

Yesterday's Sermon - In 10 Sentences or Less

Identity Check (Week 6) - God Alone is Lord of the Conscience:



1) We looked yesterday at the biblical case for the first foundational principle for how Presbyterians go about church together - "God alone is Lord of the conscience" (see The Book of Order, F-3.0101 and 3.0107).

2) One chief source for this exhilarating, challenging idea is how the New Testament letters address the "Jew/Gentile problem," that is, the tension, misunderstanding, and divisiveness that came with the earliest church expanding beyond Judaism and becoming multicultural.

3) Some chapters get very practical about how to make a diverse Christian community work: we looked in depth at Romans 14, and the conflict surrounding the eating of meat sacrificed to idols, and which biblical and/or pagan holy and festival days to observe.

4) Though these issues are no longer relevant to us 2000 years, they represent differences of the deepest kind, e.g. about biblical fidelity, theological correctness, and spiritual wellbeing, and almost all of the controversial topics facing the 21st century American church could be addressed well by heeding the wisdom of texts like Romans 14.

5) First, we should cultivate a church culture in which everyone has the chance to become "fully convinced in their own minds," about which they are "confident before God." (Rom. 14.5b, 22)

6) Thus, it seems Christians can be far more interested in uniformity and indoctrination than St. Paul - and God - are.

7) Second, we should remember what really matters, i.e. that God's Kingdom is all about justice, goodness, peace, joy, and mutual building up (14.17, 19), and not be duped by what doesn't.

8) From our inception, Christians have had the tendency to be fixated on tangential or trivial matters, "wedge issues" that divide, and it's the job of Christian leaders to correct that and bring people back to center (see Titus 3.8-9 and 2 Timothy 2.23-24).

9) Third and last, if we injure others with our strong "right" convictions, then we're wrong (14.13-15); that is, we should never sacrifice loving others on the altar of uniform agreement about controversial, divisive matters.

10) When can our personal convictions hurt others? - a) when the strength of our convictions prevent others from forming their own, b) when the mindless and inattentive expression of our convictions negatively affects someone else, and c) when we make assumptions, sweeping generalizations, or firm character valuations based on someone's convictions that differ from our own (see 14.2-4, 10-12).

Quote Worth Remembering

"We must love them both, those whose opinions we share and those whose opinions we reject, for both have labored in the search for truth, and both have helped us in finding it." (St. Thomas Aquinas, Europe's greatest theologian during the Middle Ages)

Explore More

1) This is a good week for some Bible reading - the New Testament has a whole lot to say about the divisiveness between dissimilar Christians, and how the peace of Christ can prevail among them.

- Read Romans 14 in its entirety: [Rom 14 NRSV](#)

- Read 1st Corinthians 8 (and the last section of 10), another lengthy conversation about the same topic as Rom. 14: [1 cor 8 NRSV](#) and [1 cor 10.23-33 NRSV](#)

2) A short article from the PCUSA on that foundational principle, "God alone is the Lord of the conscience" - [Presbyterian Mission Agency Lord of the Conscience](#)

3) We shared this article a month or so ago, but since Pastor Chris cited it at the end of the sermon yesterday, here it is again...though it is focused on political polarization in the pews, its ideas sync up with Romans 14 and are applicable to other controversial, divisive issues in the church too - [When Polarization Hits the Pews](#)