

May 24, 2008

Dear Elders in Christ,

This letter will serve as a record of several issues I would like to bring to your attention, some of which we have discussed previously. It should give you the appropriate time to consider what I write and respond scripturally. I did not want to be without haste in addressing the issues included in this letter, considering they concern very serious spiritual matters that need to be addressed forthwith for the sake of God and souls in the congregation at Luverne. It would be negligent of me as a brother in Christ to continue to be silent regarding these issues.

I want to make it clearly known that it is in sincere Christian love with which I write to you. God tells us that we know when we love our brothers and sisters in Christ because we will obey what He has commanded of us through His Word. Love can cover a multitude of sins provided it does not forego obedience to God.

*1John 5:2-3 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.*

*John 14:15 If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*

My obedience is to God by way of His inspiration through Paul and James...

*Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.*

*James 5:19-20 My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.*

What I perceive from the evidence and required witnesses that are before me is that this eldership at Luverne church of Christ has been negligent in shepherding the flock within this congregation and handling aright the Word of God. If the evidence that I present does not bear this out and my perception is improper, I apologize and ask for your forgiveness, as well as I humbly stand ready to be scripturally corrected. I would only expect the same brotherly love shown in return.

Again, I emphasize that I am only carrying out what I firmly believe to be my duty as a brother in Christ and my obedience to God. Just as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, I do not mean to cause you any pain, but rather my desire is to prove the abundant love that I have for you and to be able to rejoice with you in the truth (2Corinthians 2:1-4).

I bring to your attention what Peter, "as a fellow elder," wrote in his first letter...

*1Peter 5:1-4 Therefore, as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings, and one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I appeal to the elders among you: Be shepherds of God's flock that is among you, watching over it, not because you must but because you want to, and not greedily but eagerly, as God desires. Do not lord it over the people entrusted to you, but be examples to the flock. Then, when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the victor's crown of glory that will never fade away.*

I believe we can all reason that in order to properly shepherd the flock, Peter said the following needs to occur...

Shepherds are to exercise oversight; that is what a shepherd does for his flock... he oversees them.

- He counts them and notices when one is missing.
- He notices when one is limping and needs help.
- He notices when one is sick or in danger.
- He notices the sheep in need, and that is the sheep that receives his loving special attention.

Shepherds of God's flock do not do this because they are pressured to do it.

- They do this because they want to do it.
- They love their Chief Shepherd and they love their sheep.
- They know God's great love for the sheep... when they know God's will, they know how much He loves the sheep.
- They know the importance of the sheep to the Chief Shepherd and to God.
- Loving the Chief Shepherd makes them eager to do the work of a shepherd... they find fulfillment and joy in helping the sheep.

One of the most important responsibilities, if not *the* most important, is to save a sheep from spiritual death before they die in their sin. The shepherd is held accountable for those sheep under his oversight.

*Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

*Titus 1:9 He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.*

With these passages in mind, I submit the following questions for your consideration and appropriate response:

Did you stand before this congregation approximately six months ago and vow before God and everyone in attendance that you would support our preacher and his preaching from the pulpit after what many considered an offensive lesson?

Have you and do you now support our preacher and his preaching of the full counsel of God?

Do you agree that asking a preacher to hold back on any scriptural preaching directly violates God's Word and His will because it shrinks from declaring the whole counsel of God and takes away from His Word? (Acts 20:27, Matthew 4:4)

Do you agree that Jesus and the apostles publicly called out (by name) and condemned denominations as well as publicly rebuked sin and that this type of preaching is not only scriptural but necessary, even if it offends? (Matthew 3, 5, 13, 15, 16, 19, 23, Luke 7, Revelation 2, 2Timothy 3, Acts 7, 1Thessalonians 2, 1Timothy 1, 2Timothy 2, 3, 4, 3John 1)

Do you agree that Jesus is an example for us to follow in His footsteps, as well as Paul wrote that we should imitate him? (1Corinthians 4:14-16, 1Corinthians 11:1, Philippians 3:17-19, Philippians 4:9, 1Peter 2:21)

Did you stand before this congregation approximately six months ago and vow before God and everyone in attendance that you were going to address the sinful issues in this congregation that have been overlooked for years?

Have you addressed these sinful issues that have been overlooked for years?

Do you agree that forsaking the assembly is a sin? (Hebrews 10:24-26) Do you agree that we have brothers and sisters in this congregation who are forsaking the assembly?

Do you agree that using tobacco is a sin? (Romans 13:9, 2Peter 2:19, Romans 6:16, Philippians 2:3-4, Matthew 7:12, 1Peter 2:21, 1Corinthians 6:19) Do you agree that we have brothers and sisters in this congregation that use tobacco?

Do you agree that beauty pageants, dancing, and dressing immodestly is sin? (1Timothy 2:9, 1Peter 3:1-6, 1Timothy 4:12, 1Peter 4:1-5, Galatians 5:19-21, Matthew 18:6-7, 1Thessalonians 5:22) Do you agree that we have sisters in this congregation who support and encourage participation in these sinful events, as well as parents who allow their children to participate... and members in attendance who dress immodestly?

Do you agree that attending denominational functions and services is sinful? (Hear Jason Hilburn's lesson from 5/18/08)

Do you agree that we have members in this congregation who attend denominational functions and services?

Have you tended to the flock and addressed their public sin with them? If so, why have they not publicly repented and discontinued their sin or been brought before the congregation, and if necessary, have fellowship withdrawn from them?

Do you agree that failure to address public sin in the congregation directly violates God's Word and His will for eldership duties and responsibilities, as well as it clearly shows a lack of love for God and the children of God (the flock you shepherd)? (1Peter 5:1-4, Galatians 6:1, James 5:19-20 and 1John 5:2-3)

In the same way that you claim shrinking down the Word will cause less offense to those who are weak, continued public sin in this congregation causes the more spiritual to start wavering and can even cause them to stumble. It is evident that you are more concerned for those spiritually weak than you are for those who continue to wallow in their public sin. We are not seeing evidence that the eldership is addressing these public sins. Evidence would include public repentance... and repentance requires change. There is no evidence of repentance and no evidence of change. We still have the same spiritually sick members that we had when you vowed to address these sick members approximately six months ago... and they have been sick for years.

Brothers, the evidence shows and witnesses confirm that you halted progress about the time this congregation was actually making progress and had taken steps to address these issues. There is concern as to whether the influence that caused you to make this decision was scriptural or worldly. Neither I nor witnesses are able to find scriptural support for your reasoning, and therefore, it is apparent that your decision has been based solely on your choice to please members of this congregation rather than pleasing God. We may do well to remember that the fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe. (Proverbs 29:25)

I sincerely love you, brothers, and I in no way mean this disrespectfully; however, the evidence shows, and witnesses confirm, that you have failed to tend to the spiritually sick in this congregation. The evidence shows, and witnesses confirm, that you discouraged the full counsel of God from being preached, further shrinking any opportunities that the spiritually sick with good hearts may have of being healed.

This is all written in absolute, sincere brotherly love and for the love of God and His Word. The evidence shows, and witnesses confirm, an outright public disobedience to God's Word, which requires public confession and repentance.

You are binding where God has not bound when you prohibit denominational name-calling from the pulpit or preaching that might be considered offensive. If you take the time and effort to study this subject diligently, it will become crystal clear that denominational name-calling and unintentional offensive preaching are not only scriptural but necessary from time to time. It is a matter of faith, not opinion. It is as scriptural as water baptism for the remission of sins. Brothers in Christ, you are encouraging sin by laying a stumbling block in front of preachers, which is in itself sinful on your part. (Matthew 18:7) You had just as well prohibit preachers from speaking denominational names mentioned in the Bible, such as Pharisees, Sadducees, Cretans, and Nicolaitans. Only the names have changed. I would not even remotely consider abiding in your request, even to my death, nor would any true man of God. The Pharisees attempted to shrink the full counsel of God from being preached in the same way you are shrinking it, yet sound men of God refused the Pharisees even to their own death. Your binding violates obedience to God and rejects God's Word. It is a grievous sin to even attempt to hold back any of God's Word from being preached.

*Acts 20:26-28 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*

You had just as well strike the very words from the mouth of Jesus because they offended many and still offend today...

*Matthew 13:57 **And they took offense at him.** But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household."*

*Matthew 15:12-14 Then the disciples came and said to him, "Do you know that **the Pharisees were offended** when they heard this saying?" **He answered,** "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. **Let them alone; they are blind guides.** And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit."*

*Matthew 24:9-10 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then **shall many be offended,** and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.*

*Luke 7:23 And **blessed is the one who is not offended by me.***

Not only will you have to strike nearly every word from the mouth of Jesus, but you will have to literally discard over half of the Bible, which is composed of preaching that has offended people and still offends many weak and unlearned brothers and sisters to this day.

It has also been mentioned that you are attempting to use 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 1 Corinthians 8:9 to support your decision to prohibit any preaching that may offend weaker brothers or sisters. Brothers, I urge you to study this diligently and in context... it in no way applies to preaching. If you could somehow twist these verses to be applied to give you authority to shrink the full counsel of God and prohibit, or even limit, preaching that might offend, you would have over half of the Bible contradicting itself. The philosophy you are attempting to use is what denominations use to support how they preach, but they use it to their own destruction. Brothers, I beg of you to withhold from such error in your authority.

Preaching the full counsel of God is a command and an obedient service to God, not an expediency and not a liberty to be limited. To censor the counsel of God and avoid controversial doctrine is to edit the words of Jesus and the very mind of God. Teaching God's mind is not a matter of expediency or the decision of man for the sake of people's feelings, their background, or their family issues. Those who rise up against the sound Word of God and against the person speaking those words with scriptural love become exactly like the people who persecuted Jesus, the prophets, and the apostles... all of whom gave their lives for preaching and teaching the full counsel of God.

Brothers, it is becoming more and more concerning and apparent that you are allowing post-modernism and agnosticism with a flavoring of Christianity to make the lessons preached from our pulpit easy to swallow for weak or sick brothers and sisters. It is as if you are being fed denominational teachings and actually accepting them without diligent study. Do you not understand that if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit? Beloved brothers, once again, I do not intend to be disrespectful, but this evil and perverse thinking must be discarded for the truth. We must expel all symptoms of liberalism that are plaguing this congregation. It is what it is! If we start looking for a liberal behind every rock or tree and believe there is danger in everything preached and taught, we essentially degenerate our preaching and teaching into an "alarmist" theology and end up catering to the liberal brothers and sisters. This denies God's obedience and truth.

If you bind where God has not bound regarding preaching, you cause this congregation to become denominational and fall under the apostasy mentioned by Paul in his second letter to Timothy...

*2 Timothy 4:3-4 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*

By binding where God has not bound in regards to preaching, you thereby cause deception by way of smooth and flattering preaching. You will create division, and it will be on *your* hands... *you* will be publicly marked.

*Romans 16:17-18 I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.*

Division caused by standing up for the truth and obeying God is in the hands of those who leave and divide because they cannot endure sound doctrine. Division caused by the eldership's negligence to stand up for the truth and obey God is in the hands of the eldership. Which do you choose?

Brothers, Satan is working hard in this congregation right now. He is doing everything in his power to weaken the Word of God. He is doing everything in his power to cause you to invoke your feelings as well as worldly influence into your reasoning. DO NOT let him have his way with you and this congregation. Choose this day to serve and obey God!

I want to make it clear that it matters not whether you, as elders, ever live up to my standards. What matters is if you live up to God's standards and do His will as an eldership. The only thing that matters concerning all of these issues is the will of God and what pleases God. I pray that you will choose to uphold the Word of God and His will without compromise and without worldly influence. "Feelings" must be removed and replaced with the Word of God.

*Galatians 1:10 For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

I remember the words spoken of by one of you, "I would rather have 50 righteous members worshipping here than I had 150 unrighteous." How sincere are those words? If this is what it comes to because of the truth, then so be it.

My Christian duty and responsibility is to protect my family from congregational error, commandments of men, and vain worship. If this eldership continues to fail at addressing these issues and/or continues to bind where God has not bound, we will have no choice but to respectfully withdraw our membership from this congregation and, furthermore, withdraw fellowship from the eldership of this congregation, in obedience to God. We refuse to worship with anyone who desires to shun the Word of God; it is simply not Biblical.

At such time and if necessary, this letter will be made public as part of my Christian duty to make known to my brothers and sisters in Christ why my family has chosen to withdraw our membership from this congregation and to withdraw fellowship from this eldership, in obedience to God.

*Ephesians 5:11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.*

I scripturally, humbly, and respectfully submit this truth to you in Godly and brotherly love.

I pray that I have not become your enemy by telling you the truth. (Galatians 4:16)

In Christ,  
Sonnie Parker

PS. I want to make absolutely sure you understand that this letter has nothing to do with the decision that brother Jason Hilburn has made to leave this congregation, which I just learned of this morning. I started this letter back on May 21 and have been gathering my thoughts and study as well as planning it for much longer. My intentions with this letter will not sway his decision one way or another, neither would anything you do. Therefore, I continue my obedience to God in bringing forth the truth to this eldership and congregation in hopes that you do what is right. I must say that I am truly saddened by the way this eldership and some in this congregation have treated this brother and his family. I do not fault him one iota for leaving. Many, including this eldership, should be ashamed. Satan won this battle, but ultimately, he will not win the war. I fear if this eldership does not get a grip on this congregation, we will never be able to keep a preacher who will be able to preach the full counsel of God. I fear we will have to resort to someone who merely tickles the ears and sugar-coats the Word of God for those who are weak.