

Response to Kip McKean and "The Portland Story"

PVCC Elders and Ministry Staff - Sunday, September 04, 2005

Recent events in the Portland, Oregon Church, led by Kip McKean, have made this communication to our membership necessary. We realize that some of our members know a great deal about this subject already, while others know little about it. We also realize that some of our members may not have much personal interest in what is going on outside our local congregation, while others may have much interest for a variety of reasons. Regardless of present knowledge or interest, your leadership of elders and ministry staff believe that the consequences of unbiblical teaching and behavior in a sister church, especially when led by a well known figure such as Kip, will be widespread enough to warrant local comment by us.

Sometime after Kip was asked to step down from his position as "missions evangelist" of churches in the International Church of Christ (ICOC) fellowship of churches, he assumed the leadership of the small Portland church. Since that time, he has led that church to some dynamic results, much as he led the Boston church in its early days to some dynamic results. It is important to note that all of us are indebted in one way or another to what began in Boston back in 1979. The focus on total dedication to Christ and to our spiritual brothers and sisters is certainly biblical. The focus on helping other people become Christians at home and all over the world, with the sacrifices this requires, is likewise biblical. Many other emphases that came through the influence of Kip could be noted that are right and godly. However, it must also be noted that the motivation for doing these right things became more and more worldly and unspiritual with the passing of time, and other things that were promoted were never right in the first place. Short-term results are no longer impressive when the long-term results of a performance oriented motivation are finally seen and understood. While we must decry these wrong things, we don't want to lose our appreciation for the right things to which we have been called, and for the accomplishments that were God-pleasing including our personal salvation.

Having said that, we must say that some unbiblical teaching and actions have tainted Kip's present leadership and influence. Due to these teachings and actions, several brothers met with Kip nearly a year ago at the International Leadership Conference held in Chicago to warn him about the divisiveness that he was promoting. One of our elders, Gordon Ferguson, was a part of that meeting. The concerns expressed in Chicago related to Kip's comments on the Portland web site and in his speech at the Portland World Missions Jubilee in 2004. Some of the objectionable comments by Kip at this time were seen as both disrespectful and divisive. One such assertion was that if any church was not growing numerically, it is lukewarm; and if lukewarm, then its leader is a false prophet. Other comments alluded to a possible calling of the "remnant" (those with true disciple's hearts) out of ICOC churches, and the possible re-planting of churches in cities where our churches already exist.

Obviously, we are all concerned about churches growing and each disciple in every church being a disciple according to the Bible's definition. But unfortunately, we in most

older, larger churches find ourselves trying to help bring order out of the chaos that we believe resulted from faulty building principles in the first place. Taking the biblical premises in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, the fires of testing showed what sort of materials were used in the foundation of our building, and this biblical principle should make it abundantly clear that the building of the past 20+ years under Kip's leadership was clearly faulty. It is pretty difficult to hear Kip state or imply that those of us who are trying to pick up the pieces of a devastated movement are somehow unaware or unconcerned about its condition and helping it to recover.

At any rate, the brothers who met with Kip at Chicago last year expressed in no uncertain terms that he would have to cease such disrespectful and divisive statements, or unity with him would be impossible. It was clearly a warning. Passages such as these were used:

Titus 3:10: "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him."

3 John 1:9-11: "I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church. Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God."

However, in spite of the specifics of that warning, this year's "Portland Story" is much stronger in wording than Kip's statements last year that led to the Chicago meeting with him. The following quote from that article will help you to see the reasons for our concerns and comments:

"However, as of this Jubilee, the Portland leadership believes it is time for a progressive 'calling-out of the remnant of disciples' from dying, former ICOC Churches. For years, I have preached 'one church-one city;' in other words, each city should have only one church of disciples, because if they are faithful to God, He will multiply them to evangelize not only their city but the whole region (Acts 19:8-10). I still believe in this same principle. Sadly, it has become the practice of some former ICOC churches to break-up into geographic groups or groups of various conviction about commitment to Christ, discipling, and church government. If a group asks for help to restore the foundation of sold-out disciples, we will help in any way we can. Biblically, disciples can never rebel against authority, yet as seen with David who 'chose' to transfer his allegiance from the ungodly Saul to the uncircumcised Achish (1 Samuel 27:1-4) one is 'free to choose' whom to submit to. In the fall the Portland leadership will begin to seek out church leaderships in congregations that are struggling to ask if we can help them build a foundation of sold-out disciples. If they are not inclined to receive help, then we will offer to help any group that would prefer to be in a new congregation composed of only sold-out disciples. To the casual observer, this

may look like 'two churches in one city.' Yet, in time it will be obvious who has God's approval."

Regarding the need to help other churches, many leaders in our church and in sister churches have spent multiple hours via e-mail, phone calls and personal visits to struggling churches trying to help them out. Those same leaders have been called and asked for help, and in a spirit of concern, have themselves asked other church leaders of struggling churches if they could be of service. But that is a far cry different from saying, as Kip has, that the Portland leadership is going to offer help to struggling churches, and if those churches do not accept the help offered, Portland will start another church in that city. This assertion in the Portland Story article is arrogant, threatening and divisive.

Additionally, even if it were determined that some churches should be replanted, that determination should be made by more than one leader and by more than one congregation. It must be asked who appointed Kip and the Portland church to be the ones to determine which churches are really legitimate and which ones aren't? The arrogance and pride involved in such assertions is simply intolerable. Leaders in other churches — elders, evangelists, deacons, and others — are having much the same responses that we are to the "Portland Story" and other similar writings coming out of Portland from Kip. If you are interested in reading more about these responses, we especially recommend the responses of the leaderships of the Boston church and the Seattle church. Their letters of concern and warning may be seen on their respective web sites (www.bostoncoc.org and www.seattleicoc.org). We commend the leaderships of these two churches for their rapid and biblical responses to a growing threat among us.

Perhaps you are asking why we are concerned about what is taking place in a city far removed from Phoenix. That is an important question. The answer is twofold. One, the unity of our movement of churches is being threatened, as is the unity of individual members in those churches. With modern forms of communication so readily available, we all can be quickly connected and made aware of what is happening in churches all over the world — good or bad. Two, Kip and some members of the Portland church are actively recruiting members from other churches. This has become a widespread phenomenon, and has already involved members of the Phoenix Valley church. We cannot encourage our members to become a part of a group that espouses what we believe are teachings and practices that are performance-based, and that produce judgmental and divisive views of other churches and disciples.

We are adding our voices of concern to those of others in calling for Kip's repentance of his divisive approaches, and for Portland church members who are actively recruiting members from other churches to cease and desist. Please pray that God will move Kip to repent of these sins, and that unity will be produced through this trying time. While we highly commend biblical zeal and evangelism anywhere it is found, we decry a spirit of elitism that makes any of us look down on others who are trying to do God's will. In our movement in the past, unity between churches was too often based on dictated, hierarchal and competitive principles. We are desirous of seeking a forged type of unity

based on relationships of mutual respect and *agape* love. To that end, we offer our concerns and considerations. For those of our members who desire an opportunity to ask questions and give input on these matters, we will schedule a meeting in the near future.

We who are privileged to lead by serving the Phoenix Valley church are saddened to bring these matters to your attention today. However, we are resolved to respond biblically to anything and anyone that would threaten the flock of God under our care (Acts 20:28-31). Please be praying about these concerns, be discerning and do not participate in anything that would threaten the unity of the family of God in Phoenix or in other places. We love you and trust that you will respond in a way that honors God and defeats Satan.

Love from your servant leaders,
The elders and ministry staff