THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

**"Grow in Grace!"**

Rev. Carl Haak

*March 2, 2003; No. 3139*

Dear radio friends,

Where there is life, there must be growth.  That is true of your baby.  If your baby did not grow, you would be alarmed.  You would seek the best medical advice.  That is true for a farmer.  If the wheat that he planted does not come up and grow, he would immediately be on the phone with the agriculture department of a university, to send out a specialist to analyse the problem and provide a solution.  There must be growth if there is life.

That is, above all things, true spiritually.  Spiritually we must also grow in the grace that is in Jesus Christ.  This is the exhortation we receive in the Word of God, II Peter 3:18: “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

The work of God’s grace within your heart is a progressive work.  What do I mean?  I mean this.  Sanctification, which is the Bible’s word for God’s work of making us holy, is a process that goes on throughout our life.

Justification — that is the truth of the Bible according to which God declares that we have been forgiven and pardoned of our sins in Jesus Christ, that the debt of our sin has been removed, not because of any work we have done or could do but only because of Christ.  Justification is a completed and a finished work of God.  God declares concerning His elect (Rom. 8) that there can be brought no accusation against His elect, against those whom He has justified.  It is finished.

But sanctification - once again, that is the work of God in making the child of God holy or, the Bible says, conforming the child of God more and more unto the image of Jesus Christ —is not over until death.  It is progressive, it is on-going.

Are you growing spiritually?  Are you growing in the use of your tongue?  Are you growing in resisting besetting sins?  Are you growing in hope and patience and trust in God?  Are you growing in love for God and for His people?  Are you growing in new and holy desires?  Or are you remaining a child?  Are you remaining fickle, gullible?  Or are you maturing spiritually?  If you are not growing, why not?  Are you allowing the impediments of sin to restrict that growth?  Are you living in bitterness or anger?  Do you live in a lust for the world?  Or is it due simply to negligence — you do not give yourself to spiritual things?  We must grow in grace.

When Peter gives us this exhortation, but grow in the grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, he is doing so as a contrast to something he said before.  “But grow in grace.”  That means that, in the context (if you read II Peter 3), you will find that Peter has been urging upon us the importance of really grasping the truth.  He has sought to impress upon us the importance of a careful and reverent study of the holy scriptures.  He said to us in verse 14 that we must be diligent.  And he has gone on in verses 15 and 16 to speak to us of the blessing of the holy scriptures and that there are many wonderful and profound things that we must give ourselves to understand in the scriptures.  And he says that we must do this because there is a danger that we be led astray, that we be led away with the wicked and fall from our own steadfastness.  What is needed is a careful study of the scriptures in order that we are not led away or seduced by errors.

Instead of being led away and seduced by error, the apostle says, we must grow in grace.  And the point that is being made is this:  the only way to avoid falling in the Christian life is to advance.  The only way to avoid slipping back is to go forward.

Let me explain.  The scriptures are very plain that God will preserve the child of God.  It is no biblical teaching that a person can be truly saved today and be lost eternally.  No, the work of God is a faithful work.  The work of God that He begins will, by His grace, be fully done.  You can compare Philippians 1:6 to what I just said.  Or, the Lord’s words in John 10:26ff.   But although that is true, the scriptures also teach that the **Christian life is not static**, that the child of God is preserved by God in the way of God working in us perseverance, calling us to be diligent in the things of salvation.

Let me use an example.  You remember, as a boy, we used to have these tops, you know, with their string.  You wind the string around the top and that top would spin.  Well, the top stood upright on the top of the table as long as it was spinning.  But the moment it stopped spinning it fell over.  So also we are called to grow in grace, to be diligent with the things of salvation.  If you are not growing, you are falling backwards, you are exposed to the error of the wicked, you are exposed to a great fall, which will bring dishonour to your God and shame before men.  Grow in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Now, exactly what does that mean?  It suggests a few basic truths, does it not, of the Christian life.  It suggests, first of all, that being a Christian means that you have received, by grace, a new life, that you have been regenerated.  Peter has talked of this in I Peter 1:3, where he says that we have been begotten again.  And he goes on in verse twenty three to say that this life from above is the implanting into us of an incorruptible or undying seed of the life of Christ.  If we are to grow in grace, then the first thing that is implied is that the Christian is the product of the grace of God.  You have been born again by the grace of God.  God has given to you the life of Christ, so that now you are able to see spiritually.  You are able to know God and yourself and you have the desire to walk in obedience to God.  That was given to you.  That was not the product of a decision of your will.  The child of God is born from above by the grace of God.  And as God has given that life, we are now called to live out of that life of Christ, we are called to develop in that life of Christ.  That means that **Christian growth is possible only when the life of Christ has first been implanted in our hearts by the work of the Holy Spirit, according to the sovereign power and the will of God**.

Christianity is not morality.  What do I mean?  I mean this, that Christianity is not simply teaching men how to live a better life and to improve themselves and to make themselves better through reform.  That is not Christianity.  The Bible is not a self-improvement book.  The Christian life is not simply, “I do this,” and “I keep that,” and “I wear this type of clothes and that’s what makes me a Christian.”  Now, do Christians do certain things?  Yes.  Do they keep certain things (the commandments of God)?  Yes.  Do they have a certain appearance?  Yes.  Is that what makes them a Christian?  No.

 What makes a Christian?  A Christian is one who has received the divine life of Jesus Christ freely by the grace of God.  He has been given a life different from the world.  He has been born again.  And out of that life we must grow.  You see, Christian growth is vital growth.  Let me try to explain that.  What is the difference between the growth of a plant and the growth of a pile of sand?  If you have a pile of sand in your back yard, you can make that pile of sand grow.  You get a shovel and you start throwing more sand on top and you would say, “Look, the pile is growing.”  All right.  Now, if you have a plant, and that plant is growing, it goes up too.  What is the difference?  The difference is this.  One is vital growth.  Christian growth is not simply the piling on top of, the mere external piling on top of certain things.  You can grow in the knowledge of geometry, or physics.  You pile more information on top of what you know. No, Christian growth is that growth of the life of Christ within, going more and more into every aspect of our life, controlling more and more by the grace of God.  It is vital.  It is Christ growing more and more in me.  Or, put it this way, it is the child of God being conformed, by the hand of God, more and more to the pattern of Jesus Christ, being brought into closer fellowship with God.  It is living growth.

That growth is also gradual.  And it never reaches perfection.  No matter how long we are in this life, we have that old man of sin against which we must struggle day-by-day.  And the growth of Christ in us is that gradual work of God.  It is very important to stress that today because today spiritual growth is supposed to be this sudden thing.  The idea of Christianity that is being peddled by many is this:  You can arrive.  You go to the right seminar, you go to the right conference, and you finally find *it.*  When you find *it* and have arrived at *it,* you are *there.*You are suddenly at this plateau, this level.  That is not true. That is not what God is teaching us in His Word.  That does violence to the truth.  No, spiritual growth is a gradual growth through pain, through exercise, through eating the right spiritual diet, through exercising what you learned.  That is how spiritual growth comes.  Does a baby jump into manhood?  Does a plant break ground and flower and produce fruit in one day?  Of course not.  There are stages.  And those stages somehow blend into each other.  When does the boy become the youth and the youth the man?  It is a gradual growth.  **Holiness in life is not something you receive all at once**.  But God works that in you through spiritual growth.

Now grow in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ.  Grow in a deepening of an understanding of the gracious favour that has been shown to you in God.  Grow in a knowledge of your own unworthiness, your own sin.  Spiritual growth is not that the child of God says, “Ah, sin is gone.  It’s absent in my life. I can’t think of the last time I had a bad thought.”  That is not spiritual growth.  Spiritual growth is more and more that I become aware of just how devilish and just how insidious my own sinful nature is.  I begin to see more and more my own sin.  And in the light of that sin I see more and more of the wonderful grace that has come to me in Jesus Christ, and more and more I am humbled and desirous to live, no longer after myself, as the apostle says, but to live unto Him who has loved me and who gave Himself for me.

Grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.  That is the knowledge of faith.  Faith, of course, is a living knowledge.  Grow up in the knowledge of Christ.

How?

Of course, this is the work of God.  But, as explained before, it is the work of God whereby He is pleased to work in us.  There are means for spiritual growth.  We can use the earthly example to guide us.  If a baby is going to grow, then there must be food and drink.  There must be air and nutrients for your physical growth.

So also for spiritual growth.  There must be spiritual nutrients.  At the top of the list is what the Bible refers to as the means of grace.  The means of grace are given to us privately, as every child of God, by the reading of our Bible and prayer.  But God has also instituted in the church the essential and the chief means of the preaching of the gospel.  So the apostle has said in his first epistle (chapter 2, verse 2), “**desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby**.”  You must feed on the Word, and especially that Word as it is preached to you.  This is the means that God has granted, has ordained, for spiritual growth.  In this way you shall find grace to help you in time of need.  Spiritual growth comes, then, by attending to these things:  the reading of the Bible, your own prayer, and specifically attending the church diligently on the Lord’s day — being there in a faithful church — and coming under the preaching of the Word of God and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.  These are the means that God has given.  In fact God says, in Psalm 81:10:  “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.”  Do you feel, on Saturday evening, a need for your soul to be fed?  If you have been living spiritually, out of Christ, you certainly do.  Do you have an appetite, so that on Sunday morning you are eager to go to church to hear the Word of God and you need more food if you are going to live as a child of God in this world?

So you must take heed to the means of grace.

But not only must we have the right food, we must also avoid all that is harmful to growth.  That is also true in the physical world.  If you want your little boy, your little toddler, to grow, you put away poisons out of your house and you make your house “baby-proof.”  If you want your plant to grow, you keep deadly poisons away from that plant.  You avoid what is harmful to the life of the child or the plant.

So also for our spiritual life.  There are things that are very harmful.  It is what the Bible calls “the world.”  It is what the Bible says is “friendship with the ungodly.”  It is what the Bible refers to as “temptations.”  The child of God must put away these temptations from his life — pornography, drinking, greed.

But then there are also our own sins, the sins of our own flesh.  Especially destructive of spiritual growth is the sin of gossip (on the phone saying things and telling things and speaking evil judgments about others).  The evil tongue does not only do damage to other people.  It does damage to ourselves.  It stunts, it twists, it perverts spiritual growth.  We must have a spiritual atmosphere in our homes.  And we must have a spiritual atmosphere in the church which promotes spiritual growth.  That means that we must have the love of God as the law of our tongue.

Not only must we have the right food.  Not only must we avoid things that are harmful to spiritual growth.  But if we are to grow, we must also have rest. We often forget about this one, I think, spiritually.  We do not forget about it with a baby.  If your baby is going to grow it needs to sleep.  But we also, spiritually, if we are to grow, need to have our times of rest.  We need to have a quiet mind, to be at rest and peace.  What do I mean?  I mean this. Sometimes people of God develop pained expressions on their faces and ask “why does God do this to me?”  Or the child of God begins to look to himself and wonders if he has prayed correctly enough or done something well enough to be received by God.  We must rest.  What is that rest?  That rest is the great truth that we are justified by grace in Jesus Christ.  Rest is this, that I know that I am accepted with God on the basis of what Christ has done, and my future is certain because it rests on nothing but the blood of Jesus Christ.  Rest is this, that I know I did not make myself a Christian, that this is the work of Christ, that in Christ is all of my standing before God, all of my redemption, and that He has sworn to be faithful to me.  Rest is when we recline in the arms of God. If we are to grow, we must cultivate a restful, peaceful spirit.

Grow in grace that you might stand, that you might not be led away with the error of the wicked, says the apostle Peter.  That is why you must grow.  But Peter says you must also grow for another reason.   “To him be glory both now and for ever.  Amen.”  We must grow because in this way God is glorified, glorified in us, by our growing up in the grace of Jesus Christ.

God grant that to you this week.  God grant you grace and strength to be diligent, that you grow in understanding of His Word, that you grow in a desire to be as Christ, that you grow in love for Him and for your fellow believer, that you grow in humility, self-denial, and delight in God’s will, that you grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Thy holy Word, and we pray that it may be applied by Thy Spirit unto our hearts.  Remember Thy children this day. Remember Thy church.  Watch over us in Jesus’ name, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

**"Grow Up!"**

Rev. Carl Haak

*March 9, 2003; No. 3140*

Dear radio friends,

Grow up.  That is something, perhaps, that every one of us has had said to us at one point or another in our life.  Leave your childish ways, be mature, and be wise.  So also God speaks to you and to me as we are born again in His Son Jesus Christ.  He says, “Grow up.  Be no more children, subject to being led astray, but grow up into Jesus Christ.”

Ephesians 4:14, 15 reads:   “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him *(that is, Christ)* in all things, which is the head, even Christ.”

Sometimes Scripture, when it calls us to grow up, is using those words as a rebuke.  (Cf. I Cor. 3:1-3, where the Corinthian believers were behaving as carnal, that is, living their church life in envy, strife, and divisions.  They were acting like a bunch of kids.  And the Lord said to them that He was ashamed of their childish, sinful behaviour.)

But in the verse from Ephesians 4, where we are told that we must grow up into Christ, there the Scripture is not rebuking us.  Instead, that should be the heartfelt desire of the child of God.  Paul, under inspiration, is writing this verse.  And he says, “That we henceforth be no more children, … may grow up into Christ in all things.”  He is expressing the heartfelt desire given to us from God.  When you are spiritually healthy, you want to grow, you want to add to your faith, you want spiritual maturity.  Is that not your desire?  Once again, the only other alternative is that we would be backsliding.  We either grow up into Christ or we slide back into our own sins and the ways of the world.  But, **by the grace of God, we want to grow up into Christ**.  Notice, that is God’s will for us.  Notice that, not only is that God’s will but, in the context of Ephesians 4, you will find that the Lord has provided the means whereby we might grow up.  In the beautiful context of Ephesians 4 you will learn that the ascended Lord Jesus Christ, when He left us and went up to glory, did not leave us or abandon us but poured out His gifts upon the church.  One of those gifts was the gift of the pastoral ministry, of ministers.  And the purpose of this gift of Jesus Christ, says the apostle, is for the edifying of the body of Christ.  Or, as he says, so that the body of Christ might grow up to the measure, or stature, of the fullness of Christ.  The ascended Lord Jesus Christ, then, has poured out upon His church His gifts, has given to the church the office of the ministry, in order that through the ministry of God’s Word we might grow up in the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

But the apostle knows that we have not yet arrived and that there is always so much more that must be done in each one of us.  He says, really, that we are like little children, but that we must not stay that way.  We must constantly be growing up.  Be no more children, says the Word of God, but grow up into Christ in everything.

What does that mean?  Once again, the fact that we are referred to as the children of God means that a Christian is one who has been born by the Holy Spirit.   What is a Christian?  What is the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian?  Are they both basically the same — the only difference being that a Christian has added to his life certain religious things?  Is a Christian someone who is decent, good, family-oriented, respectful?  Is that what constitutes the essence of a Christian?  The answer is, No.  A Christian is one who has been born by the life of Jesus Christ.  By the grace of God he has been raised by Christ, risen with Christ out of the death of his sins.  That life that Christ has given into us, or planted in us, must grow.  It must always be developing.  For always there remain within us the tendencies of a child. The apostle says, as God has granted to you by grace the life of Christ, we must constantly then be maturing in Christ.  Each one of us must do that.  We must grow up into Christ.

The apostle knows that this is a necessity for us.  Spiritual growth, as we read this passage in Ephesians 4, is **not a luxury but a necessity**.  The apostle brings out the necessity of spiritual growth because, he says, if we remain as a child, if we do not advance and desire that our faith become mature, then, as a child, we will be subject to being led astray. We will remain unstable, gullible, fickle in our faith, and then be prey to all types of false doctrine and to men who are beguilers and deceivers, who will rob us and lead us astray without even our own perceiving or knowing that it is happening.

The apostle brings out two characteristics of a child.  He says that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro.  There he is referring to the characteristic of a child, that a child is changeable and fickle.  A child cannot help that.  That is the nature of a child.  The apostle says, “tossed to and fro.”  He has in mind the ocean and a ship or vessel on top of that ocean being pitched about, up and down, agitated.  That is characteristic of a child.  A child is subject to changeableness — from smiles to tears.  A child cannot help that.  A child is easily frightened, easily depressed, easily made happy, confused, or frustrated.  So also as children of God we are subject to violent mood swings, ups and downs.

Think of Peter.  One moment, when he sees the Lord walking on the water, he says, “Bid me come unto thee on the water.”  And He does so.  The next moment Peter sees the wind boisterous and begins to go down.  He cries out, “Lord, save me.”  (Matt. 14:22-33) Think of Peter.  At one moment he is saying that he confesses Christ.  When all others are confused, Peter says, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”  And Jesus says, “Blessed art thou.”  And the next moment?  We find Peter rebuking Jesus when Jesus says that He has to be killed, and the Lord says to him, “Get thee behind me, Satan… thou savorest not the things that be of God.” (Matt. 16:13-23)  Remember Peter.  Peter said to the Lord, “Lord, I’ll never deny you.”  Then, just a few hours later, “I don’t know that man!” (Matt. 26)

That is our character, as children of God, in ourselves.  We are fickle.  We are up and down.  We are subject to impulse and mood.  Self-control and self-discipline are not in a child.  A child wants something and wants it right now and shows his temper if he does not get it.  A child is fickle and changeable.  We must not remain spiritual children.

Not only does the apostle say that a child is unstable, he also says a child is also liable to be misled or deceived.  “Be no more children,” says the apostle, “carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”  When he says “carried about with every wind of doctrine,” he means “carried about in every direction,” just like a weather vane will follow the changing wind.  A child is gullible.  A child will believe almost anything if it is said in a convincing manner.  A child does not have experience, is not able to exercise discrimination, does not know enough yet to test and to evaluate what he is hearing.  A child lacks judgment.

Even more, a child has an inward irritation at being taught and does not want to be taught.  “Don’t tell me, I know.  You don’t need to tell me.”  A child is impatient and does not want to exercise the discipline that is necessary to be taught.  Like taking your music lessons.  You sit down as a little girl and have visions of being a grand pianist.  But the way to become a great pianist is through many music lessons.  And you do not want to do that because that is hard.

These are the characteristics of a child.  Now the apostle is saying that spiritually we must not remain children, we must not remain unstable, we must not remain liable to be led astray and deceived.

What about you?  Speaking spiritually, now, are you stable or unstable?  Are you a child?  Do you crave novelty?  Are you easily swayed?  Do you find yourself believing one thing after you talk to so-and-so, but then you talk to another person who has a decidedly different opinion and you believe what he says?  Are you stable?  Are you able to discern through the truth of Scripture?  Do you know the truths of Scripture?  Are you steadfast on those truths?  You see, this is important because, apart from spiritual maturity, we are subject to be carried away with every wind of doctrine by the cunning craftiness of men who lie in wait to deceive, says the Word of God.  There we are taught that false doctrine is not a placid thing but an active thing, and that it is always working to seduce or to lead astray the child of God, that it lies in wait to deceive us, to ensnare us.  Do you know your position as a child of God in this present world?  False doctrine, evil living, heresy is something that is planned out and that is often carried forth with extraordinary zeal. And it can come from every direction.

Are you one in the church who says “Oh, we don’t need all these negatives about doctrinal differences and evil living or warnings.  Please don’t give me any more negatives.  Love is incompatible with denouncing error.  You should not denounce error.  We all have a little truth in our own way.  It really doesn’t matter what we believe or what we say the Bible teaches.  It all ends up the same anyway.”  You talk that way?  The Word of God (not me, the Word of God) says to you as a child of God, “You must not remain a child.  You must not remain unstable.  You must not remain easily led astray, but you must grow up, you must know the truth.”  The apostle puts it this way, “You must speak the truth in love, that you may grow up into Christ in all things.”  That is the way of spiritual maturity.  That is the way of gaining stability and steadfastness. The *truth* — you must speak *the truth* in love.

Literally, we read, “having” or “holding” to the truth, “professing” the truth.  The apostle has much more in mind than just *speaking* the truth.  Yes, we must speak it.  But he means we must profess it, we must lay hold of that truth.  Understand that he is not simply saying this:  “Now be nice and loving.”  This text is repeatedly used to support the idea that doctrinal correctness is not important.  The only important thing is to be nice and loving and never criticize another view too strongly because, as was said, the popular idea is that there is a little truth in everything.  No, Paul is not saying that.  God is not saying that in that verse.  But He is saying, “Hold on to the truth in love!”  He is not saying, “Smile on every doctrinal teaching no matter what it is and never condemn or reject any other view.”  He is not saying that.  He says, “If you are that way, then you shall remain as a child, tossed to and fro.  You will not know what direction the land is.  You will be out in a ship not knowing where you are.”  But, he says, “Speak the truth, profess the truth in love.  Hold on to the truth, profess the truth.”

That means that the truth of holy Scripture is knowable, it is certain, and it is unchangeable.  I cannot hold unto mist.  I cannot hold on or sink my grip into something that is forever changing.  If I am to hold on to the truth, then the truth must be definite.  How am I to be stable in this present world?  How am I to judge things that come into my life?  I am in a college class and there are different teachings being thrown at me.  How am I to discern unless there is one absolute, fixed truth?  There *is* that absolute, fixed truth.  It is the infallible and holy Scriptures.  How am I to stand at work when different influences come to me?  How am I to discern when I watch the TV and the news reports and all these different ideas are blowing around me from every direction?  How do I know that what I hear, which often sounds so good, is right or wrong?  I need a standard.  I need the correct standard.  And that standard is the truth, the truth of the Scriptures — the Christian faith.

That is the truth.  The Reformed, biblical faith.  You see, **the Christian faith is not a nebulous, vague, indefinite thing that is constantly in the process of being defined as to what it is**, and changing, rolling over from age to age to take on new appearances.  No, the Christian truth is steadfast.  It is fixed.  That is why it is the power of God unto a holy life.  It is the truth of the infallible Scriptures.  And it is expressed in creeds and confessions.

The modern attitude is that, “Well, everybody is seeking truth in his own way.  Everyone looks for different routes to the same summit.”  This is a denial of Scripture.  This is a denial that the truth of the Scriptures can be stated and can be known.  That is what a creed is.  The creed is the work of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit guides the church to understand the Scriptures and to say, “This is what the Scriptures teach.”  The modern idea is arrogance.  The modern idea is that creeds are men trying to push ideas on the church.  No, that is not true.  Creeds flow from the very nature of the Bible itself, because the nature of the Bible is that its truth can be known and confessed and professed before the world.  Jesus said in John 17:17, “Thy word is truth.”  The apostle Paul says to Timothy (II Tim. 1:13), “Hold fast the form of sound words.”  That is a very important chapter. There Paul is saying “good-bye” to Timothy.  He is bringing to Timothy something from his heart for Timothy’s future ministry.  What does he say to Timothy?  Does he say, “Now, Timothy, as I am leaving I hope you can imitate my spirit.  I hope that a little bit of the fire that burned in me burns in you.  I hope, Timothy, that you can join my quest for a truth that I was on.  I hope that you will also join the quest for the truth”?  No, he does not talk that way to Timothy at all.  This is what he says, “Timothy, hold on — take a firm hold by faith — on the form of sound words that I imparted to you, the truth that came through revelation of God which I received not of man but the revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11, 12).   Hold on to the truth!  You cannot be lazy.  You must hold on to the truth.”

You must come under a ministry where the minister is trained in the truth of the Word of God.  You must attend a church where elders are committed to the truth of the Word of God.  And you must hold on to that truth in love.

Oh, yes.  Love.  Love for the truth.  As we speak and confess that truth among ourselves we are to speak that truth in the love of God.  That is very important.  We must not have the truth and speak the truth in a self-righteous manner.  We must not use the truth simply to prove everyone else wrong and ourselves right.  **We must not use the truth simply to win an argument**.  The Word of God is saying to us that we may not use the truth out of a party-spirit — to advance our own name and reputation.  And we must plead guilty to this.  We may not use the truth for the exaltation of ourselves.  Instead, we must speak it in love.  When we speak the truth to those who differ with us, when we speak the truth to those who are unlearned, we must so speak the truth as to win them.  We must speak in humility.  We must speak having sympathy and compassion for them.  It is the truth which is the power that will bring others to understand it.  We must speak that truth in love.

That does not mean that we compromise the truth.  However, it does mean that we speak the truth wisely, carefully, that we are slow to speak and swift to hear.  In this way we grow up into Christ, grow up deeply into Christ, into Christ who is the person, the Son of God, at God’s right hand, that we become more and more like Him in everything. We want a balance in our Christian life.  Spiritual growth is a balanced growth.  Would you say it is growth if the arm of your five-year-old boy in the coming year grew a foot? Would that be growth?  No, you would say, there is something wrong.  Yes.  Growth must be entire, balanced, in everything.  Are you growing up in faith, in love, in truth, in love for Christ?  Do you walk like Christ?  Do you desire to be like Christ before the world?  Are you crucifying your sins, crucifying your malice, your lust, your hatred, your envy? Grow up!  Grow up in the body of Christ.  Grow up into Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee once again for Thy Word.  We pray that Thou wilt use it as the power of God unto our salvation.  In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

**"Abide in Him!"**

Rev. Carl Haak

*March 16, 2003; No. 3141*

Dear radio friends,

In our last two broadcasts we looked at the truth of spiritual growth.  First, we looked into II Peter 3:18, where we were called to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.  Last time we looked at Ephesians 4:14, 15, where we were exhorted to be no longer children, but grow up into Christ in all things.

I would like to bring your attention to our Lord’s words in John 15:1 and 5, where our Lord again is speaking to us on the important truth of spiritual growth.  There He says, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.  I am the vine, ye are the branches:  He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit:  for without me ye can do nothing.”  Here we are taught that Jesus Christ is the true vine and we, His disciples, are branches.  If we are united to Him by faith, says Jesus, we will be bringing forth much fruit.  In the context, Jesus goes on to explain that His heavenly Father, as the husbandman, prunes each branch, that is, He purges each branch so that it may bring forth more fruit.  He cuts away the fruitless branches, and He so works that each branch in Christ brings forth more fruit.  God, then, is desirous of growth.  He is desirous of fruit.  He is desirous of repentance in our life and holiness, a walk with God, and a love for God.  Are you bringing forth much fruit?

Jesus says to us that the tree is not known by its leaves, but by its fruit.  The child of God is not simply one who externally takes on the trappings of a Christian life.  But a child of God is one who, from within (that life of Christ within), lives into Christ and out of Christ and produces much fruit to the glory of God.

Jesus says to us today, “Abide in Me.”

We must abide in Jesus Christ because, as Jesus says, He is the true vine.  When Jesus says, “I am the true vine,” He means to say to us that He is the source of all spiritual life.  Only by being united to Him in a true faith can we live and bear fruit.

I need to talk to you a moment about the setting of our Lord’s words.  Our Lord, in John 15, is saying His farewell to His disciples.  He is going to go away from them.  That very night He is going to be betrayed and arrested.  And He tells them that they cannot follow Him now as He goes the way of the cross, the resurrection, and the ascension.  He is going to be leaving them.  This fills their mind and their soul with great sadness.  What had they ever been without Jesus?  Out of the sight of the Lord, they were only flops.  So the Lord says, “I am the true vine.”  And He said that for them and for us in order that we might soak in the comfort.  “I’m not going to abandon you.  I am the true vine.  You are united to me.  You shall still have me and draw your life from me.”

But when He says, “I am the true vine,” He also means to warn His disciples at that time, and to warn us.  For He knew that there would be severe dangers for His disciples that very night and in the coming days.  The world would close in upon them.  The devil would come to tempt some of them.  And their own sinful nature would lead them astray.  So, the Lord says, “you must abide in Me.”

He says that also to us today.  Abiding in Jesus Christ is not an option.  It is a necessity.  Abiding in Jesus Christ is not only our comfort that we cannot be severed from Him and that we, through faith, draw from Jesus eternal life.  We do that right now, by faith.  But abiding in Christ is also for our warning and our calling.  “Abide in Me!  You must be rooted, by faith, in Me as you are in this present world.  And you must do this so that you bring forth fruit.”  In other words, the Lord is saying to us that **the church is not a flower garden**.  The church is an orchard.  The church is not on earth simply to look nice.  The church is on earth to bring forth fruit to God.  The church is a vineyard in a desert, the only place where fruit is produced to God.  But this can happen only when we abide in Jesus Christ.

Now when the Lord uses that figure, He is using, of course, a very well-known figure, for there were many vineyards in Judea.  The landscape was covered by them.  He is referring to Himself as the vine, or the stock, with the roots, which would sprout.  Other branches would be grafted into that stock and draw their life from the root, from the vine. Jesus is saying to us, “Just as in the earthly sense all of the life is in the vine, the sap is in the vine and it flows out of the vine into the branch, so I am the true vine.  I sink My roots eternally into God.  I am the Son of God.”  John says to us in John 1:4, “In him was life.”  Jesus Christ did not *receive* His life.  He *possesses* life.  He is the Alpha and the Omega.  He is the vine.  He is the eternal Son of God now in our flesh.  And in our flesh, He has been crucified as our Saviour.  Therefore, He possesses all the reservoirs, all the life, all the sap of righteousness and life.  He is the risen Lord.  He is the living One.  He says, “I am the true vine.  Only by being united to Me does a person live.”

When He says, “I am the true vine,” He also has in mind that there are many false vines, there are many who claim to do what He does.  There are all types of false religions. There are those who would say to us, “Well, you can find life in pleasure.  You can find the source of your life in your lust, or in money, or in drink, or in self, or in education.” But Jesus says that these are false vines.  There is only one true vine.

Let me make it plain.  You have a branch from your apple tree this spring.  You want that branch to grow.  What are you going to do — stick it into the dry dirt?  No, it will not grow there.  Shall you graft it into your wife’s broom handle?  No, there is no sap in that broom handle.  Shall you just erect it in the back yard with a cinderblock, a concrete block?  Will it draw its life from a concrete block?  No.

So also the Word of God says, “You must be engrafted into the true vine if you are to live.”  Where are you looking for your life, for your satisfaction?  It can be found *only* in one place, in one person:  Jesus Christ, the true and eternal vine.  We must be united to Him.

When Jesus says, “I am the true vine,” He is not just giving us a piece of information.  He is telling us that we must, by God’s grace, live out of Him or there is no life in us. There must be a true faith.  A true faith, according to Scripture, is a faith that God gives.  It is from God (Eph. 2:8) — the gift of God.  It is something that the Holy Spirit produces in us.  Faith comes from God (Eph. 6:23).   Faith, then, is not simply a human, emotional attachment to Jesus Christ.  **Faith is not simply an intellectual acquaintance with Jesus Christ**.  Faith is a living union that God makes between us and the Lord Jesus Christ whereby we believe in Him and receive from Him all things.

Faith is a living reality.  Let me use another example.  Let us take a plastic branch.  The artificial trees and branches today are so much like the original that it is hard to tell the difference sometimes.  You have to go up and feel it, to find out if it is a real plant or if it is a fake plant.  Let us say that we get an artificial grape vine and we go to an orchard and hide that artificial branch somewhere in the orchard.  Could you find it?  Now, if you placed it there, you could find it.  But if you had not placed it there and someone said, “Go look for it,” it might be so well camouflaged that you would never find it.  It is plastic, not a living branch.  But you cannot find it until….  Until when?  Until it comes time for fruit.  Then you are going to tell that there is no life in that branch because it will have no fruit.

The Lord is warning us, then, that we must be attached to Him by a true and living faith.  He is warning us of the artificial.  He says in John 15:2, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.”  That does not mean that a child of God can fall away, that the child of God can be in Christ one day and out of Christ the next day.  The Lord said in John 10:29, “No man is able to pluck them [my sheep] out of my hand.”  But He warns us that there can be the mere outward profession of Jesus Christ, a mere plastic religion — everything looks right — but there is no living union to Jesus Christ.  It is just like a plastic flower.  And the difference between a real plant and a plastic plant is *everything.* Sometimes with the eye you cannot see it.  Those who have a plastic religion are those who do not have a broken heart over their own personal sins.  They think that sin is great only when they see it in someone else.  They have no trust in Jesus Christ for righteousness.  They do not know what that means because they do not know themselves as filthy sinners.  They have no desire for a life of holiness.  They have no desire to know the living and the true God.  In brief, we can say that plastic religion is a life that has no repentance, no heartfelt repentance before God.  For that is the gift of God, the great gift of God through the vine Jesus Christ.  What is the fruit?  How do you know that you are a branch in Jesus Christ?  Do you repent?  That is what it means to be united to Christ.

Jesus says, “I am the true vine.  I am the true vine for *you.*  Draw your life from *Me.*  I am your life.  I am the true vine.”  So the Lord is calling us to exercise our faith:  “Abide in me,” He says, “and I in you.”  That is the call to all of us, to every child of God.  Whether you are an elder or a minister or a deacon or a parent, aged, teenager, boy, or girl, you must abide in Christ.  Maybe you say, “How is that possible?  Didn’t you say that God must give us faith, God must graft us into Christ?”  Yes.  But **God’s grace is not mechanical.  God works *in* us so that we desire Christ**.  That is the activity of faith, the power of God within us, so that we draw out of Christ our life.  That is a very rich and wonderful idea.  Abide in Christ.  Take hold of Him.  Depend upon Him.  Grow in Him.  Recognize just how needy you are, how sinful you are.  Realize that apart from Christ you are worthless.

To abide in Christ then means that you are a member of a true and faithful church where you hear sermons mined from the Scriptures, built from holy Scripture, explaining, expounding to you the truths of the holy Word of God, and laying that before your conscience and your heart.  It means that you live a life of prayer and Bible-reading.  It means that you live in the fellowship of the church with other believers, that you have your children instructed by the church in catechism.

There are many dangers today, there are many threats to our life of abiding in Jesus Christ.  Sometimes instead of abiding in Jesus Christ we can be defined as those who dangle in Jesus Christ.  There is the threat of our pride.  What an awful thing pride is.  Then we say (in our pride), “but I’m not like so-and-so.  Look at so-and-so.  I don’t do that!”  We do the right things in the Christian faith but it is all an outward show then.  We must be aware of our pride.  We must be aware also of worldliness.  Things in this life become so important to us, more important than Christ, more important than the church.  And we must be aware of unconfessed sin.  That too.  We must beware that if we walk in sin then we cannot abide in Christ.

This is why Jesus says that the heavenly Father purgeth every branch that abides in Him and bears fruit, that it may bring forth more fruit.  The word “purge” means “prune.”  That is a very necessary part of spiritual growth.  If the branch is to grow and to bring forth fruit, it must be pruned.  That is the law in every orchard.  But that is also the law spiritually.  That is the reason why God sends to us chastisements and trials and difficulties.  Today there is much difficulty in the church in trying to understand why Christians suffer.  But the Bible is not unclear on that truth.  I think the difficulty is simply that Christians become more and more attached to this present life and want to use Christianity simply to have more enjoyment of the earthly rather than realizing that Christianity is the enjoyment of Jesus Christ.  So God brings chastisements.  He brings difficulties into the life of His children. It is a heresy, it is a lie right from the devil, which says that if you have enough faith then you will never have any financial problems or any sicknesses or cancers.  That is not the teaching of God’s Word, the Bible.  That is a different Christ than the Christ of the holy Scriptures.

The Bible teaches us that **God sends chastisements for the same reason that the husbandman will prune the branch of his pear tree** or of his apple tree.  That branch needs to be pruned.  The sucker branches must be cut away.  It must be pruned in order that the branch may draw more sap, in order that it may bring forth more fruit to God.  God will have us abide in Christ.  To do that, He comes with His divine shears and He begins to prune in our life.

Have you ever seen an old orchard?  Perhaps one or two apple trees have been left.  But these apple trees are no longer cared for by the husbandmen.  They have been neglected.  The apple trees have not been pruned for many years.  Have you ever looked at that?  Oh, there are some apples up there.  But they are little, pitted, diseased.  And the tree is filled with disease.  Why?  Because it has not been cared for, it has not been pruned.

So also for you, child of God.  What is going to happen to you if you are left to yourself?  You must be pruned.

We say to God, “This is the way I want things:  I want health, I want this, I want that, I want this job, I want this income.  I don’t want my husband to die.  I want this home.  I don’t want struggles.”  Then the Lord does not give us what we want.  He cuts us back.  Why?  In order that we might abide in the vine, Jesus Christ, that we might draw all of our life out of Christ and abide more and more in Him.

In order that we might bring forth much fruit.  That is why God has placed us into Jesus Christ, by His grace.  That is why He elected us to be in Christ.  That is why He bestows care upon us.  That is why He prunes us with His chastisements, in order that we might bring forth much fruit.  Jesus says, “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.”  (John 15:8) This is what pleases God.  This is why God has given His Son, Jesus Christ, in order that we, His children, might bring forth much fruit to His honour and to His glory — fruits of repentance, of faith, of a holy life, of good deeds, of a testimony of the grace of Christ.  That we bring forth much fruit.

Is there fruit in your life?  Are you abiding in Jesus Christ?  Do you know what it is to have a broken heart?  Do you trust in Christ for righteousness?  Do you desire more and more to live no longer for self but for Him and out of Him?  Jesus said, “I am the true vine.  You are the branches.  Abide in me and I in you.”  In this way we shall bring forth much fruit to the glory of our Father.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee once again for Thy Word.  We pray that it may be a blessing unto our hearts.  Give us that grace that we might abide in Him, through Jesus’ name, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

**"Fight the Good Fight!"**

Rev. Carl Haak

*March 23, 2003; No. 3142*

Dear radio friends,

Our message today is taken from the Word of God in I Timothy 6:11, 12.   There we read, “But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.  Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.”

These words need very little introduction other than that each one of us must be ready to hear them as spoken by the Lord to us.  They are, of course, Paul’s word to his young friend and fellow minister Timothy, words of intense focus, deepest passion, and warmest love.  “Timothy, fight the good fight of faith.”  They are spoken by a great fighter in the battle of faith, the apostle Paul, who was a great spiritual warrior.  He will say to Timothy in his second epistle to Timothy (chapter 4 verse 7), “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”  Paul’s whole life from the road to Damascus was about keeping the faith.  And he was able to fight this fight of faith because he had been made at peace with God.

Now writing to his beloved Timothy, the experienced warrior Paul says, “Timothy, the Christian life is a battle of faith.  It matters not, Timothy, if in your life you attain to wealth, influence, power, happiness.  But this matters, Timothy:  strive always to live out of the faith, the faith union to Christ.  And hold tight His truth in your heart.”

Removing ourselves, now, from the person of Paul and Timothy and from the specific situation in which the holy Scripture was first written in I Timothy 6, we believe now that this Scripture is written for us upon whom the ends of the world are come.  For Paul also wrote to Timothy, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for us.” Each one of us, now, and especially to you who are young men and husbands and heads of households, each one of us is called to fight the good fight of faith.  Let us hear these words from God.

We should look at the first verse that I read (v. 11) as the necessary preparation for fighting the good fight of faith.  We can fight only if we have first fled these things and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness.  Only when those two things are true of us can we go on to fight the good fight of faith.  The apostle addresses us as “man of God,” and that address underscores the difference that God’s grace has made and what God has made us by His grace.  We are made, by grace, to be men of God, women of God, children of God.

In the Old Testament the title “man of God” was used to designate a person who was set apart by God to do God’s work on earth, as Moses was called “the man of God.”  In the New Testament this word “man of God” is used to describe every believer.  Once again, in II Timothy 3:16, where we read, “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God,” then we read in verse 17, “That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”  The child of God is referred to as the “man of God,” God’s man, God’s possession, owned by God, purchased through the transaction of the cross.  Now the title or ownership is in the hand of God.  The child of God does not say, “I’m my own.”  Or, “I’m owned by mammon.”  Or, “I’m owned by lust and greed or the world.”  But we are God’s peculiar possession.  A man of God.  Let that sink in.  Paul looks at Timothy and sees God’s grace.  He sees what God has made him to be, that God’s grace has distinguished him and brought him so that he is now devoted to God.  Is that true of you?  Are you a man of God?  Do you fight the good fight of faith?

But, as I was saying, if we are to fight that good fight of faith, we must first of all flee certain things and follow after other things.  What things are we supposed to flee?  The apostle says, “O man of God, flee these things.”  What things?  You will have to read the chapter (I Tim. 6) and go back to verses 3-4, where we are warned of arrogant, proud disputers of God’s Word, who would bring in strifes of words.  Then the apostle went on in verses 6-10 to speak of covetousness and greed and materialism.  The things, then, that we are to flee if we are to fight the good fight of faith are especially the prevailing and overpowering sin of materialism, of living for things, pleasures, and possessions.  The apostle says to us, “Flee, run away, avoid with fright.  Don’t back up gently from these things.  Run, because the Bible sees covetousness, the lust for earthly things, as a strong evil.”

The apostle has warned Timothy in verse 10.  He says that Some covet after these earthly things.  Literally, they reach out for them.  Those earthly things, you know, are always held just about an inch or so from your grasp.  They want you to reach out for them.  They are just around the corner — your boat is about to come in.  But God says that, when you begin to covet after and compromise and live for the earthly things, soon you will wander from the faith, you will err from the faith, you will lose focus, you will lose the path. God says, “I have set you as My child on the path.”  You are going to be influenced, tempted by sin, to reach out — just beyond your fingertips there is going to be money or influence or sports or sex or something.  You think, “I can almost reach it.”  The apostle says, “Flee that!”  Because those things of materialism, greed, and lust will intertwine in your heart.  It will not happen overnight.  But suddenly you are going to wake up and you are going to ask, “What am I living for?  What is sucking up all my energy?”  Flee these things of materialism, greed, and lust.  And follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

The point is:  you cannot flee materialism unless you are following righteousness, godliness, etc.  The Christian life is not just “don’ts.”  The Christian does not simply stand before temptation of lust and greed and materialism and say, “No, no, no.”  But the Christian, when he says “No,” turns around and begins to follow something else.  The word “follow” means “pursue, track down.”  It is a word translated “persecute.”  When Paul persecuted the church before his conversion, he tracked down Christians to their doorstep. So, the Word of God says, “follow, pursue righteousness.  Don’t just think about it.  Don’t say, ‘Well, it would be nice to be a godly person — to have more faith, love, patience, and meekness.’  But *run those things down!*  Track them down.  All of those things.”

This is necessary preparation if we are to fight the good fight of faith.  You cannot fight the good fight of faith without this preparation of first fleeing the earthly, the temptations, and following after the righteousness and godliness.  You cannot fight unless you first do that.  First we must have these things in our lives before we fight the good fight of faith.

But after that necessary preparation, we are brought into a very intense contest, conflict.  Fight the good fight of faith.  The word “fight” means “contend, struggle.”  It is a word that Paul used frequently in the New Testament from the athletic games of his day, with which Paul was familiar.  It refers to an intense struggle, to strip down, to practise, requiring grit and determination.  Always the Bible says the life of the child of God requires grit and struggle.  It is not soft and easy.  Fight the good fight of faith.

What is the good fight of faith?  The apostle is simply saying, “Live your life now out of your union to Jesus Christ.”  That is the good fight of faith.  That is the real issue in this life.  Live by faith!  Live as one who is of Christ in this world.

This issue is the real issue.  Will there be a church dedicated to Jesus Christ on this earth?  Will there be people of God living in faith in the risen Saviour?  This is the battle. And it is a battle not because the outcome is in doubt.  The outcome has been determined at the foot of the cross.  Jesus says He has the victory.  He is risen.  There will be faith on the earth.  There will be a church.  The battle is not in doubt because it is not *our* strength that will determine the outcome.  We have the victory in our Lord Jesus Christ.  The Lord fights for us.  But, nevertheless, this is a real fight right now because our faith in Jesus Christ is opposed.  Union to Jesus Christ is hated in this present world.  There will be a fight because there are sworn, merciless enemies — Satan, the world, and our own sinful flesh — which will come up against our faith.

Therefore, the word is “fight!”  Very often this fight of faith rages within us in secret.  Some of the most severe battles of the Christian man’s life are fought in secret in our own individual souls.  In the secret recesses of my heart, in the halls of my imagination, in the chambers of my heart, in my mind, the battle against my sin, my pride, my lust rages on and on, day after day.  It is not very hard to fight when you have people who are applauding you.  But when you must fight in secret and you must fight a relentless foe, you readily become discouraged and cast down.  Fight the good fight of faith.

The question is always this:  are you living in submission to the only Lord and Master Jesus Christ?  Are you bowing today before His Word?  You cannot fight without His Word.  You must arm yourself with the Word of God, with the armour of faith.  What is the basis of your decisions?  What do you want out of life?  What do you count most dear? Fight the good fight of faith.  Answer those questions with the word “Christ.”  It is by faith that you see the unseen Saviour who has loved you and given Himself for you, has paid the debt of your sins and covered your sins in His own blood, and has carried away your transgressions.  Now you see Him as the risen One who is standing at the right hand of God, who empowers you unto a new and holy life.  Seeing now your Saviour, you will be filled with peace and hope, and willingly you will battle the foes of your own soul.  You will fight your sin.  You will fight that magazine.  You will fight that pride, that lust, that anger.  You will fight anything that comes between you and your soul and Christ.

Lay hold, says the apostle, of eternal life, whereunto thou art called and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.  There is the strength to fight.  That is how we fight.  We fight by laying hold.  If you do not lay hold on eternal life to which you are called, you will not have the strength to fight.

The idea is not that if we fight then we get eternal life.  That is not the idea.  But the idea is that eternal life is promised to us.  We must lay hold of that promise.  We must believe that promise, by the grace of God, and so be strengthened in our fight.  Paul says to Timothy that he had eternal life.  He had been called to eternal life.  There the Word of God is referring to the powerful call of God whereby God addresses us, the elect sinner, in our soul.  He addresses us by His own living Word.  He calls us unto Himself.  He bestows upon us eternal life.  God has given to us that life in Christ right now, which will never die.  “He that believeth on him that sent me…is passed from death unto life,” said Jesus.  We *have* eternal life.  Not *will have*it perfectly in glory.  But we have it right now, right now.  Not something that we earned, but something that Christ has freely given to us.  Now, lay hold on that.  That is how you fight.  Hold on to that treasure in Christ.  Get a grip on it.  Hold on to it.  Know the truth.  Do not be apathetic, indifferent.  But lay hold onto eternal life.  In this way you fight.

Let me use an illustration.  Young men, when you are playing rugby, and you are the running back, you hold on to the ball.  Why?  The coach says, “Tuck the ball away, protect the ball, hold on to it.”  Why?  Because the opponents are going to try to get it away.  They are going to try to strip you of the ball.  They are going to try to jar the ball so that you cough it up.

But this is no game.  Your enemies want to strip the ball so that you let go.  Your enemies do not want you to live with the hope of eternal life in your heart.  They are going to try to knock it loose.  They are going to threaten you.  They are going to hit you hard.  They are going to say, “Where is your God?  What good does it do for you to serve Him? You don’t need to worry about eternal life.”  Or, if they cannot knock it out of your hands, they will try to seduce you.  They will say to you, “Oh, you don’t need to grip it so hard.  Just relax.  Sit down.  Enjoy yourself.  It’s Friday night.  A few beers, a little music, some party….”

God says, “Lay hold on eternal life.”  Lay hold on it firmly by faith, so that you may fight.  Out of that hope of eternal life, out of that promise of God, we fight the good fight of faith.  Sometimes I fear, when I see how weakly and feebly we hold on to eternal life.  Rather indifferently and loosely we say, “I’m a Christian, but let’s not be too much a Christian.”  Of these influences that our parents, the former generation, warned us about, which creep in more and more into our life and into the church, more and more the generation today seems to say, “Oh, they’re not going to hurt us.  Oh, yes, we need the Word.  Church is a good thing.  Sunday is a wonderful day.  But it’s a nice day too, and we’ve had a busy week, so why can’t we take Sunday a little bit more loosely?”

Beloved, what will happen when the jars come?  And they will come.  When the sicknesses and the trials and the loss come into your life, are you holding on to eternal life? Are you fighting the good fight of faith?  When those trials come, do they drive you to despair?  Do you begin to murmur?  Do you say, “What’s the use?”  Or do you lay hold on eternal life and by that grace fight the good fight of faith?

What happens when you as a young person are confronted with all the pleasures and all the treasures of the world, and the world says to you, “We can put them in your hand!” Young man, the world is saying this to you, “We can put right into your hand everything — money, pleasures, sex, possessions, good times.  We can put it right into your hand. There is only one thing you’ve got to do.  Will you please loosen your grip on eternal life?  Will you quit holding on to it so much?  Just put it down on the table here.  We’ll watch it for you and we’ll fill your hands with all of these things.”

Child of God, lay hold on eternal life.  The great issue of your day is faith in Jesus Christ.  The great issue is the battle that has raged over the earth and that is being heated for its final climax.  Your enemy has sworn to destroy you, to destroy your faith, that there be no faith left on the earth.  How are you going to fight?  You can fight only when you lay hold on eternal life, when you live out of the hope of your Lord.

Then you may be confident.  For we shall not be defeated.  The victory is of the Lord.  We are more than conquerors through Him that hath loved us.  It is not of our strength. “Did we in our own strength confide,” said Martin Luther, “our striving would be losing.  Were not the right man on our side, the man of God’s own choosing....”  Oh, yes.  The victory is in Jesus Christ.  That is our confidence.

But that confidence does not make us indifferent.  It must make us cautious and courageous.  It makes us cautious.  Keep yourselves in the love of God.  Keep yourself close to His people.  It makes you very cautious, so that you do not unnecessarily expose yourself to spiritual temptation.  But it also makes you courageous.  Then you know you can endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.  You know that whatever comes to you in this battle of faith, He will give you the strength that you might fight on.

Fight the good fight.  It is a good fight.  It is worth it!  All of the other fights, wars, efforts of men in which they seek to build their nations and secure their safety — all of these other wars are not good fights.  They are not good wars.  And ultimately the world, apart from Jesus Christ, is going to crash down in flames of judgment.  But this is a good fight.  It is a good fight because the promises are sure.  The fight is a good fight because we fight in Christ.  He is by our side.  It is a good fight because it ends in perfect victory.

Remember, the time is short.  The coming of the Lord draws nigh.  Now is the time to fight under His banner, with His eye upon you.  God make you a faithful soldier of Jesus Christ.  God give you strength in faith.  Lay hold on eternal life and fight the good fight of faith.

Father in heaven, we thank Thee for Thy precious Word.  Apply it to our hearts by the Holy Spirit.  In Jesus’ name, Amen.