

How the Early Church Grew: Not Seminary, But Discipleship

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By Bob Vincent

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Trinity Presbyterian Church
2623 N Robison Road
Texarkana, TX 75501

Website: www.rbvincent.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/rbvincent

Scripture text is taken from Acts 16, beginning at verse one, and you'll find that in the Pew Bibles on page 1720, beginning at Acts 16, beginning at verse one.

31 He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. 2 The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. 3 Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. 4 As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers. (Acts 16:1–5)

The word of the Lord. [“Thanks be to God.”]

May we pray.

Lord, please help me. as I do part one of this sermon on why the early church grew so incredibly rapidly, and effectively, and that over the space of three centuries came to control the Roman Empire by the massive numbers of those who followed Jesus. Help me, Lord, for Jesus' sake, amen.

How Was Timothy Trained for the Ministry?

Now this is part one of why the early church grew. And we notice something here that's rather profound. I want us to focus on Timothy this morning because it's interesting that on Paul's **First Missionary Journey**, he had preached there in Derby and in Lystra. He had been terribly persecuted. In fact, where Timothy is from, that's where Paul performed a great miracle on a man who had been lame from his mother's womb. And when people came down there and they began to attack Paul, those pagans who were offering sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas, suddenly turned on Paul, and they stoned him, and they thought they had killed him.

When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. 13 The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them. 14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: 15 "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. 16 In the past, he let all nations go their own way. 17 Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." 18 Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them. 19 Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. 20 But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. (Acts 14:11-20)

That's where Timothy is from. And Timothy is one of those disciples who began to be a disciple that day. Remember that the method of the first century church was to take the synagogues or places of worship of the Jewish people and use them as a base of operations to reach others with the gospel.

In the Fulness of Time, God Prepared the World for the Gospel.

That's an important truth. It's amazing how scripture tells us that in the fullness of time, God sent forth his son (Galatians 4:4-5). And in the fullness of time, the world had been conquered by the Greeks, and that's significant. Remember the Babylonian captivity, which sort of continued the Assyrian Empire, and then how Babylon fell to the Persians, and then how the Persians were defeated by Alexander the Great.

Alexander was greatly used by God, even though he was a pagan, because Alexander had a religious idea that he wanted to spread. And that religious idea was every single human being needs to become a Greek. That's an interesting religion, isn't it? Must become a Greek. And so therefore the Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, Socrates; the Greek playwrights such as Euripides and Aeschylus and others, and the Greek language became known throughout the entire inhabited world. The Greeks called it the *oikumene* (*oikouménē*, οἰκουμένη), the inhabited world of people who had civilization.

So, wherever civilization was, there was the Greek language as a kind of *lingua franca*. And that means that even in Rome itself, when Caesar Augustus made a joke, he made it in Greek.

When he made a joke about Herod the Great, and he said that it's better to be Herod's *hoos* (hoos, ὄς) than Herod's *hwuyas* (huiós, υἱός). The word *hoos* in Greek means pig. And the word *hwuyos* in Greek means son—because Herod had murdered some of his sons because he was a megalomaniacal maniac. But Herod practiced Judaism, even though he was not full-blooded Jewish, he practiced Judaism, and so that's why Augustus, Octavian, made the joke, better to be Herod's *hoos* (hoos, ὄς) than Herod's *hwuyas* (huiós, υἱός)—play on words, play on words, double meanings, double entendre. They still make us laugh today, don't they?

And so anyhow, the Greek language was coextensive with the Roman Empire. And something else occurred, that the people who had been in exile, first under the Assyrians, 722, when Samaria fell, and then in 586 when Jerusalem fell, all of those Jewish people in exile, they established places to worship. So, they had synagogues throughout those conquered territories. And that prepared the way for world missions the likes of which we've never seen in the history of the world. And so, what happens is that when

Paul began his **First Missionary Journey**, he and Barnabas travel first to Cyprus and then throughout Asia Minor, and they begin to spread the gospel, even though they're terribly persecuted.

And so during the **First Missionary Journey**, you discover something, and I'd like us to turn back in our Bibles for a moment, to Acts 14, and if you look at page 1717, where it says, in Lystra and Derby, and that's the story I just recounted, and then I want you to look at verse 21, and that is Acts 14:21.

They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. (Acts 14:21)

Now you see what he's done, he and Barnabas? Paul has been stoned to death—He really didn't die, but they thought he was dead, and yet he returns. Why? Because Paul was consumed with sharing the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ with every creature everywhere. Why? Because here's the reality.

The Gospel Gives us the Only Way to Heaven.

Whether you're a Greek or a Jew, whether you're a pagan or a practitioner of some other religion like Orthodox Judaism, which is the religion of the Pharisees, there's no way to enter heaven with your sins. And only the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ can make us fit for heaven because we're all sinners. We all come short of being what we (think we) are, and we have a great ability to deceive ourselves, thinking that we're really good people, when simply what we're doing is, in our blindness, hurting other people, persecuting them severely.

Sort of like something I put on Facebook yesterday, and I had the Hebrew up there, which nobody could read, and I had the Greek, which some people can read, and in the middle, I wrote something out, and that is, apart from a standard outside of ourselves, we will always think that we're doing good when we hurt other people.

And I quoted from the end of the book of Judges, that's what the Hebrew is about, and the Greek from the Greek translation. "In those days, there was

no king in Israel. And everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (Judges 21:25)

בימים ההם אין מלך בישראל איש הישר בעיניו יעשה:

When humans do not hold to a moral standard outside themselves, they can steal, defraud and hurt others, break their promises, murder, and even commit genocide, while genuinely believing those they harm “deserve” what they get.

They can even congratulate themselves as “spiritual” people and are completely justified in the destruction they leave in their wake, using bizarre sophistry, especially in denying the humanity of those they harm—history bears overwhelming testimony to this.

ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκεῖναις οὐκ ἦν βασιλεὺς ἐν Ἰσραὴλ· ἄνθρωπος ἕκαστος τὸ εὐθὲς ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῦ ἐποίει.

And that’s the nature of the world we’re in. We live in a terrible time in our own nation’s history because we’ve removed a standard of absolute truth. And people argue and say, well, I’m a good person. And the fact is, apart from God’s law, you think you’re a good person, but the reality is when I measure myself, first by the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5), and then by the two summaries of that, love God with all my heart and my neighbor as myself (Matthew 22:37-40), and then by the exposition of that in the life of the Lord Jesus, I can only conclude one thing: I am a hell-deserving wretch and without hope except for God’s sovereign mercy.

And you know, if you join a Presbyterian church, you have to confess that, that you are without hope except for God’s sovereign mercy.

So, Paul had a passion to reach the world with the gospel of Jesus. Why? Because the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. Paul did not want people to die and go to hell, and that’s the destiny of most of humanity. And Paul resisted that with all his heart, willing to go back into a city where they had stoned him and left him for dead.

And what he discovers as he goes there in verse 21 of Acts 14, “They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples,”

because they reached people in the Jewish synagogue, which was a base where people had a knowledge of God's Word.

But they also, through that, reached the pagan world because the pagan people realized their religions were foolishness and empty, and they were always looking for something more than what they had. And so then, in the next sentence, it says:

Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (Acts 14:21).

Look at verse 22:

Strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith (Acts 14:22).

Now this is important. In other words, they're revisiting this church, this gathering of believers in these cities. Now notice in the next sentence there:

"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. (Acts 14:22).

And Paul certainly knew it, and those believers really understood it. I mean, here's a man who's been stoned and left for dead. But God raised him up. And he's come back here to share the good news with us again. But what he's done is this.

After Sowing the Seed, Paul and his Companions Returned to Choose Leaders for the Church.

Have you ever gone hunting and set a trap? On my lake where we live there are alligators. And one time I went out with a group of alligator hunters. I followed them. Back then I used to have a boat, and someone once said, "What are the two happiest days in a man's life? The day he buys a boat and the day he sells it."

Anyhow, I followed them as they went hunting alligators, and what they had done is to take rancid chicken or beef spleen and put it on a big hook with a very thick rope, and they attached it using a very thin line to a branch. And that rope then went around and was tied to the base of a tree. So, as we're

going, I noticed that all those beef spleens and all of those rancid chickens were still there dripping in the water. But finally, we came to one, and we saw that the rope was taunt. And that meant that an alligator had leapt up and got that chicken or beef spleen and taken it down with him into the depths. And then he discovered—if you ever had acid reflux, you know, this was worse than acid reflux, because it hurt him inside, and he's struggling to get free, but the more he struggles, the more indigestion he's got as that hook digs into him.

What happens to an alligator if they don't get him, is that the acid in an alligator's system is so strong, it will dissolve that hook eventually. And that's why you don't find bones if you want to dispose of a body. You make sure the alligators eat it. So, anyhow. So, I watched them, and they began to pull it up, as one man was there with a .22 rifle.

As soon as the alligator broke the water, he fired and hit that alligator between the eyes. Alligators have tiny, tiny brains, and you don't want to miss. And the reason they shoot him with a .22 is that the alligator skin from his chin all the way down is the valuable part. Nobody wears boots if Quentin had alligator boots, which he doesn't have, nobody wears alligator boots or alligator belts made out of the upper part of the alligator. That's the awful looking stuff. It's not comfortable and smooth, but this part is. And so, they shot him with a .22. They had baited it. Now, that extensive illustration is still a straight-up point.

They had preached the Word of God, and the Word of God had borne fruit. And many, many months later, they go back and visit these towns, and they discover things. They discover that there are people who are true believers. Now notice, I think this is very important.

The New Testament Knows Nothing of One Person in Charge: Every Congregation Should Have Bishops and Elders Leading it.

Look at verse 23:

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders (plural) for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. (Acts 14:23).

This is a very critical verse, and I want to address an issue.

Why Did the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches Lose the Frontier?

Why did the Presbyterians lose the frontier? I'm going to tell you why. Because the Presbyterians came up with a cockamamie idea that you need to have people go to seminary in order to become preachers.

Now I'm grateful for a seminary education, but there would have been no first century church at all if, say, take Timothy, who had learned the scriptures from his Jewish mother and Jewish grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5), had had . . . "Well, now, Timothy, you need to uproot yourself. Go to Jerusalem and study at the school there."

That is not how the first century church operated. And yet I've got to tell you this. Again, I'm grateful for a seminary education. And I'm grateful for learning the languages. I learned Greek first by correspondence before I ever went off to college. That was in the spring and summer of 1965. And then I took my first class of Hebrew in 1969.

But I'm going to tell you something because I know preachers. I don't know. any preacher firsthand who reads through the Greek New Testament every year. I do. And I'm not saying that to brag; I'm simply saying I enjoy it. It's better than crossword puzzles at my age, because you have to exercise this part of your body as the rest of your body. But I read through the Greek New Testament every year, and I also read a portion of Hebrew every day.

So, I read a chapter of Greek and a portion of Hebrew, I'm keeping my brain working. But here's the deal for me, and this is what I'm trying to emphasize. It's great to be able to watch TV in living color as over against black and white TV, and knowledge of the language gives you that.

But what I'm saying to you is that the Presbyterian Church and the Reformed churches, as a general rule, made a man-made idea imperative. And so, we lost the frontier. How was it that the Baptists and the Methodists multiplied so readily? Here's how.

How Did the First Century Church Train People for the Gospel Ministry?

They took young men like Timothy, and they disciplined them. They had them apprentice themselves to a pastor. And I'm working with a young man now, trying to apprentice him. I gave him a systematic theology book to study, and I directed him to a website that a friend of mine, Richard Pratt, with a PhD from Harvard, set up called Third Mil, and it enables people throughout the world to be able to watch online if they have access to the internet, and if they don't, to watch on DVDs—a full seminary course. And they're translating those courses in six major languages of the world. I commend that work: <https://thirdmill.org>.

But again, I'm coming back to, what did Paul do with Timothy? He took him along. He made him a disciple of himself. And we find as we go through the book of Acts, not only Timothy, but other people are there learning from Paul and being disciplined by him. The point I want to make is that they ordained elders with no significant training in every city. No significant training.

What Is an Elder?

What is an elder? The job of an elder is not the job of a deacon. The job of the deacons is taking care of the church, its finances, its property, and making sure that God's people have enough food to live on. That's the job of a deacon, and churches who do away with that end up destroying themselves.

What is the job of an elder? An elder's job is to preach! An elder's job is to preach! An elder's job is to preach! That's the job of the elder. To devote himself or herself to the Scriptures so as to be able to present God's Word to God's people clearly and to be able to refute people who contradict the Scriptures (Acts 6:1-5; 1 Timothy 3:1-4; Titus 1:5-9). That's the job of an elder.

And I discovered one thing in this church when we ordained a new elder a couple of years ago. There's hardly a person in this church who's not been ordained as an elder. That's insane!

“How can you say that?”

I'll tell you why. Because being an elder is not an honorary position. It's not like being put on a board. I've been on several boards. I was on the boards of

the Boy Scouts over the years, including on the board of the Southern Region. And so, I've been on a lot of boards. A lot of boards people are on are honorary.

The office of the elder is not an honorary position. If a person cannot open this book and explain it to you, that person should not be an elder.

And as I look at the Presbyterian Church in the 20th century, wow! No wonder the Presbyterian Church went into apostasy. Because the elders are not there simply to help the preacher. The elders are there who are equal with the preacher because an elder should be able to know his Bible and present the Bible to other people.

So, what kind of lunacy did the Presbyterian Church experience? It experienced this. People who should have simply been deacons were made elders because, well, we ought to make so-and-so an elder.

I had that happen in the church I served for 40 years in Alexandria. And what it was, somebody said, I want to nominate so-and-so. The woman wanted her husband to be an elder. He was a fine man. He was a close friend of mine. I was with him when he died. But he was not competent to be an elder. He was a kind man. He was a loving man. He was a gentle man. And his wife manipulated it so that the other elders on the session were manipulated into allowing his name to be put forward, and he was elected an elder because it was viewed as an honorary position.

May God Almighty deliver the church from honorary elders, and may he grant to every Christian church, elders, who have studied this book and can present to you, what does the Bible say?

How Did they Find Pastors?

And that's what we see here in Acts chapter 14 that they went through in a very short time. What did they discover? They discovered the people who were eager to know God's Word and who devoted themselves to God's Word and who were there at prayer meeting. Notice what I said, were there at prayer meeting.

They saw those who had been won to Christ after a period of months as they go and revisit the churches, those people who were praying together and

studying together were made elders, and they were ordained as such by the laying on of hands. And we see that profoundly.

Then they returned, they end the **First Missionary Journey**, and you know about the first General Assembly, the first Church Council in Acts 15. You know from two weeks ago, Acts 15, beginning at verse 36, page 1720, how Barnabas and Paul got into an argument, and Paul became angry, and Barnabas became angry.

Barnabas wanted to take John Mark, who gave us the gospel, but he wasn't an apostle. And Paul took Silas. And so, we come there, and we see at the end of chapter 15, Verse 40:

But Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. 41 He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. (Acts 15:40-41)

So, if you want a mark in your Bible there at verse 40, that's the beginning of the **Second Missionary Journey**. And so, they traveled through. And at that point we come to Timothy.

Now there's something here again. We know that because of the Jewish synagogues throughout the *oikumene* (*oikouménē*, οἰκουμένη), the known world, that people had the scriptures. And so, we see that Paul meets this young man "whose mother (we're told there in verse 1) was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek." And then we see in verse 2, the brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.

The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. (Acts 16:2)

And we're going to look at the next part, not today, but later on, and I haven't finished yet by a long shot, but I want to focus on why Paul did what he did. But the point I want us to do is to turn over now. And so, look at verse 5:

So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers. (Acts 16:5)

The early church grew daily in number. How did it grow daily? Because they didn't have professionals! What is a preacher in the modern world? He's a professional good man. That's terrible! Terrible! Terrible!

All Elders Are Bishops, and all Bishops Are Elders.

You don't need a pastor; you need pastors. Let me say that again. You don't need a pastor; you need pastors. Because the ancient church had pastors. Notice again that they had ordained in chapter 14, Elders, plural, and the word elder, *presbyteros* (presbúteros, πρεσβύτερος), from which we get the word Presbyterian, and the word *episkopos* (epískopos, ἐπίσκοπος), from which we get the word Episcopalian, are used interchangeably in the New Testament (*Cf.* Titus 1:5 with Titus 1:7, as well as Acts 20:17 with Acts 20:28).

Every church needs more than one bishop. Am I a bishop? I am a bishop. What is a bishop? A bishop is a pastor. Am I an elder? Yes, I'm an elder. Every church, every church in that **First Missionary Journey** has multiple pastors.

What's wrong with the Christian church is, one guy who's the expert.

Now, I am an expert. I will say that. I say it, I pray with humility, though like you, I'm no different than you. I struggle with pride, but I am an expert.

I have devoted my life to the study of scriptures. Sandy and I were talking last night, which was our actual 56th wedding anniversary, and I said to her, I am obsessed with one book.

Not everybody can do that. People have to earn a living, so churches sometimes enable one of their pastors to be able to devote himself or herself more fully to the study of scriptures and to prayer, while others earn a living (1 Timothy 5:17-18; 1 Corinthians 11:7-9).

But the point I want you to see here is that the churches "grew," in verse 5, and "were strengthened in faith," it says, and "grew daily in number."

Why does the church not grow? Why do the Baptists grow, and the Methodists grow—though Methodists not so much anymore—but why do Baptist and Pentecostal and Assembly of God churches grow?

You know, I'll be traveling, God willing, a week from today after I finish preaching, over to San Antonio so I can visit our church on the north side of San Antonio on Monday, and I'll need to get there Sunday night. And as we travel, particularly as we travel throughout Texas, we're struck with something. You know what I'm struck with?

Where are the Presbyterians? Presbyterians, there are quite a few in the Houston area, but as you spread out from there, do you know what it's like to drive from Brownsville, Texas, where God willing, we'll be on Thursday, a week—not this coming Thursday, a week from Thursday? Do you know what it's like to drive from Brownsville, Texas to the outskirts of Houston?

How many Presbyterian churches do you see? Why? because God did not bless the Presbyterian Church after the time of the American Revolution. Because we got so obsessed on a seminary fetish that we ended up giving away the frontier to people who were willing to be more biblical than we are.

"I can't believe you're saying these things. You graduated from seminary. You've been to three seminaries. You have an earned doctorate. Why are you against seminaries?"

I'm not against seminaries. I'm against the cockamamie idea that when a young man shows aptitude to learn and to study and to be an elder in the church, people pack him off and send him away.

I met again—I've been meeting a couple of times now with a young man who has three children, and he feels called to the ministry. And the traditional model is you make him sell his home. You move him and his family off to a place where he can be bunched up with other people and study. That model destroyed the Presbyterian church. That's what I'm saying.

Why did the early church grow? Because they took people with an aptitude, and they worked with them. And then notice, if we'll turn over in closing, which is always a warning, I've got maybe 10 minutes. If you look over at 2 Timothy 1, page 1852, as he says there in verse 3, "I thank God"—he's writing to Timothy. Paul's method of training Timothy, that is one-on-one, be my apprentice, walk with me, do what I do, learn what I learn, read the

books that I have, that's the seminary training of the first century church. He says:

I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did (2 Timothy 1:3), with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. (2 Timothy 1:3)

Was he exaggerating? No. Paul tried to live his life in constant communion with God. Did he succeed? No. But that was his goal, that was his aspiration. He wanted to be in the spirit of prayer constantly. And when he was, it's like when I wake up in the night, I pray for certain people when I wake up. It's a great aid to sleep because Satan will always put you to sleep. And when you begin to pray for people—the greatest burden of my life is that all of my children, all of my children-in-law, all of my grandchildren and grandchildren-in-law will be with us at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

And so, Paul is praying and he's remembering. Look at verse 4:

Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. (2 Timothy 1:4)

This is the last letter that Paul wrote before he was beheaded under the leadership of that “great leader, Nero.”

And that tells us something, doesn't it? We obey Nero. We obey Nero in everything he tells us to do unless he tells us to sin (Acts 5:29; Romans 13:1-5; 1 Peter 2:13-18).

And so, he says:

I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. 6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. (2 Timothy 1:5-6)

Remember what happened in the **Second Missionary Journey**? Paul laid hands on young Timothy, and young Timothy becomes an elder. But Paul says, as he observes him, I want you to travel with me, because he saw in

Timothy a willingness to do what John Mark was unwilling to do at that time, and that is to suffer hardship for Christ.

And he says in the next verse:

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. (2 Timothy 1:7)

And then look it over at chapter two, 2 Timothy chapter 2. And here's the method of church growth. No seminary, no send people off to school, no destroy families. Do you know how many young people's lives were destroyed by going to seminary?

"You say, wait a minute, Bob. What do you mean?"

Well, when you disrupt a family, and you take the person who's the chief breadwinner, and you force him to work multiple jobs while going to school, and then there's resentment because there is someone, perhaps a wife who's a mother, trying to take care of children, and the man is gone all the time. Do you know how many people in seminary end up wrecking their marriages?

Seminary, this model, is a wicked model because you can't separate people for long periods of time, especially when they're young, and fail to see any result except a negative one.

So, notice here what he says, chapter 2, verse 1.

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.
2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses. (2 Timothy 2:1-2)

See again the model of seminary? Paul took him with him. Timothy observed Paul in action. Timothy was there when Paul taught. And when he preached, he was there. And he says,

Entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. (2 Timothy 2:2)

See, that's the method. The method is this. The job of the elder of a local church is this, to duplicate your life into the lives of others. That's the job.

That's not the job of deacons, though deacons can do that. The job of an elder is to disciple people to become just like you.

And that's my job. I do it in a big way standing up here, but I try to do it in small ways as I meet with people, and I interact with people.

That's the divine method. What you know, what you've learned, pass it on to other people. So again, he says, entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

And then look at verse 3.

Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer. 5 Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. 6 The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. 7 Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this. (2 Timothy 2:3-7)

What is he saying? What is your job? If you're an elder, what is your real job? Your real job is to serve as a soldier of Christ. And whatever way you earn a living in this world is a civilian pursuit. And most of us have to have a civilian pursuit in order to survive.

Notice what Paul lays on the elder. He lays on the elder the obligation to be a Christian soldier.

(Sarcasm) The job of the elder is to be a Christian soldier and to put up a sign for Donald Trump. The job of the elder is to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ and put up a sign for Kamala Harris, who probably within two or three weeks will be the president. I don't know. The job of the Christian soldier is to put up a yard sign for Bobby Kennedy, who wants to cut the military budget in half and keep some of that money back here to rebuild our infrastructure. That's what his uncle and his daddy wanted, and you know what happened to them. And he has not been given Secret Service protection. What does that tell you?

Is that the job of the elder? To campaign for candidates? You know, I'm going to tell you something. As God is my witness, there's only one person that can help this country, and it's not Donald Trump, or Joe Biden, or Kamala Harris, or Bobby Kennedy, it's the Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm just telling you this, that we're playing games with politics in this country. Our country is under the judgment of God. And the number one reason this country is under the judgment of God is because of the failure of the Christian church to be the Christian church and make the gospel the focus of why we live, why we act, and why we do.

The Beginning of Hope, Help, and Wisdom Is to Confess, "I Don't Know what to Do."

And if you're watching this on the internet, I have a word for you. If you're feeling worried about the future, that's great because you ought to be worried about the future. Anyone who's looking at the circumstances in this nation and how we're dealing with foreign nations who isn't worried is out of touch with reality.

But what I'm telling you is this, there's relief from that worry and that relief from worry comes when you take all of your burdens and all of your cares and you bring them home to Jesus, and you say:

"Lord, I can't handle this. I can't fix this. I don't know what to do."

That's the beginning of wisdom because that's the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10).

Commit your life to the Lord Jesus Christ. He will give you peace. He will give you help. He will take care of you, and he will take care of yours.

May we pray.

Lord, we pray that you would take this word that I have preached and bless it to our hearts as we now partake of the Holy Supper. In Jesus' name, amen.