

## “What We Believe about Christian Living”

Titus 2:11-14

May 28, 2017

Article 8 is probably my favorite out of the 10 in our Statement of Faith. I think it's because it's the most actionable one. This is where theology meets practice; orthodoxy meets orthopraxy. One of the key advantages of a Statement of Faith is that it helps us to evaluate when we may be missing some key essential. That's what happened with Article 8. It didn't exist back in the 1950's version of the Evangelical Free Church of America's Statement of Faith. Now, that doesn't mean Christian Living wasn't important to them. It just means that we've come to recognize the vital place of actionable Christian Living. We have determined that this is a major that we should be majoring on. So, we added it to the list! Have you heard of the “Cat and Dog Test?”

It comes from the missionary, Hudson Taylor, who once said this about Christian Living: “If your father and mother, your sister and brother, if the very cat and dog in the house, are not happier for your being Christian, it is a question whether you really are.”<sup>1</sup> Being a Christian changes the way that we live. It should have a positive impact on just about everyone we encounter. Our Christian lives are meant to shine the love and goodness of God. So, today we are going to talk about Christian Living.

Article 8 begins,

1. “God's justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose.” Let's start by defining 2 terms. Justifying: is a one-time act of God by which the sinner, who is under condemnation, puts his or her trust in Christ, and is then acquitted by God the judge. (God declares us righteous.) Sanctifying:<sup>2</sup> can be defined as an ongoing process where we are progressively fashioned to be more and more like Christ over time. (Maturity) God's justifying grace launches every Christ-follower on a sanctifying journey of power and purpose.

2 Timothy 1:9 says it this way, “[God] has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace...” “A proper understanding of Christianity leaves no room for nominal Christianity – being a Christian in name only.” There needs to be some evidence of God's sanctifying work in a person's life. If there is no concern for godliness, then it's ok for us to wonder whether a professing Christian has been “truly justified by God's grace.”<sup>3</sup> Earlier we read from Titus 2:11-14: “...the grace of God...teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for...Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness AND to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”

If Jesus is your Savior, then He is also your daily Lord. When we are granted new life in Christ, there is a transformation within us and God's Holy Spirit takes up residence. This transformation does not mean immediate angelic behavior in every area of our lives, but it does mean the beginning of real, lasting change. One way that God's sanctifying power and purpose are carried out are through the Great Commandment...

2. “God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed.” Take a look at Mark 12:29-31, “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” Our two core values for Christian Living are to love God and to love people. This is not only a good summary of all the commandments, but also the lens through which we can find meaning and purpose for our lives. We can ask ourselves, “how can I best love

---

<sup>1</sup> Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (p. 735). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

<sup>2</sup> The word sanctification can also refer to the positional righteous standing that Christ-followers have before God. For the purposes of this message, we are using the other definition.

<sup>3</sup> *Evangelical Convictions: A Theological Exposition of the Statement of Faith of the Evangelical Free Church of America*, Free Church Publications, Minneapolis, MN, 2011, p. 188.

God and love people in this situation?” It’s ironic how often we, as Christians, get distracted and bogged down in things like theological debates or behaviorism when the core of the Christian faith really boils down to who we love and how well we love them. Christian Living is focused on loving the right things in the right way. We are to love God supremely.<sup>4</sup> We are to love others sacrificially.

1 John 4:20-21 says, “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.” Christian Living forces us to evaluate if we are truly loving one another in the body of Christ. If we aren’t, God’s Word calls us a liar for saying we love Him. Philippians 2:1-5 lays this out boldly, “Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.” When we chose to follow Christ, we chose to follow His pattern of laying down our lives for one another, sacrificially.

The Bible has so much to teach us about compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed. A year ago, I preached an entire sermon on this.<sup>5</sup> It was actually my first official sermon as Lead Pastor. We had a strong focus on sponsoring a child through Compassion International or Global Fingerprints, or supporting initiatives like the International Justice Mission. There are so many good causes that Christians can support. Isaiah 1:17 commands God’s people, “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.”

There are several great local ministries and organizations that are good for Christ-followers to be aware of. Pray for and consider supporting Churches United, the Food Shelf, Meals on Wheels, Habitat for Humanity, Camp Oak Hills, and Northwoods Pregnancy Care Center.

The Bible’s message regarding helping people is consistent; there will always be people in need and we ought to do what we can to help meet those needs. 1 Timothy 6:17-19, “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”<sup>67</sup> Genuine Christian Living makes life truly worth living!

Here’s a fact: loving people is hard work. It’s often inconvenient. It gets messy. It takes time, energy, and determination. This is why our statement of faith is intentional about using the adverb, “sacrificially.” Love costs us something; we lay down our own needs and wants for the sake of others. This process of daily sanctification involves embracing a sacrificial mindset. God is most glorified when we love Him supremely and others sacrificially.

Article 8 goes on to say...

3. “With God’s Word, the Spirit’s power, and fervent prayer in Christ’s name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil.” The Christian Life is a spiritual battle against spiritual forces.<sup>8</sup> One of my very favorite verses on Christian Living is Matthew 11:12, “From the days of John the Baptist until now, **the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence**, and violent people have been raiding it.” That’s a strange verse to name as one of your favorites. However, verses like this are sobering and

---

<sup>4</sup> One of the most stinging rebukes to the 7 churches in Revelation came to the church at Ephesus, “You have forsaken the love you had at first.” (Revelation 2:4)

<sup>5</sup> *Compassion and Justice* sermon was preached on 5/8/16, available at <http://www.efcbemidji.org/media/audio-sermons>

<sup>6</sup> See also Luke 14:12-14.

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 15:11 says, “There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.”

<sup>8</sup> We learned about the Armor of God back in Ephesians 6. Download the written transcript for “*Be Strong & Stand Firm*” (*The Armor of God*) sermon from Ephesians 6:10-17, preached on 2/5/17: <http://www.efcbemidji.org/media/sermon-transcripts>

they help us realize that Christian Living is not a cake walk. The Kingdom of Heaven causes a bit of an uproar. Our enemies are real and, as Christians, we are expected to fight against the spiritual forces of evil. Matthew 11:12 is an intriguing verse because translators have struggled just precisely how to translate it into English. In fact, the 1984NIV translated it this way: “From the days of John the Baptist until now, **the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing**, and forceful men lay hold of it.”

It comes down to a grammatical choice; a matter of whether a rare verb is intended as a middle or as a passive. And, the immediate context makes it somewhat difficult to determine exactly.

The 1984 wording makes it sound like rather than the Kingdom of Heaven being attacked by its enemies, that the Kingdom itself is the one doing the invading. Now, I have to admit, I like that concept and it biases me toward wanting that interpretation to be correct. Either way though, this translation question causes us to reflect on whether Christian Living is more a matter of defense or offense. Frankly, the debate becomes somewhat moot because many other verses throughout Scripture confirm that our spiritual battle is both. We need to defend ourselves from spiritual attack with things like the shield of faith but we must also take up the sword of God’s powerful word and overcome strongholds. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 says, “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” God’s Word is one of our greatest weapons in our spiritual battle.

We learned about another weapon back in Article 6; the Spirit’s power. Christ-followers have an incredible supernatural empowering; God the Holy Spirit dwells within us. The HS “equips and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.” 1 John 4:4 emboldens us, “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”

Article 8 mentions that our spiritual combat also calls for prayer; specifically, prayer that is “fervent.” Fervent means having a passionate intensity. Synonyms include ardent, sincere, heartfelt, or even burning.<sup>9</sup> I’m not sure how often my prayers are “burning.” I think they are sincere and heartfelt. But, in order to be considered fervent, I need them to increase in intensity. That’s worth meditating on this week. My prayer for myself and my prayer for our church is that “fervent prayer” might become our experience in living out our Christian faith. Romans 15:30 says, “I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.”<sup>10</sup> We are in this together. Article 8 uses the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural “we.” We learned about this last week, with Article 7 which talks about the local church as a gathering place for believers to love and support one another.

I picture us standing back to back in battle, guarding each other, praying for each other, and watching each other’s blind spots.

Christian Living is not for wimps. It’s a spiritual battle that requires strong weapons: God’s Word, the Spirit’s power, and fervent prayer in Christ’s name! We are called to be on mission with God. By this we don’t just mean going somewhere on a “mission’s trip,” although that’s good too. But what we mean is that our regular, daily lives are energized and focused around the Great Commission. This is how Article 8 closes.

4. “In obedience to Christ’s commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed.” Matthew 28:18-20 records that Jesus came to His followers and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore GO and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Our Christian witness is not in word OR deed but rather in word AND deed;

---

<sup>9</sup> See Google definition.

<sup>10</sup> See also Colossians 4:12.

so it's not an either/or but a both/and. It's hard to consider the idea of witnessing in word AND deed without thinking of St. Francis of Assisi:

One day St. Francis said to several of his followers, "Let's go to the village over there and preach." As they went, they met a humble pedestrian who was greatly burdened. Francis was in no hurry and listened carefully to his tale of woe, shared some words of encouragement, and prayed with him. Once they reached the village, Francis talked with the shopkeepers, spent time with the farmers at their fruit and vegetable stands, and played with the children in the streets. They also met a farmer with a load of hay, and Francis spent time helping him with it. The morning was now over so the group then walked back to the monastery from where they had set out. One of the followers, who was greatly disappointed, said to Francis, "Brother Francis, you said we were going to preach. The morning is spent and no sermon has been given." St. Francis replied, "But we have been preaching all the way."<sup>11</sup> St. Francis is credited with saying, "It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless we preach as we walk."<sup>12</sup>

Acts 1:8 says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." A short while later, Acts 4:31 shows the early Christians in a fervent prayer meeting: "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and SPOKE the word of God boldly." We need a balance of both; witnessing with our words and our deeds. Christian Living means being missional in how we approach every day of our lives, Sunday through Saturday.

Our church staff has been going through the book, "Work Matters."<sup>13</sup> At the end of chapter 3 there is a personal testimony by a lawyer named Jay: "I think God wants our vocation to be in sync with our desires to redeem a broken world. As a business transaction lawyer, I am called to improve how people make promises to each other, to help people honor their promises, to help people better understand their obligations, to help people resolve conflicts, and to help people realize the best of their dreams and aspirations. I am called to use my position to foster healthy relationships in my office and to create a place where employees feel loved and cared for. My vocation is not just a means to make money, nor is my office just a convenient place to have an audience with whom to share Christ. My vocation is to improve the world around me. My work is not "secular," but rather an opportunity to bear God's image and to live within the freedom offered by obedience to God's perfect design."



We can't force anyone to become a disciple but we can certainly live out our lives as disciples and invite people to join us along the way. Making disciples happens best in the normal ebb and flow of our daily lives. It happens in wonderful ways in the midst of our daily relationships at work and play.

Matthew 5:16 gives us this challenge: "...Let your light shine before others." I read a story this past week about a Bishop named Evin Berggray. He served in the Norwegian Lutheran Church. He was once being guarded by the Nazis. It's reported that he received very special treatment from his captors. Apparently, he was guarded by 11 men at a time. But the guard needed to be changed regularly. Do you know why? ...

To prevent the guards from coming under his strong spiritual influence!<sup>14</sup>

**Let's live our Christian lives in such a way that we are a powerful influence on everyone around us!**

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji  
on May 28, 2017 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson.

<sup>11</sup> Adapted from "Preaching on the Way," Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (pp. 737-738). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc. (Prairie Overcomer)

<sup>12</sup> Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (p. 739). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

<sup>13</sup> Tom Nelson, *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2011, p. 62.

<sup>14</sup> Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (p. 735). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc. (Pathfinder)