

Take fast hold of instruction

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Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Rev A.G.Ross

[0 : 00] Now shall we read together in the book of Proverbs and chapter 4. Proverbs chapter 4. Hear ye children the instruction of a father, and attend to no understanding.

For I give you good doctrine. Forsake ye not my law. For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother.

He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words, keep my commandments, and live. Get wisdom, get understanding, forget it not, neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee, love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting, get understanding.

Exalt her, and she shall promote thee. She shall bring thee to honor, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace.

[1 : 15] A crown of glory shall she deliver to thee. Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings, and the years of thy life shall be many.

I have taught thee in the way of wisdom. I have led thee in right paths. When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straightened, that is, hindered.

And when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble. Take fast hold of instruction. Let her not go, keep her, for she is thy life. Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.

Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. For they sleep not, except they have done mischief, and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall.

For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence. But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

[2 : 23] The way of the wicked is as darkness. They know not at what they stumble. My son, attend to my words. Incline thine ear unto my saying.

Let them not depart from thine eyes, keep them in the midst of thy heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh.

Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee a froward mouth, that is, deceitful speech, and perverse lips put far from thee.

Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.

Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left. Remove thy foot from evil. And may God bless to us this reading from his word.

[3 : 28] Now shall we turn to Proverbs chapter 4 for our text, and to verse 13. Proverbs 4 and verse 13. Take fast hold of instruction.

Let her not go. Keep her, for she is thy life. Proverbs 4, 13. Take fast hold of instruction. Let her not go.

Keep her, for she is thy life. The story is told of a whaling ship in the South Seas, which was gradually sinking because of a storm.

The order was given to abandon ship, and very soon the boats were filled with the members of the crew. And they took with them all the necessities of life that they could manage.

And so they pushed off from the sinking ship. The two men were seen jumping from one of the little boats into the sea, and swimming for the sinking ship.

[4 : 34] And they made the ship, and climbed up eventually, and disappeared down through the hatch. They were absent just for a very short time, but they came back, clutching something between them.

And into the sea again they came, into the raging sea, and they swam for the little ship, and they got into the ship, and with them they took this thing, which they held on to, like dear life, for dear life.

This was the ship's compass, which was left behind in the hurry of abandoning the ship. They realized that they dare not be adrift on the South Seas without it, for the compass was their life. Now this is the kind of thing that verse 13 is bringing before us. Take fast hold of instruction. Let her not go.

Keep her. For she is your life. As the compass was to the men adrift in the South Seas. Now then, what is this instruction?

[5 : 50] It is not, as the Living Bible puts it, it is not take fast hold of my instructions. If that's what Solomon meant, he would have said so, as he does time and time again after this, in this chapter.

It's something much stronger than that, as all the other versions put it, and agree here with the authorized version. Something much stronger. It speaks of the wisdom that is brought before us here in this book.

The wisdom of which this book itself speaks. Take fast hold of instruction, of the heavenly, divine wisdom that is brought before us here in the Word of God.

We are to take fast hold of the instruction that is ours, in the sense that what comes to us through the Word of God are treasures which are hidden.

Treasures of wisdom and knowledge which are hidden in Christ, stored up in Him. The instruction, in other words, is simply the truth of the Gospel.

[6 : 56] the truth of the Gospel. Jesus Christ Himself is the way and the truth and the life. And both truth and life are in our text.

Truth being instruction and holding on to it is our very life. And so Solomon says, take fast hold not just of my instructions but of this whole body of wisdom that God has given to us in His Word.

Take fast hold of instruction. Let her not go. Keep her for she is thy life. I want to try and answer two questions here. And the first is, how is it done?

How does one take fast hold of this divine wisdom of the Gospel, of the truth as it is in Jesus? How does one do it?

What's the method? Well, may I put it this way? For one thing, the method requires application on our part. It requires application, diligence on our part if we are to take fast hold of instruction.

[8 : 11] The compass didn't just float to the men in the ships as they left the sinking ship. the compass was recovered after a frantic effort.

The men risked their very lives in going back through the stormy seas to the sinking ship for the compass. But notice this, they did that only after realizing that to have the compass was indispensable for them.

Otherwise, they would be adrift on the south seas, drifting helplessly and in the dark not knowing where they were going. And so the men went back for the compass because they realized it was indispensable for their very life.

And my dear friends, that's what we are doing if we have no regard for eternal things. We are drifting, we're going on in the dark. We don't know in fact where we're going. We're going from day, we're going from day to day and perhaps we're going round in a circle.

And we come back where we started. If we have no compass, if we have no instruction. But if by the grace of God and by the mercy of God, and it's only by the grace and mercy of God, we come to see the importance of eternal things, the importance of divine instruction, the importance of saving wisdom and a saving knowledge, for we've come to see that, then we must go further and apply ourselves to lay hold upon that knowledge and upon that wisdom.

[9 : 49] Some people are naturally thorough in all that they do. They apply themselves thoroughly to anything that they have to do.

Anything they have to do, they do heartily. Some people are like that by nature. There's no difficulty there for them. Others, however, let the world go by.

They are like pieces of driftwood. But you see, when this attitude to living, being like a piece of driftwood, letting the world go by, letting the grass grow under your feet, when this attitude is taken over into the spiritual realm, it becomes deadly.

It's the other attitude that's going to be our salvation. The attitude of application. seeking earnestly, pressing towards the mark earnestly, and with great concern and striving to enter in to a knowledge, a saving knowledge of the truth, as it is in Jesus.

Whatever happens, we begin here with application, with diligence, with an intense desire to come to grips with this thing that Solomon is writing about, this instruction.

[11 : 08] And we will never take fast hold upon it, unless we bestit ourselves, and move in its direction, by the grace and mercy of God.

Now there are those people, and we have them in our own church, who have the idea that because of the divine decree of election, all they have to do is to sit back and wait.

If they're going to have a saving knowledge of Christ, they'll have a saving knowledge, count what may. They just sit back and wait for God to do something for them.

My dear friends, this is a fabrication of the truth. There is no basis in the Bible for this kind of thing. We are to bestead ourselves. We are to strive, to press, to enter into the straight gate.

We are to approach these important issues, eternal issues, we are to approach them with diligence, with concern, with zeal, and with a desire to come to grips with them, and not just to hope in some way that if we are elect, then God will see that we'll be saved.

[12 : 21] That's not the doctrine of election. Now, it's fatalism, and there's no fatalism in the Bible. And so it requires application on our part. That's the first thing. But then to be a little more precise, if we are to lay hold upon this instruction of which Solomon is speaking, it requires application to what the Bible says.

Application to the written word. After all, the Bible is the textbook of divine instruction. And if this textbook is lost, or it's closed, or it's unused, then it's pretty certain we will never lay a hold upon instruction, upon eternal life.

If we could lay hold upon eternal life without the Bible, then God wouldn't have sent the Bible, he wouldn't have given us the Bible, he wouldn't have inspired it as he has done. And the very existence of this inspired writing, or these inspired writings, indicates that whatever we do, we must apply ourselves to what the Bible has to say to us.

It's through the Bible that we know what the Christian faith is about. The content of the Christian faith is made real to us through the scriptures. We know, of course, that there are people who, with great conviction, with great conviction, state what they believe the Christian faith to be, and they do so without any reference to the scriptures.

Now, such convictions, however fervently held, are wide of the mark if they are not related to the scriptures. Therefore, to know the content of the Christian faith, the content of the gospel, the content of this divine instruction, to know its doctrines, its precepts, its promises, we've simply got to go to the Bible, there's no way of getting around it.

[14 : 24] And if we're not prepared to do that, then we must be prepared, be prepared to drift, as it were, on the south sea, and to go on aimlessly through life, without having a compass, or a light, or a guide, or instruction to mark our way.

But when we apply to the scriptures, and take them seriously, then the very word of God becomes our authority for accepting the doctrines, and the precepts, and the promises.

These things we find in the word of God, these things become ours in response to faith, which is begotten within us by the word of God. And on the authority of the same word, we're in a position then to reject the doctrines and commandments of men.

And as I understand it, if we are to take fast hold of instruction, then we've got to apply ourselves in a general way to this, but more specifically, we've got to apply ourselves to what the Bible says, to its teaching, to its guidance, to its light, to its testimony, to its promises, to its precepts, to its doctrines.

We've got to apply ourselves to what the Bible says. But then, to be more specific still, if we are to take fast hold upon instruction, this requires not only application to the written word, it also requires union with the living word.

[16 : 06] Union with the living word. Paul says that Christ is made unto us wisdom. In other words, Christ is the personification of the divine instruction that Solomon is speaking of here.

He is the personification of it all, and if we want wisdom in a person, if we want grace and truth in a person, and if we want to lay hold upon that grace and truth, we lay hold upon Christ, for he is the person, and he is the only person in whom these things are hidden, and treasured, and stored, and made available to us.

And when our faith lays hold upon Christ, who is the truth and divine wisdom, then the truth lays hold upon us.

Now, here's the point I want to make here. The surest way to take fast hold of instruction is to have instruction take fast hold upon us. I am my Lord's, and he is mine.

And that's what happens when we take fast hold upon Christ. When we lay hold upon Christ, he lays hold upon us. It's a two-way thing. It's not that we frantically cling to Christ, and that's all. [17 : 30] He also lays his sovereign arms round about us, and he holds us fast. And that's the surest way to take fast hold of instruction. And it seems to me that we cannot say, with the greatest will in the world, that we have taken fast hold of instruction if we haven't taken fast hold of Christ, who is the truth himself.

Well, that's the first thing we look at here. It's an answer. It's an attempted answer to the question, how is it done?

How does one take fast hold of instruction? Does one just sit and wait for some kind of moving of the waters? Does one sit and wait, hoping that God might catch our eye or something, and do something for us that way?

Not at all. We've got to apply ourselves. We've got to be in earnest about this. We've got to see the worth of the instruction that's offered to us. And then we've got to apply ourselves by saving union to the Lord himself, who is the author of the instruction.

And when we have him, then we have no fear. We're at journey's end, as it were, as far as taking fast hold is concerned. We've got Christ, and if we've got Christ, he's got us, and he's got us forever, and forever.

[18 : 58] now we come to the second thing, the second question. How is it done? Secondly, why is it necessary?

Why is it necessary to take fast hold of instruction? Now let's try and answer that question. Well, it's necessary, first of all, because of the difficulties that arise, because of the difficulties that arise.

I think that this perhaps indicates the force of the words that remain in our text. Take fast hold of instruction, let her not go, keep her.

Now that indicates, you see, that there are opponents, there are antagonists, there are those who would filch instruction from us. Keep her, let her not go.

That indicates there's a pull in the opposite direction. That indicates, in other words, there are difficulties that arise in taking fast hold of instruction. Why is a loose hold upon the gospel and upon these things really insufficient?

[20 : 14] Why? Again, because of the difficulties in the way. We know very well that the looser a thing is, then the more easily it can be knocked away, or taken down, or removed.

And I believe with all my heart that unless in these days in which we are living, unless our grip on the truth is a firm, realistic grip, then we're in danger of losing what truth we may have.

Now, what are the difficulties? Well, we don't need to go very far from ourselves. The first one is this, the sinfulness of our own hearts.

And you can't get nearer ourselves than that. That's one of the difficulties, the sinfulness of our own hearts. There we have a very powerful opponent working actively within us.

The opponents are not all on the outside of us. Here is one within. Here's a fifth columnist within us. Now, you see, every one of us by nature, let us face it, is against a saving knowledge of Christ.

[21 : 24] We put this off for as long as we possibly can. We don't rush at it. We put it off. We shrink away from it. We try and get away from it. We are against it by nature, a saving knowledge of Christ, until God by his word and spirit brings us face to face with it and enables us to embrace it.

But by nature we are against it. Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. And we have within us, within those very beings of ours, we have what the apostle to the Hebrews, writer to the Hebrews calls an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

And unbelief is the sworn enemy of instruction. Unbelief is the bitter antagonist of true religion, of this truth as it is in Jesus.

unbelief does all within its power first to keep us away from the truth. But if unsuccessful there, it does all in its power then to remove us from the truth once we have got it.

So we have this enemy, we have this difficulty to contend with, it's no imaginary one, it's one of the most real things in the world. What's keeping us from Christ? What's keeping us from the truth?

[22 : 46] truth. We may have a list of excuses, but here is one of the primary ones, our own sinful hearts that rebel against the truth. For we live at enmity against God, we are not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

And then following on from that, there's this other enemy, this other opponent, which, and it's not difficult for us to see where we're going now, the activity of the great deceiver himself, the activity of

the great deceiver himself, that arch enemy of mankind, that arch enemy of gospel truth and of divine wisdom, the evil one.

We've got to contend with him, and he injects unbelieving thoughts into our minds. He does many a thing to our minds, that's one of them. Other and we've got this to contend with.

And it's no hypothetical situation that we're contending with here. We are faced with the fact that round about us there is this roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, whom he resists, says Paul, steadfast in the faith.

And then from there we move on to another enemy that would keep us from taking fast hold of instruction, another difficulty. And it is the spirit of the age in which we live.

[24 : 16] And the spirit of our age really is the spirit in every age. Although perhaps in our age we may think, because we live in our own age, not in some other age, we may think that it's worse in our age than in any other, and perhaps it is.

Now you see, the spirit of the age is very clearly against any genuine commitment to Christ the living truth. The spirit of the age is the spirit that questions the foundations of Christianity and the relevancy of Christianity.

Skepticism and humanism are in the air. This is the accepted view, this is the expected view in so many circles. And this very atmosphere in which we live, this skeptical atmosphere in which we live, very naturally makes it difficult for us to concentrate on this instruction we are to take fast hold of.

This spirit makes its own contribution to the difficulty that is ours in seeking those things which are above. And so powerful is this enemy so powerful are all the difficulties I mentioned and many others that unless we have a firm grip upon the truth then we are in danger of losing grip.

The pressure is so great. We become like those two men in the New Testament of whom Paul writes in 1st Timothy chapter 1 men by the name of Hymenaeus and Alexander.

[26 : 01] Now we are told about Hymenaeus and Alexander that they made shipwreck of their faith. That's a very descriptive way of putting it. They made shipwreck of their faith. They had lifted their anchor and they drifted onto rocks and they became a wreck.

Fancy two professing Christians becoming a wreck. They made shipwreck of their faith. Why? Well Paul tells us very precisely he tells us he says it was because they ceased to hold on to the faith that they professed.

Their grip slipped and down they went onto the rocks. They made shipwreck of their faith. So this is no new thing. It goes back to these men and to long before these men and it's something that has not ended with them.

It's something with us today we can think of people who perhaps ten years ago held on to the truth. But for one reason or another their grip slipped and they don't even come to the house of God now. You see the reality of it. It's a real thing that Solomon is speaking of that Paul is mentioning here in Timothy. The danger of making shipwreck by losing grip on the faith that was once delivered to the saints.

[27 : 27] Let us be warned then by the testimony of Hymenaeus and Alexander and the testimony of others in our own day and generation whom we knew were once in holding on to the faith but now have gone away from it.

It's a sad thing to see. That's the first thing then. Let us recap here. Why is it necessary to take fast hold of instruction?

Well we're trying to answer that by saying first of all because of the difficulties that arise. That's the first thing. And then again why should we take fast hold of instruction? Because of the benefits that accrue.

Because of the benefits that accrue. You see it's a gainful exercise is this. When God through Solomon says take fast hold of instruction let her not go keep her for she is your life.

This is a gainful exercise. He's not out to cause us loss but to cause us inestimable gain. And so we now look at the benefits that accrue.

[28 : 31] And this is the reason why we should take fast hold and never let our grip slip of the truth as it is in Jesus. Now the list of benefits as you would expect is as long as one's arm.

Almost an endless list of benefits of belonging of having a grip upon this instruction and of belonging to him who is the truth and the life as he is the way.

For one thing, to have this grip, this hold of the truth, gives stability to Christian character. It gives backbone to us when very often we need that very thing.

During the years just before the disruption in 1843 when the evangelical faith was being jettisoned and abandoned by men in the Church of Scotland who were known as the moderates, in those days when true preaching had left so many of the pulpits in Scotland, the day was saved by those men who were grounded in the truth and who clung tenaciously to the truth and refused to be moved away by the modernism that came in from Germany.

They held on to it. And because of the backbone that was there, because of the grip that they had on the truth, they were the men who had the strength of character to break away from the establishment and to form the Church of Scotland free.

[30 : 18] This thing, you see, gives stability to character and gives us conviction and the ability to act on our convictions. Again, there's this benefit, that those who have laid hold upon the truth like this, those men, those women, are the glory of the Church.

And the Church hasn't much to glory in, apart from the Lord Jesus himself, the Church hasn't much to glory in, if the Church has not men and women who are like this, who are a credit to the Church, because they are men and women of conviction.

And they know where they stand, and they refuse to be moved by every wind of doctrine that may come their way. But more than that, even, there's this great benefit too, that those who have laid hold upon this instruction, they are not only the glory of the Church, they are also the glory of Christ. And we have his authority for saying that. In his high priestly prayer, Jesus says, and I am glorified in them.

Fancy Jesus saying that. He says, I am glorified in these my people who hold on to the truth. I am glorified in them. They are glory to me, and they bring honour to me. And if we don't count that a benefit and a blessing, then we have never laid hold upon the truth.

[31 : 48] And also too, laying hold upon the truth like this gives us strength for service. It gives drive, and purpose, and direction, and meaning.

to our service for Jesus Christ, when otherwise our service will become a meaningless round, a boring round of duties. Unless we've got this drive, and this purpose, that we know the truth for ourselves, we're holding on to the truth, and the truth is holding on to us.

Our service for Christ becomes such an innocuous thing, an empty thing, but this gives it drive, and direction, and power, and meaning. Now I want to give three other benefits, and may I put it in this way, looking closely now at the text.

If we hold on to the truth, as Solomon says here, by taking fast hold of instruction, then we have our best friend.

the truth is our best friend. Therefore, Solomon says, let her not go. She's your best friend. You'll never get to heaven without her.

[33 : 04] Without her. You'll never get to heaven without her. She's an ally. She's a sure guide. She is to us instead of eyes.

And she makes sure that by our holding, holding her fast, that we be brought safely to the land of pure delight.

Take fast hold of her. Let her not go. She's the best friend you've got. That's one, another benefit. Another is this, that she becomes our greatest treasure.

Solomon says in effect, hold on to this truth, this instruction, it's your greatest treasure, therefore, keep her. keep her under lock and key. That doesn't mean to say, of course, that we're not to share this with us, with us, of course we are, but we're not to lose this for ourselves.

We've got to hide the word of God in our hearts, for this is the pearl of great price. Keep her, says Solomon, she's your very, she's your greatest treasure.

[34 : 15] We think of the words of Jeremiah when he said, thy words were found and I did eat them and they became the joy and the rejoicing of my heart.

Thy words were found and I devoured them, I devoured them, and they became the joy and rejoicing of my heart. I hid them within myself, so precious were they to me such great treasure, those words of thine.

Oh, to have the word of God in the heart. In days when Roman Catholics were not permitted to read the scriptures for themselves, a priest on one occasion angrily snatched a New Testament from a young lad in his congregation and he told the boy never ever to read the New Testament again.

The boy said to him, Father, you cannot take away the six chapters of Matthew I've learned by heart.

That's where to have the word of God in the heart. It becomes our greatest treasure and Jesus himself is the personification of it, the living wisdom and the living truth.

[35 : 44] Here's the last benefit. She is your life. That's the way the text ends. She is your life. She's like the compass that was recovered by the two men.

Without this instruction all is lost. And how sad for all to be lost when we have available within our reach the very means that will bring us safely to the end of the journey and into the land of pure delight where glory glory dwelleth.

The Benedict. There are some of them. I'm sure you can add to that list but they're sufficient there to quicken us, to encourage us, to make us think. Why is it necessary to lay hold upon instruction and to take fast hold?

Because of the difficulties that arise, because of the benefits that accrue and then just a very brief word, because of the obedience that avails.

Because of the obedience that avails. You see, we are instructed to lay hold upon instruction and to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams.

[37 : 05] You see, God, through his servant Solomon, puts this to us quite clearly. He says, take fast hold of instruction, not just take it for your consideration, just think over it, think over it as the years go by, just keep thinking about it, not at all.

He says, take fast hold of instruction and he expects us to obey it. It's a matter of obedience and not for an ending consideration as to whether we should obey or not.

The time has passed for all of us, I believe, for wondering whether or not we should obey it. The time has passed for that. The time for us now is to obey and to obey is better than sacrifice and to listen and to hearken than the fat of wrath.

And why is the time passed for considering whether or not we should give obedience to this? Well, because the time is short. Because the time is short and the days are passing and we don't know what a day and now may bring forth, how long are we going to think this over in our minds and yet do nothing about it?

And that's what so many are doing. They know all about what I've said tonight but they do nothing about it. They are no further, they are no nearer it now than they were 20 years ago. what I would have. Now you see this is presented to us tonight in order that we might give active obedience and no longer dawdle or put off or procrastinate or find some reason why we shouldn't obey and so on.

[38 : 45] And you see what God is offering to us here in the scriptures is the gospel itself. And whatever else we may think of the gospel we must say this. The gospel is our life.

It's the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believe. Lord I believe. Help thou my unbelief. Let us pray. our gracious God in the quietness of this hour of worship wilt thou manifest thyself to us and bring home to our hearts the things that we have been thinking of together this evening.

May we not dismiss them. May we not procrastinate. May we not try and excuse ourselves that these words do not really apply to me.

O Lord our God we ask this night that thou wilt help us each one to take fast hold of instruction. To hold on to it as the dearest thing that we have.

[40 : 11] The most precious thing this world affords. Never to let it go. Lest we make shipwreck of those precious lives and souls of ours.

Look down upon each one of us. Met before thee this evening. We come with thankful hearts that thou hast given to us the instruction to lay hold upon.

And we thank thee for bringing before our minds the many blessings that follow our laying hold upon it. Lord wilt thou deliver us from that evil heart of unbelief that is one of the most potent of our adversaries and give to us a heart that is willing and eager, a heart that applies itself to those things that are so important for time and for death and for eternity.

Hear us then we humbly pray as we bow in thy presence at the close of this service of worship here on this Sabbath evening. Remember each one of us.

Send us away with a song in our hearts and we have reason to sing the new song if we have laid hold upon the author of it.

[41 : 39] Deliver us oh God we pray from anything that would mute this song upon our lips. Help us to show forth the praises of him who has called us from darkness into his marvellous light.

And this we ask in Jesus name and for his sake. Amen.