

## THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

November 6, 2011

To Protect and Provide

No. 3592

Rev. Carl Haak

Dear radio friends,

# M

Marriage is given by God to be a picture of Christ and the church. We cannot say that too often. We cannot remind ourselves of that too much.

Marriage is to be a picture of Christ and the church. Marriage, therefore, is built upon forgiving grace to each other. Marriage has fixed roles. If it is to be a picture of Christ and the church, then the husband must be as Christ and the wife must be as the church. The calling of a husband is to be the head of his wife. From the Scriptures we learn that there are two key concepts in the headship of Christ over the church. Those concepts are: 1) that Christ, joyfully and in love, takes responsibility for His church; and 2) that Christ is the One who has the authority, that is, that He rules and guides His church out of His heart of love.

A husband is responsible before God for the direction, for the good, of his wife and of his family in marriage. He is also, then, to provide that leadership, that guidance, out of the Word of God for his family and for his wife.

The apostle speaks of all of this in Ephesians 5:23, where we read, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body." There the apostle says to us that that headship of Christ is seen concretely in two ways. Those two ways are that Christ protects and Christ provides for His bride, the church. Christ's leadership, which is His responsibility and His guidance of the church, takes these forms: He protects and He provides. As Christ is the Husband of the church, so also must a husband protect and provide for his wife and family.

Christ, as the head of the church, protects His bride. We read in Ephesians 5:25 that He gave Himself for the church. Jesus said in John 10, "I lay down my life for the sheep." And in John 18, "If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: that the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me, have I lost none." As the head of the church, Jesus Christ protects His bride. He delivered us from the utter ruin and death that was ours by placing Himself in between us and our judgment, in order that we through Him might be reconciled unto God. And He not only did this upon the cross, but He ever lives to continue this protection of the church, for He is the head of the church. Therefore He is able to say concerning His wife, concerning the church, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Or, as we read in Psalm 121, "He, the Lord of the church, never slumbers, never sleeps; He that keepeth Israel keeps Israel day by day. The Lord is our keeper, the Lord will maintain and preserve His people." His

love means that He brings the needed rescue from sin and the necessary defense that His church requires in this world. So Christ, as the head, protects His church.

But as the head, Christ also provides. The apostle Paul says that this aspect of Christ's headship over the church is to be expressed in these words (v. 29): "No man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church." As the head, Christ provides for the church by nourishing the church. He does what a parent does for a child—He feeds, He provides. And He cherishes the church. That word "cherish," as it is used in verse 29 of Ephesians 5, is used there and in only one other place (I Thess. 2:7), where the apostle says that, as a nurse cherishes her children, so were we among you Thessalonians—that is, we exercised a tender, loving care. Christ has a compassionate, tender, heart-felt care for His church. As the head of the church, Christ protects and provides for the church.

Why these two? Because without these two the life of the church is threatened. Because without these two the church cannot exist. If Christ does not protect us; if Christ does not assume responsibility to stand between us and the punishment that our sins deserve; and if Christ does not faithfully provide and nourish us with spiritual life—if He does not do that, we will perish! We, the church, are not autonomous. We are not nuclear-powered, we are not self-sustaining and self-supporting. We are sheep. We are defenseless. We need One to protect and to provide.

So, as the head of the church, Jesus Christ provides and protects.

Now, husband, God has made you to be the head of your wife. As Christ is the head of the church, so must you be the head of your wife, to protect and to provide. If we fail in these two callings (to protect and to provide), there will be nothing left for us to be the head of. A husband's headship, his leadership, his responsibility is expressed in his providing and protecting his wife and family in both the spiritual and physical senses. The calling, then, of a husband as the head of his wife is to provide for her and the children both physically and spiritually.

First of all, to provide physically. The primary responsibility of a husband is to be the breadwinner, as the head of his wife. Yes, the wife may help make ends meet at times. But Scripture sees the wife's primary calling as a homemaker and a manager of the home. Yes, husbands, you may share in her domestic labors. You may learn to help her out in her duties in the home and all of those many things that come before her. You may certainly help her. But the heart of a husband is a heart that longs to provide. That means that as husbands we will position ourselves, we will lay down our lives, in order that we might put bread on the table, to provide for the physical needs of our wife and family. Maybe a man, you say, is disabled. Or maybe he is temporarily in school. Nevertheless, his heart, as it is indwelt by Christ, wants to provide, and his heart moves his body and moves his use of his talents and mind so that he might provide for his wife. And he prays, "Lord, help me. Bless my labors."

Secondly, as husbands we are to provide spiritually. You can provide spiritually for your wife, as the head of your wife, only if you are growing spiritually yourself. You can provide for her spiritually only if you are daily feeding your own soul. If you have ever flown on an airplane and actually listened to the stewardess before the take-off as she explains various things and talks

to you about the oxygen masks and says that, in case of emergency, an oxygen mask will drop down before you, and if you have a child with you, put your mask on first and then the child's. That is the way it goes in the spiritual life. You have to take care of your spiritual life first. That is why the devil wants you, as a husband, to sin—because your spiritual life affects the whole family. Your sin, your guilt, your unfaithfulness—who will be affected by all of that? Just you? Do not believe that lie of the devil. When you are made the head of your wife, when you are the head of the family, your spiritual life affects your entire family. You must believe that your spiritual life is the best gift that you can give to the family. Your maintaining your spiritual walk with the Lord is the best thing that you can ever do for your family. You must understand that your pride and your impenitence and your waywardness and your toying with sin will bring woe upon your family. As a spiritual provider, take care of yourself.

But, then, as the spiritual provider, you gather your family together for worship, for worship under the Word of God, for prayer, and for family worship. You see to it that your family attends a faithful, biblical church, where the gospel of Jesus Christ and His powerful saving grace is proclaimed. And then you also organize your family time of worship. You take the initiative. You say, “But I don’t know how, I don’t have any background in this. I don’t know really what to do. What do you mean—family devotions at the meal table? What do you mean?” Well, ask your brothers in the church of Jesus Christ. Ask the elders of the church, or ask your wife! You say, “Well, my wife is smarter than I am. She could really do this better than I.” No, brother, this is *your* calling. See that your family reads the Bible each day and prays each day and goes to a faithful church twice on the Lord’s Day and discusses spiritual issues. And see to it that your spiritual life is always an example for them to follow. That is what it means to be the head of your family.

But the leadership is not only for the physical and spiritual *provision* for your family. It is also for the physical and spiritual *protection* of your family.

I would like to emphasize here the spiritual, that you are spiritually to protect your family. Yes, there is a physical side to this protection. You do not say, as a husband, when your wife and children are in the car and you are on the way to church on Sunday morning, and you get a flat tire and you pull over to the side of the road, “Well, I changed the last one. It’s your turn.” You do not say that. You get out there and you change the tire. You are the head. You are the husband. You are to lay down your life, physically, for your wife. You are to be considerate. You are to open the door for her. And you are to teach your sons to be considerate to women. Physically you are to honor them.

But above all, we are to honor them spiritually. We are to protect our wife and family spiritually. There are spiritual dangers coming at our homes from all sides. There are bombs and terrorists, there are the wiles of the devil, there are the powers of darkness. We need men, we need warriors, we need men of courage and discernment for the spiritual protection of our wives and family.

How do we do that? 1) Pray. Pray for your wife and children every day, over and over and over again in the day. “Lord,” you pray, “lead them in paths of righteousness. Protect them from temptations. Draw them unto Thee in all of their perplexities.” You are the high priest of

your family. You are to call down God's blessing upon them. You are to pray for your wife and for your children in their daily needs.

2) You protect your family spiritually by setting the standards for your wife and family. You make things happen in the moral sphere. You protect them. You take the leadership. What is watched on the television? What music is heard in your families? What is going on in the life of your teenager? Your teenage daughter needs you as a father. She needs you in dress. You do not simply say, "Well, let the wife take care of that." No, she needs you to celebrate with her when she gets it right and she looks modest. And she needs you to say to her, "You're not going out of the house dressed like that."

And your wife ought to be able to say, "Go talk to your Dad about boys." Girls sometimes simply do not get it. They do not understand the way boys are wired to see and to lust. They think that they are being cute. You are the one who must talk to your daughter about these things.

You must protect your family. You must protect your family by allowing no unresolved anger in your family. We read in Ephesians 4:26, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." There are intruders that come into our home. There are arsonists that want to burn it down. There is the devil who wishes to get into our bedroom. You ask, "How does that happen?" That is when anger, unresolved conflict, comes into your home and you do not deal with it. You are the head. It means that you have to go up to the room of your son, and you have to deal with the things that are making him angry. Maybe you need to apologize. Maybe you need to say, "Son, the way I responded was not correct. But, nevertheless, this is what I want you to understand." Perhaps you need to talk with your wife before you go to sleep. You say, "But it's her fault." And then maybe you say, "Because she is at fault, my head is hitting the pillow tonight and I'm not going to do anything about it." Is that the way Christ treats His wife? How many times has He come to you? The fault is yours—all yours, is it not? It is not Christ's. Yet He comes to you. Do not let anger into your home. Protect your home. Be clothed with humility and wisdom.

I know, this does not always work perfectly. A son and a daughter may be unwilling to humble themselves. But you must try. You must lead. You must pray. For, as the head of your family, you are accountable to God.

That is where this word leaves us. The husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church.

Now, what do you hear there? Are you hearing this: "She's supposed to do what I say, and that means I am supposed to be served"? If that's what you're hearing, then you are hearing through your flesh, but not through the Spirit. When you hear the Word of God, you will hear this: "God gave me my wife and children in His love and wisdom so that, with all the gifts that He has given me, I might lead them in ways that are pleasing to Him, in order that I might always be ready to answer my God for what I have done with my wife and my children." This humbles us. This shows us our need to be constantly following our Lord Jesus Christ in faith.

When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, God came and said (now remember, Eve had sinned first), “Adam, where are you? What happened, Adam? You are the head. Where are you?” So also when there are problems in your marriage and in your home, God comes and He says, “Husband, where are you? Is there something not right in your home?” Maybe God has an issue with your wife. Maybe your wife is indeed at fault. Or maybe it is with your kids—your teenagers are indeed at fault. I can assure you that, when God comes to your house tonight to deal with those issues of your wife and your teenagers, the very first question He is going to ask is: “Is the man of the house at home? Where are you? You are the head.”

Let this be an encouragement to us. For God designed marriage this way. He did it for His own glory and for our good, and He will give grace, always. He delights in using the weakest of means for His good.

So, man of God, you who are chosen and redeemed by His mighty grace, here is your calling from the Master Jesus Christ: Joyfully bear the responsibility of your family. Lead your wife and children for their spiritual well-being. Heal discord. Lay down your life for them. Your wife and your children will thank God for you. And God will be pleased with you.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Thy Holy Word. We pray again that it may enter into our hearts by the work of Thy Holy Spirit. We pray that, as husbands, we may take up our calling before Thee both to protect and to provide for our families, in order that Thy name might be honored by us. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

## **THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR**

November 13, 2011 A Wife’s Submission to Her Husband

No. 3593

Rev. Carl Haak

Dear radio friends,

**T**

Today we return to our series of messages on marriage, the family, and the covenant of God. We look into the Word of God today in Ephesians 5:22-24, where we read: “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife,

even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.”

Marriage is to be a picture of Christ and the church. We cannot say that too often. We cannot emphasize that too strongly to our souls. I cannot remind you of that as a husband or a wife too often. You cannot hear that too much.

The apostle Paul, in Ephesians 5, we have seen, says to us that this is a great mystery, that is, a man and a woman joined together in the bond of marriage as one flesh. But he goes on to say, “But I speak concerning Christ and the church.” In other words, Paul says, I’m telling you that God intends marriage to display, to mirror, to promote, the thing that is most dear to his heart: Christ and the church. We do not, then, want our marriage to lie to the world. We want it to tell the truth. Thus we need grace to be fitted as a husband and as a wife.

Shall we allow remarriage while one’s spouse lives? Is this a picture of Christ and the church, of Christ who never forsakes His wife for another? God forbid!

Shall there be sex before marriage? Is this a picture of the commitment that Christ makes to one woman, to His church?

Shall there be such a thing as homosexual or lesbian marriage? Is this a picture of Christ and the church? God forbid!

We want our marriage, the marriage of one man and one woman under God, and in faith in God, to be a picture of Christ and the church. And if that is to be the case, then the Word of God says there are fixed roles that are given for marriage in order that marriage may, indeed, be this picture of Christ and the church. We have looked into the role, or the calling, of the husband. We saw that this calls a man to accountability, to leadership, and to sacrifice to provide for and to protect his wife and family.

Today we want to focus on the meaning of the wife’s submission to her husband, for the Scriptures say (Eph. 5:22-24) that the calling of the wife is to “submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.”

Now I am very desirous in the Lord Jesus that we, both married and single, young and old, young adult or child, hear this Word of God as a call to something that is strong, noble, good, dignified, and worthy of a woman’s highest spiritual efforts. The Scriptures say, “Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). Our society, and many in the church-world, despise or simply ignore this Word of God that calls women to submit to their own husbands. It is especially that word “submit” that is called degrading, abusive, unequal, demeaning. Many will simply write this off as the sub-Christian culture or the sub-Christian values left over from the culture of the first century. And there are others, on the other side, who will distort this Word of God. There will be men who believe that

their wife cannot go from one room to the next without their permission and, therefore, distort this Word of God with sinful abuse or tyranny.

But the truth of submission, the submission of a wife to her husband, is the will of God. It is therefore something beautiful, good, and dignified. It has the mark of Christ's majesty upon it. It is part of the wonderful and profound display, to the world, of the grace of God. It is good and beautiful. For, listen: "As the church," says the apostle, "is subject to Christ; so let the wife be to her own husband in everything." The submission of the church to Christ is something that is good and beautiful.

Submission, according to God's Word, is a beautiful grace given by God. It is a heart issue, fundamentally. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husband. The word "submit" means "to place under, to defer, to come under the will of another." It is always first to come under the will of God. Submission, the grace of submission, is that grace whereby we bow our knee, as the apostle says in Ephesians 3:14, to our God and Savior, whereby we kiss the scepter in the hand of our Lord, who sits upon God's throne. Submission means that I make my will, by God's grace, and my abilities, to serve the purpose that God has given to me in this life. It is a grace. By nature, the apostle says, we are self-willed (II Pet. 2:10). And then, describing us according to the flesh, the apostle says that we are always presumptuous, self-willed. "They are not afraid to speak evil of dignities [or authority]." In other words, by nature we are rebellious. We place ourselves upon the throne of our own heart.

So the Bible sees that submission to God is, in reality, an evidence of His wonderful grace. It is liberation from the tyranny of my sinful self. He, says the psalmist, hath made me free, free to submit, free to serve, free to follow not my will but the will of God.

Now, wives, submit. In your heart, with an eye to God, recognize that Christ calls you to come under the husband that God has appointed as your spiritual leader. The Bible says now that this is something honorable and that it belongs to the calling of every Christian. It is dignified, it is not demeaning. Christ also has humbled Himself and has submitted to the will of His heavenly Father in our redemption. He has laid aside His own rights. It is part of the noble calling that we have that we, as the children of God, submit ourselves always to the will of God and submit ourselves one to another, seeking not our own but the things that will edify and bless and benefit one another as fellow members of the grace of God.

Now, to submit, as a wife, at its simplest meaning, means to recognize that God has given you a head, your husband, and to follow his leadership. Because we are sinful—sinful husbands and sinful wives—God's truth so quickly becomes twisted in our understanding. Let us be clear, first of all, what this does not mean. It does not mean that you, as a wife, leave your mind on the wedding altar; that, as a wife, you have nothing to say in the marriage; that the development of your talents, abilities, wisdom, and insight is to be brushed aside; that you cannot think for yourself; and that you have become a dumb servant. A humble, wise, Christ-filled husband knows the blessing of his wife and seeks the blessing of the counsel of his wife. Proverbs 31 says of the woman that her husband doth safely trust in her. To submit does not mean that you do not have a mind of your own. Wives, be subject. But that does not mean that you renounce all of your abilities and all of your talents.

Nor does it mean that you put the will of your husband before the will of Christ. If a husband calls you in some way to do what you are convinced by God's Word is sinful, you follow Christ's will. While submitting, while reverencing, while coming under him, you say, "Honey, the Lord has placed you over me as my head. I want to show you that. But, Jesus is our Lord. And when you ask me to do that which is sinful, I may not do it. I will not."

Nor does this submission mean that a husband is given license to sinful tyranny. Marriage is a holy covenant of both husband and wife, who vow that they will behave toward each other in a Christ-like manner. If a wife is contentious and will not submit to the yoke that Christ gives, and she does wrong to her husband, then she has set herself against the majesty of God. But if a man insists on his own fancy, despising his wife, and is cruel to his wife, he also defies God openly. The way that we are to approach our wives is not with harshness, acting like a madman, expecting to scare them with a grim look. If we do so, we defy God.

What does it mean to submit? The apostle says, "As the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." In other words, the apostle says that a picture is worth a thousand words. The church is subject to Christ, and that is beautiful. That is a good thing.

It means two things. It means, first, that the church gives herself willingly to advance Christ's purposes and cause, and seeks the advancement of the Lord's kingdom on earth. Do we, as members of the church of Jesus Christ, submit to Christ? How would one know? We would teach the sound doctrines that Christ has given to the church. We would show to any visitor or to anyone who would look into our church that the interest, the purposes, the causes of the Lord are our passion and our desire. We will not, as a church, say: "What do we want, what do we think we ought to do? How shall we get a name for ourselves in the community? How shall we influence people according to our own wisdom and get our name in the headlines?" But we will ask one question: "What are Christ's purposes for us? What is the cause that Christ gives us to advance?" We will look carefully into the will of the Lord in Holy Scripture. We will come to know the heart of the Master, and we will devote ourselves to His purposes, to His task, and to His truth.

Secondly, the church submits to Christ by seeking His honor. If you read, for instance, Psalm 45, you will see that the church, the bride of Christ, enjoys making known the majesty of her Master and Lord. The church delights, takes great pleasure, in extolling our Lord, our King, and our Husband. Psalm 45:2ff.: "Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips:...Gird thy sword.... ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness." The church desires Christ to be seen in all of His glory and majesty. The bride of Christ, the church, has a sheer delight, a deep impulse, to proclaim the majesty and the glory, the worth, the might, the splendor, and the power of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The church submits, therefore, to Jesus Christ in two ways: 1) She sees herself as serving the purpose of advancing His cause. She sees herself as expendable in His cause. 2) She finds great joy in proclaiming the honor of Jesus Christ.



Now, as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wife be to her husband. That means, fundamentally, you follow his spiritual leadership. But it means also that you desire him and his purpose in life to be carried through. It means that you delight in seeing him prosper in his gifts.

Christ, of course, is sinless, and a husband is not. A husband is sinful. And yet, as the wife, we will say, "I give myself to serve the advancement of your calling in this world. And I delight in seeing you take that calling and glorify God in your calling." You will say to your husband, "I delight for you to take the initiative in our family. I'm glad when you take responsibility for things and lead. I flourish when you make sure the family is going in the way of wisdom and the way of the love of God."

There is your husband before you. He is a sinner, saved by grace. He has gifts. He has a personality. He has a calling in this life. To submit to him means that you will see it as your place to encourage him, as God's son, to develop in the calling God gives him. You will not say, "I want my own interests, I want my own life, I want my own career." But you will say, "I want to use my time, my talents, for his good, for the good of our marriage." And you will honor and you will affirm your husband's leadership and help him carry it through. You were made to be a help meet for him (Gen. 2), to help him be the man of God that God calls him to be. You will, then, be his counselor. You will be his aid. You will be his help meet. You will delight that his name be held in respect through your actions. And that, through you, he is honored.

As the church is to Christ, we want the name of Christ to be honored by our actions. That is the desire of the church. So also the wife will want her husband to be honored as the world looks at her in her actions. The wife, then, will not run around criticizing her husband publicly, belittling him, telling everyone his shortcomings, discouraging him in what he wants to do in this life.

As no Christian man may have his wife in terror of him, for to do so is to despise God, so also no Christian woman may have her husband feeling hopeless, resigned, and deflated, for this too is to despise God. But as the church delights in God's cause, and as the church delights in the honor of Christ's name, so also the wife will delight in seeing her husband fulfilling his calling to be a man of God.

Submit in that way to your husband.

The apostle brings out that this submission to the husband is an exclusive thing. Submit yourselves to your *own* husband as unto the Lord. And again, Let the wives be subject to their *own* husbands in everything. This is a unique submission to your own husband that is not fitting in relation to any other man. You are not called to submit to all men the way that you submit to your own husband. Marriage is exclusive. The husband and wife stand in a relationship to each other that they do not stand in toward anyone else.

Further, Paul makes plain that this submission is always to be rendered. "So let the wives be subject to their own husbands *in everything*." This is usually more than what we might feel like or want to do. It may not always be obedience, for the wife must always obey God first. But

there must always be submission. It comes out this way. You will say, “It grieves me when you venture into sinful acts and want me to go with you. You know that I can’t do that. I have no desire to resist you. I want to follow you joyfully. But I cannot follow you into sin, as much as I love and honor you and your leadership.”

It may not always be that you agree with your husband’s decision. There may be times when the most submissive wife will hesitate at her husband’s decision. It may look unwise to her. Then it will go like this: Your husband is about to make a decision that seems foolish to you. At that moment you will express your submission in the following way: “Dear, I know that you’ve thought a lot about this, and I love it when you make decisions and plan for us. But I really don’t have peace with this decision. I feel we need to talk about it some more. How about some time today?” In your disagreements, you make it clear that you honor him in his role. And you make it clear that if all the talking that needs to be done before a decision is reached has been done and you still disagree, you will defer to your husband willingly. Wives, submit yourselves.

Husband, it does not say, “You subject your wife.” Nowhere does the Bible say that. It calls the wife to do this willingly. Submission is something that is given. It must be given freely and willingly.

And cheerfully. As the church is subject to Christ. Not grudgingly, not stiffly. But joyfully. Because you want to show what your Christianity means to you in your marriage. This is not slavery. This is not degrading. This is the very heart and the demonstration of Christianity. The wife declares before the world, “I have one Master, not many. I have one Lord. I am His servant. And for Christ’s sake, I take up my calling and place to submit to my own husband.”

As husbands and wives, we must always begin by looking not to the other, but to the Lord. Do not begin by looking across the table at each other and asking yourselves, “What do I see?” But look up to God. Do not just trot out the name of God at your marriage ceremony, but put your marriage into His hands and guidance. Call upon Him with sincerity. If you do not look to God, if you look only at your husband and at all those things that can make you scream, the whole house is going to come down in confusion and ruin. And it will turn out to your pain.

As marriage is ordained of God, we who enter into this sacred union must look completely unto God, completely to Him and desperately unto Him. We must make God our refuge. We must make Him our motive. We must see Him who has joined us together. We must have our eye upon God. For God has designed marriage between husband and wife to represent the relationship of Christ and the church. And as a wife you have a calling, a holy, sacred trust. Not for your husband’s sake, but for Christ’s sake. To show to all who see you what it means that the church is subject to Christ, to show what the church thinks about Jesus Christ.

You do that by heartfelt submission. You show in all of your life toward your husband how much we, as children of God, are indebted unto our Savior, who has poured out the treasures of His mercy upon us.

Let us pray.

Father, we again thank Thee for Thy Word, and pray that it may enter into our hearts, that it may soften our hearts, and that it may give wisdom to our eyes. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR**

November 20, 2011

Grace For Today

No. 3594

Rev. Carl Haak

Dear radio friends,

# T

This coming Thursday we have set aside in our nation a day in which we shall give thanks to Almighty God for His mercies and goodnesses to us. As the children of God belonging to the Savior Jesus Christ, we confess that we are redeemed by His blood for this very purpose. We read in I Peter 2:9 that we have been saved in order that we should show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Thanksgiving for a Christian, for a child of God, is the very purpose for our salvation. Therefore Thanksgiving is not a day, but is always. It is not for some things, but for everything. And Thanksgiving is to be thankful for God's grace, sovereign grace, and salvation.

We could focus upon many things. We could (and must) focus upon the spiritual blessings that God has freely poured out upon us. We read in Isaiah 63, "I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses."

The apostle Paul also, in his epistles, is constantly pushing back the boundaries of human language to express the gratitude that we are to have for the great mercies and goodnesses of God. He says that we must have our eyes open to see the glory of God's grace, the exceeding greatness of His mercies, that we might comprehend the love of God, which passes knowledge. He is always using great words to express the wonder of God's mercies and love to us. We are to thank Him for grace greater than all our sins, faithfulness never failing, love all-sufficient, truth enduring to all eternity. We must thank Him for His spiritual blessings.

We will focus, on Thanksgiving Day, also upon the physical and the material provisions of God. For God has made us in such a way now that we are utterly dependent upon the creation. We are of the earth earthy. We depend on air, food, drink, clothing, warmth, rest. We cannot live without these things.

So at harvest time it is good that we pause, that we thank Him, and that we attribute all things to Him. And, yes, we have so much of these things that it is embarrassing in many ways. Around the world many know better than we do how much we have. We might say that we are pinched in the economy, that life is extremely difficult. Housing and work and business are slow. Yet, we have our choice of food and clothes and warmth and so much more.

But if we are to give thanks to God, we must be free from anxiety. Our Savior speaks to us of this in Matthew 6:19-24ff. He speaks so beautifully and profoundly. He speaks there, in that section of the Sermon on the Mount, of our relationship to the earthly things. He says that our relationship to the earthly, our attachment to the earthly, is, at bottom, so often the cause of our spiritual problems. Our inability to see Father's wonderful grace and our inability to thank Him is caused so often by the relationship that we have allowed our souls to have with the earthly things. We hoard the earthly things, we covet, we are guilty of greed and sin. And when we hoard the earthly things, then we are governed by them, and no greedy person can be thankful. Or, says Jesus, if we do not hoard them, then we worry about them. We say, "Will it turn out? Will I make it? I'm laid off; I don't have a job; will I have enough? Will I have the things that I need for this life?" We become filled with worry over so many things.

A trumpet cannot blast stirring notes if it is stuffed with dirt and clay. A piano cannot play if its keys are glued with sweet molasses. Our hearts cannot give thanks if they are choked with worry and anxiety.

So we look to the Word of God to perform surgery upon clogged spiritual arteries, so that our hearts might beat strong and the blood of grace flow freely through our hearts, and our voices may sing, "Now thank we all our God!"

Jesus says in Matthew 6:34, "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Our Savior there is warning us that we must not fall into the grips of anxiety. Four times in Matthew 6 He has used the words "Take no thought." And those words mean "Don't be seized by anxiety."

We are anxious about everything. The Lord knows that. We are anxious about ourselves and our inadequacies. We are anxious about our job, about our looks, about getting married, about being married, about the church, about our beloved Christian schools, about our children, about our burdens, money, possessions. We are anxious about our health. We are anxious about tomorrow. If we would write a list of all the things that we worry about, the list would go clean out the door of our house. And, at bottom, we would worry that we worry so much. And all of the worry cloaks not only peace in our souls, but it cloaks (and chokes) thanks. We say today, "Yes, I suppose I should be thankful. I should be, but under anxiety, how can I be?"

To begin the life of thanksgiving, says the Lord, we must be free, not only from the love of money, from greed, but from anxiety. And the main point that the Savior has brought in the chapter (v. 33) is that we must seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness. He is saying, "Instead of anxiety ruling your life, you must make the kingship of God real by faith. You belong to a King and kingdom and He is your King. Every moment the King's hand is over you in power. Therefore you must have confidence that He will meet all of your needs."

Now the Lord gives reasons, and verse 34 of Matthew 6 is the last reason. But He gives other reasons in this chapter to battle our anxiety. I want to look only briefly at a few of them because I do not want to know which one of the Lord's arguments are crafted for your need today.

In verse 25 He said, "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or...drink; nor yet for the body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" He is saying to us that our life in Christ is much more than what we eat and what we wear. We worry about losing the pleasures of this life. We are anxious to have the admiring glances of others for our nice clothes. We want a long, healthy life. But Jesus says, "Don't lose sight of what life is. Life is not physical pleasure, admiring glances, or long life. But life is God, and life is to be lived for His approval. Remember that."

He says in verse 26, "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" The Lord says, "What do you see when the birds come to your feeder at your house?" You certainly learn, do you not, a lesson not to be lazy. They are energetic. They are watchful. But God feeds them, does He not? The birds do not hoard things like a squirrel. The birds do not hoard things for the day when God dies. They believe that when the sun comes up tomorrow God will be God. They are His brute creatures. And they believe that God will supply their daily needs.

Then the Lord says in verse 31 that anxiety over earthly things is exactly characteristic of the unbelieving world. He says in verse 32: "For after all these things do the Gentiles seek." Anxiety marks the children of this world. And if we are filled with anxiety as His children, then we have placed ourselves upon the same level. We live, then, on the same level that the world would live. Anxiety over earthly things shows that we are too close to the earthly and too far from God. It says that we do not think that our Father knows our needs or that, if He does know, He does not have a loving heart and will not meet those needs according to His wisdom and will.

But then the Lord comes to His last argument against anxiety in verse 34: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." And that is the heart of it.

That is the heart of our anxiety, too. It is over tomorrow. What will happen tomorrow. We are muzzled in giving thanks for mercies given today because of the troubles we see ahead tomorrow. Tomorrow's troubles blot out today's mercies. We bring tomorrow's troubles forward into today in the form of anxiety. Present mercies are ignored. Do not do that, says

Jesus. Believe that God will be God tomorrow. And thank Him today. Believe His mercies are new each morning. Great is His faithfulness!

Thank Him today for today's mercies that are sufficient for today's needs. That is thanksgiving.

An old Swedish hymn explains it: "He whose heart is kind beyond all measure, gives unto each day what He deems best—Lovingly it's part of pain and pleasure, mingling toil with peace and rest." God gives each day, in wise and loving measure, the troubles and the mercies sufficient for them. Thank Him. Today's mercies are not designed to carry tomorrow's burdens. There will be mercies tomorrow for tomorrow's burdens.

Do you ask the question: How shall my soul give worthy thanks, O God, to Thee? That is from Psalm 116. Do you ask that? Well, you must learn to thank Him for today's mercies. The calling that you have today is not to arrange strength and mercies for tomorrow. God will give them then. Manna, in the Old Testament, that was hoarded for tomorrow rotted. Unseen and prepared mercies of God will be given to you tomorrow. But thank Him today for what He gives you today.

I cannot express this too strongly. I cannot express this too strongly for children, for teenagers, for college students, for parents, for women, for middle-aged couples, for older people. We all want today to have tomorrow's strength. We all want today to know what will happen tomorrow. At the end of the day our gauge reads "empty." The Lord brought us through. We fall into bed. And what do we say? Do we say "Thanks"? Or do we say, "What about tomorrow?"

The Lord says, "No. Wrong." You must fall into bed and say "Thanks, Lord, for grace sufficient today." You want the secret of thanksgiving? You say, "Lord, open my heart to thank Thee. I'm so dull, I'm so anxious, I'm so weighed down in my soul." Then you must pray, "Lord, give me to see Thy mercies today."

Do you get it? Do you understand? If we pass over today, if we pass the mercies fresh for this day, His faithfulness in this day, and we peer into tomorrow, we will become desperate. Then either we will be seized with anxiety or we will develop the world's strategy telling ourselves that *we* are sufficient for tomorrow's troubles. But either way, there will be no thanks to God today. There will be silence. There will be a whimper of praise. Thank Him? We will say, "How can I thank Him with the things looming over my head tomorrow?" Or you will say, "Thank Him? Why?"

Let me tell you what the Lord's words in Matthew 6:34 do not mean. He is not saying to you, "There's no use worrying because it's not going to change anything." He says, "For the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." He is not referring to fate. He does not mean that things come to pass by their own power. He does not mean that you should make no preparations for tomorrow's needs. A farmer will have nothing in his silo if he does not plan ahead and work and plant and harvest. And everything, young people, everything worth doing requires forethought and planning and preparation. You must get ready.

But He means this: “Don’t bring the troubles and the fears of carrying out your preparations for tomorrow into today. Each day has enough trouble of its own. And sufficient unto the day is the evil trouble and the mercy that God gives for that trouble.” He means that each day your sovereign, heavenly Father, who is kind and wise beyond all measure, gives what He deems best. He gives both the trouble and the sufficient grace. God determines each day the limit of the trouble of that day for you. And they will not go beyond that limit. God determines the grace that is sufficient. God does not give mercies today for bearing tomorrow’s burdens. Tomorrow’s burdens are something that God does not want you to carry today. But He promises—and He is faithful, you will find Him so—grace for today. “I promise grace for every day, every hour, as it comes.” And at the end of every day, your thought and your mind and your heart should be upon thanks. Thanks, Lord, for the mercies today.

Today’s mercies are tailor-made for today’s troubles. They are tailor-made to carry today’s burdens. We get that from Lamentations 3: “Thy compassions fail not. The Lord’s mercies are new each morning; great is Thy faithfulness.” Once again, that old hymn: “Every day the Lord Himself is near me, with a special mercy for each hour.” That is the way God does it. He does it that way to keep us near to Him in dependence, that we might thank Him moment by moment, for carrying us through each hour and each day. There is a special mercy today, measured of God in love and wisdom, for you, child of God, and for every hour of this day. Give Him thanks.

We must grasp this. We must live this. How many times do we not come to the end of our treasured resources and say, “That’s it. I’m done.” And then we roll on us the stone of tomorrow and we say, “Now look what’s coming tomorrow. That’s it, really. Now I’m really done. It’s impossible.”

Beloved, God does not ask you to carry tomorrow’s load with today’s strength. What you need today is not tomorrow’s grace. You will receive it when you need it, fresh and sufficient—tomorrow, for tomorrow’s needs. You need only today’s grace. And God says, “I will give it to you today. You will find Me faithful.”

Who can ever say that He failed me today? None.

Give thanks unto the Lord!

Thank Him right now for the wonder of today’s mercies for today’s troubles. All thanksgiving is now. You do not plan thanksgiving. You either give thanks now or you fail and do not thank Him.

I have been emphasizing to the children of my congregation in the grades 4-7 that faith is always now, never later. You do not plan faith. You do not plan courage to do the right thing when you get to be thirty-five. Then, if you plan for the future that you are going to be courageous or you are going to do this or that, you are going to live a spiritual life in the future, then you are confessing that you are not doing it now.

Thanksgiving is always now, right now. Now the angels spur us on. Present mercies are surrounding us. Amazing faithfulness holds us up in the arms of the Lord right now. Now thank

we all our God. You do not say, “Well, when we get over this cancer...” or “when we get to a certain figure of income...” or “when we get to our dream situation—then we will be thankful.” If that is the way we talk, we are telling God, “I’m not thankful now.” We must be thankful today, right now. For His mercies this day, this hour, press upon us that we praise Him from our lips and souls.

Do you, today, feel afraid? Are you alone? Listen to His mercies: “Fear not, for I am with you. Oh, be not dismayed. I am your God, and I will strengthen you and still give you aid.”

Do you say, “I am too weak”? Listen, “My grace is sufficient for you; my strength is made perfect in your weakness.”

You say, “I’m just facing too much.” Listen: “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

You say, “But I don’t know which way to go.” Listen: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way that thou shalt go; I will counsel you with Mine own eye.”

You say, “I’m dying, I’m getting old, I have tribulation.” Listen: “He will save to the uttermost all those who come to Him, since He ever liveth to make intercession for them. He will not fail you, nor will He forsake you.”

So, what is the one and only response that the Lord seeks from you and me at every moment of every day and in every way? Thanks, Lord! I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call upon the name of the Lord.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Thy wonderful Word. Teach us in this day to receive Thy sufficient mercy for our troubles today with thanksgiving. Amen.