

Pray, Stabilize, and Build

Selected Scriptures

November 13, 2016

Okay, as we turn our attention to God's Word this morning, yesterday, Melinda and I were in Minneapolis. I was invited to preach at the Christian Worldview Conference. My friend, David Wheaton, maybe some of you who are tennis fans know the name David Wheaton. He was a 13-year tennis pro on the circuit in the 90's mostly. He played with guys like Andre Agassi and Pete Sampras and all that. He won his own share of trophies and tournaments and all that. But he's a Christian. He became a Christian during that time, and the Lord has turned his heart toward ministry, worldview issues.

He has a radio program. So we got together in Minneapolis where he is and discussed the election a bit, coming out on the election this week on his radio broadcast. Then we spent some time teaching folks how to think biblically about what just

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happened this past week. And I'd like to share that message with all of you because I think it would be profitable for our own church, for our, our help and edification in thinking biblically about what has happened in our county.

Well, what did happen this, this past week? What was that, anyway? Like many of you, I was very surprised by the Republican victory. I fully expected another Clinton presidency and was preparing for an accelerated marginalization of Christians in America. I was prepared for increased penalties for being a Christian, further suppression of truth and righteousness and even pursuing those who hold up the banner of righteousness, perhaps even entering into a new era of actual Christian persecution. That didn't happen this past week. And for that, I'm very grateful to the Lord. In his grace and mercy, God has granted us a brief reprieve. This is a time to allow us to get our bearings and to prepare.

We need to be ready, and we need to steady ourselves and our families and our churches and brace for the impact that's coming in the culture in a very short time. There will be

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increased hostility against Christians, against true Christians, against uncompromising Christians. Compromising Christians are going to do very well. They always will. In this world, anyway, they're going to do very well. But make no mistake, folks for uncompromising Christians, this is temporary, this reprieve. We need to use the time well and get busy building.

Lest anyone believe I'm, you know, taking the role of an alarmist, talking about the sky is falling, all of that. All you need to do is to take note of the Democratic reaction to the election. It started on election night. After election night, as Hillary Clinton supporters were dismayed, shedding tears, in total shock, utter disbelief at the turnabout they just witnessed. I was talking with a journalist I know well, who lives in that area, works in Manhattan, this week, a very sold Christian man.

But his, his newsroom after the election was like a morgue. I mean, it was just, the pall of death was over the whole place. They were shocked. Their sorrow is only temporary, though. And you can see that already as there has been an

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outbreak of violent hostility in many places around the country. You've seen the news. You've watched it yourself. You've seen it on the Internet. There are demonstrations, protests, even riots, violence, the destruction of property. This simmering anger is coming to a boil. It can only be surprised for so long.

I watched a video this past week, maybe some of you saw that, a man being beaten for voting for Donald Trump with onlookers filming that beatdown on their cell phones and jeering and cheering about it. Protests in the major cities. Protests on university campuses, some turning violent and destructive. There has even been a riot in Portland, Oregon. Portland. You know, green Portland? Priuses were overturned. There were hipsters that spilled lattes on their skinny jeans. Some soul patches were torn off. It got really bad.

But in all seriousness, it did get violent in Portland. And the violent response to these election results, it's become really emblematic of many Democratic supporters. My memory may be failing me, but I don't remember disappointed red state people rioting after Barak Obama won the presidency, do you? Or

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during the Clinton years. And I know that not all Democrats advocate for rioting, for violence, for destruction of property.

But the Democratic platform has become an expression of rebellion against God and against his Holy Word. And since they do advocate for open warfare against God's laws, well, it's no wonder their disappointed electorate has no power to restrain their anger. Why would they? Why should they? They have rejected God's laws, so what standard are they accountable to? They just give full license to their passions. It's going to get more violent, folks. And the bitter acrimony that characterized this election, the coarseness of the rhetoric, the debasing of the public conversation. We're not going to recover from that apart from wholesale, widespread, national repentance for our sins and a return to God.

So in this next four years, there will be a growing hostility, a strengthening of the rebellion. There's going to be a regrouping of that progressive liberal mentality. There's an incredible resilience in power and iniquity; it's a destructive, destabilizing energy, but it is powerful, nevertheless. We have

had fair warning. And it is time for us, as the church, to get ready. Jesus told his disciples John 15:20, he said, "Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." Why? Because they hate Jesus Christ. They hate God.

Backing up in John 15, Jesus said, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." So if you are devoted to God in the name of Jesus Christ and in Christ alone, if you insist that he and he alone is the only way, the only truth, the only life, if you insist that he is the exclusive door to reach the Father and there is no other salvation apart from, through Jesus Christ, well, get ready to pay the price.

Frankly, we American Christians have been pretty well insulated from that kind of hatred. Our prosperous brand of Christianity really hasn't cost us all that much. And that's out of sync, really, with the whole history of the Christian

church. It's an anomaly because most Christians have suffered, and they've suffered dearly. But our turn is coming when we will join Christians around the world and throughout church history in truly suffering for the sake of Jesus Christ, not for the sake of our own political viewpoints, mind you, but truly for the sake of righteousness.

In the meantime, what should we Christians be doing? Well, let's turn to Scripture to start answering that question. If you'd like a little outline, you can turn to 1 Timothy chapter 2, we'll start there. But if you'd like a little outline for this morning, points to hang your thoughts on, let me give you three outline points. As Christians, we need to be ready to number one: pray, number two: Stabilize, and number three: Build. Pray, stabilize, and build. And those are the key words. I'm going to expand on them as we go through our outline.

First keyword, pray. Pray. What should we Christians be doing as a result of this election? We need to pray. Christians should pray for peace, for salvation, and for repentance. Peace, salvation, and repentance. First, we need to pray for

peace. There in 1 Timothy 2:1, notice what Paul told Timothy; Paul, the Apostle telling Timothy the pastor; Pastor Timothy, here's what you say to your people, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people." Not, we're not supposed to take the census data and go through the phonebook, or something like that, and pray by name for every single person. That's not what he's talking about here. He's not talking about all without exception, but all without distinction. That is, we're not to make distinctions about the kinds of people we pray about because he says there in verse 2, we are to be praying "for kings and all who are in high positions."

Why is that a big revelation? Because "kings and all who are in high positions" in the Roman world were the ones who were persecuting the church, and it was very hard for any Christian, especially a slave, many Christians were slaves, for Christians to pray for those who were in positions of authority because people who were in positions of authority oppress and persecute others. Slave masters, government officials, magistrates, they, they were corrupt, more corrupt in Rome than they are now. But we're getting there, aren't we?

So we need to pray for these people, pray for the people that we don't even necessarily like, pray for the people who are not being kind to us. Supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made for not just the people you like, but especially for those who are really persecuting you, "all people, kings and all who are in high positions." Why? "That we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way."

Listen folks, let's put our theology of prayer to work, right? A theology of prayer, which makes sense only in light of God's almighty power and his absolute sovereignty. After all, if God is not absolutely powerful and absolutely sovereign, why pray? He is absolutely powerful. He is almighty. He is sovereign over everything. So let's pray. Let's put our theology to practical use by praying for the leaders of this world.

Listen, no more fretting, no more fighting, no more anxiety, no more angry arguments. We pray. Paul wrote, 1 Timothy 2:8, he said, "I desire," you can see it there, "that in every

place that men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling." Why holy hands? Hands that are dedicated to doing God's work in a holy way. Hands that are dedicated not to our own devices, not to the pursuit of sin, not to the pursuit of selfish ambition, but hands that are holy, set apart, fit for the master's use.

We're to lift up those holy hands without any anger or quarreling. Rather than get angry about politics, rather than quarrel and debate with political opponents, alienating the people that we're trying to reach with the Gospel for the sake of temporal politics. No, we need to rest in the sovereignty of God and appeal to God in prayers of supplication, asking for his will to prevail over the things that we are unable to control. We need to pray for his will to prevail over the things that are imperfect, the things that are truly unjust, the things that are immoral, otherwise out of conformity to his will.

I mean, listen, you can look at whatever side of the political aisle and see the issues that are being raised. On the conservative side, we look at the immorality in our nation and

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we say, Wrong! On a more liberal side, they look at the injustices of whether it's a social injustice, an economic injustice, whether it's a racial injustice, and they're wrong. We can all admit that. We can't do anything about it as human beings. We need to pray and ask God to give us help, to give us grace, to bring things into conformity to his will.

Jesus said to pray this way, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." Holy be your name. That's where it starts is by acknowledging the holiness of God, and we want his name to be recognized as, holy; hallowed everywhere by everyone. "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." We want absolute conformity on earth to his will in heaven. No arguing and fighting among us. Instead, dignified trust in a sovereign God whose king, by the way, Psalm 2, whose king is already sitting on the throne.

Folks, we need to stop thinking like Republicans. We need to stop thinking like the Evangelical Right. Or if you're more liberally persuaded, you need to quit thinking like your party. We need to be thinking like God's redeemed people. Jesus said,

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"My kingdom is not of this world," so we don't need to worry about the direction of all the kingdoms of this world. They're all, all of them, are going in a Romans 1 direction. They're eventually going to unravel. All of them have; all of them will.

So let's not make the same mistakes that evangelicals made during the, the Reagan and the Bush years, putting faith in politics, trying to build an ecumenical and superficial unity by trying to create a civil religion, a non-theologically based religion, one that's nice and polite, where we all get along and we don't offend anybody's theological differences, where we respect all opinions theologically. It's just that we're going to unite against that, politics. We don't seek power and influence in this world. We're like sheep to be slaughtered. Let's keep that in mind. We're not to be out there lobbying politicians for all of our moral causes and turning the mission field into the enemy.

I realize that God has chosen some Christians to work in politics. And I realize that during election seasons, Christians are sometimes going to be brought in to work in political

campaigns. It's understandable. That's not what I'm saying here. I'm just saying let's not all get distracted by temporary causes. Our minds need to be set on heavenly things and eternal issues. You know how much evangelical money, time, and energy, and resources, not to mention people, church people, how much time, and money, and resources wasted, trying to change the world via Washington D.C.?

Over the past number of decades, one of the major figures in an organization all of you would know, but I'm not going to say it publicly, he said it privately. He looks back at all of that political involvement, and the pulling of the resources, and the attention of the churches, and Christians, and all the investment that they made, and all the influence they tried to buy, and all the co-belligerency they tried to create, and they say it was really all a waste of time. And especially if we had Hillary Clinton as our president right now, that would have put the punctuation mark on all of that, right? We've seen all that going through an eight years of an Obama Administration. We've seen all of that just being flushed.

Now that Donald Trump is in the Oval Office, do you think it's going to get morally better in our nation? What was the result of all that investment? Are we a holier people because of it? Are we a godlier nation because of all that investment? We all know the answer to that. We need to stop quarreling and fretting. We need to stop wasting our resources and investing them in the wrong places. We need to make a better stewardship by praying instead of fighting. When we do note it there in the text, our lives will be "peaceful and quiet, godly and dignified in every way."

Second thing, we need to pray for salvation. Pray for salvation. Paul continues in his instructions to Timothy, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people ..., that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people," not everyone without exception, but everyone without distinction; all people, all kinds of people, "to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

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Listen, if we are known as a people of peaceful prayer, rather than a people of political protest, well, that leaves an impression on the watching world, doesn't it? God is the one who raises up kings and nations. And then God is the one who deposes kings and nations. He raises them up; he takes them down. And all according to his sovereign purposes. And since he's taking care of all of that, well we can focus on what he has called us to do, which is to be the means of bringing the Gospel to the unbelieving world.

Now that Trump has won the presidency, and now that there is a Republican majority in Congress, it may seem easier for evangelical Christians to obey Romans 13:1 and 1 Peter 2:13, to submit to the governing authorities who exist as ministers of God. Note that they are ministers of God. And they are sent to punish those who do evil and praise those who do good.

If you want a, a nutshell version of the purpose of government, there it is: Punish the evildoers; praise those who do good. But let's not think that a Republican-controlled government is in any less need of evangelical witness than a

Democratic administration. Donald Trump, from all we can tell, is not a Christian. He needs our prayers for his salvation, for his family's sake.

From an eternal perspective, from God's perspective sitting on the throne in heaven, Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Barak Obama, all the rest of them, are all on the same side. They are rebels against his holiness. God wants us praying for them all. God is no respecter of persons. He sees deeper than political rhetoric and further than party platforms, and he judges the thoughts and the intents of the heart.

Perhaps some may be tempted to think Hillary Clinton is more clearly an unbeliever because of her aggressive and relentless advocacy for the brutality of abortion, her support and celebration of LGBT causes. But listen, folks, let's not forget that Donald Trump was a longtime supporter of abortion before he started running for the presidency. He has made a lot of money from casinos and the whole surrounding pornographic lifestyle that accompanies all of that. Las Vegas, Atlantic

City, they indulge in the same kinds of sins that the LGBT community are committing.

In spite all of that, there are an alarming number of evangelical leaders who have naïvely claimed that Donald Trump is one of us, that he's become a Christian. I don't know if any of you have heard that rumor. There is one very prominent evangelical who has been assuring everyone of Trump's conversion. He knows the person, after all, who shared the Gospel with Trump. And that would be encouraging, except for the fact that that person he's talking about is a well-known purveyor of the prosperity gospel. So if Trump has embraced that gospel, which isn't hard for me to believe because he's all about prosperity, *Make America Great Again*, and all of that; he's embraced a false gospel.

Nebraska Senator Ben Sasse once publicly called Trump to bear fruits in keeping with repentance. A senator! He said, quote, "You brag about many affairs with married women. Have you repented to harmed children and spouses? Do you think it matters?" End Quote. Good questions, Mr. Sasse, Mr. Senator.

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Where are your evangelical allies in that, crying out publicly for his repentance? Listen, until President elect Trump repents of his sins, until he exhibits a new nature, one that grows in being characterized by the fruits of repentance, rather than boasting in the works of the flesh, as he has done; well, you're going to have to excuse us for continuing to make him the subject of our evangelistic prayers.

Listen, I am not here to harp on Donald Trump. I just don't want us as evangelicals to show partiality in our words, in our prayers, in our behavior. It is a contradiction of the clear Gospel message of Jesus Christ, who said, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Whether Democratic or Republican, whether Green Party or Libertarian, or even if it is a card-carrying evangelical whose life and doctrine contradicts the Gospel, beloved, we need to call sin, sin. We need to never excuse it. We need to pray for their repentance. If we show partiality, you know what? We're just like the hypocritical Pharisees. We need to be consistent and show no favoritism whatsoever.

Paul told Titus to "Remind [Christians] to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, but instead to be gentle, to show perfect courtesy to all people." Listen, in your political discourse, your conversations with other people, especially those who disagree with you, are you showing perfect courtesy toward all people? I know I've been guilty of not showing courtesy toward people who totally disagree. I cannot understand the way they think.

I can't understand why they would make that decision or vote in that direction. I can't understand it. And I unner, I know the temptation to become embroiled in political controversy, where your temperature rises and just, it's that, fight or flight, the adrenaline's flowing, and you just want to go AGH! You can't do that. Why? Because we need to remember that we, ourselves, as Paul continues on telling Titus, "we ourselves were once foolish." Do we forget that? "We were once disobedient, we were once led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, we also were passing our days in malice and envy," we were, "hated by others and hating one another."

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Unbelievers do what unbelievers do. And we, of all people, have the theology that helps us to understand why that is so. Should we expect any different from them when they act like that? Sure, they're going to be held accountable for their sins. God is gonna do that. Our job is to leave the judgment to the Judge and to speak clearly about sin and righteousness and judgment. But to teach them an accurate Gospel. 1 Corinthians 5, "What business do I have judging outsiders?" God will judge them. We need to judge what's going on inside the church.

As Paul tells Titus, we've all been saved by God's amazing grace, and not by our own amazing works, not by our own amazing intellect, and our amazing ability to figure everything out, and our amazing ability to be holy and righteous and...no! We're not the healthy who have no need of a physician, are we? We are the sick, we are the sinners, and we need a Savior just like they do. So if it's all of grace, we had better be consistent with that theology when it comes to the way we interact with the unbelieving world. And we acknowledge God's gracious initiative in saving his people when we pray for them. When we pray, entreat God to save people.

So we pray. We pray for peace. We pray for salvation. And thirdly, we pray for repentance. We pray for repentance. You say, Didn't we just talk about that? Isn't repentance implied in praying for the salvation of these ungodly, immoral politicians? Yeah, it is. But I'm not talking about their repentance. I'm talking about *our* repentance.

I'm talking about evangelical repentance because frankly, folks, too many of our evangelical churches have been involved in silliness and shenanigans. Those are the accurate, technical, theological words. They've been involved in all of that rather than doing the hard work of staying faithful to the Gospel, on track with the Great Commission, and maintaining a holy witness in the local church. We all look in dismay as our country is losing its grip on all moral sanity.

When they celebrate every form of sexual perversion, when they invert the gender binary, that is complete abandonment of sanity. What God designed for the right ordering and functioning of society and the blessing of all of us, people are rejecting to their own demise and doom. It's an unraveling of all social

order. I mean, arguing over transgender bathrooms. Really? The NCAA penalizing North Carolina, saying, Oh, we're not going to hold our tournament there because you're not inclusive enough. Well, we can all trace the pathway of this unraveling in our country by looking at Romans 1.

Turn to Romans 1, and starting, you could really look at Romans 1:18-31, but we're, we're just gonna focus on just a couple things here, starting in verse 24. Since our society has exchanged the glory of God for the glory of self, for the glory of mankind, Romans 1:24, "Therefore," because of that exchange, because God says, Look, you want to love yourself, here you go, "God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves."

Well, that's happened in our country, but it didn't stop there, did it? That happened in the free-love era of the 60s and 70s. It didn't stop there, though, verses 26 and 27, sexual immorality perverted even further, God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Women exchanging natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; the men also, likewise, like

brute beasts, people have been consumed with passion for one another, committing shameless acts with each other and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Do you know what the due penalty for their error is? It's not AIDS, folks. That's just a consequence. The due penalty of that error of homosexuality is homosexuality. You want to abandon the image of God and worshiping him, and you want to worship at the image of man, you're so in love with yourself, there you go. That's the due penalty. That is the penalty that is due that kind of an error of abandonment of the worship of the holy God, the Creator, and worshiping the self. Here, you get to have a mirror image of yourself. God handed them over. The Obergefell-Hodges decision from the Supreme Court, June 26, 2015, that put our nation's imprimatur on same sex marriage, acknowledging it, legalizing it, legitimizing it as a fundamental right. That's the language they used. Homosexual sin, well, that's happened, too, in our country.

And so, verses 28 and following, "Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up." That's a phrase that

is repeated over and over, "God gave them up," he gave them up, he gave them up, "to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done." Listen, that's what we've been watching in these two political campaigns, a pitched battle between two debased minds, propped up by other debased minds.

Listen, how did we get here? How did we get here in our nation? Our Christian nation, by the way, known throughout the world as a Christian nation. How did we get here? Sadly, it's not without evangelical complicity in the matter. How can we be regarded as a Christian nation and legislate to protect the kind of immorality that we have all participated in? How can we entertain ourselves with the kind of immorality that is constantly being pumped out by Hollywood and call ourselves a Christian nation? I mean, the Muslims around the world look at the way we treat our daughters through Hollywood, and they say, You're more righteous than us?

Colorado, seen by many as the Mecca of evangelical Christianity because of the large concentration of parachurch organizations in our state, how is it that our beautiful state,

our Christian, evangelical state populated by so many evangelicals has so little voice in influencing non-Christians toward righteousness?

We've legalized marijuana, and now, the deadly Proposition 106 overwhelming voted in, giving the thumbs up, giving people the right to die with dignity. You people who are a little older, you should be concerned about that. Watch that right, in a few short years, turn into a responsibility to die with dignity. Because it already has done that in Europe. How is it that this great Christian nation that it's become so anti-Christian? How did evangelicals fail so terribly to influence non-Christians around them?

Well for that, you have to go back decades, folks, and you have to go back before the 60s and the 70s, to the mid-twentieth century, or post-war America. And take note of all the churches that failed to exercise church discipline for those who pursued unbiblical divorces, those who were engaging in premarital or extramarital sexual activity. You know who the victims of divorce are? Children; as they watch the adults in their lives

shred the covenant that they made before God and man. They come to believe that this Bible that everyone talks so highly of as inerrant, infallible, authoritative and all sufficient, well, that Bible is just a bunch of talk, isn't it? All the adults in my life have let me down. Adults wrote this, too, right? Why should I trust it?

Listen that's what they've come to believe. And that's the complicity of evangelical churches, which has reeked devastation on families perpetuated further in infidelity as men are not the men that they should be, treating their wives with disdain. And women get sick of it, and they try to throw off the yoke. They sin themselves. It encourages the abandonment, frankly, of a younger generation, who want to get rid of all traditional family values because traditional family values to them means more abuse, more divorce, more infidelity, no faithfulness.

And they start to construct and embrace any definition of family that you want to embrace. That is why Hillary Clinton wrote the book, *It Takes a Village*. It certainly doesn't take two parents because two parents cannot be relied upon anymore.

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It takes a village to raise a child. The way she puts it, it takes a state.

After all, if evangelicals are tolerating divorce and infidelity, and they're not practicing church discipline in their churches; if they don't have the temerity and the boldness and the courage to look a person in the eye and call sin, sin, and call them to repentance; and if they don't repent, to say, Listen, you can't identify with the church if you're not going to repent. If we don't have the temerity to do that, to practice what we preach, well, then this whole thing must not be very meaningful, right?

So beloved, in the spirit of Nehemiah, Nehemiah 1:1-9, he personally didn't participate in every single one of the sins of his fathers, did he? And yet he took responsibility for it. He prayed as if he himself were guilty of all those same sins. Beloved, we need to pray in the same way. We need to take responsibility for evangelical complicity in our nation's descent into anti-Christian sentiment, and even sometimes, to our shame, our own participation in those sins. We need to

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confess our sins to God, repent, pursue righteousness, showing no favoritism, no partiality. As Peter said, "It is time for judgment to begin," Where? "the household of God," right?

So God has been very merciful to us, no doubt giving us a little time to catch our breath, to regroup, to think carefully, and to get our house in order. For the moment, we're not going to be pursued by an aggressive anti-Christian Democratic administration, and we can thank God for that, legitimately rejoice in that. That's a good thing. But this respite is not given to us to rest. It's not given to us to relax, to just take more vacations, to grow in prosperity, to continually "paneling our houses," as the prophet said, when the church of God lies in ruins. It's time for us to regroup, stabilize and get back on track.

So what does that look like? Let's consider a second key word for this morning. A second key word: Stabilize. Stabilize. Christians should anchor in deeply and stand firm. Anchor in deeply and stand firm. For this second keyword, stabilize, let's turn in our Bibles to 1 Corinthians 15:58. 1 Corinthians 15:58.

This verse is at the end, it's, it's often quoted right out of context and it's understandable why. Because it's such a powerful, impactful verse, but we need to realize it comes at the end of Paul's argument that spans 15 chapters.

And there in 1 Corinthians 15:58, Paul says, "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." Paul writes this exhortation to people he calls, "My beloved brothers." And if you know anything about the rest of the contents of this first letter to the Corinthian church, the brothers and sisters in this church are hardly exemplary Christians.

This is not a letter of commendation. It's a letter of stern rebuke. Nevertheless, they are beloved brothers, Christians beloved by God, accepted in the beloved because of Jesus Christ, and to those who heed the rebuke in this letter, those are the brothers, those who heed the rebuke, they are commended warmly; rejoiced over in the second letter.

And it's to them that Paul gives this command using a single verb of command. It's a verb of being; that is, be continually being this way. Then he gives three adjectives that complete that command: be being steadfast, be being immoveable, and be abounding. Abounding, steadfast, immoveable, and abounding. Just quickly, let's take those thoughts one at a time and get a little clarity on that three-part exhortation to the Corinthians because, beloved, we need to hear this today.

Be steadfast. First, be steadfast. It's the word *hedraios*, *hedraios*, and another way to translate that is, stand firm, or be firmly established. Paul used a related word, *hedraioma*, in 1 Timothy 3:15, where he called the church "the pillar and the buttress of the truth." Buttress, foundation: that's the word *hedraioma*. The idea here is to remain fixed and established, anchored deeply into a bedrock foundation.

The next word there, be immoveable. Immoveable, it's the word *ametakinetos*. *Ametakinetos*. And the last part of that word is the root of the word, kinetic. Do you guys know what that means? That refers kinetic, you've got children like that,

right, who are just always in motion. They don't stop moving. When they finally go to bed at night, it's just out of pure collapse. But they wake up like three hours later and they're ready to go again. *Meta*, with, *kinetos*, in motion; with motion. There's an alpha-privative that's prefixed to the front of the word, and that makes the whole thought of, with constant motion, negative; not with constant motion, not kinetic. Just like parents want all their good children to be.

There's a related verb, *metakineto*, and it refers to something that's always in swift motion. It's constantly changing, always in flux. And Paul says, Don't be always in motion. Don't be always in flux and changing. Be immovable. So you can see how these two ideas relate, right? If you're going to be immovable and not always in motion, that means you need to stay firmly, deeply anchored into the truth.

There is a clear parallel in Colossians 1:23 where Paul encourages the Colossians to "continue in the faith, stable and steadfast," there's the first word. And then, "Not shifting away from the hope of the gospel that you've heard." Not shifting

away from the hope of the Gospel that you've heard. That's the idea of immoveable. You've got to auger deep into the truth because if you don't, you will be uprooted, and you'll be blown about with the cultural winds.

The contrast is in Ephesians 4:14. Those who are not steadfast and immoveable who are "like children, tossed to and fro by the waves and," they're, "carried about by every wind of doctrine." Listen, being deeply rooted, deeply anchored, that makes us immoveable. And that means we are able to grow in strength and maturity, and that opens up the potential for us to be fruitful. Fruitful.

Here's where we're going to look at that third keyword. We need to pray, we need to stabilize, and then thirdly, we need to build. We need to build. Christians should build healthy mature churches. Churches. Listen, for far too long in our country, evangelicalism has been marked by American individualism. We tend to think very individualistically about our spiritual life. It's about me and my devotions. It's about me and my walk with God. It's about me and my worship experience. Listen, beloved,

it is not about you. It's about one individual, Jesus Christ, and then us as his worshiping people. We're to think corporately. Are you your brother's keeper? Yes, indeed you are.

Third word there in 1 Corinthians 15:58, the final word of this three-part command: be abounding in this corporate work. Be abounding. And this is where we're going to talk about building up from that prayerful, stable foundation. It's the word, abounding, is *perisseuo*. It's a word that indicates, richness. It indicates abundance, this remarkable fullness, and excellence in, in progress. It's abounding. And there are two modifiers there, always abounding, that is, we don't take a vacation from abounding. We don't take a break from it. We don't say, You know, I've been abounding enough today. I need to stop abounding and just relax, get a little me-time in front of the television. No! No! Always abounding.

And then, number two, abounding, in a particular regard; namely, the work of the Lord. The work of the Lord. Listen, the work of the Lord, is not the, every man doing what is right in his own eyes, concept of ministry where anyone with a vision

from God, or anyone with a ministry idea or a pet project or whatever; they tell you that God spoke to them or God is leading them to do whatever, that he put it on their heart. I love that one, put it on my heart.

Which means you have to support their wacky idea for ministry. You've got to fund it. They got the vision, after all, you got to fund it. No, no, the Lord himself, thankfully, otherwise the tail would be wagging the dog everywhere, right? The Lord himself has prescribed the work. He has actually defined what it looks like. He has circumscribed this work and called it, the work of the Lord, and it's in a particular realm. And since it's the Lord's work and the Lord has truly spoken in his Word, that is where we are going to find it circumscribed, right? It's only when we, as Christians, are anchored and immovable in the truth of God's Word that we can be productive, and fruitful, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, which is delineated here in God's Word. Does that make sense?

What are we as Christians to be doing, exactly? Well, in a word, it's *mathateuo*, *mathateuo*, make disciples, make disciples.

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It's the Great Commission, Matthew 28:19-20. Go ahead and turn there. Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus said, you should be able to quote this by memory, right? "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

Listen, there is only one command there, it's the command, make disciples, but the prerequisite for making disciples is that you've got to go and find them. So go and when you go out, go find them, and then baptize them as disciples and then teach them. Notice the command is not, Go make converts; it's, Go make disciples. We're not concerned with getting names on a list. We're not concerned with counting noses and nickels.

We're not concerned with numbers. Go make converts. No! We're concerned about disciples; quality, not quantity. It's not, Go entertain seekers. That's not the command. Let's make disciples. It's not, Go provide therapy and help people on their journey toward recovery or self-discovery or self-fulfillment, or whatever. No! "Go make disciples." And we're to be baptizing

them into, look at it there, the Trinitarian Faith. Trinitarian Faith in the name, singular, of the Triune God. Three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Listen, that means there is a profound doctrinal element in this endeavor that we call, the work of the Lord. And that comes in evangelism. I mean, we are getting into issues of the incarnation, the hypostatic union, the Trinitarian relations. We're getting into heavy doctrine as we evangelize. Look, as much as the Romans Road and the Four Spiritual Laws, and all that, have helped people, do not stop there in your evangelism. The tract is not enough. So let them read the tract or talk to them, use the program or whatever; Evangelism Explosion or whatever you use.

But beloved, teach them. On the front end, teach them what they're getting into. Tell them the truth about who God is. Tell them that Jesus said in Luke 9:23, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. That's a heavy command if you unpack it. Deny yourself? You mean all my dreams and ambitions? Yeah, that goes. But what about my

plans for, yep, that, too. But I'm so talented. I just have so much potential to unleash on the world that they need to pay me for. That goes too. All of it is sacrificed before Christ. His ambitions, his will, his desire, that become you. "Let him deny himself and take up his cross."

Do you know what "take up his cross" means? It's like inviting people to join you at the electric chair. The cross is not a piece of jewelry; it's a torture implement that leads to death. It's the death of you. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." Follow me, what's that? Oh, the Lordship of Christ. You've got to present that to people on the front end. Don't backdoor it to them.

Don't give them the shine and the gloss of the promises of heaven and a better life on the front end and then get them in. And then now, Well, there are these other things you need to know about. Here's the fine print I didn't tell you about that earlier. Sorry about that. I just really wanted to count you as a member of my church so we could get your money and in the

seat. No, you tell them on the front end exactly what the Gospel is.

And those people who embrace it, those are God's people. You baptize them. You bring them into the fellowship of the church. But then, after you do that, that doesn't, the teaching doesn't stop. You're teaching them for the rest of their lives. Why the rest of their lives? First, because Jesus commanded quite a bit, and to understand it carefully is going to take a long time. Secondly, Jesus doesn't just want people to know the facts of what he commanded like memorizing a list or something. Jesus said, "Teach them to observe all that I commanded you."

Understanding his commandments is simply the, the starting point for obeying his commandments. We're to observe all that Jesus commanded his Apostles, and not just to hear the commands, to know them intellectually. Jesus wants us to obey his Word. You cannot obey what you do not understand, so you must be taught and you will be greatly helped toward obedience to do what you've actually learned when you observe it happening in the local church.

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It's about mentorship. It's about discipleship. It's about life on life. It's about seeing striving families, striving toward healthiness and toward maturity. You're wanting to, to watch them in motion, to learn from them. We need to learn with each other. We need to be a body that is joined together, growing together, discipling one another, not fractured, not everybody doing what's right in his own eyes, not everybody fractured and doing their own thing. Not everybody, some involved over there and some involved over there and they're just like sheep without a shepherd. No. We need to be joined together under the Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, and joined together, obeying this command. When you see other Christians learning, and observing, and obeying, you're going to know how to walk in wisdom and maturity in your own life as well, right?

And that's why the work of the Lord is accomplished in, in and through all these local assemblies of Christians called, churches. Do you know what the church word is? It's *ekklesia*. Do you know what that word means? It means, assembly. Assembly. There were political assemblies, there were social *ekklesias*. This is the Lord's *ekklesia* here in the local church. The

proliferation of all these mega-wealthy international parachurch organizations. I know much of it was well-intentioned at one time, but all of it has resulted in actually detracting from the work of the Lord through local churches. Why? Because so many of them have failed to do the Lord's work in the Lord's way. They don't submit themselves to the authority of the local church. They're underneath their own authority. They're doing their own thing. They're qualifying their own people. They've got their own structure, their own model.

So many people have left the local church to try to do the Lord's work in some other way, in ways that make sense to a business man, in ways that make sense to an entrepreneur, in ways that make sense to all other talents and giftings. And they're either ignorant of the need to work within the local church and under its structures and under its authority, or they become frustrated with that and they go do their own thing. They venture out on their own. They fly solo. They join some parachurch organization. They set up their own authority structure apart from the local church. They determine their own mission. They qualify their own leadership, and they essentially do what it right in their own eyes.

You might find this surprising, but Jesus seems to have thought this thing through. He seems to have prepared for it, this thing called, Doing the Lord's work. He planned for it. He had his Apostle write down the way that the work of the Lord should be accomplished. We've been here before, but turn back to Ephesians chapter 4. Ephesians 4, that is where the pattern for the church for doing the Lord's work is clearly outlined. After winning the victory through the cross, Jesus ascended to heaven, and then from heaven he gave gifts, and he gave gifted men.

He gave Apostles and prophets. What are they? They are the ones who lay the doctrinal foundations of the church. That's been laid. We have it canonized here in the New Testament for us. He also gave the evangelists. Who are they? Are they the people out sharing the Gospel all the time? No. They're the ones who have clarity about the Gospel. They are thinkers about the Gospel. They have Gospel precision. They understand apologetics. They understand other worldviews, and they know how to train you to be better proclaimers of the Gospel. Those are the evangelists. Christ gave those. He thought those were necessary, very necessary.

He also gave the shepherds and the teachers. The shepherds are the pastors. The teachers are people who teach. They're joined together in this text in the grammar, that shepherds are actually like teachers and teachers are shepherding in their thinking. They're kind of joined together under one article there. I won't go into that. But all these guys are given to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, "for the building up of the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith," not faith not your subjective feelings—no! The faith is a doctrinal body, content, *the* faith, unity in that and unity in the knowledge of the Son of God. Why? So that we can "grow to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Look, the work of the Lord, it's done in and through the Lord's churches. Local churches, which he has equipped with gifted men. They are called. They are gifted. They are qualified according to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, and they are ordained to do always and only what God has actually called them to do, which is what? To equip the saints.

I had a dear lady come to me yesterday after this message and she was almost wagging her finger in my face, saying, How dare you didn't organize your church politically to go out and do the..." I said, You know, ma'am, dear, dear woman, look at 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, and tell me where I'm held accountable to do what you're telling me to do? Look, the evangelists, pastors, and teachers, they teach, train, and equip Christians. You want to go organize a political rally? Go do it. Do it as equipped Christians, though. Be equipped for the ministry and primarily focused on building up the body of Christ. Until those Christians come to unity in doctrine, that is, faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and to a maturity that conforms to the person of Jesus Christ, until that happens fully and completely, our work is not done.

We need to continue focusing here. The end result is going to be doctrinal unity, Christ-like maturity, unshakable strength, so that when congregants, when Christians go out and they do wantta go stand in front of an abortion clinic, they are going to be good witnesses, not argumentative, condemning Pharisees. Keep mark of that maturity. It's a church filled with

Christians who are marked by a theological discernment, and I'm afraid that is not the mark of today's evangelicalism. It's very sad, but there seems to be no sense of discernment among many evangelicals today.

You don't need to turn back there, but you may have noticed back in 1 Corinthians 15:58, the word, therefore. "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable," and all that. We skipped it, but we'll address that word now. The word, therefore, points back to what's immediately preceding, which in the immediate context refers to the doctrinal deviation that entered into the Corinthian church, the denial of the principle of bodily resurrection, the very principle that undergirds the foundational doctrine of the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. That was being taught in the church.

There were some false teachers who entered the church without notice, it would seem, and they were denying the principle of bodily resurrection. They were teaching it openly. And that was not the only doctrinal error in Corinth. Others claimed that the Holy Spirit was speaking through them and

relaying this message by prophecy: Jesus is anathema. Still others were teaching that all bodily impulses and appetites should be indulged. On and on it goes. They're teaching all those things right in the Corinthian church! You say, How could they do that? Those teachings are patently false, totally opposed to Christianity, utterly undermining the faith. And you're absolutely right. But let's be careful to examine our own camp to see what errors we've committed.

David Wells wrote a book back in the early 90s, *No Place for Truth*. It's subtitled with the sorrowful question, *Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* And the book expresses his dismay as he tries to answer that question. With sadness he says, "I have watched with growing disbelief as the evangelical church has cheerfully plunged into astounding theological illiteracy." He's right.

Listen, Paul's letter of admonition to the Corinthians it's really a letter to today's evangelical church. He traced the errors that he confronted in the church; you're going to see it. It's pretty close to our evangelical homes. The doctrinal error

of chapter 15 is connected to the ecclesiological errors of chapters 12 to 14, which are connected to the practical errors, personal errors of chapters 8 to 10. And those are connected to the moral errors of chapters 5 to 7, which are connected to the fundamental error in chapters 1 to 4 of a heart of pride.

So going back the other direction, starting with the heart of pride and drawing a connection to our evangelical moment, we can see the heart of evangelical pride, touting external forms of success, bragging about money and numbers. That pride blinds us to significant moral errors. Does anybody remember the fall of Ted Haggard, the former president of the National Association of Evangelicals? He was caught buying methamphetamine from a male prostitute.

All the moral scandals of evangelicals are part and parcel of practical errors within the church, ecclesiological errors of evangelicals. I mean it's all diminished the significance and role of the local church. It's turned church services into entertainment venues and expected very little from Christians and their leadership. So it's no wonder, really, that doctrinal

errors and heresies continue slipping by, entering the church through hirelings and false teachers, who continue to be peddling their books to our people in the Family Christian Bookstores.

Listen, if we invest our lives to build strong, healthy, mature churches, that's not going to happen. Christians will become strong and discerning, no longer "children tossed to and fro by the waves, carried about by every wind of doctrine." Back to 1 Corinthians 15:58, "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." The more you know and understand, the more you submit to and obey all that the Lord has commanded, the more you're going to be filled with assurance and hope because you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. As long as you stick to the plan and do the Lord's work in the Lord's way, your labor, your blood, sweat, and tears, it's not in vain. It's not a waste of time.

That is such an encouragement, isn't it? It provides us with assurance and hope that when we stick to God's plan, the

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Lord's plan, when we study Scripture to see what his work actually is and we commit ourselves to do it, none of our labors are going to go unnoticed. Our sovereign God, he sees everything, every thought and intention of the heart and every work. If your labor is not in the Lord, then it's in vain.

There's a lot of, in vain, work going on in the name of the Lord, isn't there? It's costly. It's expensive. It's in full swing, always in motion. But listen, Paul warns the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, "Let each one take care how he builds upon the foundation laid by Apostles and prophets." Be careful how you build. No one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, or wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire. The fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire."

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Beloved, let's not come to the end our lives wait to find out on that day that all of our evangelical labors have been in vain. Invest wisely, labor smartly. Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your in-the-Lord-work is not in vain. Pray, stabilize, and build. The Lord has given us a little time to do that, a respite. So let's make the most of it, shall we? Let's pray.

Our Father, we give you thanks for helping us to think biblically about all that's happened in our country. You've given us wisdom above so many of the pollsters and the pundits and all the bright cerebrals in our contemporary society. We have more knowledge in all of our teachers. Why? Because we stick close to your Word. We have the very mind of Christ written in the New Testament. And those who study the mind of Christ tap in to all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Help us to be a people marked by that wisdom and knowledge.

Help us to live according to that understanding. None of us on our own are anything. We're nothing great. We're not wise.

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We're not noble. We're not mighty. We're not strong. We're not regarded in this world.

We are truly jars of clay. But inside of our jar of clay you've placed a great treasure. And the only way that that treasure is going to be exposed is if that jar is broken. Let us be a broken jar of clay, revealing the treasure that's deep inside. Let us let that treasure shine forth. Let us be a people marked by good works, zealous for good works, preaching an accurate Gospel that we know and love, through which, and because of which we worship you. We pray all glory and honor would be to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. In his name we pray, amen.