

“A Church, If You Can Keep It”

Introduction: “...if you can keep it...”

On Sept. 17, 1789 following the constitutional convention, the founding father Benjamin Franklin, when asked what type of government had been established, is said to have quipped, “A republic, if you can keep it.” Franklin’s point was that the people of the nation would bear the responsibility of holding to the values the nation was founded upon and seeking to pass them on to subsequent generations.

“A year short of its 250th birthday, the United States remains a marvel: a continental-wide republic of 340 million people that, for all the defects just noted, remains the world’s most egalitarian society, the world center of innovation, and the free world’s best hope for leadership in confronting tyrannies with aggression on their minds. Still, “We, the People” have a lot of work to do to get our act together, so that we can celebrate “America 250” with gratitude and hope rather than soured spirits.”

—George Weigel, “Independence Day No. 249” (*First Things*)

We have much to be thankful for as citizens of this nation and we do well to heed Ben Franklin’s words. As believers, we should also consider how this exhortation can apply within the context of the local church. The Lord Jesus promised that He would build His Church in the world, but we must recognize the role He has given to us in bringing this about.

Jude 3—Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Psalms 145:4 [LXX]—Generation and generation shall commend your works, and your power they shall declare.

Main Point: Each generation of believers is called to both _____ for and _____ the faith.

Contending & Commending

1. We are called to proclaim and teach the _____ of Scripture. (Psalm 78:1-8)

Psa. 78:1,3-4—¹Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth!...³things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. ⁴We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.

- The emphasis here is on one generation _____ and the other _____ about who the Lord is and what great things He has done.

Psa. 78:5-6—⁵He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, ⁶that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children,

- The emphasis here is on the _____ of the Lord that is the basis for the faith. This is the basis for the content of our doctrine.

NT Emphasis: (1) The _____ (2) The Christian _____ (3) Our Future _____

Psa. 78:6-8—⁷so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; ⁸and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.

- The first purpose is that the next generation would be encouraged and would _____ the Lord and learn to walk with Him through life.
- The second purpose is that they would be warned and would avoid the _____ of previous generations.

Key Point: We contend for the faith by proclaiming _____ is good about knowing and serving the Lord and by teaching _____ these things are good!

2. We are called to _____ the faith within the believing community. (Titus 2:1-6)

Titus 2:2,6—²Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness...
⁶Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled.

- The older men of the church are to set an _____ for the younger men of what it means to be a man of God.

(1) Their character is worthy of _____!

(2) They have a _____, vibrant faith!

- The younger men are to be trained by both the example and exhortations of the older men.

Titus 2:3-5—³Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, ⁴and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, ⁵to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

- The older women of the church are to model godliness and instruct the younger women in it.

(1) They live and speak under the _____ of the Lord.

(2) They use their _____ to build up and encourage the younger women.

- The younger women learn from the older women that they are called to live their lives in service to God and others.

Key Point: A healthy, multi-generational community is a significant way that we can commend the faith in an _____ world.

3. It is _____ for the faith to be passed on from one generation to another. (2 Timothy 1:3-7)

2 Tim. 1:3-4, 6-7—³I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy... ⁶For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

- The relationship between Paul and Timothy illustrates how older men can _____ younger men.

2 Tim. 1:5—I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

- The reference to Timothy's mother and grandmother illustrates how the faith can be commended within a family from generation to generation

Key Point: Whatever part we are called to play in the work of contending for and commending the faith, the results are ultimately in the Lord's _____.

Concluding Thoughts

- What weekly practices further the goals of contending for and commending the faith within my own life?
- Who has the Lord put in my life that I can spend time with and encourage in the faith?
- Who are the people in my life that I can spend time with and learn from?

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- The emphasis here is on the Word of the Lord that is the basis for the faith. This is the basis for the content of our doctrine.

NT Emphasis: (1) The Gospel (2) The Christian Life (3) Our Future Hope

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- The first purpose is that the next generation would be encouraged and would know the Lord, learning to walk with Him through life.
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Key Point: We commend the faith by proclaiming what is good about knowing and serving the Lord and contend for the faith by teaching why these things are good!

2. We are called to model the faith within the believing community. (Titus 2:1-6)

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Key Point: A healthy, multi-generational community is a significant way that we can commend the faith in an unbelieving world.

3. It is possible for the faith to be passed on from one generation to another. (2 Timothy 1:3-7)

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