Congregational Forum #3 – Church Discipline

When you hear the word “discipline,” what do you think of? Belt? Wooden Spoon?

Church Discipline is not about punitive measures. It is a positive mark of the true church.

John Calvin: Three marks of a true church

1. Right preaching of the word
2. Right administration of the sacraments
3. Right administration of church discipline

Because of variety of scripture/God views, have difficult time with discipline. Assure that we adhere with our covenant together as a church.

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The purpose of discipline is to honor God by

making clear the significance of membership in the body of Christ;

to preserve the purity of the church by nourishing the individual

within the life of the believing community; to achieve justice and

compassion for all participants involved; to correct or restrain

wrongdoing in order to bring members to repentance and restoration;

to uphold the dignity of those who have been harmed by disciplinary

offenses; to restore the unity of the church by removing

the causes of discord and division; and to secure the just, speedy,

and economical determination of proceedings.

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. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV)

Discipline provides means of restoration, build up body of Christ, stick to covenant together. None of that is easy stuff. Sometimes messy because people are messy.

Today:

1. Disciplinary System of PC(USA)
2. Here at FPCD

PCUSA

Book of Discipline.

Courts at all levels. Members elected to 6 year terms, ½ elders and ½ clergy

Deal with Remedial Cases (Procedural matter)

Disciplinary Cases are when a person does something wrong.

First Court is the session. Deal with members of this church

Presbytery deals with pastors and lay pastors

Synod and GA can have original jurisdiction and also handle appeals. GAPJC is like Supreme Court, except that GA can override the GAPJC

Main issue centers around ordination policy.

History

1978 – AI about homosexual behavior and ordination (handout)

Difference between ongoing behavior and sexual attraction and repentance

Ruling in essence – If you are unrepentant and affirm you will continue in this behavior, you cannot be ordained.

Why no words before? Because it wasn’t an issue.

Ruling also clear that repentance = fidelity or chastity.

We do believe the gospel changes people.

Things begin to get murky.

2001 - Eventually “Ammendment B” which was “fidelity/chastity” clause.

Read. To serve in an ordained position.

2006 – Continues to be an issue because of lobbying group of people who want to be ordained. PUP task force gives recommendation that people can scruple everything but the constitution. Allowed breathing room that might allow people to be ordained.

2008 – AI tosses out the 1978 AI and all previous judicial cases based on that interpretation. Now say that you can also scruple a part of the constitution. This did not have to be ratified by the presbyteries.

2011 – The constitution is changed with “10-A”

Why is “local option” a problem?

ORDINATION is an ACT OF THE WHOLE CHURCH. Local ordination = national recognition.

Ordination to the ordered ministry of teaching elder is an act of the whole church carried out by the presbytery, setting apart a person to ordered ministry. G-2.0701

Paul Capetz – When Fidelity/Chastity passed in 1976, he set aside his ordination. Professor at a seminary in Minneapolis. When 2008 AI passed, he petitioned his presbytery to reinstate his ordination, and they did so. He “scrupled” the clause. Wasn’t currently in a relationship with another man.

Ruling was appealed all the way to the GAPJC. Said “You are not currently violating the constitution, but only making a future pledge that you’ll violate it if circumstances allow. So, we’ll allow your ordination. CONVOLUTED?

**NOT JUST HOMOSEXUALITY, BUT BELIEF.**

Quotes from ministers in good standing

Carol Howard Merritt – Holy Week 2010

But what does that say about God? Do we serve a divine being that needs blood to forgive? And, even more disturbing, would we worship a Creator who would require the sacrifice of God's son to extend mercy? That sort of reckoning may have made sense in ancient times, but now it puts into question the nature and character of God. Is God vengeful? Does God need payment for wrongs that have been committed? Is God bloodthirsty? Is God some sort of divine child abuser, a being who needs to see his own Son suffer so that our wrongs might be paid for? This idea of the divine is quite disturbing, so many [progressive Christians question the nature of this reckoning](http://www.amazon.com/Christianity-Patriarchy-Abuse-Feminist-Critique/dp/0829808086), and we see the sacrificial system as something that humans needed.

Because we allow all perspectives on the Bible, have no essential tenents, we’ve decided that this person’s views have a place at the table in leadership in our denomination.

John Schuck denies the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ on his blog.

“No more crosses” sermon.

A few years ago a poster advertising Mel Gibson's movie, The Passion, featured an image of Christ wearing a crown of thorns. The caption read:

Dying was his reason for living.

The movie itself was about his supposed last hours cobbled together from the various fictional accounts in the gospels.

The four gospels that made it into the canon of holy scripture all contain a version of Jesus' trial and execution. In fact over half the gospel material has to do with his death.

Why are we so obsessed with this man's death?

Dying was his reason for living.

Really? The belief that Jesus died for us or died for our sins or died to save us has been Christianity's theological centerpiece. His death and resurrection are two parts of this mythology.

That mythology has little to do with the historical person of Jesus.

Details about the trial and crucifixion are literary memes taken from other sources. It isn't that the gospel writers observed what happened and wrote it down. It is what we would call, for lack of a more sophisticated word, fiction.

Schuck a minister in good standing of Holston Presbytery in Tennessee. In fact, in December he was elected clergy commissioner to upcoming General Assembly!

Can you see why this is not just about homosexuality?

In Elizabeth Presbytery, we examined a candidate to be an associate pastor for youth ministry if he could explain how a person is saved. Despite the fact that he couldn’t and wouldn’t say, he was accepted. Argument was that we need to allow all positions a place at the table.

Because we have a hard time defining the boundaries, cannot deal with it when people step outside of the lines.

GAPJC – Recent Ruling on Jane Spahr

Opinions after the ruling:

The best solution is for the General Assembly to amend the definition of marriage to

authorize teaching elders and commissioned ruling elders to preside at the marriages of same-sex couples in civil jurisdictions that recognize such marriages as legal. The definition now found in W-4.9001 was never designed for these circumstances. It was adopted in a world where samesex marriages were inconceivable. By retaining that definition despite the increasing number of jurisdictions recognizing same-sex marriage, the church creates a form of second class

citizenship for faithful Christians despite all the other places in the Book of Order where the full

equality of persons regardless of sexual orientation is affirmed. I encourage the General

Assembly to so act.

Respectfully Submitted,

Barbara A. Bundick

Since the Directory for Worship is part of our constitution and the

majority has found that it may give rise to disciplinary cases, then it should be immediately

amended to clearly state that we fully welcome the LGBT community into their rightful place in

our church, including allowing them to marry.

Respectfully Submitted

Clifford Looney

A. Bates Butler III

Susan J. Cornman

Jeana Lungwitz

Michael Lukens

Rebecca New

According to the L.A. Times:

On Tuesday, Spahr said she would continue to marry gay and lesbian couples regardless of the verdict by the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission, the church's version of the [U.S. Supreme Court](http://www.latimes.com/topic/crime-law-justice/justice-system/u.s.-supreme-court-ORGOV0000126.topic).

AT FPCDNJ

Matthew 18:15-20

Matthew 5

You go to the person who has a problem or who has a problem with you.

Level 2 – mediator

Level 3 – session

Goal is always to restore the sinner, demonstrate mercy, and build up the body.

Do we do it here? Yes. Ideally, it’s handled confidentially. Sometimes more public.

Discipline is our attempt to steer people toward godly living, and protect the body from false teaching or immoral behavior.

PRESBYTERY OF ELIZABETH does a good job following procedures, and is diligent in moral cases, particularly when power issues are involved.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE involves setting and maintaining appropriate boundaries. Not happening in PCUSA. Local example – Princeton Theological Seminary presents “The Vagina Monologues.”

Pro-sex feminist [Betty Dodson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Betty_Dodson), author of several books about female sexuality, saw the play as having a negative and restrictive view of sexuality and an anti-male bias.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Vagina_Monologues#cite_note-5)She called the play "a blast of hatred at men and heterosexuality". [Individualist feminist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ifeminism) [Wendy McElroy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wendy_McElroy) agreed, stating that the play "equates men with 'the enemy' and heterosexual love with violence".[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Vagina_Monologues#cite_note-6)[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Vagina_Monologues#cite_note-7) She also identified problems with the work's lesbian bias, stating "A play that claims to unveil the truth about vaginas but, somehow, overlooks the salutary role men play in most women's sexuality has no credibility."[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Vagina_Monologues#cite_note-autogenerated1-8)

Is there no one who will say “This is not Christ like or acceptable in the most prestigious seminary in the PCUSA?”