

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

MARCH 2022

“Hold to God’s Unchanging Hand”

The hymn *Hold to God’s Unchanging Hand* contrasts the fleeting and uncertain nature of temporal things with the constancy and dependability of God.

The hymn begins with the words, “Time is filled with swift transition.” These words might bring to mind to the ever-evolving morals of society. Thankfully, God gives us a steady, reliable guide to direct us. Instead of being tossed to and fro by society’s shaky standards, the faithful Christian holds steadfastly to “*the Lord’s word*,” which “*endures forever*” (1 Pet. 1:25).

The opening words of the hymn might also bring to mind the brevity and uncertainty of our time on earth. The “swift transition” of one’s physical life could be likened to “*a vapor that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away*” (Jas. 4:14b). The Spirit tells us, “*you don’t know what your life will be like tomorrow*” (Jas. 4:14a).

While such brevity and uncertainty are applied to our physical lives, our *spiritual* lives need not be filled with uncertainty at all. Those who are right with God can lean on His steady hand, even when life on earth is at its shakiest.

The hymn goes on to say, “Naught of earth unmoved can stand.” Not only do we not know how much longer each of us has on earth, but none of us even know how much longer the earth and temporal things in it will continue to exist. In 2 Peter 3:10, the apostle Peter gave part of God’s answer to those who scoff at the idea of the Lord returning on the Day of Judgment. He says, “*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.*”

The contrast between God’s eternal power and what 2 Peter 3:10 says about the earth shows the foolishness of building our hope on temporal

things and the *wisdom* of basing our hope on *eternal* things (Matt. 6:19-20). This principle is expressed in the final words of the hymn’s first verse, which say, “Build your hope on things eternal, Hold to God’s unchanging hand.”

The second verse of the hymn says, “Trust in Him who will not leave you, Whatsoever years may bring...” Though future temporal things are unsure, God promises His children that *He* will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5). God’s children can count on Him to *know* all that we face (Rev. 2:9), to *care* (1 Pet 5:7), and to ensure we always have what’s needed to obey Him (1 Cor. 10:13), no matter the trial faced.

A particular trial that highlights God’s trustworthy hand is alluded to in the latter part of the hymn’s second verse. There the song says, “If by earthly friends forsaken, Still more closely to Him cling.” While behavior of others can be unpredictable, God is steady. God’s faithfulness is especially precious to consider when we are forsaken by others (cf. 2 Tim. 4:16-17).

The third verse of the song (omitted in *Hymns for Worship*) says, “Covet not this world’s vain riches, That so rapidly decay, Seek to gain the heav’nly treasures, They will never pass away!” This compares the value of fleeting earthly riches with lasting spiritual riches (cf. Luke 12:13-21).

The hymn’s final verse digs deeper into the lasting value of being spiritually rich. The verse says, “When your journey is completed, If to God you have been true, Fair and bright the home in glory Your enraptured soul will view.”

This home is a guarantee for those who choose the path of righteousness, because God can be trusted to fulfill His promises (Titus 1:2). God’s faithfulness thus gives a sure foundation on which to build a hope that anchors the soul.

This gets at the underlying theme of this thoughtful hymn. While life on earth has much uncertainty, God is ever-reliable. May we hold steadfastly to *His* “unchanging hand.”

“Overcome Evil with Good”

Romans 12:19-21: *Don't seek revenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to God's wrath. For it is written, "Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord." Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in doing so, you will heap coals of fire on his head." Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

The first eleven chapters of the book of Romans describe the “*mercies of God*,” which should motivate us to “*present [our] bodies a living sacrifice*” to God (**Rom. 12:1**). We do this by transforming our lives to think and behave as He instructs instead of conforming to the world's standards of righteousness (**verse 2**).

The fruit God's Word produces in a sincere heart is described in the remainder of **Romans 12**.

Much of the focus is on our treatment of others: loving sincerely (**verse 9**), putting others first (**verse 10**), helping when it is needed (**verse 13**), being there for others in good times and bad (**verse 15**), and, in the final handful of the chapter's verses, loving even those who treat us poorly.

Romans 12:14 says “*Bless those who persecute you; bless, and don't curse.*” **Verses 17-18** teach, “*Repay no one evil for evil. Respect what is honorable in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as it is up to you, be at peace with all men.*”

Worldly wisdom promotes “getting even” with those who mistreat us. Someone doing wrong toward us is seen as “justification” for doing wrong ourselves.

God's Word teaches differently. While we

can't control others' choices, we can, as much as it's up to *us*, seek peace with others, knowing that vengeance belongs to our perfectly just Creator.

In **verse 20** of **Romans 12**, the phrase “*you will heap coals of fire on his head*” is used in connection with our need to respond to evil with good. This highly figurative phrase likely refers to the possibility that if we do what's right even when others do wrong toward us, we might lead them to shame, godly sorrow, and repentance. If we love others as we should, this opportunity will mean more to us than “getting revenge.”

This phrase is followed up in **verse 21** with the command, “*Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*”

It's a simple truth that if one wants to “put out” darkness, he or she would need a light of some kind. We can't put out darkness by adding more darkness to it.

In the same way, evil doesn't go away when one responds with more evil. It only makes things worse.

We can allow evil to overcome us, or we can respond to it with good.

Jesus' response to His persecutors gives us a perfect example of overcoming evil with good. He didn't use others' mistreatment to “justify” doing wrong. Instead, He “took the high road” and persisted in doing right. “*When He was cursed, He didn't curse back. When He suffered, He didn't threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously*” (**1 Pet. 2:23**).

May we mimic our Savior rather than the world, and may we never be “*overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*”

-Michael Hickox (both articles)