

Pray, Stabilize, and Build, Part 1

Selected Scriptures

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 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.

Jesus told his disciples, John 15:20, "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 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

and 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." 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 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.

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, "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 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, money, and resources are 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 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. 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 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."

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.

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, and to show perfect courtesy to all people.” Listen, in your political discourse, your conversation 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 disagree. I cannot understand the way they think.

I can’t understand why they would make that decision or vote that in direction. I can’t understand it. I know the temptation to become embroiled in political controversy, when your temperature rises. It’s that, fight or flight, response. 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, “For 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.”

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 going to 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? 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 just going to 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 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?

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 they 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. 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, in 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 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. 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.