

KNOW JESUS • FIND GOD'S CALL FOR YOUR LIFE • LIVE IT
By loving God Serving Jesus Loving One Another



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September 5, 2010

Dear PCOG Member and Friends,

Several months ago, we distributed a document entitled *Denominational Issues Questions & Answers*. It was prepared to respond to several questions raised within the congregation about PCOG's relationship within the PCUSA.

On August 30th, members of the "Denominational Relations Team" met with members from the Presbytery to discuss denominational issues. Among the information provided to them was a copy of the "Q & A" document because it addresses the following question: *What is the rationale for gracious separation?*

Since so much time has elapsed since the initial distribution and discussion of the *rationale*, we thought it would be helpful to circulate it again. And we ask that you read it again.

We will hold a "town meeting" on October 24th where representatives from the Presbytery will be present to hear your comments about our denominational relationship and whether you are in accord with the *rationale* which we have provided to them.

If you have questions, please send them by email to office@pcogonline.org attention Denominational Relations Team.

Thank you.

Denominational Relations Team

Q 1 -- What is the rationale for gracious separation?

As a member church of the *Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, we are in a **voluntary covenanted relationship** with one another and with God through Jesus Christ.

The Bible, the historic witness of the Confessions of the Church and our form of Government hold the covenants that create our denominational faith and life. We write this rationale as a response to actions by denominational entities, governing bodies of Presbyteries and churches, ordained officers, individual members and advocacy associations which breach or ceaselessly challenge the covenants of our relationship as we understand them.

Jesus Christ

Jesus said -- "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*" (John 14:6)

PCOG's "*Statement of Faith Values*"¹ states the following about the person Jesus Christ:

We worship Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord believing Him to be fully divine and fully human, of the same essence of God".

We believe that Jesus has total and exclusive redemptive power to transform and sustain new life and is the only provision for salvation."

In contrast, a 2008 survey, conducted within our denomination, by *Presbyterian Panel of Characteristics of Presbyterians*, reveals a shocking statistic. Under the category *Dimensions of Belief*, the survey states that only 35% of pastors and 22% of specialized clergy "*strongly agree*" or "*agree*" that "*only followers of Jesus can be saved.*"

The PCUSA website² states the following under the caption "*What Presbyterians Believe -- Jesus is the Way*":

"To declare that everyone will make it in the end is to make the same theological error as to decide that only those who profess Christ in ways we understand will be present in the Kingdom. It is to forget the sovereignty of God, to lose our focus on Christ."

Jesus said -- "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*" (John 14:6) Those words of Jesus are both debated and even denied in denominational settings (our elders have experienced this at Presbytery and it is confirmed by the *Presbyterian Panel Survey* cited above.)

We can no longer trust our denomination to preach that Jesus is THE way of salvation.

- Acts 4:12 "Salvation is found in no one else [Jesus], for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."
- John 14:6 above
- 1 Timothy 2:5 "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,"

Can we remain in a covenantal relationship in our denomination, through Jesus Christ, when we proclaim different Gospel messages?

¹ PCOG *Statement of Values* can be found at www.pcogonline.org The *Statement* was used when PCOG became a part of the *Confessing Church* advocacy movement.

² www.pcusa.org/today

Holy Scripture

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. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction. 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. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. (2 Timothy 3:16 – 4:5)

PCOG's "Statement of Faith Values" states the following about the Word of God: "We believe that the Bible is the infallible Word of God, inspired and preserved by the Holy Spirit, and our authority for obedience in faith and life."³

A contrasting statement about the denominational view of Scripture appears on the PC(USA) website,⁴ under "What Presbyterians Believe." It states: "For some the Bible is inerrant [part 1]; for others it is not necessarily factual, but it breathes with the life of God [part 2]."

A quote from Eugene Peterson represents our biblical viewpoint as well as "part 1" above of the denominational view: *the Bible, all of it, is livable; it is the text for living our lives... we are given this book so that we can imaginatively and believingly enter the world of the text and follow Jesus.*"

In contrast, we believe the following illustrates how others would restate Peterson's quote: *the Bible breathes the life of God in some places ... in other places it is useful as a reference ... but it may or may not be relevant to our modern culture and understanding.*

We can no longer trust our denomination to say the Bible is fully inspired by God the Holy Spirit to lead people to a saving knowledge of God and to help them understand their world rightly. By its very nature the Bible is infallible.

Can we remain in a covenantal relationship in our denomination, through Jesus Christ, when we hold significant disagreements on biblical interpretation and its role in faith and life?

Lordship of Jesus (i.e. faith & manner of life)

"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."

(Luke 6: 46 – 49)

³ Other references -- Hebrews 4:12ff and Confessions (e.g. Westminster at C6.001ff).

⁴ See www.pcusa.org website

Our faith and manner of life (i.e. behavior) are inseparably linked. Our manner of life is a window into our faith.

Over the past two decades, PCOG has authored numerous documents written to express our faith-based identity in order to set us apart from denominational actions, reports, studies and statements.⁵ While the PCUSA Constitution continues to reflect our faith-based values for the most part, actions by advocacy associations, Permanent Judicial Commission rulings and overtures enacted by Presbyteries generate ceaseless efforts to rewrite the covenants of our relationship in ways that we hold contrary to biblical authority.

We can no longer trust fellow members and denominational entities to uphold the letter and intent of our Constitution, particularly in behavioral matters. And we no longer trust that agencies that seek change do so under biblical prescriptions. We are weary of the constant onslaught by, and the distractions of standing firm against, those who desire to alter the covenants in our relationship by introducing practices that are not biblically permitted.

Can we remain in a covenantal relationship in our denomination, through Jesus Christ, when we cannot agree on the things that Jesus requires of us in our manner of life?

Closing Statement

Know Jesus Christ, find His call for your life and live it.⁶

Is God *calling* us to separate graciously? Have we prayed, listened to God's voice in scripture and counseled one another?

Our *Watchman's Duty* (Ezekiel 33: 1-9) has been fulfilled. The responsibility to act now lies with those who have *heard* the words of the *Watchman*.

The Scriptures warn about being "*double minded*" (James 4: 4-8) and about letting our "*yes be yes and no be no*" (Matthew 5:37). Listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah: "*Woe to those who call evil good and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and clever in their own sight.*" (Isaiah 5:20-21).

Denominational differences are profound. They are the result of deeply held beliefs and unwavering convictions. Our members have long been active participants locally and nationally in expressing PCOG's *faith-based values* including participation in prayer. Our differences are barriers to shared worship, prayer and service. Denominational membership has ceased to identify "*what PCOG believes*" and "*what we resolve to do.*"

How can we remain as *faithful* members in our denomination "in agreement" and in a relationship based on *mutual trust under the Word of God*?

Have our *faith-based* differences already separated us from PCUSA? If so, the next step is to complete the *Discerning the Way* process with our Presbytery for the purpose of discerning whether it is God's Will to grant "dismissal" ... graciously and in a way that honors Jesus Christ.

⁵ See PCOG website for documents – www.pcogonline.org

⁶ PCOG Mission Statement