

“Hold Fast”

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The Globe, April 2022

“Hold Fast!” It’s a phrase that would echo across a ship while sailors raced to secure themselves as they braced for the impact of a coming storm. “Hold Fast!” instructed sailors to find something secure to grip on to for their own safety, and also to secure the safety of the ship for all. For many sailors, it became a philosophy of life.

In the movie “Master and Commander,” starring Russel Crowe, there is a graphic scene where one of the shipmates is being operated on for a head injury. The camera pans across the man’s hands, fists clenched tight and held together. “Hold Fast” was tattooed across his knuckles. He was facing a different kind of storm, and he was holding on for dear life.

We instinctively hold fast to certain things to get us through the storms of life, which shake our security and stability and may even take significant things from us. The Apostle Paul speaks to new Christians who are being rocked by external persecution and pulled apart by self-centered survival instincts. They were threatened with being cast overboard by cultural pressures and selfish instincts. They were tempted to cling to their comfort, their own interests and their egos. Does that sound familiar?

“... in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, **holding fast to the word of life.**” Philippians 2:15–16 (ESV)

Paul instructs the followers of Jesus that their ability to be lights in the dark world around them depended on them holding fast to the “word of life.” The “word of life” is first and foremost a person, Jesus! It is also the written truth of His revelation of Himself in the Bible. Jesus brings life, as do his words. They don’t just secure us in the storms of this life -- they also cause us to act and respond in ways that bless others, that bring calm to the storms. Clinging to Christ will secure us in the storms of suffering or cultural decay. Holding fast to Christ will set you free from your problems in the past, your pain in the present, and your need to control the future. Christ in you will give you life and make you an overcomer.

What we hold fast to determines how we will survive the storms we face along with how we will affect others in the storm with us. Furthermore, how we act and treat others reveals what we are truly holding fast to! To what do you hold fast?

Do you cling to certain people for security? Do you cling to financial security or your ability to control the world around you? Do you cling to your political party, your news source like Fox News or CNN, or your social media feed to tell you what to think and how to respond? Do you cling to your past family’s behavioral patterns or their messages about you or life? Do you cling to the bitterness of how you have been wronged? Do past tragedies hold you back because you hold on to them? Do you self-medicate with food, alcohol, drugs, pornography, etc. to numb the loss of control?

What you hold fast to powerfully effects everything: how you think about yourself... how you relate to others... how you make your choices... how you interpret the storm you are facing, and the choices you make in order to weather it.

Will your choices benefit you at the expense of others? Will those choices harm you and your future? Will you love your neighbor and yourself? Does what you hold fast to lead you to be patient and kind? Does what you cling to give you hope and meaning in the storm itself and help you see beyond the storm? Does it secure you so much so that you want to share that very anchor of hope with others, that they might have such a firm hope as well?

Does what you hold fast to compel you to lean into the forces of conflict that seek to tear relationships apart. Does it compel you to be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry? Does it compel you to make peace or to retaliate? Does it empower you to love your enemies and bless those who harm you? Will what you are clinging to right now cause you to lose your ground and compromise your character and values under the pressure of cultural forces?

It doesn't matter what your age or station in life is right now. What you hold fast to has an immediate and eternal impact on your life.

To what do you Hold Fast?

Friends, these are turbulent times! Let's be honest, life in this world is passing from one storm to the next. Let's hold fast to the Word of life... to Jesus Christ... and not just survive but be a light to this dark world.