Authority of Scriptures

JANUARY 24, 2016
SOUTHMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH DISCERNMENT PROCESS
SUNDAY SCHOOL DISCUSSION
OUR STORY

JOHN CALVIN AND THE REFORMED TRADITION
In the beginning: Protestant Reformation

- **Martin Luther**
  - Ninety Five Theses of 1517
    - Nepotism – favoritism to relatives
    - Simony – act of selling church offices and roles
    - Usury – unethical monetary loans
    - Pluralism – a diversity of views and standards within the church
    - Sale of Indulgences – a way to reduce the amount of punishment for a sin
Calvin stressed, along with Luther and Zwingli, three major issues of the Reformation

**Sola gratia:** we are saved from sin and destruction by the *grace* of God *alone*, never by human works, no matter how good they might seem to be.

**Sola fide:** our major responsibility toward God is to live through total *faith alone* in God and his “providence” or good care.

**Sola scriptura:** All authoritative guidance for the Christian life comes from *scriptures alone* – not from human authority, no matter how important such human authority may seem to the life of the church.
What makes a church “Presbyterian”? 

- Presbyterians share a common theology known as “Reformed” tradition and operate under a Presbyterian government form of governance. (government by representative assemblies of Elders)
- Presbyterian roots go back to John Knox and John Calvin.
- Presbyterians are often characterized by:
  - Belief in the Sovereignty of God;
  - Justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ;
  - The doctrine of election (salvation of man depends on the election of God);
  - Adherence to the teaching of Scripture (Authority of Scripture)
The Factions

- Traditionalists believe that the Old and New Testament are the written Word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit.

- Progressives believe that the Bible is a guidebook, that human beings were not given specific rules to live by in the Bible, but only guidelines.
The last century saw increased debate within the PC(USA) over the view of and use of Scripture. In 1927, the General Assembly voted to no longer require that all candidates for ordination to claim the Bible to be without error. “Thus, the view of biblical authority and interpretation that Presbyterians held from the mid-1700’s gradually made room for new theological perspectives.”

In the 85 years since, “new theological perspectives” on Scripture have become outright repudiation of Scripture’s authority.

Changing Times

- When the New Form of Government was adopted within PC(USA) (2011 – 2013), there was a shift in the language regarding the requirements of candidates for ordained office in the Book of Order:
  - Previously, candidates had to promise to “lead a life in obedience to Scriptures.”
  - The new language only says that councils examining candidates “shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions.”

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Consequences

- PC(USA) seminaries are related to the General Assembly through the Committee on Theological Education (COTE), the GA effectively decides on the polity and theology that is taught, and must be embraced by the pool of potential ministers.

- In our opinion orthodox or traditional congregations are going to have a vanishing pool of candidates who reflect their Christology and doctrinal views.
Beginning around 2006 through 2014, a total of 396 congregations have left PC(USA). 232 of these were in the Confessing Church Movement. This movement began in 2001 and was based on a confessional statement that included:

- The Bible alone is the Word of God and the sole authority for faith and life.
- Jesus Christ alone is the Way of salvation, The Truth of God’s Word and the Life of the church.
- The Holy Spirit continues to work to bring people into conformity with the will of God, toward holiness, including living within fidelity in marriage between a man and woman or chastity in singleness.

The Layman, Research Services: Two major departure eras for PCUSA, one is still ongoing.
Shifting of the Denomination Voting Block

- Add to this list:
  - Grace Presbyterian Church in Houston
  - First Presbyterian Church of Houston (in process)
  - Memorial Drive Presbyterian of Houston (in process)

- The Traditionalist voting block is declining rapidly in the PC(USA). Expect more Progressive changes to come more frequently.
An example from Denominational Leadership

On July 24, 2010, Landon Whitsitt, the Vice Moderator of the 219th PC(USA) General Assembly made these comments:

- “Sola Scriptura” is dead in most places and rapidly dying in others."

- “Scripture is only a reference point to the Word of God, it’s not the Word of God, you know, capital W. It’s only a reference point”

July 24, 2010 weblog http://quotidiangrace.blogspot.com/
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“Sola Scriptura [scripture alone] is dead in most places and rapidly dying in others.”

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