

The Bible Presbyterian Church: Striving For Purity and Adequately Serving the Lord

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I have been a pastor in the Bible Presbyterian Church for forty-one years. I would say that the Bible Presbyterian Church is striving for purity and adequately serving the Lord. I would rate the denomination high in its biblical adherence and adherence to its own doctrinal standards. When it comes to adequacy, it gets a passing grade, but there is room for improvement.

Historically, the Bible Presbyterian Church can trace its existence to the desire to have a Presbyterian Church true to God's Word and blessed of Him. I will briefly mention the Protestant Reformation, Presbyterian struggles here in America, and in particular, the rise and decline of the Bible Presbyterian Church. My sincere hope is that we will see our Bible Presbyterian Church expand its ministry in the 21st century.

I have enjoyed my ministry in the Church, and hope that many will consider serving in it. It is my opinion that the Bible Presbyterian Church was for many years a unique blend of the Reformed Faith and Fundamentalism. In many ways it profited from this position. For example: it preached the doctrines of Grace, and had a great evangelistic zeal. The emphasis was: the Bible says, rather than the Reformed Faith says. The messages from pulpits were not just to the head but to the heart and soul, urging people to salvation and obedience in their walk with the Lord.

When I speak of churches impure and striving for purity, I am talking about adherence to the doctrinal truth of Scripture. We know that total purity will only be achieved in heaven. Adequacy has to do with the ability to take biblical truth and apply it to the life of the Church. It is important to stand for "thus saith the Lord." It is important to be tolerant on those things that are not "thus saith the Lord," and to be able to distinguish between the two.

Churches Impure and Inadequate (Roman Catholic and Presbyterian Church U.S.A.)

Prior to the Protestant Reformation, the church had become so impure and inadequate that it had lost the gospel. People who followed its teachings were led down the broad road that leads to destruction. "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." (Matt. 7:13, 14) The Protestant Reformation was a great revival. The gospel was rediscovered and many were saved by trusting in Christ as their Savior.

As the Protestant Reformation unfolded, the Presbyterian Church was born. It had a glorious ministry from John Knox (1514-1572), to Charles Hodge (1797-1878). Great Presbyterian beliefs include the following:

1. The Bible is our only rule of faith and practice (2 Tim 3:15-17)
2. God alone is Lord of the conscience (1 Thess 4:1)
3. The Westminster Standards (1643-1648) were adopted as the secondary doctrinal standard of the Church (2 Tim 2:15)
4. Church government and church discipline are to be administered through church courts (Session, Presbytery, Synod; Acts 15; Matt 18:15-20)
5. The eldership, both teaching and ruling, all have the same authority (1 Pet 5:1-5)

The first Synod of the Presbyterian Church in America was constituted in 1716. The Presbyterian Church grew and had a great influence on our country's form of government. The freedom we cherish so much today is rooted in scripture as expounded by Presbyterians. Great revivals broke out in the land, and educational institutions at all levels were established under Presbyterian ministry.

In time, evolution and higher criticism began to make inroads into the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. It affected the churches, mission programs, colleges, and seminaries. Dr. J. Gresham Machen's book *Christianity and Liberalism* stated that liberalism was not Christianity, but a new and false religion. By 1924, the Auburn Affirmation and its views had been accepted in the Presbyterian Church. A broad and inclusive position was accepted that no longer required ministers and elders to believe these truths:

1. The Bible is the inerrant Word of God (Ps 19:7-14)
2. Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary (Isa 7:14 with Matt 1:22-25)
3. Jesus bodily rose from the dead (1 Cor 15)
4. Jesus suffered on the cross to atone for our sin (Heb 10)
5. Jesus performed miracles (Matt 12:22-28)

The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. had now become very impure and inadequate, denying both scripture and its own doctrinal standards. On March 17, 1935, Dr. J. Gresham Machen gave his confession from the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania:

My profession of faith is simply that I know nothing of the Christ proclaimed, through the Auburn Affirmation, by the Moderator of that Commission. I know nothing of a Christ who is presented to us in a human book containing errors, but know only a Christ presented in a divine Book, the Bible, which is true from beginning to end. I know nothing of a Christ who possibly was and possibly was not born of a virgin, but know only a Christ who was truly conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. I know nothing of a Christ who possibly did and possibly did not work miracles, but know only a Christ who said to the winds and the waves, with the sovereign voice of the Maker and Ruler of all nature, "Peace, be still." I know nothing of a Christ who possibly did and possibly did not come out of the tomb on the first Easter morning, but know only a Christ who triumphed over sin and the

grave and is living now in His glorified body until He shall come again and I shall see Him with my very eyes. I know nothing of a Christ who possibly did and possibly did not die as my substitute on the cross, but know only a Christ who took upon Himself the just punishment of my sins and died there in my stead to make me right with the holy God.

When certain ministers and elders would not accept the errors of the Auburn Affirmation they were tried and put out of the Church. It is indeed an eye-opener when one learns how tolerant liberal ministers are to error, and how intolerant they are of truth.

It was during this time of struggle that Bible believing Presbyterian organizations were formed: In 1928, Westminster Theological Seminary; In 1933, The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions; In 1936, The Presbyterian Church of America. Like the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s, the separation from unbelief was of the Lord and according to His Word. God has commanded us to separate from unbelief when our attempts to reform the Church have failed.

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said, I will dwell in them and walk among them, I will be their God and they shall be My people. Therefore, Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty. (2 Cor 6:14-18)

Churches Striving for Purity and Adequacy: Presbyterian Church of America, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and Bible Presbyterian Church

The death of Dr. J. Gresham Machen was one of the reasons the new Presbyterian Church of America had a brief existence. Issues of lesser importance than those of the Auburn Affirmation began to come forward. They included these areas:

- Eschatology – amillennialism, premillennialism, postmillennialism
- Denominational control or independent control of church agencies
- Issues of Christian liberty, especially the church's position on the drinking of alcoholic beverages
- Issues concerning the Bible's teaching on separation from believers in, or working with, apostate groups (2nd degree separation)

While these issues were not major in defining Presbyterianism, they were allowed to become divisive and split the church. Out of this struggle the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Bible Presbyterian Church were founded in 1938.

It is my opinion that this separation should never have happened. There is no perfect Presbyterian Church, or pastor. "The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture

and error; and some have so degenerated as to become no church of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a church on earth, to worship God according to His will.” (WCF 25:5)

We should seek ways of working together with those Presbyterians who like us are striving for purity and adequacy in serving the Lord. There is much said in scripture about purity, unity, and peace (see Eph 4:1-16). I have enjoyed God’s faithfulness in using the Bible Presbyterian Church for His purpose. It has been very rewarding to work with others who truly are saved, love the Lord, and are seeking to please Him. God has given us His Word and the Bible Presbyterian Church has sought to obey it. There have been times of salvation and real church growth.

As a denomination we have been blessed with godly men who have led in establishing mission boards, colleges, seminaries, rest homes, conference centers, radio broadcasts, interdenominational church fellowships (nationally and worldwide), youth ministries, and international Christian relief centers. Truly God has blessed the Bible Presbyterian Church.

The Bible Presbyterian Church has been consistent in its loyalty to Scripture and the Westminster Standards since its founding. It has at times been inadequate in dealing with minor and administrative issues. “Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand” (Rom 12:4). These problems have caused split after split. Therefore, today, the Bible Presbyterian Church is a remnant of what it was just forty years ago. Our future depends on being able to deal with minor issues and administrative problems without splitting the Church.

A Church Maintaining Its Purity And Improving Its Adequacy: The Bible Presbyterian Church in the 21st Century

I praise God for continuing to use the Bible Presbyterian Church. Some of the signs of His blessing are our young people who are training and considering serving in the Bible Presbyterian Church, and younger ministers who are having good and faithful ministries in our churches. Another may be those of us who are retired or near retirement being of help to these gifted younger leaders.

As we enter into the 21st century, we must adequately deal with the issues that come our way without splitting the Church. “That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another” (1 Cor 12:25). We must be careful not to destroy our own denomination. Here are some areas that come to mind to enable us to improve the Bible Presbyterian Church.

1. We must humble ourselves before God and one another. Many problems are caused by pride and failure to forgive and be reconciled (1 Pet 5:1-11).
2. We must solve problems in our independent agencies and not allow them to overwhelm the local churches and the denomination. Our first priority is to build the local church.

3. We need to make a real effort to enlarge our local congregations through evangelism and discipleship. We must not be hesitant in our pulpits to encourage people to repent of their sins and trust in Christ as their Savior (1 Cor 1:20-25).
4. It is important that we all keep ourselves in the love of God (Jude 20-21). When we remove the log in our own eye we will be of more help to others (Matt 7:1-5).
5. We should seek fellowship with other Bible believing Presbyterian Churches (1 John 3:14).
6. Beware of having a high view of the Bible but preaching politics instead. God's people must be taught God's Word (2 Tim 4:1-5).
7. Christ is the head of the Church (Col 1:16-18). May we always seek to please Him rather than men (Gal 1:10).
8. Beware of legalism in all of its forms. I understand legalism to be taking a strong stand on issues not clear in Scripture and making them a rule of faith and practice. The Bible does teach liberty in some matters, and we should avoid judging one another in these areas (Rom 14:1-23).
9. We used to use the Harvey Cedars Resolution (1945) as our position on separation. It stated that we separate from those who deny God's Word in doctrine or practice. It also warned that there were risks in fellowshiping with those who are true to Scripture themselves but remain in apostate churches. I believe this to be a biblical position, and one we can practice with consistency.

(The Harvey Cedars Resolution - 1945)

(1) We hold that it is a Christian's duty to separate himself from all cooperation in religious activities with those who deny the full authority and dependability of the Word of God, and that no consideration of expediency could ever warrant such cooperation.

(2) As concerns cooperation with those who, while themselves believing in the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, continue in membership in denominations which include known unbelievers, and fail to see clearly and to observe fully the scriptural injunction to separate themselves from such organizations, we hold that this is a sphere of expediency, that is, one in which no man's conscience may be bound by other men; however, we as a Synod feel that great harm is done in many cases by such cooperation, and hence that it is unwise to enter upon or continue in them without careful consideration.

(3) Regarding such individuals as are described in paragraph (1), we should seek by every possible means to win them to Christ; regarding such individuals as are described in paragraph (2), we urge that they be dealt with in a spirit of brotherly love, seeking by every proper means to win them to the scriptural position of separation rather than to drive them from us, and yet not violating our conscience.

10. As our Church becomes more reformed, we must be careful not to become hyper-Calvinists. May we be the means God uses to win the lost and build His Church.
11. We need to strive for the purity, peace and unity of the Church. All three of these are important. We must not be content with one or two of the three (Ordination Vow).
12. Our agencies, whether synod controlled or independent, must give accurate and understandable reports to their supporters.

13. Financial matters must be kept in such a way as to be acceptable to God and men (2 Cor 8:21)
14. We need to hold firm to the biblical account of creation. God created all things out of nothing by the Word of His power in six days, and it was very good. There is no reason to interpret “days” other than twenty-four hour days.
15. We must reach out to Bible believing colleges and seminaries and encourage their graduates to become ministers and missionaries in our denomination.
16. Our book of discipline should be revised so that the steps of discipline are clear. It is always the purpose to restore the offender to good standing in the Church as God changes the heart.
17. We should keep a balanced ministry by preaching the whole counsel of God to our congregations (Acts 20:26-28).

Conclusion

Clearly the Bible Presbyterian Church was born out of conflict, and has had its own problems. Through it all, it has maintained its integrity to Scripture and the Westminster Standards. Our great need is to be able to deal with lesser issues in a way that brings peace, purity, and unity to our Church. May God be pleased to lead us all in building a strong Bible Presbyterian Church. As we stand “For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ,” let us remember who God’s people are. “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people, but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy” (1 Pet 2:9-10).