



*** I Go to Prepare a Place for You**

John 14:1-3

*** Try the Spirits**

I John 4:1-3

*** A Father's Pity**

Psalm 103:13

*** Keeping the Lord's Day Holy**

Hebrews 10:24, 25

*** Freedom**

Romans 8:2

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Reformed Witness Hour

(www.reformedwitnesshour.org)

Station Listings

Station	Location	Frequency	Time/day
KARI	Blaine, WA.....	550AM.....	8:00 P.M./Sunday
KCWN	Pella, IA.....	99.9FM.....	3:30 P.M./Sunday
KDCR	Sioux Center, IA.....	88.5FM.....	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KGDN	Tri-Cities Walla Walla, OR.....	101.3FM.....	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KLOH	Pipestone, MN.....	1050AM.....	8:00 A.M./Sunday
KLTT	Denver, CO.....	670AM.....	1:30 P.M./Sunday
KPRO	Riverside, CA.....	1570AM.....	11:30 A.M./Sunday
KSPO	Spokane, WA.....	106.5FM.....	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KTAC	Moses Lake, WA.....	93.9FM.....	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KTBI	Wenatchee/Moses Lake, WA.....	810AM.....	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KTRW	Spokane, WA.....	630AM.....	9:30 A.M./Sunday
KYAK	Yakima, WA.....	930AM.....	5:00 P.M./Sunday
WFDL	Fond Du Lac, WI.....	930AM.....	6:30 P.M./Sunday
WFUR	Grand Rapids, MI.....	102.9FM.....	8:00 A.M./Sunday
WFUR	Grand Rapids, MI.....	1570AM, 92.9FM ...	4:00 P.M./Sunday
WORD	Pittsburgh, PA.....	101.5FM.....	10:00 A.M./Sunday
WPFGB	Carlisle, PA.....	91.3FM.....	8:00A.M./Sunday
HOPE Radio (Long Island, NY)			
	Nassau & West Suffolk County.....	101.5FM.....	8:30 A.M./Sunday
	West/Central Suffolk County.....	94.5FM.....	8:30 A.M./Sunday
	Central Suffolk County.....	104.5FM.....	8:30 A.M./Sunday
	Central/East Suffolk County.....	96.5FM.....	8:30 A.M./Sunday
	Central/East Suffolk County.....	96.9FM.....	8:30 A.M./Sunday
	Central/East Suffolk County.....	107.1FM.....	8:30 A.M./Sunday
UK			
GOSPEL	Northern Ireland.....	846AM.....	8:30A.M./Sunday
Philippines			
DYSB	Philippines.....	1197AM.....	6:30 P.M./Sunday
Canada			
CKNX	Wingham, ON.....	920 AM.....	7:00A.M./Sunday

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

June 1, 2014

No. 3726

I Go to Prepare a Place for You

Rev. Carl Haak

Dear Radio Friends,

Our message today is taken from the beautiful words of our Lord in John 14:1-3: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

How many of God's children have been comforted by these words of our Lord! How many have had their hearts made calm in the deepest trial and sorrow by remembering these blessed words! How many hospital rooms, funeral parlors, and how many believers in moments of heaviest grief, loss, pain, sorrow have found our Lord's words here of tremendous comfort, of victory, and of eternal life!

Now Jesus is speaking them again to us. He is speaking to us through His Word right now the one thing that is most necessary for our life, that we hear His own words and that we receive them with a believing heart.

In John 14 our Lord is

speaking to us as He was about to leave His disciples in such a way that they could not follow Him. He was saying to them and to us that He would go away from us through the cross and through the resurrection from the dead and, then, after forty days, He would ascend up into heaven. He would travel the path that the Father had laid out for Him in order to accomplish the entirety of our salvation. The Word of God tells us in Hebrews 6:20 that He is the forerunner who has for us entered into the heavenlies; that He was the one according to Isaiah 63 who would tread the winepress of God's wrath all alone; that He would obtain our salvation and then return to His heavenly Father in a glorious ascension.

The Lord tells us that everything that He ever did on earth was always for us, for the elect, whom the Father had entrusted to His care. And He tells us now that through that work we also have access into the grace of eternal life; that we, too, have access to heaven; and that He goes to heaven to prepare a place for us.

From every point of view, then, the gospel that we hear today is a wonderful word of comfort and victory for us as children of God. Jesus begins with the words, "Let not your heart be troubled." The word "trouble" there means "thrown into fear, anxiety, or confusion." Do not have your heart thrown about with fears and confusions. How weak are our hearts.

At that point the disciples were filled with sorrow, despair. They were feeling that they were being forsaken. And what about us? Can you count the troubles of one day in your heart—the worries, the fears, the burdens over sin, the anxiety, the grief? And we have no defense of ourselves to keep all of that out of our hearts. There are no bars, there are no bolts, and there are no locks to keep trouble out of your heart.

But now listen to Jesus. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." The remedy for our troubled hearts is faith in the living God and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and to listen, listen to Him. Then, to buttress and support the call that we are to put away a troubled heart, the Lord tells us that He goes away (in the ascension up into heaven), but that He goes away for a gracious purpose, a gracious purpose for us. "I'm going away to prepare a place for you in My Father's house of mansions."

Let us think about that! What a wonderful place. He speaks to us of Father's house. "In my Father's house are many mansions: ...I go to prepare a place for you." Very plainly, Jesus Christ is talking about heaven, and that in the ascension forty days after His resurrection from the dead He would go there in His glorified body. He would go back to His home in heaven. He had taught us that He came down from heaven (John 3:13). And, having completed the work that the Father gave Him to do, He would ascend up where He was before (John 6:62). Heaven is Father's house. Heaven, then, is not a cold, sterile, empty place. To Jesus it was the place where He enjoyed perfect love and peace and joy and warmth of fellowship with His Father. He was eager to return.

Now, I know that the language is figurative. It is borrowed from this present life: house and mansions. But, you see, heaven is a real place. It is more real than anything we know here below. You say to me, "Where is heaven?" I do not know. Eye has not seen and ear has not heard and it has not entered into the heart of man to conceive. It is exalted in glory. It is totally different from the earthly. It is full of wonder and praise. But it is not a dream. It is not something made up in our imaginations.

we receive not only pardon, but also the work of the Spirit bringing us sorrow and repentance and the desire to walk in obedience to Jesus Christ. That is what it means to be free. We are free in Christ Jesus.

Out of the blood of Christ, which has justified me and forgiven me of my sins, I am given the power also to fight lust, greed, anger, pride, and selfishness. Freedom.

Out of the love of Christ, and out of the blood of Jesus Christ, I am given not only to know my sin but also to hate my sin and to fight my sin and to desire to serve God. This is freedom.

Out of the love and blood of Jesus Christ, I am not only forgiven my sin, but I see that indeed my problem is *my* sin, and I want to take hold of myself and walk in obedience to Christ.

How do you approach the battle against sin in your life? Do you approach as a victim? Do you say, "I can't help it. Everyone does it. It's to be expected. You'd do it too if you were in my circumstances. And it doesn't really matter. Aw, come on, it's not as bad as So-and-So." We learn where the bar is set. And if we can come under that bar, then we think we are OK. If that is

the way we think, then we do not know the cross of Jesus Christ.

Do you battle your sin this way, as one who in Christ has been made free as a conqueror, and more than conqueror, in Christ Jesus? Do you know that you have been forgiven, and not only forgiven but made free, that the Spirit of Christ now rules in you, so that you want to resist that sin, hate that sin, fight that sin, and you want to live now in a way that will thank Him and praise Him? We fight our sin, not to earn salvation, but because God has forgiven us. Then all the glory is God's. Absolutely all the glory is of God.

Understand, and live in freedom, forgiven in the blood of Christ, so that you might repent now, humble yourself, and feel, by the Spirit of Christ, a new impulse to submit all things in loving obedience to Jesus Christ. This is freedom. And all of this to God's glory.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for the Word, and we pray for its blessing upon our hearts in this day, that we may stand in the freedom, in the liberty, of Jesus Christ. In His name do we pray, Amen.

The apostle means free in the sense that this principle of sin is now *checked*. It means that the dominion of that principle is broken. It means that I can contradict the law of sin and death. It means that the power that I now desire to follow is the law of life in Christ Jesus.

It makes us free in two ways. The Spirit of Christ makes us free, first, in a painful way. He gives us to know our sin. The conviction of sin. He slays us. The Spirit of Christ introduces me to my sin. I mean, truly introduces me to my sin and to my problem. Do you know your problem? You say, "Well, of course I know my problem. She is sitting across the table from me." Or, you say, "Well, it's my mother. It's my parents. They're so unreasonable." Or, "It's him. If you had to live with him, you'd know what my problem is."

When you speak that way, you speak out of the law of sin in your members. What you are saying is that your sin, at least

in comparison to other people's, is not so bad, and that what you do and say in your marriage is explainable because of the other

person. As long as you think that way, you are in the bondage of your own sin. The work of the Spirit of Christ is first to show you yourself, that the tyrant and the evil sinner is yourself. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. That was the testimony of the apostle Paul.

So the first work is a painful one—the conviction of sin. But then the second work of freedom of the Spirit is repentance. And repentance is freedom. It is to say, "I'm sorry, truly sorry. I have sinned against heaven and I have sinned against you." The devil says, "Don't say that. Don't humble yourself. Be proud." Freedom is repentance. It is the faith of Christ within our hearts delivering us from the hardness,

the darkness, the selfishness, the defiance.

Do you repent? Is your heart soft before God? Do you know what it is to be broken, in tears, over your own sin? This is a miracle. This is the principle of the life of Christ within you. In

Christ we receive this power to repent, to sorrow over our sin, and to desire to walk in a new and holy life. United to Christ,

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It is God's dwelling. It is His house. He has a throne there, and His honor is shown there. It is Father's house. It is the place where all of God's glory and love and mercy is to be felt and experienced through Jesus Christ. That is what makes heaven heaven.

Do not misunderstand. Heaven is glorious. It is unimaginably beautiful. The Bible tells us in Revelation that it has streets of gold and gates of pearl and rivers of life. Heaven and everything about it reflects God's glory. It is unspeakably beautiful. But the true beauty of heaven does not lie in the place itself, but in the fact that God is there. Father is there. Heavenly, almighty Father of Jesus is there.

Is that not true in your earthly life as well? You know that, do you not? A house may be elegant. It may be the house of your dreams—staggering in its design, best building materials, ten rooms, five baths. But if father and mother are not there, it is a shell. On the contrary, you may be in a humble home. It may be somewhat cramped. But if father and mother are there, your children are happy. And if you live in love before them, then, the Bible says, it is better to be there, better to be in a humble abode where the love of God is, than in a rich dwelling where there are contentions.

So also, perfectly, what makes heaven heaven is that God is there. There His warmth of eternal love and mercy and grace are to be experienced, which more than swallow up all of our sorrow and death and tears.

Jesus said, "I am going to that place." That is what happened in the Ascension, forty days after He arose from the dead. Jesus crossed over the great Jordan and entered into the heavenly Canaan and took up His place at God's right hand upon the throne in heaven. And that, too, makes heaven heaven. If Jesus were not there, if the only begotten Son of God, the crucified Savior, the risen Lord, were absent—well, that cannot be. Then it would not be heaven. But He is there! And we shall sit at His feet. The Lamb Himself shall lead us and bring us to fountains of living water, says the book of Revelation. That is what makes heaven heaven.

Now He says to us that in His Father's house are many mansions. That is, heaven is a place that is more than adequate for all the children of God. It is a place of full and uninterrupted glory for each child of God. The Lord confirms it. He says, "If it were not so (that it is a place of many mansions), I would have told you. If it were not spacious and glorious, I would have said so." You are going to another

place. You are going to go to heaven as a child of God. You ask, "Is there room?" Jesus says, "I told you. There are many mansions there." It is a roomy place, a place for all of God's children—for the most renowned of those children (David and Daniel and Paul and Moses, Luther and Calvin and Augustine)—a place for the lowliest, humblest (for the thief on the cross, for the woman at Jacob's well, and for me). A countless throng shall be there, a throng that no man can number, vast and glorious. It is a place of mansions. And that means that in every one of us will be seen the dazzling display of the wonderful grace and love of Jesus. "In my Father's house are many mansions."

"I go to prepare a place for you." What the Lord means to say is that His ascension up into heaven makes it possible for us also to go there. That is the gospel. Apart from Jesus and apart from His work, there would be no place in heaven for you. Without His death upon a cross you would have no right to enter. And without His resurrection and ascension into heaven and the return of the Holy Spirit into your heart you could not be made ready to enter into that place.

That was His work — the whole work of Jesus was this: that He be born under our sin; that He die on a cross for our sin; that He be raised again the third day with newness of life as the Head of the church for all of His own; and now that He ascend up into heaven. We ask, "Lord, why? Why did you come down to do all of this?" The answer: To prepare a place for us. Or, in the words of Psalm 68, that men might dwell with Thee, O God, forever.

Your and my place is not Father's house — not as far as we are concerned. We do not have any right to Father's house. Your place and my place, as far as we are concerned, is hell's pit. We belong to the place of the damned. We are sinners. By nature we are rebels and haters of God. We deserve the lake of fire, everlasting burnings.

But God sent forth His Son into the world. And through His work the saved child of God has the right for eternal glory.

But more. The saved child of God is being prepared for that place of glory. Listen to Jesus: "I go to prepare a place for you." Right now, between us and God's house is a great gulf, a high mountain. There was the high

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members as sinners, fallen in Adam. It is in us right now. This law is operative in our minds and our tongues, and in all the organs of our bodies. It is real. It is as real as the law of gravity that holds us to the ground. And it is irrevocable of ourselves. It is the law of sin and death. It leaves us broken and miserable and ruined.

But we have been set free, declares the apostle. This is the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. This is its wonder: Freedom, true freedom! Not man-made freedom. This is true freedom—to be freed from the powers of sin. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Let that Word of God come to you. Let it roll over your mind and soul with all its glory and power and relief and comfort. It is really the same words that I quoted of Jesus: "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Jesus Christ is the great emancipator. His cross not only erased the guilt of our sin and its punishment, but His Spirit, the Spirit of the crucified Jesus, frees me from sin's dominion.

There is another principle. There is not only the law of sin and death, but there is a greater principle. It is called the law of the Spirit of Christ Jesus. The Spirit of Christ frees the child of God from the power of sin and

death. Paul is referring to the authority and the power of the Spirit of life in Christ to bring us unto life. God, by grace, implants within us this other principle. It may now be only a *beginning* principle. But it is the life in Christ Jesus. It is the life that is directed toward God. It is a life that is from Christ Jesus unto God. It is in Christ Jesus. That is, it is for those for whom Christ has died.

Not only is there, as I said, no condemnation, but there is also for them freedom—freedom from the law of sin and death. The child of God does not simply say, "I am forgiven and now I am content to live in sin." That is impossible. But along with the forgiveness comes the work of the Holy Spirit of repentance and sanctification.

But still we say, Free? What do you mean by free? You yourself said that the law of sin is in our members and remains there. What do you mean, Free?

Well, free, not in the sense that sin is gone. A Christian does not say, "Well, I lived once a life in which I swore and drank and lusted and all the rest. But now I couldn't swear if I tried. And I don't have any lust in me anymore." That is simply not true. The person who says that is blind, blind to his own self. The Holy Spirit always works within us (John 16) a conviction of our own sinful nature.

spill (an oil spill). You cannot get it to stop. It keeps coming and keeps polluting. We think we can stop it. But we cannot.

What King David thought was just a fling of one night with Bathsheba brought murder and lifelong, horrible, devastating consequences into his life. He thought it would be just one little sin.

You tell a lie in time of trouble and that lie, to cover it up, requires five more. Parents come home and say, “Were you on the computer while I was gone?” Or, perhaps, as a little boy, there was the quarter on the counter that Mom left there and you took it. And then that quarter became a dollar and the dollar became....

We read in the Bible, in Genesis 4, of Cain, who was jealous of Abel. Before Cain killed his brother, God came and spoke to him and said, “Cain, sin lies at the door, and unto thee shall be its desire, and it will rule over you.” God thus warned Cain of this law. He said, in effect, to Cain: “You’re jealous of your brother. You pet that jealousy and you think that that jealousy is just like a little pussy cat. You can comfort yourself by being jealous. But, I tell you, Cain, it is no little kitten. It is a lion. That jealousy is just like a lion, and it’s crouching right now. It’s outside your door. It’s crouching to devour you.”

And so you say to a sin, “It’s just a little one, it’s just once. It doesn’t matter. Don’t bother your head about it.” So, what once would cause deepest hurt and pain and remorse, now you do not even blush. In fact, you do not even know that you are doing it anymore. That is the law of sin and death. It breeds sin.

The final postulate of the law of sin and death is that sin does not let go. Sin embeds itself. This is true of specific sin, of lust, greed, bitterness, anger, addictions. There is the law of sin and death. Addictions are the fangs of the pit bull of sin. They do not let go. So, eventually, the job and family and children and everything that you worked for are gone.

We read in Proverbs 23:29-35 of what is called the addiction, chemical addiction, unto wine—drunkenness, says the Bible. There the Bible speaks of the person who has redness of eyes. Who is this that has redness of eyes, and wounds without cause—all kinds of hurt and broken relationships and contentions? He has eyes for strange women. The one who has this is the one who has been drinking. And then read those most distressing words (v. 35): “I will seek it yet again.” Sin does not let go. I will seek it yet again.

There is a law within our

mountain, first of all, of our own sins. But Jesus came and took those sins away. He washed them away in His own blood. But still more. Having secured for us eternal life and glory, the Lord also now enters into glory, into heaven, as the pledge and promise that we shall follow Him and that we belong there. When your time comes, that is, when the will of God concerning the length of your life and all the trials and things necessary to come into your life has been accomplished, you, child of God, shall go there.

And when you go there, no one can say, “What business do you have going there? How dare you enter!” Oh, no. No one can say that. Not to us as we stand in Christ. For in Jesus Christ the gates must give way. And a loud Hosanna shall meet you. And you shall hear the words “Come, ye blessed of My Father. Enter into the kingdom *prepared* for you.” Prepared for you by what? By Jesus, by the grace that is in Jesus. He is the One who made it possible. He is the One who prepares you for it.

We ask the question: “Why not right now, then? Why can’t we go there right now? He’s died for our sins. He’s risen. Why can’t we go?” Jesus says, “I must go first to prepare a place.” Certainly those words imply that we must be made ready. What does that mean?

He must prepare for us a place, not in the sense of earning the right, but in the sense of molding and conforming and fitting us for that place.

So the work of God is not a work any longer of obtaining pardon, but the application and the molding of the child of God for glory. The Scriptures teach us that our ascended Lord has a purpose for our present life. There is a purpose for your life. This human life, young person, is not idle time. It is not “down-time.” It is molding and sculpting time. It is fitting time. Our whole human life as a child of God is not regulated by chance. It is not a meaningless riddle that I have to try somehow to solve, to eke out some type of meaning or significance. Here is the significance. It is a glorious significance. It is found in Jesus. Jesus is preparing us for glory. Through trial and storm, each trial fitted for and unique to each child of God. By shaping and molding us, He is preparing us for that place of eternal glory.

Do you think that your life is a meaningless, tangled mess, that it is snarled, with no sense to it? Oh, no, child of God. Look up to your Savior. He is preparing a place for you. That is why you lost your husband and now you are a widow. That is why you lost your child. Or that is why God did not give to you children. That is the reason for

the burdens that you bear this day. And that is the reason for your physical woes, your pains of joint and limb, your diabetes. And that is the reason for your heartaches and your sorrows and your difficulties. He is preparing, He is working upon the vessels fitted for eternal glory. He is preparing you right now, with His own hands, working as a master craftsman to prepare each one of us as His children for everlasting glory, the place where I shall glorify Him. All my sorrows and all my joys, all my pains and all the good things, all the bad things and all the sunshine — it is all in His hands, fitting me for that place.

The Lord is preparing us for that place. The Lord says, “I go to prepare a place for you.” I cannot explain everything that is involved in that. I know what it cannot mean. It does not mean, as I said, that he is working to secure the right for us to enter into heaven. That is completed. The title for our entrance into heaven, the inheritance, is ours. It means that there is a work of love and tenderness that is necessary in our lives. That means that you must not view heaven mechanically. Do you say to your loved one whom you are expecting home for a special occasion: “We have to get ready”? When you are expecting someone special to come home, do you not get the home ready?

If it is a loved one, do you not say, as a father/mother, “It has to be just so when they get here”? I go to prepare a place for you. Not only you for the place. But I must prepare the place for you. It has to be just right. I know its glory already. I know that. But, the Lord says in His tender love, “I’m preparing a place for you.”

Those are words that are bursting in tenderness. “And if I go,” He says, “and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” He is saying to us, “If I don’t go, I can’t prepare this place for you. It’s very necessary that I go. But I’ll be back. When I have finished My work, when I have seen personally that all of Father’s will is accomplished in your life, I’m going to come again. And then the whole purpose will be yours. You shall be brought to be with Me. Where I am, there ye shall be also to see My glory.” That is the purpose: that you might be with Him in glory.

Did you hear that? There is one grand object in the salvation of the church, in your salvation, and one grand object in the details of your life. That object is this: that we might be with Christ, which is far better. Jesus ascended and has returned to His Father’s house in order that we might be taken

7:22, 23, “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law [there it is again] in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law [there it is again] of sin which is in my members.” Paul says, “There is a principle, there is a law, of sin in my members. And it is constantly bringing me into subjection unto sin.”

Well, what are the axioms, or the corollaries, or the postulates of this law of sin and death? There are especially three.

The law of sin and death is, first of all, this: that sin in me (or my human nature as fallen into sin) reacts always in hatred and resentment to God and to what God requires of me. Paul will say in Romans 8:7 that “the carnal mind...is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” The carnal mind is enmity against God. The first postulate of this law is that there is within me irritation with, and the desire to break, the commands of God.

It comes out in a little child. You say, “No, don’t touch that candy dish.” The child looks at you and reaches out to touch it. It seems that the good law of God, the commandments of God, provoke and stir up sin within us.

Paul says in Romans 7:5, “For when we were in the flesh, the motions [or the desires] of

sin, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.” It is as if the law is the stick that pokes the dog.

I remember, as a boy in the second or third grade, a particularly cold winter—sub-zero temperatures. And at that time many houses would have outside an oil barrel for heating. And I remember my friend’s father saying to us as we were outside playing that cold day, “Don’t put your tongue on that barrel in this cold weather. It will freeze immediately.” Well, we had never thought of doing such a thing. It had not occurred to our mind. But when the prohibition was given to us, it was irresistible. The commandment came, and the desires of rebellion arose.

And so it is within. There is this law within our natures that when the good law of God comes to us and says, “No, don’t do that,” there stirs immediately within our hearts by nature, “Who is God to tell *me*?” And we defy that law, so that the skin of our life is torn off and we are brought into pain and misery.

That is the first postulate of sin and death—the urge of the sinful nature to violate God’s good law simply because God has told me not to.

The second postulate of this law is that sin breeds sin. Sin gives birth to sin. You cannot contain a

flesh, but after the Spirit.” There the apostle declares that when, by grace, we have been united to Jesus Christ by God’s powerful work, then Christ is our righteousness; then Christ has performed the work for us upon the cross; and then, as God sees us in Christ, we are declared “not guilty.” The guilt, the penalty, the condemnation of our sin has been removed. That is what it means to be justified—to be declared by God innocent and righteous and forgiven of all our sins so that we shall not endure eternal condemnation. That is Romans 8:1.

But then, in verse 2, the apostle proceeds immediately to another biblical doctrine, namely, sanctification, or transformation. He says, “For by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus [I have been] made free from the law of sin and death.” In other words, he says that wherever God has declared a justification, a pardon and forgiveness of sin, He goes on to work a sanctification. The Spirit of Christ is placed within those who are forgiven by mere grace. And that Spirit of Christ works within them and empowers them to a new life in Jesus Christ, a life that is one of repentance, a life that desires to serve Christ. We have been set free, free from sin, from the dominion of sin, by the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let us ask a few questions about that today.

First of all, we are set free from what? And the answer: the Spirit has set us free from the law of sin and death.

What is the law of sin and death? The word law here in the Bible is used to refer to a principle or a power. The verse is saying that there is a certain principle or power of sin within us that holds us, that subdues us. The word law in Romans 8:2 does not refer to a code of do’s and don’ts. It is not a reference to the Ten Commandments, but it is a reference to a principle or a power that works within. The law here is not like going in the summer to a park or to a campground and on the board are posted the rules: #1, no fires; #2, no alcohol; no pets; no firearms. Not law in that sense. But the word law here has the same idea as when we use that word in science, as for example the law of motion, the law of thermodynamics, or the law of gravity. We refer to certain principles at work, certain powers at work in the creation.

Now Paul says there is also a law, there is a principle, that is operative in sin. Then he says, “Praise God, there is another law—the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.”

The law of sin and death, then, is the principle or the power of sin. Paul says in Romans

there and be with Him in glory. Each believer, therefore, goes to heaven at the moment of death. Do not fear death. Do not live like a fool, never thinking about death. Reckon with the reality of death. But do not let your heart be troubled. It

may be that after seventy-five years, in a silent night, the Lord will come and your place is ready and you are ready and He will take you to Himself. It may be after fifty-five years and through the rough door of cancer. It may be in an instant of crashing metal, in what we call a car accident, and your loved one is taken from you. It may be in a heart attack. But this is what it *will* be: “I will come again, and I will receive you unto myself, that where I am, ye may be also.”

Death is when Jesus comes and carries us home. That is what death is. Death is not the work of a biological clock. Death is not a chance. But death signals that two things have been accomplished. As a child of God, I have been prepared, and Jesus has prepared my place. Then He comes and He says, “Come, rise up, beloved. Come away with Me to glory.”

Then, finally, at the day of judgment, Jesus will come again and He will raise our bodies from the dead. Do not marvel about that. Earth could not hold Him. He ascended up into heaven. Nor can the grave hold your body. It shall

be raised to newness of life. It will be a glorious day. Think of it! The only begotten Son of God, the crucified and risen Lord of the church, the great Moses—He will come leading the church out of Egypt. The redeemed hosts of God shall enter into Canaan, into Father’s house, into mansions. The gates will spring open when they heed the summons, “Ye gates, lift your heads, wide open the way; the King of glory enters with His redeemed host.” We shall be welcomed home, home at last, with all of the angels. And we shall be with Him.

Will it not be glorious? Can you wait?

Father in heaven, bless Thy Word to our hearts today, through Jesus’ name, Amen.

*There is one grand object
in the salvation of the church,
n your salvation,
and one grand object
in the details of your life.
That object is this:
that we might be with Christ,
which is far better.*

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

June 8, 2014
No. 3727

Try the Spirits
Rev. Carl Haak

Dear Radio Friends,

Today, as the church of Jesus Christ, we celebrate one of the greatest gifts that Christ has ever given: the outpoured Holy Spirit, given to work in the church and in our children, bringing all the blessings of our salvation that Jesus won for us upon the cross. Today is Pentecost Sunday. Fifty days after Jesus arose from the dead, ten days after He ascended up into heaven, He poured out the Comforter, as He promised, even the Holy Spirit of truth, to abide with us forever.

It happened at 9:00 in the morning. Acts 2:1-13 tell us that the hundred and twenty disciples were gathered together in Jerusalem and that suddenly there was a sound as of a mighty rushing wind. There were cloven tongues as of fire that sat upon the head of each of the disciples. And they all spake in different tongues the wonderful works of God. The Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of the risen Lord, was poured out upon the church with irresistible power to cleanse us from our sins and to gather by the Word all of Christ's own out of all nations and thus form the one church of Jesus Christ.

If someone were to ask you as a Christian: "What is Pentecost?" were you aware it is today? If someone were to ask you, "Who is the Holy Spirit? What does He do?" would you be able to answer with more than just a sentence or two, with more than just a "Hm-m-m, I'm not sure"? Young people, would you be able to answer? Children, what about you? Who is the Holy Spirit? What does He do? You say, "Well, I could say something about the birth of Jesus, and the death of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus, and maybe even something about the ascension of Jesus. But Pentecost? The outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ? Hm-m-m." You do not know much about that?

I can give you a little excuse. The work of the Holy Spirit, according to the Scriptures, is self-effacing, that is, the Holy Spirit always covers Himself. Jesus said, "He shall not speak of himself; ...he shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you" (John 16:13, 14). But, nevertheless, if you and I do not know the work of the Holy Spirit, we dishonor Jesus Christ. We dishonor

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

June 29, 2014
No. 3730

Freedom
Rev. Carl Haak

Dear radio friends,

Are you free? No, I am not asking about your political standing. I am not asking if you are a member of a free nation with the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Nor am I asking if you are incarcerated in some prison for crimes against the state. I ask, Are you free?

You say, "Of course, I'm free. I'm my own man." But I am not asking you that, either. I am not asking for your opinion of yourself or of your own will or character. Are you free?

Are you free from the dominion of sin, so that sin does not rule over you? Are you free?

Jesus Christ said in John 8: He that committeth sin is the servant of sin. He went on in that chapter to say that He alone was able to make men free. "If the Son shall make you free," He declared, "Ye shall be free indeed." Are you free in Jesus Christ from the dominion and power of sin? Not that you do not sin, but that you know your sin, you confess it in tears of sorrow before the living God. It grieves you.

And are you free in this sense, that you fight your sin. You fight against that sin all the time. You do not want to yield to it. Are you free in this sense, that you would live a new and obedient life. That, rather than yielding all of your life, your thoughts, your abilities to sin and to yourself, you would rather, by the grace of God, yield all in the service of Jesus Christ. Are you truly free? Free, then, from the damnation and condemnation that you deserve, which is hell. Free from an awful, ruinous life of pride and sin. Free to serve God in Christ Jesus.

We read in the Word of God concerning freedom. We read this in Romans 8:2: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Paul there declares that, by grace, the child of God is made free, that he has true freedom.

In Romans 8:1 we have a very precious statement of what is called justification. Let me read the verse. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the

once, it's not going to hurt. You must think that you're better," they will sneer at you.

Have you endured that reproach, or have you succumbed to that reproach? Have you become accustomed to going once? Maybe your parents cannot get you out of bed? Maybe you prefer to watch TV, or you are doing your own pleasure on the Lord's Day? We must answer to the Lord. In Luke 4:16 we read of Jesus: "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was [as His custom was!], he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day." That was His custom on the Lord's Day. His custom was that He would go to church diligently, faithfully.

We must delight ourselves in this day. We must come to church with a sincere, heartfelt love for the risen Savior, in gratitude for all that He has done for us and in anticipation of all that He has laid up for us through His death and His resurrection. We must use the Sabbath Day to stock the cabinets of our heart with spiritual food, so that we can make it through the next six days. And then, after those six days, we return bruised and weary from the fight against sin, that we might again rest for awhile in our Savior. We are fortified on the Sabbath to fight the good fight of faith, that we might yield ourselves for the

next six days unto the Lord. Keeping the Sabbath means that you are active in your faith, that you are living carefully for six days, not worldly for six days and then thinking that you can have a blessed Sabbath, that you can make up for it by going to church. But keeping the Sabbath means that you live out of Jesus Christ consciously all the days of your life. And then on the first day of the week you meet with your risen Savior and you learn what the Lord has done for you. The idea of staying home will become foreign to you. You will not look for your own pleasures upon this day. You will not say, "Aw, it's too far to go." But it will be your custom to gather with the people of God.

Hear the word of the Lord. Do not say, "This is too hard." Do not say, "Oh, that preacher is way too strict." But, if need be, let us repent. Let us not say that we can honor the Lord without honoring His day. Let us keep the holy day spiritually, joyfully, actively, out of faith. Keep Sunday. And as you hear the Word in church, let that Word whet your appetite and comfort your soul for the glory that is already ours, and that soon will be ours perfectly in heaven.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for the Word. We pray that it may go forth and accomplish Thy purpose. In Jesus' name, Amen.

God. We show that we are not appreciative of the greatest gift, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Still more. If we do not appreciate the work of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon the church, then we are exposed to being deceived by the spirit of the antichrist, the spirit of falsehood, because one of the most important and crucial works of the Holy Spirit in the church is the work of leading the church into all the truth. Jesus emphasized this almost exclusively when He told the disciples that the Spirit was going to return after He left. He said, in John 14-16, that the Holy Spirit would comfort them, but repeatedly He emphasized that the Holy Spirit would lead them into the truth. "But when he is come (the Spirit of truth), he will guide you into all the truth."

The Holy Spirit does that through the Scriptures, the Bible, the Word of truth.

You see, it is not the Spirit guiding us *or* the Word of God guiding us, but it is the Spirit *and* the Word; or, better, the Holy Spirit works *through* the Scriptures. In this way, and in this way alone, He keeps the child of God from being seduced, from being led astray by error, which is so great and prevalent today.

... if you and I do not know the work of the Holy Spirit, we dishonor Jesus Christ.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit, through the Scriptures, to teach the church to confess the truth of Jesus Christ. It is the work of the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures to keep you, as a child of God, from falling away and being swallowed up by error. It is the work of the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures to work in your heart, as a child of God, to know the truth and to be blessed in it.

There is a passage in the Bible that speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit in this regard. It is found in I John 4:1-3 where we read, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into this world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus

Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come

in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world." There the Scriptures tell us about the work of the Holy Spirit of guiding the church into an understanding of the truth. The apostle says, "Try the spirits whether they are of God." It is the calling of every child of God

who has received the Spirit of Christ to be trying the spirits.

Now, by the word “spirits” there is not meant ghosts or devils or demons, but teachings, and specifically *false* teachings, brought by flesh-and-blood men. He goes on to say: “Because many false prophets are gone out into this world”—the spirit of error. The apostle John is talking about ideas, attitudes, thoughts that gain acceptance among men, that begin to infiltrate people’s thinking and take hold upon the mind and the heart; teachings that, in fact, we pick up on and that would move us in one direction or another. In one word: the spirits that we are to try are every teaching, every idea, every attitude that would attempt to lodge within us in our thoughts—specifically, every thought, every teaching, that is contrary to God’s Word. Try the spirits!

Sometimes those teachings, attitudes, or thoughts are seemingly insignificant and minor, something, you might say, that does not matter—it is insignificant. It may be the subtle nuance of a TV commercial. It may be a joke about marriage

that was told you in the office. It may have come through something you read in the paper or heard on the radio. It may filter down into your mind and heart

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through the lyric of some song. Not necessarily something abrupt, but an idea, a teaching, an attitude confronting you day after day after day, attempting to gain acceptance in your mind and to regulate how you will think, how you will act, and how you will view life. That attitude, that thought that is attempting to infiltrate itself into you, may appear to be harmless, non-threatening. It may even come as something that is apparently good and passionate, and something that is yearning for your acceptance.

But the Word of God tells us that these spirits are false prophets who are gone out into the world. And we are to test, by the Word of God, in dependence upon the Spirit’s work in our heart, every teaching, every idea, and every attitude—because false spirits are gone out into the world. The idea is this: As the church sends out into the world teachers, ministers, and missionaries; and as the ordinary believer goes forth into his job to speak the truth of God;

rest, rest for my soul. Sabbath means rest. The Sabbath, then, has a very appealing ring to it: the word “rest.” What does the word “rest” mean to you as a mother who is taken for granted, who is harried and busy from dawn till sunset? Rest. That is an appealing word.

The Sabbath is the rest of God. The Sabbath of the Lord thy God, the rest of the Lord thy God, of course, does not mean that God is idle, that God ceases from His work. But when we search the Scriptures we discover that God’s rest is His enjoyment of Himself. It is His enjoyment in His work so glorious that He is the all-sufficient and wonderful God. Especially the Sabbath rest is His enjoyment of His perfect work in Jesus Christ—when He raised Him from the dead and set Him on high above all things. It is rest—for God and man. Apart from God, man cannot rest. He has no rest. Isaiah 57:20, “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest.” But there is a rest for the people of God. That rest is in the completed work of Jesus Christ, perfected in heaven and tasted on Sunday.

Diligently frequent the church of God on the Lord’s Day to hear His Word. Attend the church where His Word is preached and honored twice on the Lord’s Day.

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as

the manner of some is” (Heb. 10:25), and so much the more as we see the day approaching. There the Scriptures are speaking of an assembling, an assembling for worship—not simply a social gathering, but a time when the people of God are actually called by God. God calls us. Psalm 50:5: “Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.” Let us go up to the Lord’s house. We are called to enter into His house. Do not forsake this call.

We say, “Well, it’s easy to become accustomed not to go to church. That happens slowly and gradually.” In Hebrews 10, the Hebrew Christians were beginning to forsake the assembling on the Lord’s Day. It was due in part to persecution. If you read the verses 32 and 33 of that chapter, you will find that they were enduring a great fight of affliction and that they were being made a gazing stock of the world by reproaches. Sometimes that can come to us. If you diligently come to your church twice on the Lord’s Day because you thirst after the Word of God, and you bring your family, then, perhaps, you will hear words like this: “Why? Do you think you’re better than everybody else? Do you need to go twice? Why can’t we have the family party on Sunday? It’s always you who are making a problem with the family. If you miss

abides and is necessary for the Christian life. The Christian life cannot endure without the observance of a day of rest. The fourth commandment brings, after all, the first table of the law to its close. Jesus said that there were two tables of the law: Love the Lord thy God; and love thy neighbor as thyself. The first four commandments are in that first table. And at the end of that first table is: Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.

So, look at its place in the ten commandments. It shows the way, how we are to stay on the path of keeping the first three commandments of the law of God. In the first commandment we are admonished to have God as our trust: Have no other God before Me, have no idol in your heart. In the second commandment we are to worship God as He instructs in His Word. We are to have no graven images. In the third commandment, we are to revere His holy name. We are not to take His name in vain. But how shall we do this? How shall we trust; how shall we worship; how shall we revere the Lord God in our lives, day-by-day? How will we do this? The fourth commandment comes and says, “Remember the Sabbath Day.” It is God’s institution of maintaining love for Him. Can you maintain love for your wife and children without time spent with them?

But there is more. The breaking of this commandment, the setting aside of the fourth commandment, and the refusal to hallow this day by setting aside our own pleasures and devoting ourselves to the Lord, is to sow in our life apostasy and falling away from the Lord.

In Hebrews 10:23-25, we have words of wonderful encouragement. In the context there, “Let us draw near to God.... Let us hold fast the profession of our faith....” And then that chapter, after the wonderful encouragement, ends with a chilling warning to those who would tread underfoot God, and who would count the blood of the covenant whereby they are sanctified an unholy thing. And right between the encouragement and the warning, you find this: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is” (v. 25). To neglect the worship services is the first step on the road to apostasy in your own personal life and in the life of your congregation.

The fourth commandment is utterly crucial, because on this day the child of God finds one thing that his soul needs. If we are to continue faithfully as those who tread the way to Zion (Ps. 84), as those whose hope is set in Christ, in all the glory and the promises of heavenly life; if we are to continue on that pathway, we require something:

so also the kingdom of darkness, Satan, sends out into the world false prophets. False prophets are those who contradict the Word of God. They do not take their starting point saying, “Thus saith the Lord. The Lord has spoken.” But they take their starting point with the words, literally, of Satan: “Hath God said? Is that really true? Is not the Word of God somewhat repressive and restrictive? Is it not misguided at certain points? Is it not really a compilation of various myths and traditions? Doesn’t it really, at times, express a bigoted attitude?” These spirits, these false ideas, these false, heretical teachings can come forth even from the church. When the church begins to allow (and say) that the Scriptures are not the sole authority; when the church says that creation did not happen, as God’s Word plainly says, in six 24-hour days but it was over a long period of time; when the church begins to say that those doctrines of an eternal predestination, of an unconditional election and reprobation, those are unbiblical and not taught in the Bible—then out of the church itself are coming false spirits, false prophets.

Especially there is the false spirit going forth, which has claimed a place in the hearts of a vast multitude, that says, “Religion is all about you and your feelings. It’s all about community and meaningful

relationships. It’s all about connecting with yourself. It’s all about fulfillment.” These are false spirits. These false spirits can come to us from the world. They can be, perhaps, the idea that there is no ultimate truth, there is no one code of behavior. There are many ways of approaching God. There are many ways of identifying God. There is one God, but everybody worships Him in different ways and calls Him by different names. These spirits go forth into the world. They are false spirits. And the Bible says, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God.”

That means that when the Holy Spirit is poured out upon the church He says to that church, “The Scriptures are the foundation of all truth.” And the church and the believer must subject all things to the teaching of the Scriptures. Therefore, the church on earth is a thinking church. The believer on earth is a thinking Christian. The church must reason from the Scriptures. The believer must learn from the Scriptures to be discerning. That is the exercise of the mind. Is it not a striking thing today that men and women can think, and think well, on almost every topic except religion. Then, it seems, that the brain is turned off and we have to be spoon-fed. But the Scriptures, and the Holy

Spirit, are telling us the very opposite: “You must first of all *think*.” If you are inclined to spiritual laziness, if you think, “Well, you know, if you want me to have religion, you had better make it pretty easy, because if it’s not easy, I’m out of here, I’m not going to listen,” then you are set up for destruction. The Holy Spirit makes you a discerning spirit, makes you a discerning Christian. Lethargy is a sin, it is spiritual pride.

Very often there is in the church the attitude, “Well, I really don’t concern myself with doctrine. Our minister, evidently, is a great man. He’s an inspiring leader. He probably knows what the truth is.” Do you discern? Do you read the Scriptures? You are called to be a discerning Christian. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is not some type of emotional upheaval bringing you to where you know not. But it is the work of the intelligent Holy Spirit giving you to understand the mind and the thoughts of God as they are revealed to you in the sound doctrines of the holy Scriptures. What do you believe from those Scriptures? You say you have the Spirit? Well, what do you believe, then?

If you do not know, then you had better get on your knees

with an open Bible and find out. You had better come under instruction, sound instruction, from the holy Scriptures. That is your need. That is the need of your family. That is where you have to have your family. You have to bring your family under the truth, the truth of God’s Word.

That is a calling for all of us, every one of us. The apostle says, “Beloved, believe not every spirit.” Do not believe every spirit that is going around.

You have to try those spirits by the Word of God. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. That is certainly the work of ministers and of elders. That is certainly their work in the church of Jesus Christ. The work of a faithful minister and the work of faithful elders is to take heed to the doctrine, the teachings of the Word of God, and to know them and to preach them and to teach them faithfully to the people of God. Is that what your pastor is doing? Is that what you elders are doing? If so, by the grace of God, then you ought to be today profoundly thankful to God. You had better have your eyes open for what a blessing that is. That is the evidence that you are a church of Pentecost, that the Holy Spirit is in your midst. Do nothing to grieve the Holy Spirit, then, through pettiness and bickering

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Sunday seeking rest, seeking rest for our souls in the unshaken, unbroken Word of God, the Word of truth, and the very first thing the minister would do would be to tear the first three or four pages out of the Bible. What would that do to you, and to your rest in Jesus, if the Bible in its entirety is not the Word of God? How could you find rest there, in that church?

But the fourth commandment says that it is rooted in creation. It teaches that the creation was performed by God in six 24-hour days, and God rested on the seventh. And, therefore, God says to us, “Moses did not give the fourth commandment. The fourth commandment did not begin at Mount Sinai.” Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for man, made for man as man. Man was made with the need of rest in God. God made man, even before sin, to need the time when he could put down his hoe and rest. We need the time when we can get out of the truck, hang up the work belt, and enjoy God, waiting upon Him without distraction.

The second reason the fourth commandment is an abiding commandment is that the

fourth commandment is rooted in redemption. It is especially God’s commandment for those whom He has redeemed from the bondage of sin. This is found in how the fourth commandment is given in Deuteronomy 5:15. The ten commandments are given twice (Ex. 20 and Deut. 5). In Deuteronomy 5, the fourth commandment is stated differently. At least the rationale for keeping it is stated differently. There we read that we must remember the Sabbath Day for this reason: “And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.” There God is speaking to the redeemed,

the redeemed, their redemption. All the days of my life I must yield myself to the Lord because I have been redeemed by His blood. But central to that, to doing that for six days, is that I will devote one day in seven to Him.

The fourth commandment

tery.” As a redeemed Christian we would not say, “Well, it is understandable that the child of God is going to fall into fornication occasionally. After all, it is so prevalent. So, occasionally, if children of God give up their chastity or their vows of marriage, this is understandable.” We would not say that. We would say that the ninth and the seventh commandments are the abiding will of the Redeemer, Jesus, for the life of every one whom He has redeemed in His precious blood. Tell the truth—always. Live a pure sexual life—always.

So also the fourth commandment (Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy) is the remaining and abiding will of our Redeemer Savior Jesus. The requirement of the fourth commandment is that on the day of rest, Sunday, I diligently frequent the church of God. And “diligently frequent the church of God” means twice. If you come once, that is not frequent. That is infrequent. We come twice to hear His Word, and to pray, and to call upon the name of the Lord, and to use the sacraments, and to contribute to the relief of the poor. All of this is behavior that becomes a Christian. This is not behavior that becomes, as some would say, a Puritan, or an Old Testament saint, and we know better now. Or a legalist, or a formalist—someone who is concerned only with *form* and does

not have the *heart* of Christianity. No, to keep the Sabbath Day holy, to come diligently to church twice, is behavior that becomes a Christian, one who is redeemed in the blood of Jesus Christ. It becomes a saint of God. “For I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with the multitude that kept the holy day” (Ps. 42:4). This is consistent. This is in harmony with, this flows out of, the Christian life. This is not an imposition upon a Christian life. This *is* the Christian life.

The fourth commandment is an abiding commandment for twenty-first century Christians—twenty-first century Christians with cottages, with Skidoos, with recreational vehicles, with vacations. It is an abiding commandment, the will of the Redeemer, Jesus.

The first reason that it is an abiding commandment is to be found in the commandment itself, for we read that the fourth commandment is rooted in creation. In Exodus 20:11 we read: “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth...and rested on the seventh day.” I bypass, for now, the plain condemnation of theistic evolution that is to be found there in the Word of God. And I bypass what it would mean for you and for me if we were to come to church in faithful obedience to Jesus on

and raising upside issues, issues among the people of God that are hard, perhaps, to discern, that is, issues related to things of spiritual maturity. Do not cause division in the church over your own opinions. But if the Word of God is being taught faithfully, then be thankful to God for that.

It is the calling, nevertheless, of all of us. Each child of God must discern the truth. Each child of God is now filled with the Holy Spirit. Joel prophesied that the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon sons and daughters, upon old men and old women. The idea of being filled with the Holy Spirit is not a life of being swept up in the clouds of spiritual utopia. But to be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be waked out of stupor, out of indifference, and to be made alert on the battlefield and strengthened for the fight.

The words that we are looking at from I John were written by the apostle John. John’s purpose in this epistle was that we have fellowship with God. He says, “I write of those things that we have seen and heard, and we declare them to you.” Why? In

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chapter 1:3 we read, “That ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father; and with his Son Jesus Christ.” The purpose of John in writing this epistle is that we have fellowship with the Father and with His Son. And now he tells us that error, false teaching, is destructive of fellowship with God. Those spirits lead us away from the presence and the experience of God’s fellowship. As a child of God, you must try the spirits, you must repudiate error, in order that you might experience fellowship with God and with one another.

So this applies to all of our life. To try the spirits is to subject all things to the teaching of the infallible Scriptures. It means that you will become a humble and diligent student of those Scriptures. You will love the biblical and Reformed faith. You will attend that church which preaches the truth.

And under the preaching of that truth you will listen and grow. You will read sound, biblical expositions. You will read good, sound material. And you will teach your children how to read. You will teach your children how to be critical in

their thinking. You will explain things to them from the Word of God—not simply tell them the do’s and the don’ts. You will seek to train up your child to be a discerning Christian, able to understand, able to think biblically, able to think the thoughts of God after God.

That means that you will not say to your child, “Well, sheer enjoyment and relaxation shall be our goal.” But you will teach your child to say, “What does God say about this? What is being said in this book? What is being said by this documentary you are watching? Child, you have to be on your guard. You must examine. You must not simply accept something on its face value. You must be discerning in the Word of God.” In college, when you are assigned to read a book, and when you listen to a lecture, you must discern them according to the truths of God’s Word.

You will then be busy, if you are filled with the Holy Spirit, with the holy Scriptures. You will be found in a faithful church. You will come under the faithful preaching of the Word of God. And you will be humble, because, as you stand before the Scriptures, you will stand before

the revelation of the wisdom of God. You will see that, although those are clear, that is, that you can understand and you can discern the truth, nevertheless, they are profound, they are a great depth. For the Spirit is showing to you the deep things of God.

Discerning the spirits of your day, the attitudes, the trends, the thoughts in the light of holy Scripture—that is the proof of the outpoured Holy Spirit. Has the Spirit been given to you? Here is the test: Do you take the Scriptures as the only authoritative truth? And do you bow humbly before them, seeking to have all of your thoughts, and all of your actions, all of your heart, and all of your desires in conformity more and more with the Scriptures? That is the fruit of the outpoured Spirit.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Thy Word. We thank Thee for the wonder of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that we celebrate on this day. We pray, heavenly Father, that He may dwell in us, and that through Him we might come to know the truth. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

*To try the spirits is to
subject all things
to the teaching
of the infallible Scriptures.*

luxuries interfere with the hour of worship? Is your will, your pleasure, your feelings, lord of the Sabbath? Or is Jesus Christ the Lord of your Sabbath, to the glory of God and as a witness to the world around you?

Gratitude runs deep within our veins as redeemed of the Lord. We love the Lord Jesus. We belong to Him by the covenant of His grace. Our gratitude runs deep when on nice summer Sundays we diligently frequent the house of God to hear His Word.

The fourth commandment is God’s commandment to every one of us: “Keep the Sabbath Day holy.” It is a commandment to all the children of God: Rest in Me.

We have a catechism called the Heidelberg Catechism, a faithful exposition of the Word of God and a faithful exposition of the fourth commandment. In the thirty-eighth question of this Catechism the question is asked: “What does God require on the Sabbath Day?” It does not ask “What does God suggest,” or “What does God recommend?” But, “What does God require?” And the answer is: “That all my life I cease from evil works and

yield myself to God, and especially on the Sabbath Day, the day of rest, I diligently frequent the church of God to hear His Word, to call upon His name, and to contribute to the relief of the poor as becomes a Christian.”

We do not say to the Lord, “Sunday is no big deal. I do as I please.” But in our heart, when we hear the fourth commandment, we say, “My times are in Thy hand. Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth” (Ps. 31).

The point to be remembered by us today is that the fourth commandment, as it is one of the ten commandments of the law of God, remains the will of God our Savior for New Testament Christians. It remains the will of God for you and for me as much as any other of the ten commandments. Now, certainly, we would not say, as a Christian and redeemed in the blood of Christ, that an occasional violation of the ninth commandment is permissible. The ninth commandment says, “Thou shalt bear no false witness.” We would not say, “Well, occasionally, you know, a lie is OK.” Nor would we say that of the seventh commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adul-

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THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

June 22, 2014
No. 3729

Keeping the Lord's Day Holy
Rev. Carl Haak

Dear Radio Friends,

The fourth commandment of the law of God reads: "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy." There God, in this commandment, focuses upon our time and how we are to use our time. There God declares that Jesus Christ is the Lord of our time, the time of His children, how they spend it. In that commandment God says that it is His will as our Redeemer and Savior that "six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work." We are to work, work hard, to the glory of God for six days. And one day out of seven, which is now the Sabbath of the first day, the resurrection day of Jesus Christ, in that day thou shalt do no manner of work. On that day we are called by our Redeemer and Savior to worship, to worship twice in the church of God and to devote the whole day to our spiritual life.

The fourth commandment says, "I am the Lord of your time. Your time, too, is redeemed by Me." The psalmist confesses in Psalm 31:15, "My times are in thy hand." Time is an instrument of God, to mold us for endless time. As children

of God, we make the glorious confession: "I am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, both in body and soul." Belonging to Jesus Christ as a Christian, both in body and soul, means that also our time, how we spend our time in body and soul, belongs to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ. It is not *my* time. It is not that *I* decide what to do on Sunday. But it is Christ who is the Lord of my time. He is the Lord of *everything* that I do. Joyfully, six days I labor for His glory, and on the seventh, the Sabbath, how I spend my time is determined by my relationship to Him.

Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, that He is Lord of your time? How do you spend your Sunday? Does your church attendance show that you belong to Jesus Christ and that you use your time to glorify and obey Him? Or do you spend Sunday as your time? Jesus said, in Mark 2:28, "the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath." Is He Lord of your Sabbath? Is your attendance at your church off and on? Is it once? Are you gone for long periods of time? Do your pleasures and fun and

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

June 15, 2014
No. 3728

A Father's Pity
Rev. Carl Haak

Dear radio friends,

On this Sabbath Day, in which we give special remembrance to the calling and blessing of fathers, I call your attention to the Word of God in Psalm 103:13: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him." This verse from the holy Scriptures goes right to the heart of what it means to be a father. It expresses it in one word: pity. A father pities his children.

Psalm 103 is a beautiful Psalm. It is outstanding among the 150. In that Psalm the psalmist says that he will bless the Lord, he will speak well of the Lord; and he calls us also to extol our God with him, and with all that is within us. In order that we might do this, the psalmist says, we must remember all of Jehovah's benefits so richly showered upon us. He speaks to us of the central benefit of the forgiveness of our sins. For instance, in verse 3: "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases." He goes on to explain to us that this forgiveness is rooted in God's tender mercy, verse 8: "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous

in mercy." He tells us further that the forgiveness that God has given to us in His Son is a complete and thorough forgiveness. It is no little forgiveness, verse 11: "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him."

And then the psalmist tells us what causes him to adore his God more than anything. He says that it is His pity. "It's my heavenly Father's pity. He pitied us as His children in all of our woe of sin. He was moved with compassion toward us in our hopeless misery." Jehovah, our perfect heavenly Father, pitied us. That is what undergirds His being a perfect Father. And it is that fatherly pity of God that a human, Christian father is to have if he is truly to be a Christian father.

We read, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him." What does it mean to pity? We would say, "Pity—who wants *that* today?" In our proud and self-absorbed age, that is considered demeaning and condescending. Do we not

hear the words, “Don’t pity me!” The handicapped do not want your *pity* but your *respect*. The downtrodden do not want pity but *understanding*. Does it not mean, when you pity someone, that you are looking down on him and degrading him?

Yet, we read that Jehovah pities us, His children. And God’s pity is one of His most beautiful virtues. It tells us that He is a God who is filled with tender compassion. It tells us, first of all, that in our best estate, that is, when we are standing on our two legs in all of our beaming pride, He looks at us and He sees much to pity. He sees nothing of good. He sees that we need His compassion.

That ought to humble us. That ought to check our pride. And that ought to comfort us. Our God is not a God of wood or stone, untouched, but He pities right now. And in His pity He never ceases to flow out towards us in His compassion. God’s pity is His love in the form of tender, melting compassion for His elect in Christ as He sees us in all of our weakness, suffering, misery, and sin.

The word “pity” means to be soft, to hold in tender affection.

It implies that we who are the object of God’s love are of ourselves only miserable sinners. Yet the Lord has taken note of us and for His own Name’s sake has pitied us and given to us a full and free salvation. It is God’s love in the form of tender, melting compassion for His own elect as He sees them in their weakness, suffering, and sin. That is a beautiful thing.

That pity is an aspect of His eternal Fatherhood. For as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those that fear Him. As our heavenly Father, He is the God who is moved with eternal pity for us and has given to us His Son to save us.

Now, that truth of Jehovah’s fatherly pity must be seen in a Christian father. For the pattern of all of our life is to be holy as God is holy, that is, to pattern our life after God. For instance, in marriage we must live as God lives with His bride, the church. Therefore, as fathers, we must

seek to conform our earthly parenting and fathering to His heavenly fathering and parenting. God says, “I have shown My pity to you as My

son. I am your perfect example. As I have pitied, so you are to pity your children.” You must cultivate a relationship with

*You must cultivate
a relationship
with your children
in which you seek to reflect
the fatherly pity of God.*

often think, as a father, that it is unmanly to confess our faults in front of our wife or children. Sometimes, brethren, we have to do that, we must do that. A believing child does not expect you to be perfect. But he has a right to expect you to be sincere. We need to spend time on our knees repenting of our sins.

But we do not leave this Word of God despairing. No, we leave this Word of God rejoicing. The more we consider what God has done for us, what pity He has shown to us, the more we will

be moved to exercise that pity to our children. He pities us. He has chosen us in Christ, not because we were better or more

noble. We were the least. We have no right. But for His own name’s sake He willed to have compassion upon us. Oh, what pity! He gave His Son to die upon Calvary’s cross. Look at it, the shame, the agony, the darkness. Jesus bore what our Father knew we could never bear. He gave His Son to do that for us. And throughout our life our heavenly Father keeps

us and carries us and protects, forgives us and draws us and pities us.

Now when our children see us living in the consciousness of such pity, then they will be encouraged to look heavenward. Then they will fear Jehovah. They will not dread Jehovah, but they will stand in awe of their heavenly Father, by the grace of God. Through the Scriptures they will listen to Him and obey Him. Is that not what we desire more than anything else? Is that not what you desire for your chil-

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dren—that they know their heavenly Father? Why, we would die for that! Well, God does not call you to die for it. God

calls you to live and to show your children a father’s pity.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, bless us as human fathers that we may turn to Thee for wisdom and strength. Bless our children. Supply to us all that we need. Amen.

Or do you say, “They get on my nerves.” I want to say this reverently. Do you not think that you and I get on God’s nerves? How do we act in front of God? Oh, He chastens us as a holy and righteous Father. But He is filled with pity. You say, “But I can’t understand where those kids are at, especially those teenagers.” Let me ask again, “Don’t you think that you and I need infinite understanding, patience, and wisdom from God with us who are such complicated, fickle creatures of sin? If that’s the way God is toward us, what are we to be?” No, it does not mean that you let your child run all over you. There must be one person who rules the house, and that is the parent. But you cannot exercise that rule without pity. You have to see your own sins. And if you understand your own sins, you will understand your children. Then you will understand why they do what they do. That is why it hurts, right? As a believing father, you see your own sin in your own children, do you not? Does that not give you some kind of compassion and understanding and wisdom how to deal with them? That means that you are determined to be close to them.

Now they may not have the same tastes that you have.

You may have thought that your little boy was going to be a mechanic, a carpenter, a computer genius. He was going to be sharp as a tack in business. And he grows up and shows no interest for any of those things and you find him at a piano. He likes music. And you do not care about that. Guess what?

... if you understand
your own sins,
you will understand
your children.

That means that you have to get over to the piano and become interested in those things with him. Or your little girl was going to be prim and feminine. And instead of that she likes dirt—a lot of dirt in the back yard. She is not what you pictured. Well then, you had better learn to go to the back yard and play with her in the sandbox if that is what she likes. Do not resent them because they are not what you want them or expected their interest to be.

You never cuddle what you resent. How many times do we not as God’s children come to God? Constantly, and He never rejects us, does He? Then, do not say to your child, “Get away. Stop bugging me.”

As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him. I’m sure that as fathers, when we hear the Word of God today, we feel great pangs of guilt and inadequacy. We

your children in which you seek to reflect the fatherly pity of God.

Yes, that means for sure that as a father you are called to meet their earthly needs. You are to fill their bellies. You are to clothe their backs. You are to put a roof over their heads. And, yes, leave them an inheritance. But what a horrible thing if that is what fathering means to you—if it is nothing more than that—if you do not prayerfully create a climate of spiritual warmth in your home, of tenderness and pity and affection for your child. You must be as God, filled with tender pity and affection and compassion in Christ for your child. Do not say, “Oh, that pity stuff is for wimps.” Oh, no. As a father you are to reveal the pity of God. That means that you must not allow coldness, distance, ill-will, resentment to be the atmosphere of your home. If you allow that to be the atmosphere of your home between you and your child, if you are guilty of those things, if you are guilty of the abuse of your child, if you are guilty of harboring resentments and ill-will and distance and coldness toward them, you are being ungodly. You are not as God!

This is the question with which we must confront our-

selves as Christian fathers today: Would you want God to be the kind of parent to you that you are to your children? Fathers, you and I are confronted by that question today in God’s Word. Would you want your children to conceive of God’s heart as they conceive of your heart? That is serious business. You say, “I never thought about that when

Would you want your
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conceive of your heart?

I got married. I never thought about that when I started to have children. You mean to say to me, pastor, that all of my child’s concepts of God are also to be based upon what they see in me as a father?” I answer you, “Yes. That is the teaching of God’s Word.” That is why we tremble. That is why we need to be on our knees before God. That is why we need the holy Scriptures. That is why we need the faithful church of Jesus Christ to instruct us. And that is why we need one another in the house of the Lord. We must work together as men of God, that we might be fathers in Christ.

That is why you need, as a man of God, a husband, father, to know more of your God—more and more of Him. What will our children think of their heavenly Father? Much of the answer is to be found in you, especially in those formative, pre-school years. Oh, we are not perfect.

That is why repentance is so necessary in our lives before our children. But, you see, if we resent those children; if in our frustration we slap them across the face; if we do not use wise, consistent, biblical discipline applied to the seat of their pants; if instead we rant and we yell and we call them names and we have no time for our kids — if that is the way we go about things and brush it off as insignificant and we go on in those patterns of life, then we are being ungodly. What will that little boy, that little girl, think when you teach them to fold their hands and pray, “Our Father who art in heaven”? How will they have the courage to look to heaven and believe that they are precious to their heavenly Father? That means that you must rear your child conscientiously, principally, from the Word of God. You must seek to be conformed to the pattern of your heavenly Father.

Your life, then, as a father is to be exemplary. There is nothing that so confounds and confuses a child as inconsistency. We must not simply talk of God’s grace. We must not simply sing lustily about God’s amazing grace to which we are a debtor. We have to live it in front of them. Our Lord spoke of this when He spoke of the painful

reality of hypocrisy. In Matthew 23 He spoke of the Pharisees who said but did not do; of the Pharisees who set out the duties for others until a man was so laden down that he could not get up, but, the Lord said, they never lifted a finger to remove the burden. They said what they were to do but they never did it.

That means that we can be conversant with the holy Scriptures, we can talk of honesty, respect for authority, and moral precepts, but if we fail to embody them, then we do not see our own sins. And we are confounding our children. If you walk in dishonesty, if you lack respect for the civil authority, for the church authority, you are lading your children with an inconsistent example. And that is going to create in them cynicism toward the gospel.

We cannot fool our children. They know about the reality of our life. We can be guilty of the most glaring inconsistencies and try to gloss it over with the clever use of words. You say to your children in their squabbles with each other, “You shouldn’t lose your temper like that. Think before you speak. Honor your mother.” So you said that to your little boy. Ten minutes later they see you come home

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lose your temper like that. Think before you speak. Honor your mother.” So you said that

and over a slight provocation you blow up at your wife, you have hard words, you lose your temper, and in innocency they come and say, “Daddy, isn’t that a bad temper?” And you respond, “You keep your place. I’ve got a righteous anger. You mind me, you impertinent thing!” That will provoke your child to anger. That will foul up your child’s ability to discern righteous anger from pride. That will make them lawless. They will not respect authority that way.

It means that as a father you wish to cultivate a climate of closeness and spiritual warmth in your home. That is part of God’s pity. In His pity God comes close to us in compassion. God’s pity to us is not the pity of a millionaire who says, “Well, here’s a donation to help out. But don’t bring those people to my doorstep.” In His pity, God made an atonement for our sins. He erased our debt. But He was not content with that. He was not content simply to have our birth recorded in heaven, to adopt us in the blood of Christ, and to leave it in the file drawer way off in heaven someplace. No, He wants you, He wants you to be with Him, He wants you to enjoy His fellowship.

The parable of the prodigal son—remember about the father who received his wayward son? How did the father receive him? Did he receive his wayward son in a merely cold and legal way as a lawyer behind closed doors signing papers? No, he pitied him. He received him in the closeness of the covenant bond. We read that when the son was yet a long way off, his father was moved with compassion and ran and fell upon his neck and kissed him. He did not say, “Well, glad you came to your senses, you rebel. You wasted your inheritance. I don’t want to be shamed in front of the neighbors, you had better come on in.” No, He took us from the hog pen, from hell itself, and He turned us to Himself in sorrow. When the son returned, by God’s grace, in humble self-loathing, how did he find his father to be—distant? Aloof? No, the father was not content with anything less than intimate closeness. He ran out to his son, he embraced his son, he put a robe around his son, he put a ring upon his finger, he invited him to a banquet.

So also, as fathers, we must show the covenant closeness and spiritual warmth of Christ to our children.

Are you determined that your children will see this in you?