He went up into the physical heavens and out of the sight of the apostles and disciples, but then He entered into the heaven of heavens, the holy of holies; into heaven itself, on our behalf. He is out of sight, but we are not for one moment out of His mind. And knowing this, we now can experience the reality of His interceding on our behalf, all the days of our lives. This is what we can now confess, and that God helping us, we will hold it fast.

Now, 2nd – We as believers have a High Priest who indeed can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities.

Verse 15 – “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” The King James states it this way: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin.” You will notice the double negative that Paul uses here. We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses. He words it in this way to strengthen his point that Christ is not someone who, great as we know that He is, is far-off in heaven, and thus He cannot identify with us, He cannot really minister to us, or help us, when we are experiencing physical or spiritual weaknesses, or going through times of temptation. That is an entirely false perspective on Christ's intercession for you, if you think this way. Christ not only can sympathize with you as a Christian undergoing temptation, a person who perhaps is having many doubts and fears concerning yourself and your own ability to live the Christian life, you should understand that He really is able to sympathize with your weaknesses. Indeed, it says here, He is touched with the feeling of your infirmities, dear Christian. Who is weak without Him knowing it? He has felt what you feel, and a thousand things more, and a thousand times over, since He suffered for you in going to the cross. Because when He went to the cross and was nailed there to it, he came to know what it feels like to feel guilt and shame for sins, even though He never once committed any sin. He felt these things because He was bearing our guilt and shame, that which we deserve to feel; but He bore it there on the tree.

And what about sorrows and disappointments? It says in Isaiah 53 that He was a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, while He walked upon the earth. Now that He has ascended on high and is seated at the right hand of the Father, can He still sympathize with those who are going through sorrows and distresses of various sorts? Well, listen to Jeremiah 31: 25 – “For I have satiated (I have satisfied) the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul.” This is what our Lord Jesus Christ is able to do continually; now that He is raised from the dead and has all power and authority in heaven and earth to command blessings for His people. This is why it is so essential for you to hold fast your confession of your Lord Jesus. It is because you cannot really overcome all of your sorrows and disappointments, all of your temptations to give up and do something else with your life other than being a Biblical Christian, without the Lord Jesus interceding for you, and helping you to work through all of these difficulties in your mind.

I would have you to remember, that He is all eyes to see you in your most difficult and perplexing situations. He is all ears and ready to listen to your voice in the steep pathway of life. My beloved brethren, are you casting all your cares upon Jesus knowing that He cares for you?

While I was studying this matter out, I came across this, in the letters of John Newton. Volume 6 of his *Works*, page 212-214 – February 11, 1769 – “My dear Sir, although, by the Lord’s mercy, I have not, since the years of my miserable bondage in Africa, been much subject to a depression of spirits, I know how to sympathize with you under your present complaints; but while I am sorry for your trials, I rejoice much more to observe the spirit of submission and dependence with which you are favoured under them. Whatever may be the immediate causes of your troubles, they are all under the direction of a gracious hand, and each, in their place, cooperating to a gracious end. I think the frame of your spirit is a sure evidence that God is with you in your trouble; and, I trust, in due time, He will fulfil the other part of his promise, to comfort and deliver you, because he has given you to know his name: Psalm 91: 14 and 15. It will be always a pleasure to me when a letter comes with your superscription; but while writing is so painful to you, I shall be willing, (since you are pleased to receive mine so favorably,) to send you two or three for one, rather than expect a punctual return of answers, till your health and spirits shall enable you to gratify me without inconvenience to yourself.

Your saying that, “If I have never been in the like circumstances, it is impossible for me to conceive the uncomfortableness of them,” reminds me of one admirable peculiarity of the Gospel, which seems a fit topic for a paragraph in a letter to you at this time. I mean the encouragement it affords us to apply to our great High Priest, from the especial consideration of His having felt the same sorrows which we also feel. Though He is now exalted above all our conceptions and praises, is supremely happy in Himself, and the fountain of happiness to all His redeemed; yet He is still such an one as can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities; Hebrews 4: 15, 16. He has not only a divine knowledge, but an experimental perception of our afflictions: Isaiah 63: 9.” “And as Dr. Watts well expresses the thought — *“Touched with a sympathy within, He knows our feeble frame; He knows what sore temptations mean, For he has felt the same.”* “You complain of a dejection of spirits, which I apprehend nearly expresses the sense of ἀδομενεῖν in the Greek in Mark 14: 33, (“He took Peter, James and John with Him and began to be troubled and deeply distressed”), which is one out of many of those emphatical words the evangelists use to give some apprehension of that depression, agony, and consternation of spirit which filled the soul of Jesus when he entered upon the great work of atoning for our sins.”

“All that He endured from the hands of wicked men was probably very light, in, comparison of what He began to suffer in the garden, when he was exposed to the fierce conflicts of the powers of darkness, and when the arrows of the Almighty drank up his spirits, and it pleased the Father to bruise him; Zechariah.13: 7. How different the cup He drank himself, from that which He puts into our hands! His was unmixed wrath and anguish; but all our afflictions are tempered and sweetened with many mercies. Yet we suffer, at the worst, unspeakably less than we deserve; but He had done nothing amiss. The hymn writer says: *“Now let our pains be all forgot, Our hearts no more repine; Our sufferings are not worth a thought; If, Lord, compared with thine.”*

Newton goes on to say: “But what I chiefly intend is, that having suffered for us, He knows how to pity and how to relieve us, by an experimental sense of the sorrow which once filled His own soul, (yea, all his life long he was acquainted with grief,) even as we, (if it be lawful to compare great things with small,) are prompted to pity and to help those who are afflicted in the same way as ourselves. May He be pleased, by the power of his Holy Spirit, to reveal, with increasing guidance and power in your soul, this mystery of redeeming love. Here is the source of consolation, that Jesus died for us, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. The knowledge of His cross, like the wood which Moses cast into the spring, Exodus 15: 25, sweetens the bitter

waters of afflictions, and sanctifies every dispensation of providence, so as to render it a means of grace.” (end of quote) And so it is, brethren. But what I want to ask now, is: Are you experiencing the reality of this in your life?

The Lord Jesus sympathizes with you in your weaknesses. He does not sit at the right hand of God gazing at you as though you are stupid and weak. As the glorified Son of God, He is studying to see how He might cause you to realize how great is His care over your life; your spiritual life, your physical life, your mental and emotional stability, and what is bothering your conscience, or oppressing your spirit. Jesus cares, and sympathizes, and looks into all of your greatest and deepest concerns. His object is to do you good and to build your faith in Himself; that He is able to do all things well in regard to you; that nothing is too difficult for Him, that nothing impossible for Him. How shall you make progress in holiness and righteousness? The Lord Jesus knows how it shall come about, and He knows the level of sincerity that you have, in trying to make progress. And He is working with you, dear Christian. Will you not praise and thank Him for His patience, for His kindness, and for His sympathy towards you? He will build your life into something which is pleasing to God as you hold fast your confession of Him.

And 3rd – As believers we have a High Priest who hears and answers our prayers.

Verse 16 – “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Let us remember, when we think about making progress in holiness and being a good witness to Christ, that God uses means to accomplish His ends, and that means for you, the believer, is for you to learn to pray; to boldly come to the throne of grace and pray to God. Why is prayer so important if God already knows what we are going to say before we speak? It is important because Christ who has overcome, will pay attention to your use of the means of your prayers and fellowship with Him to bring you to the place where you will learn to overcome your weaknesses and sins. When you boldly come to Him you will be coming to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. You may be very timid and perhaps even guilt-ridden because you have come to see, so very clearly, how much you have failed to keep God’s commandments. You know in your heart that you have not lived up to all the grace that He has given to you, and all the truth that He has shown you from His word. You think that you must be a fool to think that the Lord will be continuing to forgive you for so many sins, so many failures, so little faith, and so little love to Him.

But dear Christian, I hope that you will see from this verse that even though you may have failed the Lord in some of the things that you have done, that His love for you will never cease. His love and His favor is not based on your performance; your keeping the law; it is based upon what Christ did fully and completely to fulfill the law and to suffer on your behalf. You may indeed have done very badly. You may not have overcome your sinful weaknesses in the way that you have wanted to, but you should still be bold to come to the throne of grace. You should come because you have a High Priest who is sitting victorious on His Father’s throne. Christ has overcome and He would have you to overcome by His grace and sit down with Him. Listen to Revelation 3: 21 – “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” These words our Lord spoke to the lukewarm church of Laodicea. These were people who had failed Him badly and had thought that they needed nothing because they were materially rich. It is true that He rebuked them, and that He would chasten them where necessary. But His intent was to make them into better people. And the reason that He would do that was because He loved them; He could not deny Himself. Therefore they were to be zealous and repent, and to open the door when He knocked.

Let me ask you now, whether you will open the door to Christ today, so that He can come in and dine with you, and you with Him? He is not only standing there knocking and waiting, but He is full of good will and promises of blessing to each one who will boldly come to the throne of

grace. May you think of all that He has done for you, the sinner, and all that He is doing and will do for you, the saint, and see that nothing is uncertain with Him; that He is bringing you to God.