

**LORD OF THE CONSCIENCE**  
**Ordination and Installation Sunday –January 17, 2016 –Philippians 2: 1-13**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

As Presbyterians we have something called the “Historic Principles of Church Order” which are mini confessions of the church. *“God alone is Lord of the Conscience”* says one of them. *“and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship.”* (F-3.0101) God alone is Lord of the Conscience –so what does that mean?

It means the church cannot tell you what to think. It means no pastor, including Stu, can tell you what to think. It means that you have to read and study the scriptures in order to figure out what you think. It means the government cannot tell you what to think. It may through laws attempt to control your behaviors but no government may attempt to tell you how to think or what to think, particularly about matters pertaining to faith and religion. It means in our heart of hearts it is Jesus who is Lord and we follow Him and nothing and no one else. For those who come from more hierarchical church traditions this may seem new and foreign, as in that previous church ALWAYS told you what to think, but here we leave that process up to you. Martin Luther, the great Reformer, would say that his conscience was held captive by the Word of God. In this church then it requires you to study, to attend adult ed classes, to personally read the Bible, to turn things over in your own mind and heart in order to have Christ alone be the Lord of your conscience.

But it also means, as the Apostle Paul wrote in our scripture from Philippians, that we must then *“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”*. (Philippians 2: 13) No one comes to the Father except you. No one holds your hand. No one spoon feeds you what to believe. No one is responsible for your own salvation and your own faith other than you. It is scary in a way to consider that one day each one of us will stand in the presence of the Holy God, alone, and make account for our life, and what we believe, and what we have said, and what we have done. No pastor stands with us. No church stands there with us. It is why the Apostle Paul writes we need to work out our own salvation with *“fear and trembling”* now. And now I am speaking to elders and deacons, and remind you of the fact that God is Lord of Conscience means that everyone in a Presbyterian Church is entitled to their own opinion. And by the way, are not uncomfortable in expressing that opinion, in the church parking lot, in the hallways, on the phone, in the kitchen and at bridge and over Bible Study. And rarely will those opinions all agree. Indeed, to be a Presbyterian is to accept a certain amount of messiness, disagreement and discord over matters large and small. It is difficult to seek to be a leader in the midst of a church whose God is Lord of Conscience. It is like herding cats. It is like trying to channel a raging torrent. It is not controllable. Nor should it be. It can feel at times like a runaway freight train. Or a roller coaster at Kennywood. We ask you to lead a group of people whose opinions are their own and aren't afraid to express themselves. That is why I always say, *“We will pray for you”* and I do so with a little knowing smile. You need prayer in order to lead this people, wisely and well.

Of course, the Apostle Paul, no slouch in the opinion department, when he wrote these words about *“fear and trembling”* he attached them to a wonderful section on the Lord Jesus Christ. This second chapter of Philippians notes that we are to *“have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 2: 5) And the mind of Christ is what? He *“humbled Himself”*; He *“emptied Himself”*; He took *“the form of a servant”*; He became *“obedient”* even obedient to death on a cross. So when Jesus is indeed Lord of our conscience does that mean we get to have our own way? Does that mean that we get to prove ourselves as being *“right”* at someone else's expense? Does that mean we have to win the argument? Does that mean my position must prevail over another's? Or when Jesus is indeed

Lord of the Conscience, and you have the mind of Christ, does that mean we lead in humility, obedience, self-sacrifice, and emptying ourselves of those opinions which divide us and cause us to be led away from the Lord? Fear and trembling, I say; fear and trembling. New leaders, we will pray for you...

I conclude with the story of King Solomon and his wisdom. (1 Kings 3: 25) The story is that two women come to King Solomon both claiming that a certain baby is theirs. They have both born children but one had died and now both claim the living child. The one says: *"No, the dead child is yours and the living child is mine."* (v. 22) In a way it represents two philosophies in argument with one another –No, my views make for a living church. No, my opinions make for a living church and your opinions make for a dead one! So Solomon says, *"Bring me a sword"*, and Solomon says he will divide the child in two (never I think was he ever intending to do so). *"Give half to the one and half to the other."* But, of course, in the process of division the child will die. But, of course, in the process of division the church will die. The Spirit will be killed by division. So the one woman says fine, divide the baby. But the other says, *"give (the other woman) the child and do not slay it."* And, of course, in that moment Solomon knows that the second woman is the child's real Mother. Who loves the baby? --the real Mother. Who loves the church? Why the ones who will not do anything, or say anything, that they know, or should know, will divide it.

New leaders, new elders and new deacons, it is good to have the wisdom of Solomon in order to lead this people. To work out our salvation with fear and trembling. To have Jesus Christ alone as Lord of Conscience. God bless you. We will pray for you. Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA  
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*