

WRESTLING IN SCRIPTURE WITH STAYING OR LEAVING THE PCUSA

Session Study at Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church – Charlotte, NC

SCRIPTURE ON LEAVING

Jeremiah – judgment on a disobedient people

Ephesians 5:3-11 *"Among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality... because these are improper for God's holy people. ... For this you can be sure: No immoral... person has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.... Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them."*

We can stay within the PCUSA and still have nothing to do with fruitless deeds of darkness. But the call in v. 7 is to not be partners with the immoral, and in v. 11, to expose their deeds.

2 John 7-11 – *"Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in this wicked work."*

We are instructed to continue in the teaching of Christ. We are also told to shun the one who does not bring this teaching – if not, we share in his wicked work.

2 Cor 11:3-4 – *"But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough."*

These are words of caution on tolerating or 'putting up with' false teaching within the church. Are we putting up with false teachings in the PCUSA? And if we have a seat at the table with them, are we not in greater danger of being deceived/led astray?

Titus 1:9-16 (instruction to elders) – *"He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach – and that for the sake of dishonest gain.... Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth.... In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good."*

2 Thess 3:6 – *"In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us."*

This passage is about idleness and hard work, but brings to bear the command to keep away from those who do not live according to the Scripture.

Romans 16:17-18 "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceived the minds of naïve people."

How can we be called to keep away from those who go against the teachings of Scripture, while at the same time to stay with them?

I Cor 5:1-13 – This passage focuses on the sexually immoral within the church. In verse 3 Paul has "already passed judgment on the one who did this." He instructs the church to "hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord." (v. 5). Verses 6-8 use the imagery of yeast – a little yeast ruins the whole batch of dough. Verse 9 instructs us "not to associate with immoral people – not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral,... In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral... With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked man from among you." (quoting Deut 17:7, 19:9, 22:21 & others)

We are not supposed to judge, lest we are judged. Yet here it appears we are instructed to judge those inside the church.

Revelation 2:20 – to the church in Thyatira: "I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. ... Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): Only hold on to what you have until I come. To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations."

I see the instruction to hold on to what you have until God returns. But God holds against the church that she tolerates the false prophetess. Could He hold that against the PCUSA? The question becomes, how should we respond to the false prophets among us – leave or stay & fight for the Truth both appear to be viable options, both express intolerance.

2 Tim 3:1-8 – "There will be terrible times in the last days... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sin and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.... These men oppose the truth – men of depraved minds, who as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected."

We are instructed to have nothing to do with those who oppose the truth.

2 Tim 3:14-17 – "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Sermon at Uptown Christ Covenant on "Community" – A community is defined by a common truth. In the case of a Bible-based Christian community, Scripture is the basis for truth, as set forth in 2 Tim 3. With the recent direction of the PCUSA to move away from what is Scripturally sound, we no longer share a common truth, required to be a community.

SCRIPTURE ON STAYING

Hosea – Hosea was called to marry a whore, despite her unfaithfulness.

Ezra – Ezra finds himself in a place of mass unfaithfulness, little or no authority or accountability. Spiritual revival and renewal flows, as Ezra leads the people in confession, humility and repentance. After revival, discipline and accountability were restored. God used Ezra because he stayed and called the unfaithful church to renewal. (see longer summary included below)

John 3 - (v.16-17 God didn't send Jesus into the world to condemn it, but to save it. V. 30-31 Jesus does nothing on his own initiative, but on the Father's. As He hears, He judges, and His judgment is just, because He does not seek His own will, but the will of the Father, who sent Him.)

Revelation – letters to the churches. It's not over 'til it's over. God takes unfaithfulness in church very seriously. While there are contexts where immediate action was taken (Paul, I Cor. 5), there are also contexts where, in response to serious sin, the message is "repent,... for God WILL judge" as opposed to asking the faithful to separate and judge now. PCUSA can be identified with the church at Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6), where there were still a faithful few who had not soiled their garments, though the majority were called "dead". Call to strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die, and remember what they have received and heard, keep it, and repent. (see longer summary included below)

Jude 18-23 – In the face of scoffers who follow their own ungodly desires, men who divide, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit, we are called to 1) build ourselves up in our most holy faith, 2) pray in the Spirit, 3) keep ourselves in God's love, 4) wait for the mercy of Jesus to bring us to eternal life, 5) be merciful to those who doubt, 6) snatch others from the fire and save them, and 7) show mercy, mixed with fear, hating even the clothing stained by corrupt flesh. It does not say "stay" or "leave" – however, 6) and 7) are most easily accomplished by staying.

2 Peter 2&3 – Instructions on what we should do in the last days when scoffers will come, following their own evil desires, include: (3:8-10) Remember that God is patient because he wants everyone to come to repentance, but He will one day come like a thief to judge the world. (3:11-18) Live holy, godly lives, look forward to the day of God, be found spotless and at peace with Him, remember that His patience means salvation, be on our guard so that we are not carried away by the error of lawless men, grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

Here we see that GOD is the one who will judge the world. We are not called to judge, but to take care that we do not fall, and be faithful as we grow in our knowledge of Him. In the meantime, "our Lord's patience means salvation" (3:15) – He wants to save even the scoffers, and is patient to show His wrath until that time.

Matthew 13:24-30 – the parable of the weeds. *The kingdom of God is like a man who sowed good seed in his field (the church doing its job). But while everyone was sleeping, (we must not sleep!) his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat... (Satan sowing sin within the church). When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. (good and bad grow side by side) The owner's servants came to him and said, "Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?" (Why do we see such sin inside the PCUSA?) "An enemy did this," he replied. The servants asked him, "Do you want us to go and pull them up?" (Should we do what we can to get rid of them?) "No," he answered, "because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned, then gather the wheat and bring it into my barns." (No, that may damage the faithful in the church. Let good and bad exist together until I come to judge. I will be the one to instruct the harvesters [angels?] to collect those who have done evil for judgment, and those who are my children for eternal reward.)*

Daniel 11:31-33 – *"The king of the North (Antichrist?) will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him. Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered."*

Even in the face of Antichrist, the faithful are not called to run from evil in the church, but to firmly resist, and to instruct many, even in the face of persecution and death.

Ephesians 4:14 – *"We will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."*

We are not to allow ourselves to be blown around by false teaching and deceitful scheming – in other words, we are to stand firmly rooted in the truth. And we are to speak that truth – in love – and continue to grow in Christ.

EZRA: Public Repentance and Humility Leads to Revival

The Rev. Robert Austell – Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Ezra finds himself in a place of mass unfaithfulness, little to no authority or accountability.

Also, interestingly (to me), the first step in the story in Ezra is the restoration of property and the place of worship at the hands of the worldly power of the day. Spiritual revival and renewal follows as Ezra leads in confession, humility, and repentance.

Ezra 9:1-14

- The people of Israel were unfaithful in the extreme, explicitly sinning against God by marrying pagans
- Ezra singles out the leaders as *foremost* in this unfaithfulness
- Ezra and others who "trembled at God's words" gathered, appalled

Ezra 9:5-14

- Ezra and the faithful remnant rise from their shock and gather to pray in humiliation, confessing the people's sin (including themselves in that, interestingly, not us-and-them, but we)
- Ezra notes God's grace in the midst of judgment – the opportunity to "raise up the house of our God"
- Ezra continues to confess his own sin, though he is part of the grieved remnant: "O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we have been left an escaped remnant, as *it is* this day; behold, we are before You in our guilt, for no one can stand before You because of this." (v. 15)

Ezra 10:1-5

- While Ezra was expressing personal repentance and obedience, many others (including the unfaithful) were drawn to him in similar repentance: Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, said to Ezra, "We have been unfaithful to our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope for Israel in spite of this." (v. 2)
- The unfaithful leaders confessed (and corrected) their sin and looked to Ezra to witness their new vows of faithfulness

Ezra 10:6-8

- Notably, after revival, discipline and accountability were restored

REVELATION: It's not over 'til it's over

The Rev. Robert Austell – Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Broadly, I look to the churches in Revelation as an indication that:

1. God takes unfaithfulness in the church very, very seriously
2. While there are some contexts where immediate action was taken (Paul, 1 Cor. 5), there are also contexts where, in response to serious sin, the message is “repent... for God WILL judge” as opposed to asking the faithful to separate and judge now
3. I particularly could identify the PCUSA with Sardis (see below)
4. Note that even though Laodicea has no faithful deeds or remnant, a path of repentance and blessing is still issued

EPHESUS (2:1-7)

- SIGNS OF FAITHFUL REMNANT: Known for deeds, toil, and perseverance; cannot tolerate evil men; put false apostles to the test; have endured for My name's sake; have not grown weary; you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans
- PROOF OF UNFAITHFULNESS: You have left your first love.
- PENDING JUDGMENT: I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place – unless you repent.
- FAITHFUL RESPONSE: Remember from where you have fallen; repent; do the deeds you did at first

SMYRNA (1:8-11)

- SIGNS OF FAITHFUL REMNANT: I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not (and are a synagogue of Satan)
- FAITHFUL RESPONSE AND BLESSING: Do not fear what you are about to suffer – prison, testing, tribulation for 10 days; Be faithful until death; and I will give you the crown of life; you will not be hurt by the second death

PERGAMUM (2:12-17)

- SIGNS OF FAITHFUL REMNANT: I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; you hold fast My name and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness and faithful one, who was killed among you
- PROOF OF UNFAITHFULNESS: A few things: some who hold the teaching of Balaam – to put stumbling blocks before the Jews – to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality; you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans
- PENDING JUDGMENT: Repent, or else I am coming to you quickly and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.
- FAITHFUL RESPONSE AND BLESSING: I will give some of the hidden manna and a white stone and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.

THYATIRA (2:18-29)

- SIGNS OF FAITHFUL REMNANT: I know your deeds, your love, faith, service, perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.
- PROOF OF UNFAITHFULNESS: You tolerate the woman Jezebel – a false prophetess who leads my people to immorality and idolatry
- PENDING JUDGMENT: I will throw her (Jezebel) on a bed of sickness – and all who commit adultery with her; I will kill her children; I will give to each one according to your deeds; those who do not follow Jezebel – I place no other burden on you
- FAITHFUL RESPONSE AND BLESSING: Hold fast until I come; he who overcomes and keeps my deeds until the end – to him I will give authority over the nations as I have received authority from My Father; I will give him the morning star

SARDIS (3:1-6)

- SIGNS OF FAITHFUL REMNANT: But you have a few people who have not soiled their garments; they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.
- PROOF OF UNFAITHFULNESS: You have a name that you are alive; BUT, you are dead.
- PENDING JUDGMENT: If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.
- FAITHFUL RESPONSE AND BLESSING: Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and His angels.

PHILADELPHIA (3:7-13)

- SIGNS OF FAITHFUL REMNANT: I know your deeds. I have put an open door which no one can shut before you because you have a little power and have kept My word and not denied my name... You have kept the word of perseverance.
- PROOF OF UNFAITHFULNESS: Some of you have said they are Jews, but lie (synagogue of Satan)
- PENDING JUDGMENT: I will cause the liars to bow at the feet of the faithful; I will keep you from the hour of testing which is about to come
- FAITHFUL RESPONSE AND BLESSING: I am coming quickly – hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. I will make he who overcomes a pillar in the temple of My God; he will not go out from it; I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city – the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

LAODICEA (3:14-22)

- SIGNS OF FAITHFUL REMNANT: none
- PROOF OF UNFAITHFULNESS: I know your deeds – that you are neither cold nor hot; You are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold. You think you are rich, but are poor.
- PENDING JUDGMENT: I will spit you out of my mouth. I discipline those whom I love. I stand at the door and knock – if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with me.
- FAITHFUL RESPONSE AND BLESSING: Purchase spiritual riches that last; use eye salve that you may see. Be zealous and repent! He who overcomes, I will grant to sit down with me on my throne, as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.