

Holding onto the Truth

by Rev A. van Delden

We're going to speak on the topic of "hold onto the truth", or "hold firmly to the Word".

What I've noticed in the Scripture is this repeated call to hold firmly to the truth.

We'll see it:

- First of all in Philippians 2:16: "Hold firmly to the word of life."
- Then again in 2 Thessalonians 2:15, "Stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught."
- Then in 1 Timothy 4:16, "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." And so there's that word 'persevere' which is basically, continue on and hold on.
- Then in 2 Timothy 1:13, "Hold fast to the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me..."
- Then there's 2 Timothy 1:14, "But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them..."
- Hebrews, a book which is full of the exhortation to hold fast, as it is in chapter 4:14, "Let us hold fast our confession..."
- Hebrews 10:23, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering..."
- In Revelation 2:25 (to the church of Thyatira), "But hold fast what you have till I come..."
- Revelation 3:3 (to the church of Sardis), "Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly!" And that's really the whole call of the Reformation. Go back to what you believe, to what the early church said and certainly what Calvin did. He was very much influenced by the early church father Augustine.
- Then again, in Revelation 3:11 (to the church of Philadelphia), "Hold fast what you have..."

So there's all these constant repetitions of hold fast, hold on, persevere in the truth. And it makes us ask the question, well what are we supposed to hold on to exactly?

1. First of all, and obviously, we hold onto the Word.
2. And then secondly, we read, hold onto the traditions. And those traditions are the doctrines of God's Word as passed on from one generation to the next generation.
3. Then finally, hold fast our confessions, which is our way of saying the same thing as God says in His Word. The word 'confession' in the Greek language simply means 'to say the same thing.' So you could say it is to echo the Word of God; our confessions are simply echoing what God says.

So hold on, hold on to the Scriptures, to traditions, hold on to your confession. And then the question is: why? Why are there all these repeated exhortations to hold on? The reason is clearly given in our reading 2 Timothy 3. Because the Word of God is the power of God to salvation. The Devil knows that the Bible is the Power of God to salvation, and he desires nothing more than to 'unplug' us from this power of life. And this is what the Scriptures say; Paul says: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of salvation to everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16). Or, in 1 Corinthians

1:18, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." And because the Devil knows that the Word of God is the power of God, he wants to unplug us, to separate us from that Word.

The Word of God is able to do two things. First of all, in 2 Timothy 3:15 we learn that "...the Holy Scripture are able to make us wise for salvation." By nature we are all foolish, our minds have been darkened, our thoughts have become foolish and as a result, we don't know God, we don't know the truth. We believe that light is dark, that white is black. Our minds are all confused. By nature we say that there is no God. Or we believe in false gods that are not gods at all. But the Word of God is able to make us wise again. It is able to impart to us the knowledge of the truth, that there is a God, and who this God is. It is also able to make us know ourselves, and our sinful condition, that we are under the curse of God and doomed to condemnation. The Holy Scriptures then make us wise for salvation. The Spirit uses Scripture to bring us to faith. By faith we're connected to Christ, and in Christ we become heirs of salvation. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Word of God makes us wise to salvation. That's the first thing Scripture can do.

The second thing that Scripture can do is prepare and equip His people to do every good work. Just as a carpenter has to get his tools together before he goes to work, without which he can't do much, so also we can't do anything good without having the knowledge of the Scriptures. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Scripture equips us with all that we need, to do what is good. And doing good works is really important. The Devil knows that, and we must know it as well. We're celebrating the Reformation. We know that we don't do good works in order to be saved. But we also know that no one who fails to produce good works is saved. Without good works no one can be saved because faith without works is dead. A tree without fruit will be destroyed. Even now, the axe is laid to the root of the tree. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire, and the Devil knows that! And so the Devil would love nothing more than to take away the Word of God from us. If we don't have the Word of God to tell us what is good, we're going to start deciding for ourselves what is good. That's what happens in the world. What's good? If you're in a marriage and your marriage isn't working, what's good? This: divorce and try again. If you're pregnant and you don't want that child – what's good? Get rid of that child through abortion. If one man loves another man, or one woman loves another woman, what's good? That they marry!

The Devil knows that if he can separate us from the Word of God we will start to determine what is good on the basis on our own thoughts, which are foolishness. In the end, we will not do good, but evil. And if we continue to do evil, we will perish eternally.

Because the Bible is the power of God to salvation, the Devil and the world will appeal to our sinful nature and use every means available to induce us to abandon God's Word, both as the foundation of our faith as well as the guide for our life. And it's because of this that the Bible keeps on saying, "Hold on to the truth!" "Hold on to the Word!" "Hold on to the traditions!" "Hold on to your confession!"

Now for the sake of this speech, I will point out seven tactics that the devil will use to make us let go of God's Word. I'm sure there's more and I purposely didn't rack my brain to think of every one because otherwise there would be nothing left for you ladies to discuss afterwards.

Tactic #1

The Devil's tactic number one is 'crowding out the Word of God'. It is really interesting; when I was in Jakarta, back in April, I had to do a book presentation of my book on the Canons of Dort that was translated into the Indonesian language. I was at a Theological College, but it wasn't really a Reformed college. After introducing the book, one of the young members in the audience questioned the whole idea of God choosing us. "We have to choose for God," he says. And he referred to the text in Revelation 3:20, *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."* The Arminians use this to say that God is knocking on the door of everybody's heart. And it's up to each person to open the door, because there's only one handle on the door of your heart. That handle is on the inside, says the Arminian, and therefore **you** have to open the door to let Christ come into your life. I said to the young man, "Thank you very much for asking that question!" In fact I gave him a free book, because it was such a good question. It gave me another 15 minutes to address the crowd. I asked him, "To whom is Jesus speaking in that text? He's speaking to the church. He's not speaking to people who don't know Christ, who don't know God. He's speaking to the church. And how is it that Christ is outside knocking on the door? It's because these professing Christians in Laodicea had crowded Christ out of their life. Their life was so busy with all kinds of things, all kinds of interests, all kinds of work and all kinds of recreation, that there was simply no room for Christ in their life. He had been crowded out of their life. And so Christ stood outside the door, knocking and pleading, "Let me back in! You used to have time for me, but you don't anymore." In this text, then, Christ is not calling people to come to faith; he's calling them to come to repentance!

Now that's the Devil's tactic. He wants to fill your mind, he wants to fill your day with all kinds of things. He wants to occupy your time and fill your minds with as many things as he can. Good things, like studying perhaps. As a student, you've got so many assignments to complete, and exams to study for. Or perhaps you have a job which demands so much of your time. Or perhaps you're a busy mother and housewife. So many things for women to do at home. And then there's the social media. Facebook! Twitter! And then there's the internet. You can shop online till you drop; you don't even have to leave the comfort of your home. And then there's sports – I don't know if you ladies are really into sports, but certainly guys are. And there's also the realm of entertainment. TV shows you can watch! Books to read! Then there's travel. Oh there's so much! So much that occupies our mind! And the result is, we have very little time and very little energy to read and meditate on the Word of God. And the Devil is very happy with that, because in effect he has separated us, he has unplugged us from the Word of God which is the power of God. And so there are a lot of things that are not evil in themselves, but which can be and are used for evil purposes. Weapons of mass destruction.

Now Jesus warned about this in the parable of the seed and the soils; the Word of God in the hearts of men. He said in Luke 8, 'Now the ones (seeds) that fall among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.'

So that's the first tactic. The devil is going to try to fill our minds.

And here's the remedy: set and guard times for meditation and prayer. Make that a priority! Despite the busyness of life, we need to make Scripture meditation and prayer number one in our schedule. I'm not sure if it's always the best thing to do first thing in the morning. I was just at a minister's

conference and there was one minister who said the first thing he does is, he gets up, sits in the lounge and has his meditation first thing in the morning. If I tried that, I would fall right back to sleep. I have to do something physical first, to get my 'engines' running. Once they're running, then I can sit down. So first thing in the morning wouldn't work for me. But the point is not that it has to be first in time, but first in importance. We have to get our priorities right. The most important thing I need to do each day is to read and meditate on the Scriptures. I also need time for prayer.

So first, set priorities. Then second, 'Form habits'. Habits are really good. Daniel had habits for prayer. We read in Daniel 6: *"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home, and in his upper room with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day and prayed, and gave thanks before his God as was his custom since early days."* This is a pattern which Daniel set for himself already when he was young. And it became a custom, it became a habit for him. We need to form a habit of meditating on Scripture and praying.

The next thing you need to do is rid yourself of things that hinder you from meditating on the Word of God. And I think there's a good analogy that Jesus said in Matthew 18: *"If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye rather than having two eyes and being cast into hellfire."* An extended application of this text would be this: if anything hinders your meditation on the word of life and if anything hinders your prayers, then cast those things from you. It is better to go through life without those distractions rather than to let go of the Word of Life. Now it's painful to pluck out an eye. It could be quite painful in a way, to cut yourself off from some of those weapons of mass destruction. It might be quite difficult to delete your Facebook account. It might be difficult to rid yourself of your television. But if anything is distracting you and using up your time and energy so that you don't have enough time or energy for Scripture reading, meditation and prayer, **get rid of such things.**

Okay so that's the first one - the devil's tactic number one. Now we're going to look at devil's tactic number two, in which he is trying to get us to let go of the Word of God by conforming ourselves to worldly opinion.

Tactic #2

The Devil will work on our natural desire for conformity with others. He is going to tempt us to conform to the world around us. That desire for conformity pertains to the outward appearance. Christians follow the worldly pattern of fashion. The clothing some Christians wear is immodest. Many Christians follow the example of the world with all sorts of body piercing, which was always done by the pagans. Then there's the ripped up clothing that so many are wearing today. There's the music that lacks all beauty and majesty, and has no structure or harmony.

But the desire for conformity is not just external, appearances and fashion but this desire for conformity also applies to thought. By nature we want to be onside with popular opinion. And the devil works on that natural weakness in us. And one of the greatest examples that really blows my mind is what happened during the time of the second World War. The desire for conformity was stronger than one's conscience. The people of Germany were willing to do what they knew was wrong simply to conform to the majority. During the time of the Nazi regime, people knew that what Hitler was saying and doing was wrong. Yet so many Germans embraced him gladly. And it wasn't just the common people, but also the leaders of the church. Bonhoeffer was exemplary and put many

Christians to shame for his resistance to Nazism. But many Christians in Germany let the voice of the majority speak louder to them than the voice of Scripture. There were Lutherans who joined the Nazi party and joined in doing the things that were abominable, simply because everybody was doing it. Yes, sometimes the desire for conformity speaks louder than the conscience.

Well, don't be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the Word. That's what the Scriptures say. That's the remedy. *"Do not be transformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."* (Romans 12:12) So the only antidote to letting go of the Bible is to hold onto it. And rather than putting the Bible aside and letting your mind be conformed to what the world is thinking and doing, you must hold onto the Bible and be transformed by it so that you will know and do that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

The strength and courage that you need for non-conformity is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It's something we need to pray for. Aware of our natural inclination to conform with the world, we need to consciously pray that God will give us the Spirit and the strength and the courage to be able to stand alone, even amidst all the consequences. And so there's that old song: 'Dare to be a Daniel, Dare to stand alone, Dare to have a purpose firm and dare to make it known'.

So it's not, 'Thus says the people according to opinion polls.' I refer to the referendum on same-sex marriage. There are Christians who are saying we should allow same-sex marriage. It's boggling to the mind. What happened? How is it that they have let go of the Word of God? It's because they're listening to popular opinion. They're listening to what people are saying around them. And so we have to be aware of how strong the desire for conformity is, and we need to pray for strength to resist it.

It's not a matter of arrogance to hold an opinion contrary to majority, if the majority hold on to an opinion that is contrary to God's Word. It's merely obedience to God's Word. Luther presented an interpretation of Scripture that was contrary to what all the learned and wise people of the church said. And that was one of the tactics which the church leaders of Rome tried to use in order to get Luther to conform. They said, 'Luther you are one man, claiming to know the truth. Against you are all these learned people of the church who are claiming to know the truth. Do you suppose, Luther, that you are wiser or more knowledgeable than all these men? You think you alone are right, and all these others are wrong? If you think that, you are one arrogant person.' Thankfully, as a result of Luther's stand, even if he had to stand alone there (and thankfully he wasn't standing alone and not for long), he said 'here I stand'. He could say, 'Here I stand alone. All of you are on that side but I am here. I stand with the Word of God'. So we can be very thankful that Luther was willing to stand alone. He was a Daniel wasn't he?

Now sometimes, what people say and think has more effect upon us than what God says in His Word. There's a book I highly recommend; Edward T. Welch has written a book entitled *"When People are Big, and God is Small."* In it he addresses the impact that people have on us compared to the impact that God has. So easily we are affected by the opinions of people and are more afraid of being chastised by people than we are of being chastised by God. We're more afraid of the mockery of people than we are of the wrath of God.

Tactic #3

The devil's third tactic is elevating the human mind above God's Word. The devil appeals to our vanity and pride. We humans have the ability to understand, reason and fathom lofty matters. The devil appeals to that vanity and pride and prompts us to give greater weight to our thoughts and understanding than to God's Word. In his pride, fallen man refuses to accept as true, that which exceeds his understanding, or that goes contrary to the way he believes it should go. Fallen man interprets Scriptures the way he wishes, or simply rejects parts or all of it. Fallen man thinks he's got infinite intelligence. And insofar as fallen man acknowledges the existence of God, he is inclined to make God a projection of himself. The God that some Christians worship is more a reflection of man than it is of God who reveals Himself in His Word.

Furthermore, the natural man is inclined to put greater faith in the fruits of scientific research rather than the Bible. For many professing Christians, science speaks louder than the Bible. As a result, they deny the truth of creation, and believe the lie of evolution. Or they try to blend evolution together with the Bible and they come up with the theory of theistic evolution or the framework hypothesis. Relying upon science, there are Christians who deny the virgin birth. Science shows that no woman conceives a child without a man's input. They reject all Jesus' miraculous signs. Jesus never really walked on the water. The disciples were just deluded! They didn't know where they were! They thought they were in the middle of the ocean, but it was dark and stormy. Actually, they were only metres from shore. Jesus wasn't really walking on the water; He was walking on the beach! In like manner, they reject miracles as being untrue – just figments of the imagination of the early church.

They don't accept Christ's resurrection – it's not true. Science shows that dead people do not come to life again. Oh, they believe that Jesus lives, but not literally. He lives in the minds of His apostles. And so there are Christians who give in to the tactic of the devil and they sacrifice all or some of God's Word on the altar of human wisdom.

To accept as truth only that which is reasonable and understandable to man is an act of supreme arrogance – giving the human mind supremacy over the Word of God. Man's mind is enlarged and the Bible is made small.

So what's the solution? Well first of all, we must reject the notion that we have to understand something before it can be true. We need to accept the final authority of the word of God, *Sola Scriptura* – one of the five solas of the Reformation.

Now I want to add this: true science is not an enemy of Scripture. True science never conflicts with Scripture. We have in our churches some brilliant doctors of science who accept the supremacy of Scripture. And yet they are full-fledged scientists. No, science doesn't conflict with the Bible. But the Bible has supremacy. It's divinely inspired as we just read from 2 Timothy 3. It's infallible.

Tactic #4

The devil also uses man's natural inclination to be free from the Law of God. People embrace the gospel, but they want to be free from the law. There are thousands upon thousands of Christians who say that there is no place for the law of God in the worship service. I've had guests attend our church services, and later come to me and say with amazement, "You read the 10 commandments in church!" I said, "Yes, that's true." "But," they say, "the Bible says, we are free from the law!" There is a site on

the internet from someone named Matthew Drysdale. He has nothing good to say about the law. Here are some of the things that he writes:

- “The law reveals sin but cannot fix it.” Great! That’s like having a doctor who tells you that you’re sick but he can’t heal you
- “If the law worked, then faith would be irrelevant.” That is, if salvation could come through the law, we wouldn’t need faith. But the law can’t bring us to salvation. So we need faith instead.
- “The law brings wrath upon those who follow it.”
- “The purpose of the law was to increase sin.”
- “Christians are not under the law.”
- “Christians have been delivered from the law.”

They are convinced that as Christians we no longer need to keep God’s law. And for that they are glad, because they feel that God’s law is so demanding on the one hand, and so restrictive on the other. God’s law commands us to do what we don’t want to do, and God’s law prevents us from doing the very things we want to do.

So what’s the remedy? Listen to what God’s Word says about the goodness of God’s Law.

The Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The judgements of the Lord are true, righteous altogether. More desirable than gold, sweeter than gold and the drippings of the honeycomb.

To hold on to God’s law, we need to believe in the goodness of God’s law. That was conveyed in very physical ways in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 28:2, God says: "All these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God". And there follows a long list of blessings that the faithful would experience in their marriages, in their families, in their work, in their nation.

Then there’s that beautiful Psalm 128: 'Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, You shall eat the fruit of the labour of your hands, you shall be blessed and it shall be well with you'. God says: 'my commandments are so good for you'.

James says, The man who looks steadily at the perfect law of freedom and makes that his habit...will be happy in all that he does. I love the fact that it’s called the *Law of freedom*, because the Devil is trying to tell us that God’s law is binding us. The devil tries to make us think that the Law of God puts us in a strait-jacket. The law binds us so that we can’t move. The law is so restrictive. But the Bible tells us that the law actually *sets us free*. The law of God actually preserves us in the freedom Christ obtained for us. The law keeps us free from the clutches of the devil. The law keeps us free from much of the misery that comes as a consequence of living in disobedience to God’s law. And so we need to remind ourselves and teach our children that God’s laws are very good for us. And that obedience brings so much wholesomeness, and so many blessings into our lives. On the other hand, going on our own way and doing our own thing only leads to so much brokenness and misery as is evident in the

world around us where there are so many broken marriages and dysfunctional families, so many youth entangled in drugs and alcohol.

Tactic #5

The devil tells us that our faith is futile. Our faith has no value. Our faith doesn't help us.

Elihu claims that Job said, "It profits a man nothing that he should delight in God." Your faith is useless. "Who is the Almighty that we should serve Him? And what profit do we have if we pray to Him?" (Job 21:15). In Malachi 3:14: God records the saying of the Israelites: "You have said, 'it is useless to serve God; What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and have walked as mourners before the Lord of hosts?'..." And so already since the Old Testament, God's people sometimes felt that faith was futile.

Why should we hold onto the Bible? Why should we believe in God? Why should we serve Him? Here's a comic strip that I found. In Room 6 of a hospital ward, one patient asks: "God, why don't you answer my prayer?" whereas in Room 7, the patient says: "Thank you God for answering my prayer." By means of this comic strip, someone is poking fun at prayer. One prays and he doesn't get answers: the other prays and he does get his answer. Do you really believe that your prayer helps you? Do you really believe that there is a God who is listening to you? Man, it's all a figment of your imagination! Praying doesn't help, God doesn't exist. Faith is useless!

I love Psalm 73. Asaph says: "Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled;". You could say, his faith had almost failed. "My steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death, But their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men." And then listen to what he says next: "Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued. And chastened every morning." Asaph was almost at the point of throwing his faith away. He was almost at the point of saying: 'There is no benefit in serving God'. He was almost ready to 'throw away the Bible, because it seemed like faith had no value.' Similarly, because of the seeming futility of faith, many Christians abandon the faith, withdraw from the church and they let go of the Bible. Faith seems to be futile.

So what's the solution? Well the remedy is: be far-sighted, not near-sighted. We have to realise that God never promised us an easy life. He didn't promise us health and wealth and every other good thing. There are people who teach that.

Let me return to Asaph, who was ready to abandon his faith because it seemed futile. He went to the Temple, where the Word of God was read. Then he realised what was going to happen to the wicked in the end. He realised that they were walking an easy road to eternal destruction.

Paul said, "If only for this life we have hope in Jesus Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." Paul knew that the life of a Christian here on earth isn't a life of ease, a life of all health and freedom and prosperity and all good things. If we put our hope in Christ because we want a good life here and now on this earth, then we should be pitied. Oh there are benefits to believing in Christ now already, wonderful benefits. But if you as a Christian are hoping for a good life here and now, you're going to be sadly mistaken. We must be clear about what has God promised and what He has not promised. God has not promised days without pain, laughter without sorrow, nor sun without rain. But He did

promise strength for the day, comfort for the tears and light for the way. God has not promised to give us all good things in this life. But He promises to make all things work together for good for those who love Him.

Affliction is actually good for us. We read in Psalm 119:71, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes." Dear brothers and sisters, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested your endurance has a chance to grow. We read in James 1:4 that when your endurance is fully developed, "you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing." So let it grow. The Bible tells us we're going to experience troubles. That's ok! It's actually going to work for our good. Hebrews 10 recalls that you've suffered and you accept it with joy because you knew that there were better things waiting for you, that will last forever. When God doesn't give us the good that we ask for, it's because He has something better for us, that we haven't asked for, something better that we can't imagine.

So God never promised to spare us from all suffering and sorrow, but instead He promised 'strength for today, and bright hope for tomorrow.' And so be far-sighted, not near-sighted, as Paul was in Romans 8:18. He wrote: "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us." This hope of eternal glory serves as the anchor of our soul that enables us to hold onto the word of life, even in the midst of great troubles.

Tactic #6

The devil's sixth tactic is making us ashamed of God's Word.

The Bible tells us that the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are headed for destruction. People hate the cross. The Bible tells us that when we preach Christ crucified, the Gentiles will regard it as nonsense. It's foolish. Believers who hold onto God's Word in faith are regarded as fools. They are ostracised, criticised, mocked, and marginalised in both social and academic spheres.

Nobody likes to be thought a fool. Nobody likes to be mocked. So the devil uses our abhorrence of mockery to induce believers to abandon the truths of Scripture. And some Christians give up parts or all of the bible because of it. This is how it goes. Some parts of the Bible are offensive and are objectionable to the modern man. But you earnestly desire to want your neighbour to be saved. So you have a problem. You want your neighbour to be saved, and you want to share God's Word with him. You want him to come to faith in Jesus Christ. But you know that the Bible contains truths which your neighbour will regard as nonsense, foolishness. So what do you do? He's not going to come to faith in Christ if he thinks the Bible contains nonsense. Well, you re-interpret the Bible to make it more acceptable and palatable to the tastes of the worldly man and woman. You do so with the noble end of winning your neighbour for Christ. But then you no longer have a Holy Bible anymore but a Worldly Bible. It's not the New King James translation but it's the New Acceptable Translation. Now how do we remedy that?

Well we must discern between real wisdom and foolishness. The Bible (1 Cor 3:19) tells us that: "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their own craftiness'" and (1Cor 1:25) the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. And therefore we need not and must not be ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God to salvation says Paul. Antonin Scalia, a former judge on the American Supreme Court, a Christian judge, wrote: "God assumed from the beginning that the wise of the world

would view Christians as fools, and He has not been disappointed. If I have brought any message today it is this: Have the courage to have your wisdom regarded as stupidity; be fools for Christ. And have the courage to suffer the contempt of the sophisticated world.” And Scalia did just that. As a Christian judge he was often ridiculed in the media. But Paul forewarned us about this. He said our dedication to Christ makes us look like fools. 1 Cor 4:16. So we must adopt this thought: I would rather be a fool for Christ than a tool for the devil.

Christ suffered mockery and shame for our sake and out of gratitude we must be willing to suffer shame for His sake. If Christ is not ashamed to call us brethren, let us not be ashamed to call Him our Lord and Saviour. And that’s what we need to know for ourselves and that’s what we need to breed into our children. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ you are blessed because the Spirit of God rests on you.

Although the world scorns the doctrines of creation and regards the temptations of the serpent as a myth, scoffs at the idea of a world-wide flood, ridicules the notion of our Saviour’s virgin birth, denies His resurrection and ascension and sneers at His kingship and rule... hold on to these doctrines because your eternal life depends upon it!

There’s a passage in John which recounts a time when Jesus spoke words that were offensive. In John 6, Jesus said “Whoever eats my body and drinks my blood will live.” “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him.” When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” And soon after, many of Christ’s disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. They were so offended. Then Jesus said to the Twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” Peter said, “Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Some things may be offensive to us and those around us. But we must never let go of even a part of the Bible because of any offense it gives. For God’s Word is the word of eternal life!

Just as he who stumbles over one commandment is guilty of breaking the law of God as a whole so he who denies one part of Scripture denies the whole of it. Scripture is one whole unit. It’s a whole system. We cannot pick and choose what parts of the Bible we will believe. We can’t just believe 90% of what the Bible says. Scripture is clear (Deuteronomy 4:2): “You shall not add to the Word which I command you nor take away from it that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you”, and (Revelation 22: 18,19) “I warn everyone who hears the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and whoever takes away from them I will take away his name from the book of life.”

Tactic #7

The hypocrisy of parents, office-bearers and teachers.

A hypocrite is a person who puts on a false appearance, or virtue or religion; a person who acts in contradiction to his or her stated belief or feelings. He presents himself as a child of God but really he is a child of Satan.

Paul addressed the hypocrisy of his kinsmen, the Jews. They were instructors of the foolish, teachers of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth. They taught others, but did not teach themselves. They preached against stealing, but they themselves stole. They preached

against adultery, but they themselves committed adultery. As a result, the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles because of them.

Now I'm addressing you, the women of the church. Many of you are mothers and grandmothers. The point that I want to make here is that hypocrisy amongst parents, or church leaders, is one way that the devil tempts the youth to abandon Scripture, and reject the faith.

JC Riley wrote, 'Children are very quick observers, very quick at seeing through some kinds of hypocrisy, very quick in finding out what you really think and feel, very quick in adopting your ways and opinions. You will often discover: 'as the father is, so is the son.'

Children are very quick to see hypocrisy in parents and church leaders. If, on the one hand, you as a parent say, 'I believe in the providence of God, that neither hail, nor rain, nor drought, neither riches nor poverty, yes nothing comes our way except by the will of God,' but then, on the other hand, you grumble about your lot in life, and you're very dissatisfied with what you have, expressing dissatisfaction and complaining, your children will see your hypocrisy. If you teach your children that not a hair can fall from our head without the will of God, but in the slightest danger you become paralysed with fear and worry, your children will see your hypocrisy.

Tolstoy, the great Russian philosophical writer wrote, 'Hypocrisy in anything whatever may deceive the most clever and penetrating man. But the least-wide-awake of children recognise it and are revolted by it, however ingeniously it may be disguised.' And therefore if parents and ministers and elders and deacons and teachers act hypocritically, those who are under their instruction will recognise that hypocrisy, and it will cause the youth to reject the Word of God. And that's serious. Because 'Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.' (Mark 9:42) And so we have to be very careful that we practice what we preach as ministers and as elders, as mothers and as grandmothers.

What's the remedy, then? Practice what you preach! Do what you teach! Walk the talk! We must exemplify the gospel in our daily living. In 2 Timothy 3:14 Paul writes that Timothy "must continue in the things he had learned". That's the exhortation. And Timothy's encouragement to do so, was to come from the example set by those who taught him. The example of his teachers was to assure him of the truth of what he had been taught. Who were Timothy's teachers? Well one was Paul. He said it just a few verses before (:10): "You have carefully followed my doctrine, my manner of life, my purpose, my faith. Timothy you saw my longsuffering, my love, my perseverance." Timothy had seen the transforming power that the Word of God had in Paul's life. Paul was a hater of the church and a persecutor of Christ. But the Word of God changed Paul. And the other two people who influenced Timothy were his mother and grandmother. "I Paul, thank God when I call to remembrance the genuine faith which was in you Timothy, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and mother Eunice." (2Tim 1:5)

The youth of the church today also receive assurance of the truth of God's Word from observing the power of God's Word in the lives of their parents, their church leaders, and their teachers at school. The Word of God transforms true believers into the image of God, and seeing the wonderful transformation gives the youth the assurance that God's Word is real and true. They see the power of

God's Word at work in our lives. I know that my Dad's faith was real. I saw his faith exemplified in who he was and what he did, and therefore I knew that the Bible was true.

Just as hypocrisy in parents and church leaders is a tactic that the devil will use to induce the youth of the church to abandon God's Word, so faithful living is used by the Holy Spirit to assure the youth of the truth of God's Word, which in turn induces them to embrace it in faith. Let me close with this thought: that in the church of Christ no one has greater influence on the next generation of Reformed children than a faithful, pious, godly mother. Thank you.

(NB this is a transcription of the speech, held on League Day 2017)