

SCRIPTURE ALONE
Second Sermon in a Series: Distinctiveness of Presbyterians
June 7, 2015 –Confirmation Sunday/ Communion 2 Timothy 3: 10-17
The Church of the Covenant

“Sola Scriptura” is the next “Sola” we will tackle as we endeavor to unpack the core of Presbyterian believing through the “5 Solas” –Christ Alone, Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone, and to the Glory of God Alone. These sermons were inspired by conversations I have had with our wonderful Confirmation Class and I dedicate them to these newest disciples of the faith. Today, our scripture is the Apostle Paul’s advice to his young friend, Timothy, so perhaps consider this is my advice for my young friends who are joining the church today...

I suppose I could veer off on the topic of Biblical Authority and that just as it is about Christ Alone (what I preached last Sunday) it is also about the Bible Alone (this Sunday). Instead, I want us to explore together how OUR WORDS are connected to OUR DEEDS and our words and deeds are connected in power to God’s Word (Sola Scriptura) and God’s Deeds. There is a powerful connection between our words and God’s Word and between our deeds and God’s deeds. So I begin by noting how we have cheapened our own words and robbed them of meaning, delinking them from our deeds. Our words tend not to mean anything anymore. “I’ll be there at 1:00 p.m.”, we say. But something else intervenes and we cancel. Our words and our promises start not to mean very much. “I promise to do this or do that.” But then we don’t and our promises are devalued by a factor of ten. In my ordination vows I promise not only to serve Christ but also the Presbyterian Church, but circumstances change, I don’t like something, I disagree with something and so I don’t keep my vow. I become a member of The Church of the Covenant and I stand up and say, not only that I believe Jesus is my Lord and Savior, but also I will be an active disciple following Him in my life, and also I will be a “faithful member of this church wherever I may be”, but then I don’t serve and I don’t help and I don’t attend. God is faithful and God keeps His promises...but the truth of the matter is we are not very faithful and we do not keep our promises to God. There is POWER in the Word of God because God keeps His promises to us; there increasingly is no POWER or believability in our words, because we do not keep ours. “I’m tired so I won’t do what I said I would do.” “Circumstances changed and its hard to keep my promise, so I’m not going to.” “Something else, in my mind better, came along so I have the absolute right to change my commitments and adjust my words because I can.” My Mother and Dad taught me in high school that when the nerd invited me to their birthday party and I accepted, I especially had to go, even and especially when some other offer I deemed better came along. They were teaching me about the power in my words, commitments and promises.

To recap –We are to live out of SCRIPTURE ALONE (Sola Scriptura) but this means we are to live out of the promises of God and this means we are to live out of the promise we make and this means we will regain the POWER in our words. Our words plus God’s Word equals spiritual power. Sola Scriptura.

When I was recently in Haiti, there were a number of young men from the New Testament Mission School who would hang out with us each late afternoon and early evening. They would play soccer in the courtyard where we stayed. And about the first day there they invited me and others to attend their soccer game on Friday. I agreed. And then Monday they asked again, “Are you coming to our soccer game on Friday?” And again, I promised. Tuesday, the same thing and again I said, “Yes”. Wednesday and Thursday the same and again and again I promised. And the day of the soccer match arrived and we walked across the busy road to root on “our kids” in their soccer match. I had the feeling like many eyes were on me; like the kids from Haiti were all watching and in effect asking the question:

“Will he be there? Will he keep his promise? Will he honor his word?” So 4:00p.m. arrived and the game was supposed to start but it did not begin until 5:15p.m. And we were all cheering on the team and the kids we had come to know and care for that week. But then it came time for our dinner. It wasn't just any dinner; it was a special dinner; it was the final special, specially prepared dinner for our Haiti Mission Team on the last night we were there. “O great”, I thought, “now how can I keep my commitment to attend the soccer match AND keep my dinner commitments to our Mission Team?” Life is sticky like that, isn't it? And our mission team got up and started to leave prior to the end of the soccer match. I said, I wasn't leaving yet. The team leader said to me: “You aren't supposed to ever be alone (true) and this is the final special dinner, you need to come.” I felt like all the kids from the New Testament school were watching me. So I stayed at the soccer match. By the way I was surrounded by kids from the school and Pastor Toussant so I was completely safe. Finally, two members of the Mission Team were dispatched to retrieve me, so now I was also getting “Dr. Georges”, our own Dr. George Jones, and another man also in trouble. But for me it was simple. I had promised those kids. And I wasn't going to go eat a nice dinner and let them down. These were young men who often had no fathers, had been let down by the adults around them their whole life, was I going to be just one more adult not to live out of the power of my words, just one more significant adult to let them down in their life? It was easy. I kept my promise. I stayed till the end of the game. I rooted them on. I celebrated their victory with them at the end. I had promised. I kept my promise. Simple.

Now I want to step out of that story for a moment. Our young people are going to make a whole lot of promises to God and to Jesus and to the Presbyterian Church today. “Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?” Yes, I do. “Will you follow Him as His chosen disciple?” Yes, I will. “Will you be a faithful member of this congregation, giving of yourself in every way?” “Yes, I will.” And young people maybe you'll live out of those promises and maybe you won't. The first test will be next Sunday – “Will you believe in Jesus enough to motivate yourself and your family to come back to church and to follow Jesus with your time and your life like a disciple always does...or not?” You'll be asked to participate in 943 worship team and you'll be asked to come to the Washington Home Mission Project here in June and you'll either say “yes” or “no” and be living out of your promises...or not. Will you be standing on the promises or vacating the premises? Yes or No?

The Apostle Paul as he is writing to his young friend, Timothy, begins this passage by stating: *“Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness...”* (2 Timothy 3: 10) And then Paul powerfully links it to his statement related to Sola Scriptura and writes: *“All scripture is inspired by God...”* (2 Timothy 3: 16) “Inspiration” means all scripture is “in-breathed by the breath of God”. God has breathed into scripture the Holy Spirit. The same breath that God breathed into humankind at creation, God now breaths again into His written Word and into the promises He has made and fulfilled through CHRIST ALONE. We believe God loves us because Jesus went to the cross and died for us. Timothy, you may believe the Word of God to be true because you have viewed my life, my teaching, my aim in life, my patience and my love and my steadfastness. You believe God because God has kept His promises to you through Christ. And you believe me because my words connect directly with the Word of God and my promises are filled with love and steadfastness just as God's promises are filled with love and steadfastness for you. Timothy, look at my life and hear my words and believe them because they are consistent with God's words. Believe my promises to you because I keep my promises to God. There is transformational power in our WORDS when they are linked to the Word of God, Sola Scriptura.

So I want to apologize to you young people because quite honestly you don't have many role models of adults around you who make their promises and who keep their promises. Not many Apostle Pauls for

our Timothies. Our culture and our world do not reinforce consistency and steadfastness where our words connect directly with our deeds and our words are believed because our deeds are absolutely consistent with them. God may be believed because He has made promises to us that were completely fulfilled by CHRIST ALONE at the cross, He who spoke words of power and then backed them up by shedding His blood and dying for you and for me. When we link our words to the Word of God incarnate, Jesus Christ alone. When we link our promises to the sure and certain promises that God has made to us in scripture. When our words match our deeds. When we live out of our promises and we live out of God's promises. Then and only then do we have a life of spiritual power and significance. Then we will make a difference because we ARE DIFFERENT.

Sometimes fellow ministers, often who have left our denomination, will say something like this to me – “Stu, I know your heart and I know that you don't agree with everything in the Presbyterian Church, why are you still here, why don't you go elsewhere?” From time to time we are all confronted with situations where we disagree, or feel the circumstances have significantly changed, or feel maybe its just easier to leave. But my answer to my friends is this: “Because on June 1, 1983 I stood up in my home church and made a whole series of promises to Jesus and to the Presbyterian Church.” And the church may change but I'm not changing. The matter was decided long ago when I stood up and made promises in my ordination vows. I'm still here. Because I promised.

There is POWER in your words and there is POWER in THE WORD. Sola Scriptura. And Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*