

October 3, 2016

To the Session of Faith Presbyterian Church:

To the charge of contempt toward the Church and its leaders, in violation of 1 Peter 5:5, Hebrews 13:17, and members' fifth vow of membership to submit oneself to the government and discipline of the church (BCO 57-5), I plead not guilty.

The Westminster Confession and the PCA Book of Church Order uphold liberty of conscience as a foundational principle of church government and discipline. To quote from BCO Preliminary Principles 1 and 7:

God alone is Lord of the conscience and has left it free from any doctrines or commandments of men (a) which are in any respect contrary to the Word of God, or (b) which, in regard to matters of faith and worship, are not governed by the Word of God. Therefore, the rights of private judgment in all matters that respect religion are universal and inalienable.

All church power, whether exercised by the body in general, or by representation, is only ministerial and declarative since the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and practice. No church judicatory may make laws to bind the conscience.

The particulars with which I've been charged are acts of conscience, not acts of sin. The Session has overstepped its authority by making laws to bind the conscience, and demanding that I obey the Session's commandments rather than Jesus' commandment in Matthew 18:17 to tell the whole church when private efforts to address sin have failed. It would be incumbent upon the Session to show that I was violating the law of God according to Scripture by sending an open letter, saying that I would attend a Gospel Community Group, or displaying the text, "Justice, not Abuse" during worship, in order to issue binding directives against doing these things, or charge me with sin for violating its directives (BCO 29-1.) These things are not violations of God's law.

Therefore, I urge the Session to drop these charges and repent of the issues I've raised pertaining to injustice surrounding abuse in the church, which are the subject of my open letters and the formal complaint I've filed with the Presbytery. If the Session does not drop the charges, then I invoke BCO 41-3 and suggest that the trial and decision in this case is most appropriately referred to a higher court due to manifest prejudice on the part of the Session.

Sincerely,

Jessica Fore