

April 17, 2005

To the Elders of St. Peter Presbyterian Church,

I desire to be at peace with all fellow Christians, so I am writing an official withdrawal from membership at St. Peter Presbyterian Church for the reasons stated in the vows taken when my family joined which are: I can no longer continue our membership in good conscience. Both our doctrinal beliefs and practices are not in agreement with the teaching at St. Peter.

We in no way want to cause problems or divisiveness.

I view my family as Reformed Covenantal Baptists. I have been studying the Bible which has led me to look at other views. I do not profess to knowing all things by any stretch of the imagination, but I do believe that I have come by my convictions honestly by praying for God to reveal truth and by reading His word diligently. Though I am not a man of many words, my convictions are held strongly. I do not desire to debate, but to leave in peace. It is my responsibility to lead my family and for the following reasons, we will no longer be attending St. Peter Presbyterian Church.

Doctrinal Disagreement:

I believe that circumcision is not completed in Baptism in the N.T., but is fulfilled in Christ. The reference that links circumcision to baptism is referring to the baptism of the heart (not made with hands), that being regeneration. This I believe is also so in regard to passover. It is not completed in the Lord's table but in Christ Himself. --The same is true with communion. I believe as the Bible states that we must be able to examine ourselves before partaking of communion. A baby or small child is unable to do this, so I do not believe in paedocommunion. Baptism and the Lord's Table are both symbols of what Christ has already done. I therefore believe in believer's baptism only, and do not accept paedobaptism as Biblical.

I also believe in the regulative principle of worship. I do not believe in kneeling before the pastor in order to partake in communion. In the book: *How God Wants Us to Worship Him* by Joe Morecraft, he states on pages 128-129:

"Coming forward and kneeling to receive the Lord's Supper from the hand of the minister or priest in some Protestant churches is a "hangover" from the rituals of Roman Catholicism. This is forbidden because it is not commanded in the Word of God. It was unknown in the Christian Church for several centuries after the apostolic age. In fact, in the second, third, and fourth centuries, it was considered unlawful to kneel in worship on the Lord's Day, since kneeling was a posture of solemn fasting and not of the celebration and joy of worship in the presence of the risen lord. Even the famous Council of Nicea (A.D. 381) forbade kneeling on the lord's Day! Coming forward and kneeling to receive the Lord's supper was not introduced until the doctrine of transubstantiation made its appearance in the Roman Catholic Church."

He goes on to explain that it is a meal and a meal is eaten by family members passing food to one another sitting by each other in fellowship.

I do not see the Presbyterian form of church government anywhere in scripture. I see men in the churches leading together with elders brought up from among the church members who have led lives that example the qualifications seen in scripture. My understanding of elder is not a hierarchy as the Catholics have, but instead older men (plural) who lead by persuasive teaching and by example in their own life and family. The men in the church are accountable to one another including the elders. I see no instruction for robes or other attire which would set elders apart or above others in scripture mentioned after Christ's resurrection. The emphasis seems to be that we are one in Christ and are the body working together—not the forms seen in the Old Testament priests or NT priests prior to the Resurrection of our Lord.

I do not believe in presumptive regeneration. The Bible states that there is one way to a Holy God, through the gift of faith, in Christ alone by His grace. I believe we must teach diligently our children the gospel and ways of Christ as seen in scripture. In the case of infants or those who are in some way unable as far as we can see to understand, I believe we must trust God that His ways are perfect. The Father will bring to the Son all who have been promised to Him. If God chooses to give faith as a gift to an infant or others, He is able to do so as He knows best. I, on the other hand, can make no presumptions on such a point because I see no clarity on this in scripture and I am but a finite man. I believe to teach such a doctrine is in error. Some things are not for us to know.

I believe in clearly proclaiming the gospel of Christ in an understandable way that does not confuse those in the church who hear it preached. I do not see baptism or being in the covenant as regeneration. Esau was among those in the OT covenant who were not saved. I believe this teaching to be in error.

I see no directions in scripture for a liturgical service, though there is beauty in religion or ceremony-I believe that the regulative principle is more obedient to God. Aaron's sons brought to God "strange fires". This was not something that God had strictly forbidden, it was something that they brought in addition to what God had commanded them. It is my conviction that we must learn from this and not follow the wrong example even for reasons we see as pleasant or , if God Himself has not instructed it.

Disagreements in Practice:

I believe the practice of the church should be set apart, father-led, family-oriented, and an example for Christ to any who see the church. I believe this would mean that children should be trained and guided by their parents. Family integration should include the whole family, not be a free-for-all with adults conversing as the children are left to themselves unsupervised and wild. This goes against scripture regarding training and discipline. It enables ungodly behavior to occur. Community socializing, celebrating, or what have you, should not take the place of individual family time.

I do not believe any of us should be flaunting or pushing personal liberties on others that may be offensive, but instead, we should be willing to give things up in order not to offend for the glory of Christ. I will be visiting churches in this area. We are also looking at other areas.

We do not leave with any anger or malice towards any. We love the people at the Mendota parish, and will miss seeing them. We hope to maintain healthy supportive friendships that are glorifying to Christ.

I give you all this information not as a means to start an on-going debate, I have no interest in that. I do so, to express clearly my reasons for leaving and am hopeful that this will be accepted in love and peace.

Let us let our consciences be held captive to Christ and God judge our hearts.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Blessings-Respectfully,
John Austin