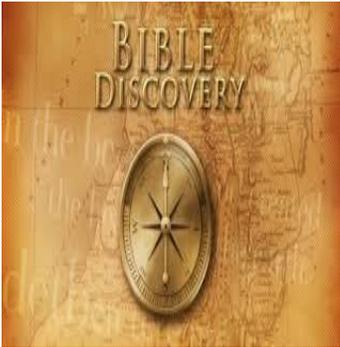


Holding On through God's Sacrificial Love



It's difficult to recognize how greatly western society's history has interwoven with the Church. Social services such as public education and medical care were spearheaded by the faithful; art, philosophy and even politics have all been influenced by Christian thought. Even our views on vice versus virtue have traditionally been reflected within society though that seems to be waning. It's harder seeing how we as the church have intertwined ourselves with our society. 85% of Christians polled hold the same views on many critical doctrinal areas as their secular counterparts. We've strayed from our foundational call to promulgate the teachings of Jesus to lost souls in the world in favour of policing this world, holding

holding her to account at best and being swallowed by her fangs of secularism as we proceed in the 21st century. While we've just finished celebrating Christmas, we're now leading to Easter – both public holidays in our society though far from celebrating Christ as intended. We measure our years from the date of our Lord's birth, but today's world abandons us as leprous outcasts. We yearn to draw near Christ, we long to keep what we've been taught, we seek to follow our Lord, living life in harmony with Him, yet we find ourselves increasingly out of step with the society in which we dwell – what are we willing to do about that? What must we do to hold on through God's sacrificial love? Lest we fear this is a recent condition, listen to Matthew Henry over 100 years ago, writing, "The love of this world's often the cause of turning back from the truths and ways of Jesus Christ. People turn away from the truth, they grow weary of the gospel of Christ; they're greedy for fables, taking pleasure in them." Paul pronounced the same thing to Timothy. It could've been written on the pages of today's Christian Post.

People don't behave like this because they've no choice; no, our world's chosen not to put up with the teaching of God even while it's gnawing at their hearts, churning their consciences, plaguing their minds, pointing plain as can be straight to the best resolve for their lives. They ignore God's sacrificial love and rather than as God's people being called to turn our backs on them, we're to be ever watching, ever seeking opportunities; ever willing to bear the effects of their distrust and ridicule against us - we're to be ever taking every chance to sacrificially share His Gospel out of love. Though we await our crown of righteousness in glory when our task is complete, and today neither want to subject ourselves to worldly ways, nor release ourselves from responsibility (*as we actually can't*) for reaching out, snatching them, if you would, from the very cusp of eternal despair, we continue to walk through our faith in Jesus who has purchased our salvation, given us life, set us free.

The task of sacrificial love explained by Paul to Timothy, and to each of us, is one which we'll have to give account to the Lord for so let's take it seriously. Never forget as believers in Christ we're called to spread the good news through sacrificial love that comes from self-sacrifice to alleviate the suffering of others. This love's a suffering love, a love requiring personal involvement in the daily, knotty problems of a hurting world, a love that bears the failings and weaknesses of others, a love committed to helping others regardless of the cost. We've the example of the patriarchs such as Moses, who risked his life before Pharaoh for the sake of his people, of David who though anointed king to succeed Saul, waited patiently, pursued and endangered, until God's timing was complete, of Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who faced death rather than deny their God to profess faith that He was worthy of their trust, and ultimately, Jesus, God's own Son who came from heaven to earth, and gave His life to redeem sinful humanity.

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We recognize our understanding of God comes primarily through every day personal experiences with Him while walking with Jesus. We witness global events, wrestle with daily challenges, seek to remain true to the gospel in our relationship with God, always shaped; strengthened by experience. You think you know God? You think your faith is sufficient to endure whatever comes? Consider the faith of Job, let something devastating happen in your life and see how you come to know God much more deeply.

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That's why we're called to hold on through God's sacrificial love. The more we need God, the greater our hold of Him is – holding on gives us strength to overcome what seeks to destroy us. Jesus always knew God, understood Him as His Father, and loved Him with absolute certainty, yet prior to offering the fishes and loaves to the multitude He offered them up to God for His blessing. In Gethsemane, during Jesus' worst days, He petitioned His Heavenly Father to allow this incredible power to sustain him. *"Not my will, but your will be done."* Jesus never doubted God's love was sufficient to sustain Him. So we too must have such faith holding on even in the midst of troubles and tribulation.

Paul never doubted God's love sustained him too. Paul's always looking ahead; ready to to receive His crown through the righteousness of Christ, able to hold on despite events threatening him. Paul's outlook on was death while following after God's own heart meant release from imprisonment in this world and enjoyment of a new world, the New Jerusalem shared forever with his Saviour. He knew "It only gets better!" Though we too may live amid poverty, amid pain, amid sickness, amid the agonies of death, we rejoice knowing to whom we belong, knowing **it only gets better**. Each of us must decide whether our walk with God will be neglected, rejected, spurned; if there'll be sufficient evidence of Christ found in us for conviction. Will our crown be lost, our light covered and darkened; will we have uncertainty, distress, and cloud harassing our final hours? Or will we hold on to God's sacrificial love?

Paul, while on the road to Damascus, encountered the incredible power of God's sacrificial love. Though blinded, he heard a voice, *"Why do you persecute me?"* Paul's story's the personal testimony of one man holding on to the incredible power of God's love. What's your story? Some 175 years ago, the incredible power of God's love allowed Christians to abandon their homes journeying to a new world where they found freedom to worship in spirit and truth. Faith in God brought them through. Holding to the incredible power of a God they believed would deliver them, freed from the tyranny of a state church and its structure, the Canadian Baptists struck a chord in the heart of what's now Canada enriching its lands with hospitality, mission and the gospel. Those roots are the foundation on which we continue our service to Christ. It's the same incredible power of God's sacrificial love that allowed Daniel destined for the Lion's den to never regret

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praying to the one true God, knowing He'd set him free – either on earth or in glory. It's the same incredible power of God's sacrificial love allowing Stephen to proclaim his faith even in the face of being stoned to death; the same incredible power of God's sacrificial love encouraging Timothy to defend the gospel, to preach the word - both when it's popular and when it isn't. Is the same incredible power of God's sacrificial love encouraging you?

Grasping the benefits of the incredible power of a God who loves us sacrificially means we recognize there's no real life apart from God! There's nothing better than being identified with the One who's made us – the One who died **for** us and gave us eternal life. If we would hold on when the world beats against our breasts, if we would accurately examine the benefits, we'd gladly embrace God's sacrificial love, and live every day with optimism in our hearts. We'll endure through suffering, trusting God's Spirit to sustain us, knowing suffering develops a life of perseverance that enables whatever comes, trusting - believing God brings us through it. Paul told Timothy right up front that, as he trusted in Christ, such a life would be filled with struggles [1 Timothy 6:12]; struggles, indeed a fight, for God and the gospel. That's not the message we hear from today's pulpits but it's why Paul calls it the good fight. As Paul looks back he can say he fought well. For him the struggle's over, he's finished his fight. Paul imagines holding onto the Lord as a marathon race. Those who run work hard both

on and off the track, running to reach the end of the race. Paul says he's finished that race; he's finished the work the Lord gave him to do, he's kept the faith. His trust in Christ never faltered. He believed in Christ to the end. God trusted him with the truth; he'd held on and kept it. Paul lived his life doing what he's now encouraging Timothy – and each of us – to do well, saying in essence, “Be ready at all times, and tell people what they need to do” (not what they may prefer to hear)! “Tell them when they're wrong”. Do it by “encouraging them with great patience and careful teaching” – not giving up on anyone. The incredible power of God's sacrificial love instills a very different task than the comfortable pew dictates –it's message: **a new hope** – a H.O.P.E. which stands for, “Have Only Positive Expectations”, a hope from God presented through you, in you, to others as His witness of what it means to hold on to a God who is trustworthy, holy, and loving. True character's revealed as you act especially when you're at the bottom. True character's revealed when seemingly God's forgotten you. Is this your story - displaying hope rather than despair? Does your character reveal Jesus in you, the hope of glory? Are you holding on to God's sacrificial love?

Another instruction Paul gives Timothy comes while life's draining out like the proverbial drink offering. In Jewish Law, animals presented on the altar, were preceded by a drink offering. The first mention of drink offerings is with Jacob. Jacob only offered it *after* God taught him what he had to learn; peace with his father-in-law Laban and his brother Esau; only after humbly experiencing wrestling an angel all night; and only after receiving a new name, Israel. Only then as Jacob returned to where God originally appeared to him was he ready for God to use him. The drink offering, offered after *completion* of God's work on Jacob, strongly suggests Jacob's submission and readiness to serve with a joyous heart. Jacob, stripped of all his own strength and cunning, had come to trust in God's strength alone, had found the joy of earthly peace, had entered God's presence. It's the same joy of God in the completed work of Christ at

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Calvary who poured out His life for us. We too can only know such joy, peace and presence of God in our lives as we allow our lives to be poured out for Him in submission and readiness to serve with joyous hearts.

Just as Paul offered his life to God, so to we present ourselves to the Lord, willfully giving ourselves to His service. Paul worked hard to achieve all the Lord asked of him. Not grudgingly but joyfully, fully appreciating the sacrificial love of the Father. Though we translate the Greek word Paul uses as departure to describe reaching the time to leave this life, it actually signifies much more than just his leaving. It gives the idea of success - of being set free. To him death freed him from this life to receive a better life. It's the same promise given to all who love Christ. It's for all who're waiting for Jesus to appear. We're holding on through God's sacrificial love because we've God's Word on it!

Do you know God's sacrificial love? Don't let another day go by without answering that question with a resounding YES! Give us a call to talk further or to just let us know you know JESUS and know that He loves you.

*Blessings,
Pastor Dave*