

Hold Fast

HN 01/01/06pm

Reading: Deuteronomy 11, Romans 12

Study Text: Deuteronomy 11:18-32

Sing Psalms: 135:1-6, 62:1-2, 5-6, 62:7-10, 62:11-12

A friend of mine has a boat and likes to go out to sea fishing. He invited me to go with him but I like to keep at least one foot on solid ground! The incessant rolling of a boat or ship – up and down, up and down – plays havoc with the stomach of many people. All they want is to stand on something firm. They are overjoyed when the ship reaches harbour and they can get back on solid ground.

For some life is like being on such a ship. The ups and downs, the lurching from crisis to crisis makes them weary and exhausted. The crises are often caused by relationship problems. But at a deeper level are spiritual problems, insecurity about life itself or fear of death.

Such people keep reaching out for something to hold onto, something that will support them in this journey of life. They reach out to friends, but friends fail them, they reach out to tradition but tradition fails, they reach out to gurus but gurus fail, they reach out to religions but religions fail. Even in the church many are tossed about by different winds of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14).

The Israelites were about to enter a new land. They would face many unknowns in the days that lay ahead. Moses exhorted them to *hold fast to the Lord your God*. He would uphold them and go before them. The Lord would give them increase, he would give them long life, he would give them victory, and he would give them peace on every side.

What will you encounter as you enter this New Year? How will you cope? Whatever befalls you, you can know the peace of God in your heart. Hold fast to the Lord your God and remember his covenant promises. Do not let doubts overtake you, for one *who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind* (James 1:6).

Learn and Teach

In Deuteronomy Moses is recalling the covenant the Lord made with his people at Horeb, and explaining and renewing the covenant commands. Those older than forty had seen the great deliverance from Egypt and heard the Lord declare the law at Horeb. But a new generation had arisen – young people who had not witnessed these defining moments in their history. It was imperative that their history and the law be remembered from generation to generation.

Their history told how their lives were saved and the law told how they were to live. Do you remember how your life was saved? How was it that you came to have eternal life? It was by grace was it not – grace alone! And how do you know how to live? How do you know what is right and wrong? You will be challenged in the days ahead as to what is the right thing to do or say. How will you know? Is it not that the Lord has told us how to live in his revealed word!

The teaching of the Bible still permeates our society- but for how much longer we do not know. When learned men attribute the royal law to Abraham Lincoln, and sayings of Jesus to other men, we might wonder how much longer these truths will remain. If they are only the words of men then men can change them. Nothing is regarded as sacred and beyond the realm of men.

Moses commanded the people to teach their children the words of the Lord (11:19). Before doing so of course they themselves must learn and obey these commands. Moses did not allow for hypocrisy. He did not allow a 'do as I say and not as I do' attitude. Parents must be examples to their children.

Nor did Moses allow a 'compartmentalising' of life- the sacred and the secular. These were not 'Sunday morning' Christians. You shall teach them in *your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up* (11:19). These commands were for all to obey all the time.

You will note that Moses said the same things before (6:6-9). Why this repetition you might ask. Well this is a sermon not a letter. Matters of importance are often repeated when speaking – and this is a matter of great importance. Failure to teach the children has contributed to the decline in the church that we see today in our land.

An elderly lady in the church told me that when she was a girl every child went to Sunday school. And the parents went to church, unless there were decidedly pagan. She sent her children to Sunday school but was not regular in going to church herself. Soon all the family were doing other things on the Lord's Day. There was so much going on- there was sport, the surf, the cinema and lots more. Her grandchildren have never even heard about Sunday school. They are highly educated in science or business, but Biblically illiterate. It only takes one generation. Teach the children the word of God.

Practice and Possess

Love the Lord your God, walk in all his ways and hold fast to him (11:22). His commands are not burdensome. They are good, they are perfect and pure, and in keeping of them there is great reward (Psalm 19). If you carefully keep all these commandments said Moses then *the Lord will drive out all the nations from before you* (11:23). You will become a great nation, a people that other nations will dread and stay away from. The Lord will give you every piece of ground that you tread upon.

The borders of Israel delineated here (11:24) and back in chapter one were not reached until the monarchy of David and his son Solomon. Failure to trust and obey the Lord prevented them from establishing these borders earlier and for the same reason led to them losing a lot of land afterwards. It pays to obey the Lord.

Trust and obey for there's no other way,
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Slaves they may have been and still few in number but in the Lord they would have victory. The Lord would cause others to fear these people of God. We find the same thing with the small band of Jesus' disciples (Acts 4). After receiving the Holy Spirit they began to speak the word of God boldly and perform miracles in the name of Jesus. They were only

fishermen, uneducated men from Galilee. The leaders in the city were amazed and indeed afraid to deal with them.

What about us? What about you? Do you find encouragement in knowing as a child of God others fear you? They may keep away from you or they may ridicule you and give you a hard time, but they know that they cannot touch a child of God. Hold fast to the Lord, stand firm in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will have the victory. *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the Lord* (II Corinthians 10).

Along the coast you will often see rocks standing high out of the water. You see the waves crashing against them day and night but still they stand. Will you be like such a rock in this coming year? Will you stand firm resisting all attacks of the devil and his agents. No matter what may come your way will you stand firm on the Rock that is Christ? Moreover will you be more than a rock. Will you be a lighthouse, a beacon of light shining in the darkness to warn those around you of the dangers of failing to heed the word of the Lord?

Blessing and Curse

Finally Moses makes it very clear and simple. *Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse* (11:26). The Lord had chosen these people to be his own special treasure. He had saved them from a life of misery and cruel bondage. Now he was bringing them into a land they could call their own by driving out nations mightier than them. It was all of grace, all the doing of the Lord.

The Lord established a covenant with his people, declaring how they should live in this land. They were to love the Lord and walk in his ways. That love would be expressed by obeying his commands. Disobedience would signal that they did not love the Lord and had gone after other gods. You cannot love the Lord and deliberately disobey his word.

The outcome of disobedience and turning away would be divine sanctions or curses – ultimately to being cut off from the people of God. These sanctions are spelt out in later chapters (27 and 28) – they make for solemn reading. Curses included drought, disease, disasters and defeat at the hand of enemies. Blessings included health, rain in season and peace on all sides. Moses told them to set aside two mountains in Canaan to remind them of the blessings and the curses under the terms of the covenant established at Horeb.

Years ago I saw a correlation between the level of poverty and the proportion of Christians in each nation. It was quite revealing. Those who obey the Lord he will bless. What about our own nation you might ask- so few in church but we appear to be so prosperous. But note two things – firstly there is a lag phase in such matters, and secondly the word ‘appear’. Appearances of prosperity can be deceptive.

Will you hold fast to the Lord in this New Year? Do not fear the world, nor compromise with the world. *For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have entrusted to him until that Day* (II Timothy 1:12).

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