

May 15, 2011  
Fourth Sunday of Easter

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2 Timothy 4:1-5

**R.I.P.**  
**PC (U.S.A.)**

*“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine.”*

**Back in the 1970’s, legendary actor Charleton Heston starred in a movie called, *Planet of the Apes*.**

**In it, Heston played an astronaut whose crippled ship lands on a strange planet dominated by intelligent, warlike apes.**

**These apes treat human beings like animals. And, they capture Heston and plan on doing all sorts of terrible things to him. But, by movie’s end, Charleton Heston escapes and is riding horse-back along some lonely desolate beach.**

**As he rides, however, he sees something in the distance that causes him to dismount from his horse.**

**For a moment he stares blankly ahead – his mouth hanging open in amazement – until he finally falls to his knees and start pounding the sand in agony.**

***“You finally really did it!”* he shouts!**

***“You maniacs!”***

**Of course, watching the movie you wonder what Heston means...**

**What he’s seeing!**

**Then, the camera slowly pans back and in front of him are the ruins of the Statue of Liberty -- half-buried in the sand.**

**And, it's in that moment Heston realizes he's not on some strange distant planet. He's back on earth – sometime in the future...**

**And the unimaginable has happened!**

**Mankind has finally destroyed itself!**

***“You finally did it!”***

**Well, that's how I felt this week when the “unimaginable” finally happened in the Presbyterian Church too.**

**On Tuesday, May 10<sup>th</sup>, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) – our own denomination -- voted to remove the church's constitutional standards regarding sexual ethics for its ordained leaders.**

**Simply put – the Presbyterian Church will now permit unrepentant, openly practicing homosexuals to be ordained as ministers, elders and deacons.**

**It also presumably also allows “any” variety of sexual practices among its leaders – homosexual or heterosexual.**

**Whereas the church had previously mandated that leaders either remain faithful in marriage or chaste if they were single – it's now a free-for all with everybody doing what's right in their own eyes!**

**And, of course, the issue is mind-boggling!**

**Now, please trust me when I say I'd rather be talking to you about anything other than this today.**

**But, rather than serving as a model regarding God's design for humanity and His call to holiness in all aspects of our lives, the Presbyterian Church has capitulated and surrendered its call to be God's witnesses in the world.**

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Now, before we go on, I need make it absolutely clear that people engaged in homosexual activities are no worse sinners than any of the rest of us.

**The Bible's clear!**

It says, "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). And so, speaking about this today is not an attempt to single out one group of sinners from the rest.

**We all fall short!**

**We all need grace!**

**We all need to examine our lives and repent of our sins!**

And, I say this because, frankly I'm sick and tired of how anyone speaking against homosexuality is labeled a hater or homophobic or considered just plain prejudice.

I've had friends who, unfortunately, have been caught up in this kind of lifestyle. I loved them then. And, I love them still.

**But, that's not really the point.**

**The point – as it relates to what happened in the Presbyterian Church this week – is about the abandonment of Biblical authority and what that means in our lives.**

**You see, this question of sexuality is only symptomatic of a greater disease.**

**That disease is idolatry – the rejection of God and the substitution of something else in God's place!**

**That's the real issue!**

**We all sin! We all fall short!**

**But, without fidelity to God's Word we've got no foundation...**

**No base...**

**And, we might as well admit that we're making it up as we go along!**

**Dr. Albert Mohler – President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary nails it when he says:**

**...even beyond the specific issue of homosexuality, the church faced two of the most fundamental questions of Christian theology – the authority of the Bible and the Lordship of Christ. In making this change, the church clearly affirms that one may submit to the Lordship of Christ without submitting to the clear teachings of Scripture. That is a fundamental error that leaves the denomination now in the implausible position of claiming to affirm the Lordship of Christ while subverting the authority of Scripture.**

**And, Mohler's certainly right!**

**But, the question is, "How did we get to this point?"**

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**Well, it's important to understand that the Presbyterian Church has been arguing about this for years!**

**And, in an attempt to quell the argument and set down clear standards in line with God's Word, the Church adopted guidelines which said that all church officers – ministers, elders and deacons – were required to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman...**

**(funny how we've got to define that nowadays)...**

**Or, remain chaste if they were single.**

**And, that seemed simple enough.**

**People were either faithful to their spouse or they didn't sleep around if they weren't married...**

**Just like the Bible says!**

**But, no sooner had this provision been adopted in 1996, than efforts began to repeal it.**

**Three separate times -- in 1997, 2001 and in 2008 -- the issue came up again and again and again. Each time it was defeated -- but the strategy seemed clear.**

**Like the drip, drip, drip of Chinese water torture, the people pushing this agenda just kept at it hoping to wear down the opposition.**

**Now, why it passed “this” time is anybody’s guess.**

**Some pin it on a growing tolerance for homosexuality in the wider culture.**

**Others see the exodus of bigger churches in the denomination as leaving the rest of us without the resources or the votes to stem the tide.**

**There’re any number of reasons!**

**But, at the heart of it all, God’s Word clearly tells us there would come a time when people simply wouldn’t accept the truth anymore!**

**And, at least in the Presbyterian Church, that time has finally come!**

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**Now, our Scripture lesson today is taken from 2 Timothy.**

**2 Timothy is the last known letter we have from the Apostle Paul.**

**Paul writes this letter to his young protégé – Timothy. And, the reason Paul writes is because he’s in prison – in Rome -- and he soon expects to die. So, he takes time to pen a final letter to his beloved friend to encourage him and leave instructions before he’s executed.**

**Now, of course, the first thing Paul does is he reminds Timothy of the core foundation of the Gospel – Jesus Christ Risen from the dead.**

**That's the foundation upon which everything else is built.**

**But, starting in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter and, continuing to where we picked it up today in chapter 4, Paul also warns Timothy to *expect* a time when people will turn away from the truth and surround themselves with teachers who simply tell them what they want to hear.**

**Paul says:**

**For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.**

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**I had a doctor's appointment this week.**

**Just a regular visit. Pretty routine stuff.**

**But, I've got a great doctor. He's patient. He really listens when I've got something to say. And, I'm convinced he's got my best interests at heart.**

**But, how smart do you suppose it would be if my doctor took a look at my test results and said, "*Say, John, your cholesterol is pretty high...*"**

**Or, "*Your blood pressure's bordering on hypertension...*"**

**Or, "*You really should lose some weight.*"**

**What if my doctor said any of those things and suggested a treatment plan and I said, "*Thanks, Doc! But, no thanks.*"**

***"I'm gonna go see what another doctor has to say."***

**And then, another doctor tells me the same thing...**

**And, another doctor after that...**

**And, another!**

**And, I keep searching for doctors until I finally get one who tells me, “*Don’t worry about your cholesterol or your blood pressure or your weight! You’re fine!*”**

***“In fact, be sure to grab a jelly doughnut on your way out today!”***

**Now, I like jelly doughnuts.**

**But, that would be pretty stupid, wouldn’t it?**

**To just keep on looking for doctors until I found one who didn’t care about the truth, but simply told me what I wanted to hear.**

**Well, this is what Paul says would happen!**

**And, it’s happening now!**

**The Truth is being exchanged for a lie!**

**And, the decision we’ve got to make is whether we’re gonna stand firm for the Truth...**

**Or, whether we’re gonna bow down to the idols of contemporary culture and surrender our witness!**

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**When Christian Herter was the governor of Massachusetts back in the 1950’s, he campaigning for a second term and was scheduled to appear at a church barbeque late one afternoon.**

**It’s been a busy day for Herter. He’d missed lunch and was pretty hungry. And so, when he got to the barbeque, he stepped in line and held out his plate to the woman serving chicken.**

**She put a piece on his plate and turned to the next person in line, but Governor Herter politely interrupted her.**

*“Excuse me,”* he said.

*“Do you mind if I have another piece of chicken?”*

*“Sorry,”* the woman told him. *“I’m supposed to give one piece of chicken to each person.”*

*“But I’m starved,”* the governor said.

*“Sorry,”* the woman replied. *“Only one to a customer.”*

Well, even though Herter was normally a modest man, this time he decided to throw his weight around.

*“Do you know who I am?”* he said. *“I am the governor of this state.”*

*“Do you know who I am?”* the woman replied.

*“I’m the lady in charge of the chicken. Move along mister!”*

Now, you gotta love that story for two reasons.

**First, that lady clearly understood her mission.**

**And second, she was faithful to her mission!**

She didn’t care who was in line!

She had her marching orders and she was gonna carry them out!

But, what about us?

Will we remain faithful to our mission, as well?

You see, inevitably you’re going to read about this in the papers –if you haven’t already.

You're also going to hear people say, "*So what?*"

*"The Presbyterian Church ordains gays!*

*So does the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the United Church of Christ!"*

"*So what?*"

*"The sun still came up this morning. People still got up and went to work. The sky didn't come crashing down. Life goes on as it always has."*

That's what you're gonna hear!

But, what we need to understand is that God's judgment doesn't always come right away...

And that, God's judgment isn't always what we think it is!

You see, if we go to 1 Peter 3, for example, we find the Apostle Peter talking about folks mocking God's judgment saying – "*When's it coming? Everything's the same as it's always been. Nothing's changed. When's it gonna happen?*"

They don't believe it!

But, in response, Peter reminds us that while God's judgment is a *certainty*...

**God's timing is always His own!**

He says:

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day...

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare."

**So, judgment's coming!**

**It's not a matter of "if!"**

**It's just a matter of "when!"**

**In the meantime we've got to understand that God's judgment doesn't necessarily have to be cataclysmic – at least in the short run.**

**In fact, I'm convinced often it isn't.**

**You see, rather than sitting in Heaven hurling thunderbolts down on sinners (which we all are anyway), God's judgment is that He often just allows the consequences of our sinful choices to play themselves out in our lives!**

**That's what it means, for example, in the first chapter of Romans, when it says:**

**Therefore God *gave them over* in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They *exchanged* the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen.**

**Now, there's a very interesting pair of words here.**

**Throughout the text we find the words, "*exchanged*," and the words "*gave over*" paired together.**

***"They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images... Therefore God gave them over..."***

***"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie... Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts."***

**They "exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones... [so] He gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done."**

Throughout this passage the word “*exchanged*” is paired with the words (actually one word in Greek) “*gave over*” – so that every time humanity stubbornly insists on its own way, God acquiesces, and lets them have exactly what they want!

You see, far worse than being disciplined or corrected by God is when – because of persistent sin – God finally says, “*Okay! You want your own way. You’ve got it!*”

And then, He takes His hand off our lives and lets us have our own way...

Along with all the consequences that go with it.

That’s judgment, too!

And, trust me...

Or rather, trust the Word! God doesn’t miss a beat! The Scripture says:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit, will reap eternal life.

God knows what’s going on!

As the Scripture says, “*The sins of some men are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them*” (1 Timothy 5:24).

So, whether it’s now or then – judgment is sure to come.

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Now, what does this means for the Presbyterian Church?

Well, I certainly don’t expect the ground to open up and swallow denomination headquarters in Louisville.

**Rather, I suspect the Presbyterian Church will just continue to slide into irrelevancy.**

**As a denomination – the Presbyterian Church will simply cease to matter!**

**What this means for us individually and as a church – however – I hope is something else!**

**Speaking to Timothy, Paul says:**

**But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardships, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry (2 Timothy 4:5).**

**You see, we've still got a mission!**

**We've still got a mandate!**

**No matter what, God has always left a remnant of His faithful people in the world as a witness to His Truth!**

**And, we are those witnesses in these times!**

**So, we can look at the Presbyterian Church and mourn how far this once great denomination has fallen – and wonder where it's all heading.**

**But, in the end, like Joshua, we need to say...**

***“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).***

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**On May 26, 2002 a tugboat on the Arkansas River accidentally veered off-course and pushed two barges into the concrete pilings of the Interstate 40 bridge that spanned the river.**

**The force of the barges hitting the bridge was like a sonic boom and instantly collapsed a more than 500 foot-long section of the bridge.**

**But, what was even worse was that unsuspecting cars and semi-trailers couldn't see the collapsed section and kept driving.**

**And, fishermen below watched in horror as one vehicle after another drove straight off the bridge and into the waters 70 feet below.**

**The fishermen – a couple fellas by the names of Kirk Washburn and Alton Wilhoit -- began waving frantically and trying to signal cars from their boat below.**

**But, cars continued to plunge unsuspectingly from the bridge.**

**So, they decided to back up further away from the bridge in hopes that people might see them and stop.**

**It was then that Wilholt remembered he had a flare gun on board.**

**And, while they slammed the boat in reverse – bobbing in the waves -- Wilholt took aim at an approaching semi on the bridge above.**

**Miraculously, the flare hit the windshield and the trucker managed to hit the brakes just short of the gaping chasm – effectively blocking the way for the rest of the traffic behind him.**

**Wilholt and Washburn then began combing the waters for survivors.**

**All told, 14 people died that day.**

**Men, women, children. Singles. Married couples.**

**It was a tragic – tragic day.**

**But, think what it would have been if not for those two fisherman down below and their desperate attempts to save lives.**

**Well, folks, we're in a similar position today.**

**People are spiritually dying.**

**They're enslaved to a lie and the Presbyterian Church has surrendered the Truth.**

**But, God can use you, just like He used those two fishermen...**

**And, people can be saved...**

**Through the power of Jesus Christ!**

**We know God is willing!**

**The question is: "Are you?"**

**Amen.**