

Pray, Stabilize, and Build, Part 2

Selected Scriptures

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.

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 immoveable. So you can see how these two ideas relate, right? If you're going to be immoveable 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. What are we as Christians to be doing, exactly? Well, in a word, it's *mathateuo*, *mathateuo*, make disciples, make disciples. 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.

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 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 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.

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's 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.

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 in 1 Corinthians 15:58, the word, therefore. "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immoveable," 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.

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.

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 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."

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. 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.