

Why Stay in the PC(USA)?

Twelve Reasons:

4

presbyterians for renewal

Mobilizing leaders of congregations within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be biblically faithful and missionally minded in their service to Jesus Christ.

So, What Else Is New?

by John “Mike” Loudon, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Lakeland, FL

The Church is made up of human beings, and all human beings are infected with a spiritual malignancy. The Old Testament teaches that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it” (Jeremiah 17:9). The Apostle Paul wrote in the New Testament: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The late Ben Lacy Rose once wrote, “We are tainted by sin from birth; our souls come to us stained—infected with a deadly virus...it infects every organ of man’s soul: his thinking, his feeling, and his doing.”¹

We believe that God’s love for sinful humanity moved God to send his only begotten Son to become incarnate among us, and die on a cross, as the atoning sacrifice for human sin. John, in the opening chapter of his Gospel, writes: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). Paul wrote: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The hymn writer, Charles Wesley, summed this up when he wrote, “Amazing love! How can it be that thou, my God, should die for me?”

Christ called the Church into being. It is his idea. God said: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of death will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18). We Protestants interpret what Jesus said to mean that the Church would not be built on Peter himself, but on the faith in Christ he expressed. He had said just prior to this that he believed Jesus to be the long awaited Messiah, “...the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matthew 16:16). So, we believe that Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Church and it is our faith in him that is vitally important.

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the followers of Jesus. On that exciting day, the Church of Jesus Christ was born. The Book of Acts teaches that the early believers “...devoted themselves to

¹ Ben Lacy Rose, *T.U.L.I.P.* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 1992)

the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...they sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all people" (Acts 2:42-47).

But from the very beginning, all was not perfect in the church, because it was and is made up of human beings. There were problems. There were tensions. There were disagreements. There were moral failures. There was greed. People are sinners. These are people for whom Christ died. These are people who have trusted in Jesus as Lord and Savior. These are people who have been redeemed by Christ's blood and transformed by His Holy Spirit. But the Church is made up of people who are still human, and still tainted by sin and selfishness.

In Acts, chapter 5, we read of the tragedy of Ananias and Sapphira in the earliest days of the Church. Later, Paul wrote in I Corinthians 5 of grave moral problems in that congregation. John, in his vision of The Revelation (chapters 2 and 3), was given a message to a number of congregations that struggled with sin encrusted barnacles. Church discipline was called for, but the Church itself was not abandoned. God did not call people to "give up on the Church."

The problems we face today in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are serious, and call us to be vigilant in our witness for Christ and faithful to God's Word. But the issues we face are no worse than those faced by Christians in the early Church, or Christians throughout the centuries. As the writer to Ecclesiastes wrote: "There is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

Every Christian must be faithful to his or her conscience and calling. Some may look at the PC (USA) and believe the time has come to move to other pastures which seem more pure, morally and theologically, and which offer a fresh beginning to weary pilgrims. Other faithful pastors and elders, however, look at our denomination and acknowledge that although we have serious moral, theological, and internal problems, the Church of Jesus Christ has always struggled with such issues and what may appear to be greener pastures elsewhere may not be as lush and rewarding as we think. Every denomination is made up of redeemed sinners. Christians seek to live by God's Word and walk in God's love, but we are still fallen people, and therefore, there is no perfect congregation, and no perfect denomination this side of glory.

I confess that I have pondered whether I should remain in the PC (USA) at various times through the years. Every time I have wrestled with that thought and have prayed through the situation, I have been led to stay and minister here. Passages such as Jesus' parable of the wheat and tares growing together (Matthew 13), and Abraham pleading to God on behalf of Sodom if ten righteous persons could be found (Genesis 18), have spoken to me. I believe there are many opportunities for evangelicals for service, ministry, and mission in this denomination. I pray that you also will be led to continue to worship and serve Christ here.

Article Four in a series, "Why Stay in the PC(USA)?"
resources created by the Issues Ministry Team of Presbyterians for Renewal © 2007
For more information on this and other resources for leaders of congregations,
find us on the Web at www.pfrenewal.org