

## Imperatives for the Christian Life Pt 2 – Be Stable

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*1 Corinthians*

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**Bible Text:** 1 Corinthians 16:13-14.

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Well, if you would please turn to the book of 1 Corinthians chapter 16. We finished the book of Hosea this morning. If you want to begin reading and thinking ahead, Lord willing, next Sunday we will begin a study of the gospel of Luke. So that is where we will be next and you can begin reading that and looking at that.

1 Corinthians chapter 16 we come to verse 13. We are going to read verse 13 and verse 14.

Paul writes:

Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.<sup>1</sup>

Let's ask God's blessing on our time in his Word tonight.

*Father in heaven, we thank you that we belong to you. We thank you that we are brands that have been snatched out of the fire. We are your own possession. We have been purchased by the blood of your Son. We are your sheep. We are your people. And our relationship to you cannot be explained by us in any way, shape or form. But, Lord, it is explained entirely by your free and gracious love toward us even as we saw this morning. And so we bow before you and we just say, "Thank you for saving us."*

*It rejoices our hearts to belong not only to you, but to each other, to realize that we are a part of the family of God and that in this family of faith we have brothers and sisters. And we are our brothers' keeper, Lord. We have a responsibility to one another, to exhort each other all the more as you tell us to do in your Word even as we see the day approaching. Help us to be faithful to you, Lord, by being faithful to each other.*

*We ask your blessing upon your Word this night. I thank you for the high privilege I have to preach your Word to your people. My desire tonight is to magnify our Savior, to glorify you and, Lord, I pray that you would empower me to do that as I declare your*

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:13-14.

*truth. Help me, Lord, to cut it straight, to declare tonight not my own thoughts, but your very thoughts by being faithful to the Scriptures.*

*We ask, Lord, that you would enlighten us so that we grasp the things that we are taught, that they would take deep root into our hearts, that your Word would transform us, Lord, from the inside out. We pray for anyone here tonight who doesn't know you. We ask for their salvation. We ask for all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

As we mentioned Wednesday night, Paul is wrapping up this letter to the Corinthians by finishing with two basic thoughts. He ends the letter talking about relationships, but before he gets to those relationships, as he wraps up this letter he is saying, in effect, "Let me give you five very important things that you should not forget, five rapid fire commands, imperatives."

When you talk about something that is imperative, you are talking about something that is necessary, something that is a must and God doesn't give commands if they are not important for our lives. And so in verses 13 and 14 you have five imperatives for the Christian's life. And as I said Wednesday night, I want to say again tonight. Before we look at one of these imperatives, we just need to stop and let it sink in and we need to realize that this really is an imperative for us. This is not optional. This is not something that we ought to look at. This is something that must be a part of our walk with God.

We looked at the first one Wednesday night, verse 13, when he says:

"Be watchful."<sup>2</sup>

We talked about the necessity of living a life that is alert, spiritually alert, spiritually awake. And we noted in the New Testament specifically, you know, not our own ideas, but from God's very Word areas where we are told that we must be alert. We talked about being alert, for example, to the return of Jesus Christ, living our lives every day in the awareness that Jesus is coming again, being alert to the reality of Satan, being alert to the reality of temptation and all sorts of other things that we saw in the Word of God.

We talked about being watchful. We talked about how to do that and what it looks like when we are spiritually asleep and that we must not sort of sleep walk our way through our lives. We must remain alert at all times.

Tonight we are going to focus on the second imperative. I mean, we could rush through these. We could just make mention of them, but I thought it would be good because these things are imperatives, because these things are necessities. Let's just take... let's just slow down and take time to really think about each one of these. And so tonight we are going to set our focus on the second one, verse 13, when he says:

"Stand firm in the faith."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:13.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

We are commanded to stand firm in the faith. There is a definite article there in the Greek text. It is not standing firm in faith, but standing firm in the faith. And so he is talking about that body of Christian truth. He is talking about the gospel in all that God has revealed to us in Scripture related to the gospel, Christian doctrine. Stand firm in the faith that has been delivered to the Church.

So we are going not organize this tonight under three main headings. And the first one is this. What does it mean to stand firm in the faith? If we look to God's Word for the answer, if we pay attention to what the Scriptures say to us, what does it look like, what does it mean if we are standing firm in the faith?

And the first thing we can say about it, the first way it can be described is this. It means that we remain true to the faith that has been delivered to us. We stay true to it in terms of believing it and passing it on, teaching it. There is a body of truth. It has come to us from the apostles. It is set forth in this God-breathed book that we have in our hands, the Scriptures. And what has come to us from the Lord we must stand upon. We must defend it. We must contend for it. We must believe it. We must hold on to it.

We can say it this way. The first thing this speaks of is faithfulness to what God has given to us in an objective sense, right? The truth is outside of us. The truth is a deposit that has been put into our hands and now we must stand firm when it comes to that deposited truth.

For example, Galatians 5:1. When Paul is writing to the Galatians he says this.

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”<sup>4</sup>

And you are familiar with the book of Galatians. You know that the gospel was under attack. And so when Paul says to them, “Stand firm, therefore,” he is talking about standing firm in the gospel. When he says, “don't submit again to a yoke of slavery,” he is saying, “Don't give in to the Judaizers. Don't give in to these additions to the gospel. Don't give when someone says to you must not only believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, but you must also be circumcised. You must, in effect, become Jewish in order to be saved.” He says, “Don't give in to that. You stand firm in the truth that has been delivered to you.”

2 Thessalonians chapter two verse 15.

“So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Galatians 5:1.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:15.

Remember, it took time for the New Testament to be completed. It took time for all of this to come together that we now hold in our hands, a finished deposit as the apostles were giving the Lord's doctrine, the apostles' doctrine by Word and by letter, that was what these people were to hold to.

He says, "Don't move moved away from it. Hold firm to it."

By the way, these are military terms that we see here in verse 13. And when he says we are to stand firm, he means we are not to be moved away from it. We abide in the place where we ought. If you imagine a soldier being called upon to stand his post, to stand his ground, not to retreat. That is what he is talking about here. You stand your ground when it comes to this truth that has been given to you.

In fact, there are going to be times when we have to fight for it. Sometimes even within the realm identified as Christendom, I mean, even within this, you know, broad category that the world sees as Christianity. We must stand for the truth and at times fight for what is true.

Isn't it amazing that you have so-called churches that are now taking a very mild position when it comes to the matter of homosexuality? It is frightening because the Bible is very clear about it, isn't it, extremely vivid and clear about the fact that that is sexual sin. But it is not politically correct. It is sure not a position you can hold to and not be thought of as ignorant or be persecuted and so, you see, the Church begins to sort of move away from the Word of God, begin to sort of back up from what the Bible says.

Biblical roles of men and women. When you look at what the Bible says about that, it is very clear. It is not really foggy at all, but it is not politically correct. And so you see the Church begin to back away from what the Bible says about that issue.

The book of Jude the third verse it says:

"Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."<sup>6</sup>

You see, there is this faith that has been given to the Church and Jude says, "Fight for it. Stand up for it."

So what does it mean to stand firm in the faith? First it means we hold fast to the Word of God. We hold fast to the apostolic doctrine. We hold fast to the body of Christian truth. We are not moved away from it.

But we can say there is a second element to this. What does it mean to stand firm in the faith?

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<sup>6</sup> Jude 3.

Second, it means we continue in personal faith. If you are going to stand firm in the faith, not only do you continue to believe that it... that the Word of God is the truth, but there is that additional personal commitment to the truth. We can make that distinction, can't we?

It is one thing to say I know the Bible is the Word of God. I believe that the Bible is the Word of God. It is one thing to say that. It is another thing for you as an individual to be personally committed to the Lord by being personally committed to his Word.

We could say it this way. We must not be moved away from Jesus on a personal level.

Philippians 4:1.

“Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.”<sup>7</sup>

1 Thessalonians 3:8.

“For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord.”<sup>8</sup>

1 Timothy 4:1.

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.<sup>9</sup>

Even in the Old Testament there is this word about personal faithfulness, personal faithfulness to God.

In Psalm 101 verse three it says:

“ I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. I hate the work of those who fall away.”<sup>10</sup>

Even this morning we saw that when God does a work of salvation he heals the heart that is hopelessly apostate. In other words, he stops our turning away, moving away, running away from the lord. He creates in us a heart that is faithful to him in a personal way.

So it is not enough to say, “I believe the Bible is the Word of God.” It is not enough to say, “I believe that this is the truth.”

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<sup>7</sup> Philippians 4:1.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Thessalonians 3:8.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Timothy 4:1-3.

<sup>10</sup> Psalm 101:3.

Now the question is: Are you personally committed to it? Do you just believe it intellectually or do you believe it as a matter of personal commitment?

By the way, that gets worked out very practically, doesn't it? How do we know that we believe what the Bible says?

According to the book of James if we are not going to be self deceived, then we will not just be what? Hearers of the Word. We will be doers of the Word.

How do you know you believe the Bible? You obey it. You know you believe it when you submit to it and you walk in it.

Third, to stand firm in the faith means that we continue in our commitment to the believing community. There is this objective faithfulness. There is this personal faithfulness. And if we are standing firm in the faith there is a corporate faithfulness.

Standing firm in the faith—listen—standing firm in the faith, walking with Jesus means you continue with his people. This lone ranger mentality that has found its way into Christendom, this idea that I just serve Jesus as an individual and I have no real relationship to his body is something foreign to the New Testament.

Where do you find Christians in the New Testament? You find them in the body of believers. You find them walking with the Lord together. Oh, yes, it is true to say that someone's faith is genuine and real apart from everybody else's faith. I mean the Lord does an individual work of salvation. This is why if you were imprisoned your faith would not die. There is this personal relationship. But yet show me in the New Testament believers who had the opportunity to gather with other believers and just didn't want to or just chose not to.

Indeed, in the first century if you were going to hear one of these letters where would you have to gather in order to hear it? Where was it read? In the midst of the Church.

In fact, in the book of 1 John when apostasy is described, do you remember what God wrote?

“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”<sup>11</sup>

how do you know someone is an apostate? They don't continue with the church anymore. They don't find their place among God's people.

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<sup>11</sup> 1 John 2:19.

Philippians 1:27, listen to this. Again, you know, if you want to know my method here. I have been looking for this word translated “stand firm.” Where do we see this at in the New Testament?

Now listen to this. Philippians 1:27

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.”<sup>12</sup>

That is what it means to stand firm. It means we stand together. It means we are striving side by side for the advancement of the gospel and for the teaching of the gospel, for the faith of the gospel.

In fact, if you will notice, look at Hebrews chapter 10 if you would, please.

You know, there is that one verse. We are so familiar with about not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. But never forget the context for that.

What is being warned about in Hebrews chapter 10? Apostasy. I mean, walking away from Jesus, walking away from the faith. And so the need to gather together and be together has to do with the perseverance of the believer’s faith. God has ordained that he would supply what we need to persevere and one of the means that he uses to supply for us our perseverance is his Church.

Hebrews 10. Look at verse 24.

“And let us consider...”<sup>13</sup>

We ought to be giving real thought to this.

“...how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”<sup>14</sup>

What is the next word? Verse 26, what is the first word?

“For...”

Doesn’t that connect it with what we have just read? Yes.

For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, if we go on sinning

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<sup>12</sup> Philippians 1:27.

<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 10:24.

<sup>14</sup> Hebrews 10:24-15.

deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

For,

“Yet a little while,  
and the coming one will come and will not delay;  
but my righteous one shall live by faith,  
and if he shrinks back,  
my soul has no pleasure in him.”

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.<sup>15</sup>

Who are those who are truly saved? Those who persevere, those who persevere. What is he talking about in Hebrews 10? Persevere. Continue. Endure.

And what is a vital part of this endurance? Gather together. Exhort each other. Encourage each other all the more as you see the day approaching.

So to remain firm in our faith means we hold to the objective truth of the Word of God. It means there is this personal subjective commitment to the Word of God and it means that we see ourselves as a part of the body of Christ so that there is this commitment, not just to the Lord, but to our brothers and sisters, to his people.

What does it mean to stand firm in the faith?

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<sup>15</sup> Hebrews 10:26-39.



Fourth, it means that we continue to live eternity driven lives. You will not, you cannot stand firm in the faith unless you keep your eyes fixed on your hope. We are not to be moved away from our hope.

Colossians 1:23 talks about all this wonderful stuff that belongs to the believer. And then he says:

“...if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.”<sup>16</sup>

Don't be moved away from your hope. You want to be stable? You want to stand firm? Don't be moved away from your hope. Our hope is Christ and in Christ our hope is everlasting life.

So to be firm in our faith means we live in light of heaven. We live in light of eternity.

Look again here at Hebrews at chapter 11. Look at what we read beginning at verse 13.

After talking about all of our many of these testimonies of what God has accomplished in the life of people through faith, then the writer says this, verse 13:

“These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar.”<sup>17</sup>

How do you see what you haven't received? You see it by faith. You know it because God has said it, because he has revealed it. You know it is so real and so true that it is as though you can see it and you can welcome it from afar.

Notice what this resulted in, verse 13.

“...and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.”<sup>18</sup>

To see these things is to realize you are a pilgrim. This is not home. You are a stranger. You are an exile on this earth. That is to say you realize now you are left here to be a missionary.

Verse 14.

“For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.”<sup>19</sup>

Notice how this relates to stability in the faith.

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<sup>16</sup> Colossians 1:23.

<sup>17</sup> Hebrews 11:13.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Hebrews 11:14.

Next verse.

“If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.”<sup>20</sup>

They could have turned back.

“But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.”<sup>21</sup>

Who is the city of God prepared for? Not for those who turn back, but for those who confess they are strangers and pilgrims and exiles on the earth. Those who are looking for a better country, a heavenly one. These are God’s people.

Look back, if you would, please at 1 Corinthians 16 verse 13.

So he says:

“Stand firm in the faith.”<sup>22</sup>

There is an objective element to that, holding fast to God’s Word. There is a subjective element to that, a personal commitment to God’s Word. There is a corporate element to that. We commit to these things together.

And there is the need for spiritual vision and sight that is faith so that we continue and endure in this way looking for a better country, a heavenly one.

It leads to our second main thought tonight when we think about standing firm in the faith. What threatens our standing firm in the faith?

Is standing firm in the faith just an automatic thing? I mean, does it involve no effort on our part? When God commands something of believers, doesn’t it involve something on our part as well? Is he going to stay alert for you? Is he going to stand firm for you?

He supplies what we need to obey him, but nonetheless, it involves obedience. And if there is no battle for the believer in this area, then there would be no need to keep reminding us. What battles against our standing firm? The world, the flesh, the enemy.

So we can identify some things from Scripture under a few headings. First of all, what battles against your standing firm in the faith? Worldly ideas. The battle is going to be in our thinking. And it is going to come sometimes in an official form. Sometimes it is going to come in an unofficial form, but one of the real battles we face is with demonic

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<sup>20</sup> Hebrews 11:15.

<sup>21</sup> Hebrews 11:16.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:13.

doctrine. This is why the church is so important. This is why God ordained and called and gifted men to teach his Word, because this leads to the maturity of the Church so that we are not tossed to and fro, right, standing firm, versus being tossed all about by every wind of doctrine, Ephesians 4:11.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.<sup>23</sup>

How many tonight recognize there are false teachers in the world? How many recognize that what they are teaching is demonically inspired? And how many recognize that there is a lot of teaching going on that doesn't come from someone who is officially called a preacher? How many recognize that it can just be the conversations you have around school or the conversations you have with those whom you call your friends or the conversations that may even take place in the context of a family where people are spouting ideas that don't agree with Scripture and those ideas are upsetting the faith of others?

Paul was so deeply troubled about the gospel being forsaken by the Galatians, he could hardly contain himself. He believed they were saved, but he recognized something. If they are truly saved, they are going to continue with Jesus.

And so he saw that Judaizing threat as a very real threat. If our concept of grace makes us dull to their idea of real doctrinal threat, we are misreading the Scriptures.

Galatians 1:6 Paul writes:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.<sup>24</sup>

Do you want to know how important it was to Paul. You know this so well. Listen to what he writes.

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

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<sup>23</sup> Ephesians 4:11-14.

<sup>24</sup> Galatians 1:6-7.

For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.<sup>25</sup>

And why does he even mention pleasing men? Because this is often times how these false doctrines make their inroads into the Church. You have teachers who seek to tickle the ears of the listeners and tell people what they want to hear. Or they come in such an intimidating fashion that believers are brought to the place where they think that in order to get the acceptance of the teachers, they must submit to the doctrine that is erroneous.

Worldly ideas threaten our stability in the gospel. This is the need for maturity. This is the need for maturing. That is what the Church is about and that is what the teaching is about that we would mature in Christ.

But not only is our stability threatened by worldly ideas, our stability is also threatened by worldly allurements. That is, the world comes to us with all of its toys. The world comes to us with all of its offerings, all of its pleasures. And it is constantly saying to us, "There is something more important here than the gospel. There is something more important here than the Church. There is something more important than heaven. There is something more important than living of Jesus which is why it will be ok for you, you see, to take these precious things and put them on the back burner, sort of shove them to the periphery of your life because there is something that I have to offer to you that will really satisfy you more than this. It needs to have the priority, you see?"

You don't really need to be a fanatic for Jesus, do you?

You remember the parable of the sower that Jesus gave? You see the picture there of someone not stable in the faith, not rooted, falling away. Well, what does he say causes people to fall away or what explains their falling away from a human point of view?

Mark chapter four verse 18.

And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.<sup>26</sup>

What are we talking about in specific terms? Well, what is more important to you, your walk with God or money? What is more important to you spiritual things or possessions?

What is more important to you, faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ or relationships? Human relationships.

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<sup>25</sup> Galatians 1:8-10.

<sup>26</sup> Mark 4:18-19.

Can I tell this serving thing I see in the church? I see believers dating unbelievers. Does the Bible have anything to say about being unequally yoked? So why would a believer make the conscious decision to enter into a dating relationship with someone who doesn't have the same Lord, who isn't living life from the same perspective? I mean, listen. If you are talking about dating someone, isn't there the potential for emotional involvement that might actually lead to something else including the potential for marriage? Why would you want to be yoked to someone when you are in light and they are in darkness, when Jesus is your Lord and theirs is Belial? What fellowship can light have with darkness?

You see, what you are demonstrating is Jesus is not as important to as your desire for that relationship. That is the truth of the matter.

What is that? Worldly cares. Worldly offerings. Pleasure. Pleasure.

This is what makes sin attractive, beloved, the idea that there is a pleasure to be found in sin that isn't found in God. There is someone today, someone wasn't vacation, wasn't some special thing at all, there is someone today somewhere in this state out on a lake, out on a boat, out a football game not gathered with the Lord's people.

Why?

Look, I was 16 years old when I was converted. I can remember Sundays being for football games. And I can tell you that all of those football games ended. In fact, you know, when my favorite team—not the Houston Texans—won the Superbowl, not once, but three times in a four year period of time, you can't get on a higher mountaintop than that. You can guess who my team is, right? The Dallas Cowboys. That is exactly right.

I mean, we are flying high.

Now we haven't had a playoff win in 15 years or one I think.

What I am saying to you is this. Those things leave you at the end of the day empty, empty. It doesn't last. And our God tells us there are pleasures at his right hand that are forever more.

I have told you this before, but it doesn't hurt to repeat it. John Piper had a great insight when he said that sin is what we do when our heart is not satisfied with God. And sin is what we do when we believe sin's promise of pleasure more than we believe God's promise of pleasure.

Who traded the Lord? Who traded the Church? Who traded the Word of God today for some pleasure that won't last beyond this day?

What is that? Worldly allurements, having some standing among men, having some recognition among men. It threatens our stability.

Third, when we think about worldly allurements, there is also or we think about what threatens our stability, not only worldly ideas and worldly allurements, but, third, there is worldly opposition. People are moved away from the faith because they... all of the sudden it dawns on them. This is costly from a human point of view. Everyone is not going to applaud my commitment to Christ and my commitment to his Word. Again, Jesus shared that in that parable, Mark 4:16.

And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.<sup>27</sup>

This kind of opposition can come from the nearest and dearest of relationships. It can happen in your own family.

Jesus said in Matthew 10:35:

For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.<sup>28</sup>

And then our Lord said this to us.

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.<sup>29</sup>

What is Jesus demanding? That we put him above all other relationships. He is preeminent in everything. And, as you follow Christ there will be people maybe within your own family who scoff at you and reject you, shun you, distance themselves from you and now the question is: Will you move away from the faith? Will you move away from the Word of God? Will you move away from the truth so as to have their love and acceptance?

Your friends, people you have hung out with in the past.

Something else threatens our stability in the faith. In fact, we can sum the first three things up under this heading. Worldly conformity. Which is to say there is this constant pressure from this present age upon us wanting us to conform, conform in the way that we think, conform in the way that we feel, conform in the way that we live, which is why the Lord appeals to us through Paul in Romans 12:1 with these words.

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<sup>27</sup> Mark 4:16-17.

<sup>28</sup> Matthew 10:35-36.

<sup>29</sup> Matthew 10:37-38.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.<sup>30</sup>

How is the Lord going to transform us? How is he going to produce the character of his Son in our lives? A personal relationship, yes. That is the context for this. But it is through the renewal of our mind. We are sanctified by the Word of God, by truth.

Jesus prayed:

“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”<sup>31</sup>

So we are commanded to stand firm. And there is going to be a lot in this world that battles against our standing firm.

Let’s finish tonight with this thought. Practically speaking, how do we take action on this? How do we obey this commandment to stand firm in the faith?

I want to finish tonight by directing you to one other passage. Look again at Hebrews chapter 12 because I think Hebrews 12, the first four verses really give us just a great succinct glimpse of how we put this into practice.

Hebrews 12 verse one.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.<sup>32</sup>

What do we do? First of all, we remember our heritage. The Lord has saved us as an individual. Praise God for the salvation he has given us. But we are not the only one whom he has saved and we belong to the family of God and so, verse one, we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. He has just finished chapter 11. He has given us example after example after example of men and women who endured by faith. And he says, “Now remember something. You are surrounded in the sense of their testimony. You are surrounded by all these witnesses.”

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<sup>30</sup> Romans 12:1-2.

<sup>31</sup> John 17:17.

<sup>32</sup> Hebrews 12:1-4.

Next statement.

Let us also lay aside... let us also. Let us follow in their footsteps. Let us walk in the same way they walked.

This helps us to be firm in our faith, to remember that the gospel, the truth has been passed down one generation after another, one generation after another. Faithful men have taken up things they have been taught and taught it to others who then, in turn, teach it to others. And it is like this great relay race where the baton has been passed on one generation to the next. And I don't have the right now to take that baton of truth and sit down in the infield and say, "I don't want to run anymore."

I must take the truth as it has been passed on to me, this deposit of doctrine and pass it on to others.

It helps to remember I am not alone. I am not the first. I won't be the last if the Lord carries. Neither will you. I can just tell you from a pastoral perspective, if I ever get discouraged, if I ever feel tired, if I ever want to feel sorry for myself and throw a pity party, which I don't very often because I realize how blessed and privileged I am. But if I ever want to, how can you feel sorry for yourself and remember and look at, for example, the apostle Paul.

Have I been stoned? Have I been flogged? Have I been imprisoned, shipwrecked? No, no, no, no.

Well, then, wow. You mean I can't continue?

As we are going to see in a moment and I am not going to get there yet. I will get there in a moment, but we have an even greater example, don't we, than Paul. But we have human examples just like us, men and women who by the grace of God and through faith remained faithful.

If you get discouraged, read Hebrews 11 and look at what the Lord did.

Not only do we remember our heritage, second, we have got to put away the hindrances.

Let us also... what did they do? What should we do? Lay aside every weight. You see? He is giving us imagery of someone running a race. Can you imagine being weighed down with all this stuff. He says, "Look, if you want to run the race, you have got to lay aside the weights."

What is the weight? The sin which clings so closely. You see, we have got to put away our sin.



You want to be firm in the faith, you have got to make a choice. You have got to put away your sin to pursue the Lord.

Why are some of you not doing very well right now? Because you are all mixed up with sin. And you know it is sin. You have been taught it is sin. You are aware that it is sin, but you won't let go of your sin. And then you wonder why you struggle so much and are found being tossed to and fro with so many ideas. Put it away. Put it away.

Third, commit yourself to endurance.

“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”<sup>33</sup>

Realize that you have been saved to live for Jesus forever. And so in your own mind and heart commit yourself to the idea of endurance.

Do you know what God has promised you in this world? He has promised to conform you to the image of his Son. He hasn't promised you earthly riches. He hasn't promised you earthly ease. He hasn't promised you that people will love you. He hasn't promised you any of that, but he has promised that he will conform you to the image of his Son and that all things work together for good to those who love him, Romans 8:28 through 30.

Isn't that glorious? Isn't that enough?

It can somewhat be compared to marriage. When my wife and I were married 28 years ago one of the best bits of biblical wisdom we ever got and one of the best commitments we made is that we would never use the divorce word no matter how upset we got with each other, no matter how difficult it got. Divorce was not an option.

In other words from the very beginning we were committed to endurance. It changes the dynamic because you will either be joyful together or miserable together, but either way you are going to be what? Together.

And thank God that in Christ Jesus we have joys that I can't even express. But do you know what? The Christian life is of the rest of this life and for eternity. Put aside the stuff that holds you back. Commit yourself to the idea of I must endure. By the grace of God I will endure.

But here is the key. Here is the preeminent thing of all. In fact, this is the way you remember your heritage and this is the way you put away the hindrances and this is the way you commit yourself to endurance. You must fix your gaze on Christ.

“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”<sup>34</sup>

How do you run this race?

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<sup>33</sup> Hebrews 12:1.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

“...looking to Jesus, the founder and the perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”<sup>35</sup>

He has arrived where we are headed and will take us to be with him forever. And until that day comes we run with endurance the race on this earth and we do it fixing our eyes on him, not only in the terms that he is the model for the way that we ought to live, but he is the reason. It is an adoring gaze. It is a worshipful gaze. It is a loving gaze. It is a committed gaze. I live my life for Christ.

And I would encourage you with this thought. I have encouraged some brothers recently with this idea. You know, it is true that we must see our sin and we must confess our sin and we must—as we have seen here—put away our sin. We must do that. We are commanded by Scripture to do that. And any concept of grace that would have us not listen to the commands of grace is a missed, a distortion of what grace is. But will say this to you, that Jesus did not die for our sins to keep us constantly focused on our sins. He died that he might... we might realize he is the satisfaction for our sins. And we are transformed from glory to glory as we behold the glory of the Lord.

Focus on the Lord Jesus and love him and you will be ready to put away your sins.

You don't find the desire to put away sin by focusing on sin. You find the desire to put away sin by focusing on Jesus.

We are meant to live a cross centered, Christ centered life.

Talking with a discouraged brother the other day I asked him, “When was the last time...” because he was telling me how he was focused on his sin and how he was so discouraged about the sinner that he is and all the rest. And I said, “Look, when was the last time that you meditated on Jesus, who he is, why he came, what he did, where he is, who he is to us right now, where we are headed? Have you been meditating on him?”

I don't know about you, but I can think back to when I was first saved. My heart was so full of joy, so full of excitement, I knew so little, still do, but I knew so little, but I knew this. I knew that for the first time I really knew Jesus. And I just wanted to live for him. And that should never cease to be the driving force in our lives.

Paul said:

“...that I may know him.”<sup>36</sup>

Let's pray together.

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<sup>35</sup> Hebrews 12:2.

<sup>36</sup> Philippians 3:10.

*Father in heaven, we thank you that we are in the faith, if, indeed, we are. My genuine brothers and sisters, Lord, we thank you that we are in the faith and we thank you that we are preserved in faith by your power. But, Lord, we also recognize you work through means and you have commanded us here to stand firm in the faith. So wherever we have felt our feet slipping, wherever we have moved away even in the slightest way from what we know to be your Word, or moved away even in the slightest way from our personal commitment to your Son and to his Word, I pray that we would repent and heed your commandment and take action by remembering our heritage and putting away our sin, committing ourselves to endurance and fixing our eyes on your Son.*

*Help us, Lord, to be sensitive to your commandment to us that we would not forsake our gathering together, but that we would encourage each other more and more as we see that day approaching. Help us to be alert to the reality that our Savior might come even tonight, that we would not push precious things to the periphery of our lives for temporal fleeting worldly pleasures to take its place. I pray for anyone here this evening, Lord, who isn't yours. I ask for their salvation that they would see their need for Jesus, the true knowledge of him. And we ask for this tonight in Jesus' name. Amen.*