Hold Fast and Let Go

This title qualifies to be added to our list of "Divine Oxymorons." You know, "the greatest gift of all is free but it will cost you everything" and "the greatest victory we can achieve is through surrender." An oxymoron, just for clarification, is a contradiction in terms, a paradox. "Military Intelligence" is another clear example.

With the Passover fast approaching, we have taken several looks at topics of self-reflection and examination. This theme remains in alignment with previous studies.

As we just read in the CGG Essay, maintaining control in excess can lead to many undesired outcomes and even thwart our spiritual growth and hinder our relationship with God. The desire to control may have several root causes. Fear, as mentioned, can also be a lack of trust in God. We may think we are doing what God wants us to do and even "lending him a hand." God certainly does not need us helping Him. God will use whomever and whatever He chooses to fulfill His will.

Luke 3:8- "Therefore, bring forth fruits worthy of repentance; and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' because I tell you that God has the power to raise up children to Abraham from these stones."

I have certainly learned from my past mistakes, it is far better to be obedient and seek God and His will in all things than to hold tight to something I think He needs

my assistance with. We may get scriptural overload from this essay but we are cramming for an upcoming final.

Why do we hold onto things that are spiritually detrimental?

Jeremiah 8:5- "Why has this people of Jerusalem slidden back *by* a never-ending backsliding? They hold fast to deceit; ***they refuse to repent***." Refusal to repent! Have you ever found yourself to be in the middle of a trial or storm that you brought upon yourself? Almost never…right…I can almost visualize The Lord looking down at me just shaking His Head. There is our free will we all have, but God allows it regardless. But hold on, here comes the storm AND the lesson He sends with it.

James 1:2-8- "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you are beset by various trials, Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. But let endurance have *its* perfect work, so that you may be perfect and complete, not lacking in anything. However, if anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, Who gives to everyone freely and does not reproach t*he one who asks*; and it shall be given to him. But let him ask in faith, not doubting at all because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven by the wind and tossed *to and fro*. Do not let that

man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord. *He is* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

Hopefully, we will learn whatever lesson the storm or trial brings. If not, we will get it again. Some of us remember when schools actually flunked students who failed. You could be made to repeat a grade if you failed to learn and pass the subjects. Unlike nowadays, if you show up with a pulse, you pass or parents will sue the school board. If we fail a lesson from God, you can bet you will repeat it.

So why would we refuse to repent anyway? Pride. The original sin that caused Satan's downfall and one third of the angels to be cast down with him. Pride can cause spiritual blindness one may not even be aware of. We can be so stubborn and get so caught up in our motives, we can actually miss the mark on growing in our relationship with God. Are all storms and trials mere "coincidence" or are they specifically designed to get our attention?

Proverbs 16:18- "Pride *goes* before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

Proverbs 11:2- "When pride comes, then shame comes; but with the lowly *is* wisdom."

Proverbs 18:12- "Before destruction, the heart of man is haughty, and before honor *is* humility."

Proverbs 16:5- "Everyone who is *proud in heart is* an ***abomination*** to the LORD; *though joined* hand in hand, he shall not be unpunished." God really hates the haughty pride.

We have spoken numerous times on the contrite heart and humble spirit that God favors. **Proverbs 29:23- "**A man's pride shall bring him low, but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit." God will exalt those whom He chooses.

1 Peter 5:6-7- "Be humbled therefore under the mighty hand of God so that He may exalt you in due time; Casting all your cares upon Him, because He cares for you."

The pride filled Pharisee in the following scripture exemplifies someone who thinks more of himself than others.

Luke 18:11-14- "The Pharisee stood and prayed with himself in this manner: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men— extortioners, unrighteous, adulterers—or even as this tax collector. I fast twice in the week, and I give a tithe of everything that I gain.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not even

lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat himself on the chest, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled; and the one who humbles himself shall be exalted." Throwing your arm out of socket for notoriety will definitely draw attention but maybe not the kind we were hoping for.

Matthew 23:11-12- "But the greatest among you shall be your servant. And *whoever will exalt himself shall be humbled*; and whoever will humble himself shall be exalted."

God has a way of taking us down a notch when we get "too big for our britches" as my mom used to say. Take a hard look between now and Passover. Blowing your own horn does not make you a musician.

Romans 12:3- "For I say through the grace that was given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think with sound-mindedness, as God has divided to each one a measure of faith."

Isaiah 2:17- "And the pride of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day."

Hopefully we are not so puffed up we can take a step back and look at ourselves (which is what this whole "pre-Passover" time is for) and realize we have got some work to do. Anger, grudges, judgments and the like are things we may sometimes overlook as just being human. The Bible is very specific on our handling these faults. Judgments and unforgiveness will be held against us.

Matthew 16:15- "But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Matthew 7:1-2- "Do not condemn *others*, so that you yourself will not be condemned; For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you mete out, it shall be measured again to you."

As difficult as forgiveness can be, especially when we think we have been greatly wronged, remember, we are not to take offense **(Matthew 11:6, Luke 7:23)** and we are to esteem others more important than we are **(Philippians 2:3)**. It is definitely easier said than done, but when we forgive and are not offended, we get a little further from the things of this world and grow closer to God. His peace comes with this as well. We no longer carry the burdens associated with either.

1 John 2:15-16- "Do not love the world, nor the things *that are* in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him Because everything

that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pretentious pride of physical life—is not from the Father, but is from the world."

Romans 12:16-18- "Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high ambitions; rather, be accommodating with those of low estate. Do not be wise in your own eyes. Do not render to anyone evil for evil, *but* be prepared to do what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, as much as is your part, be at peace with all men."

Philippians 2:2-5- "Fulfill my joy, that you be of the same mind, having the same love, being joined together in soul, minding the one thing. *Let* nothing *be* done through contention or vainglory, but in humility, *each esteeming the others above himself.* Let each one look not *only* after his own things, but *let* each one also *consider* the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which *was* also in Christ Jesus;" Putting on the mind of Christ will unify us together in the faith.

God had and has His hands full of folks within His Church that are still full of pride. "Stiff-necked" is another term He used for the pride filled Nation of Israel.

Exodus 32:9- “And the LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it *is* a stiff-necked people.”

Deuteronomy 31:27- “For I know your rebellion and your stiff neck. Behold, while I am still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against the LORD. And how much more after my death?”

Pride not only can cause spiritual blindness, it can cause one to become deaf as well.

Jeremiah 17:23- “But they did not obey, nor inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, so that they might not hear nor receive instruction.” Have you ever known anyone who would not receive correction or constructive criticism?

Acts 7:51- “O stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so also do you.”

God will have His will imposed on those who refuse correction.

Proverbs 29:1- “A man who hardens *his* neck when reproved shall be suddenly broken—and that without remedy.”

Sadly, as we mentioned, sometimes one does not know they have an issue with pride and fully believe they are doing God's will.

Isaiah 46:12- "Hearken to Me, you stubborn-hearted who *are* far from righteousness;"

We can avoid a hard lesson from the Creator if we heed and obey His words and Commandments.

2 Chronicles 32:26- "Notwithstanding, Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, he and the people of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah." A little humble repentance goes a long way.

Psalm 31:23- "O love the LORD, all you His saints! The LORD preserves the faithful, and fully repays the proud doer."

Psalm 37:11- "But the meek shall inherit the earth and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." We know that meek does not mean week, but controlled strength. There is a scene in the movie "Man of Steel" and it depicts a young Clark Kent (Superman) being shoved to the ground by a bully trying to pick a fight. Clark does not fight back and the bully walks away when he sees Clark's father

watching. As Clark gets up, the metal fence post he was holding onto was crushed. That is controlled strength. Holding our peace when someone cuts us off in traffic is another example. Remember, hold no grudges or judgments, and take no offense. Jesus forgave those who nailed Him to the cross.

Psalm 101:5- "Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, in secret I will cut him off; he who has a haughty look and a *proud heart*, I will not allow." There are no secrets from God.

Our basic human nature is one of rebellion against God and His ways.
1 Samuel 15:23- "For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king!"

Jeremiah 17:9- "The heart *is* deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" We war with our flesh and its desires against our spirit.

Romans 8:7-8- "Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God; neither indeed can it *be.* But those who are in *the* flesh

cannot please God." By submitting all we are to God and His Commandments we have the ability to overcome the flesh.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5- "For although we walk in *the* flesh, we do not war according to *the* flesh. For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to *the* overthrowing of strongholds, Casting down *vain* imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought into the obedience of Christ;"
Bringing every thought into captivity is no small task *but it is our responsibility to walk as He walked.*

Deuteronomy 11:22- "For if you shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you to do—to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, and to hold fast to Him,"

Deuteronomy 13:4- "You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments, and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him."

Joshua 22:5- "Only, diligently take heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments, and to cleave to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul."

If we can learn to overcome and let go of our pride, we will reap the blessings that God promises. To accomplish this, we must ***hold fast*** to keep His Commandments.

Proverbs 4:4- "He also taught me, and said to me, "Let your heart ***hold fast*** my words; keep my commandments and live."

Romans 15:4- "For all the things that were written before were written for our instruction, so that through patient endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures *we might have hope*."

Romans 12:9- "*Let* love be without hypocrisy, abhorring that which is evil and *cleaving* to that which is good."

Titus 1:9- "*Holding steadfastly* to the faithful word, according to the teachings *of Jesus Christ*, so that he may be able both to encourage with sound doctrine and to convict those who are gainsayers."

Hebrews 4:14- "Having therefore a great High Priest, *Who* has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, we should ***hold fast*** the confession *of our faith*."

Hebrews 10:23-25- "Let us ***hold fast*** without wavering *to* the hope *that* we profess, for He Who promised *is* faithful; And let us be concerned about one another, and *be* stirring up *one another* unto love and good works; Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, even as some *are* accustomed to do; but rather, encouraging *one another*, and all *the* more as you see the day drawing near."

Revelation 3:3- "Therefore, remember what you have received and heard, and *hold on to this*, and repent. Now then, if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you shall by no means know what hour I will come upon you."

Revelation 3:11- "Behold, I am coming quickly; ***hold fast*** that which you have so that no one may take away your crown."

We have been given a tremendous gift that was bought with the Highest Price.

Matthew 11:25- "At that time Jesus answered and said, "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent, and have revealed them to babes."

Pride is a most difficult nut to crack but we must break through this barrier to open the door to spiritual growth. Yielding the fruits of the Spirit will follow with due diligence. .

Galatians 5:22-26- "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, Meekness, self-control; against such things there is no law. *But those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts*. If we live by *the* Spirit, we should also be walking by *the* Spirit. We should not become vain-glorious, provoking one another, *and* envying one another."

2 Timothy 3:1-5- "Know this also, that in *the* last days perilous times shall come; For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, braggarts, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, savage, despisers of those who are good, Betrayers, reckless, egotistical, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God;

Having an outward appearance of godliness, but denying the power of *true* godliness. But *as for you*, turn away from *all* these."

Between now and Passover, let us make a concerted effort to fully examine ourselves in preparation for renewing our Covenant with The Lord. Seek to hold fast His Word and way of life in all things. Pray with diligence and ask Him to reveal any areas of iniquity we may be overlooking that we may seek forgiveness, repent and put all things under submission to Him. May we let go of any issues of pride that may be holding us back in our spiritual growth, that we can move forward to fulfilling our creation purpose according to His Divine and perfect will.

Philippians 3:13-15- "Brethren, I do not count myself as having attained; but *this* one thing *I do*— forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to the things that are ahead, I press toward *the* goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. So then, let as many as *be* perfect be of this mind. And if *in* anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal even this to you."
Amen.

BL-03/04/23