

**TRUTH FOR TODAY**

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**PROVOKE UNTO LOVE AND GOOD WORKS #2**

Our thoughts in this and the article from last month center around the inspired words of Hebrews chapter 10:

*“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:23-25).*

The writer emphasizes first from this text the need for holding fast to the faith - to be so attached to the faith that nothing can pull you from it.

Repeatedly through the New Testament, Christians are admonished to *“hold fast”*: *“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).* *“Hold fast the form of sound words” (2 Timothy 1:13).* To the church at Sardis, Jesus said, *“Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent” (Revelation 3:3).* To the church at Philadelphia, Jesus said, *“Behold, I come quickly: hold thou fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (Revelation 3:11).* Throughout Hebrews, the writer encouraged his readers to *“hold fast their boldness (3:6,14)* and to *“hold fast their profession” (4:14).*

Now, the Christians are encouraged to cling to *“the profession of our faith,”* or, as the American Standard Version renders it, *“the confession of our hope.”* Many feel this refers to the confession one makes at baptism. Regardless, the emphasis is the same, *“Don’t forsake Christianity by reverting back to Old Covenant worship or by going back to the world. Hold fast to the Christian faith!”*

Such was to be done “*without wavering.*” At this time, some were already wavering, and some had already wavered. In light of the benefits and blessings Christ offers, why would anyone even dream of leaving Him? Their faith was faltering because of pressure by persecution. These were the “Jesus Jews,” i.e., Jews who had obeyed the gospel. They were lonely, as the Gentiles would have nothing to do with them because they were Jews, and as the Jews shunned them because they were Christians. Many of these were now without homes, jobs, respect in the community, and protection and had become the easy targets of criticism and blame -- simply because they were Christians!

One person who took aim at them was Nero. On July 18, A.D. 64, there was a fire in Rome that destroyed much of the city. Nero was believed to have started it to make room for a new palace project he had dreamed of. To divert suspicion from himself, he blamed the Christians and started a bloodthirsty campaign to purge them from his empire. He had some:

*“nailed to crosses; others sewn up in the skins of wild beasts, and exposed them to the fury of dogs; others were smeared over with combustible materials and used as torches to illuminate the darkness of night. The gardens of Nero were destined for the melancholy spectacle, which was accompanied with a horse race and honored with the presence of the emperor”* (Edward Gibbon, The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, p. 600).

That’s why they were in danger of wavering! Yet, in spite of those extreme circumstances, they were still under obligation to “*hold fast*” to their faith at the expense of everything -- including life itself! “Don’t save your life only to lose your soul!”

But, what about us today? Do we know of those who are wavering from the faith?

Could it be that we are in danger of such ourselves? And, if so, under what conditions? The admonition to “*hold fast the faith*” was sorely needed then - but what about today?

Surely, in our age of comfort, conveniences, and religious freedom, no one even contemplates drifting from Christ, right?

No doubt, every one reading these words can name at least one, if not several, who have or are wavering from the truth. No, not reverting back to the law of Moses, but back to the world of sin. Many begin to compromise with denominationalism and false doctrine; others bend to pressure exerted by peers. People who at one time were fervent, faithful, and “on fire” for the Lord, but who today seldom if ever darken the doors of a church building. One has well said that today we have many “Alka-Seltzer” Christians: you just dip them in water - they fizzle for a while - and then disappear! Could this even be true of you, dear friend?

Do we say enough about finishing the Christian race? The crown of life is promised only to those who finish the race, not to those who begin well, but then slacken and eventually drop out altogether! And, do we not realize the seriousness of it all? These are live versus death, heaven versus hell matters!

In short, we need people who will endure: “*For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise*” (Hebrews 10:36). The word “*patience*” also denotes “*endurance*” and literally means to “*abide under.*” In ancient times, the word described a beast of burden - like an old donkey - loaded down with baggage. Even when the load was stacked higher and higher, the donkey kept standing. It had “*patience,*” that is, it did “*abide under*” the load. The same ought to be true with us - no matter how heavy the load we shoulder, let us also abide under it.

During World War II in war-torn London, as the Germans kept bombarding the city with bombs in their fierce nightly raids, the morale of the people began to run low. It took the statesman - Sir Winston Churchill - to raise the spirits of the people, to give them the resolve to keep standing. One night, Churchill spoke to a large audience, and implored the people with these stirring words: *“Never give in, never give in, never, ever, ever give in!”* This is exactly what the author of Hebrews says to Christians of all ages - *“never give in - never give up - never, ever, ever leave the faith!”*

But why should we be faithful? *“For he is faithful that promised.”* Repeatedly, Hebrews refers to the promises of God. One characteristic of God is that when He makes a promise, He keeps it. Scriptures says there are five things God cannot do, that is, five moral impossibilities. One of the five is that God *“cannot lie”*: *“That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie...” (Hebrews 6:18)*. One has calculated some 7,487 promises by God to man as recorded in Scripture. Rest assured, He will keep every one of them, He will never renege, or go back on His word. If God said it, He’ll do it. Just as God kept His promises in the Old Covenant, He keeps even better promises in Christ. The point? As God hasn’t wavered with you, don’t you waver with Him!

Next, our text emphasizes there is something we can do to keep brethren from wavering:

### **THE NEED FOR PROPERLY PROVOKING EACH OTHER**

*“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works”*  
(Hebrews 10:24).

*“Let us consider.”* *“Consider”* means to direct one’s whole mind to an object, to “give it your all” in taking careful note of each other’s spiritual welfare. After all, “no man is an

island to himself.” Long ago, Cain asked, “*Am I my brother’s keeper?*” God’s reply: “You’d better believe it!”

Because these ancient believers were in danger of renouncing their faith, the author exhorts them to put their entire minds to the task to “*provoke one another.*” “*Provoke*” is generally used negatively in our time, meaning to “irritate.” At times, we do things to provoke or irritate others today, whether it’s something as minor as not picking up after ourselves or something as major as reckless driving. It’s easy to become provoked in that sense of the term, isn’t it?

But in our text, the word “*provoke*” is used positively, meaning to “stimulate,” or to stir up. On occasion, we all need stimulating and stirring up to get us going, to keep us busy! Spiritually speaking, we need to “get on fire”! Often, we become incited over everything except what’s really important. For instance, in politics, tell a Democrat that a Republican’s better, and you’ll see someone provoked! Tell an Ole Miss student that Mississippi State is a better school, and you’ll see someone provoked! Ask a woman how old she is, and you’ll see a woman provoked - stimulated - stirred up!

Let’s become aroused to spiritual matters! After all, most of our world is in a lost condition and hell-bound (*Matthew 7:13-14*), many of our own brethren are drifting away (*Galatians 6:1*) -- we need to try and do something about it!

But what can stir us up? What can stimulate us? What can properly provoke us? Powerful motivations like God’s love for us, seen in His giving His only begotten Son as our sacrifice, made possible by His amazing grace. Couple all of that with His wonderful Word and our example and encouragement -- what a difference it can make! One of the best assurances of

our remaining faithful comes in our stirring up each other to act:

*“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:12-13).*

[continued next month]

Wayne Cox

### WEBSITE

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### GOSPEL MEETING

June 28 - 30, 2019

Mel Futrell, speaker

### VERONA CHURCH OF CHRIST

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