

If Peter Has The Keys, How Has Kip Been Driving Us Around All This Time?

“You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or pushes himself forward or slaps you in the face. To my shame, I admit that we were too weak for that!”

(Apostle Paul, 2 Cor 11:19-21, NIV).

I thought about titling this essay: “Revolution Through ... Revision,” but with the numerous letters, warnings, and stories from former members, I suspect that this title has already been taken, and probably several times. Much of what I am writing here has no doubt been written many times, and likely will continue to be voiced as ex-member after ex-member calls out to their former brothers and sisters still in the Matrix. I also thought about titling this in the same sensationalistic, zeal-dripping drama that ICC leaders seem to title everything they publish like: “The Evangelization Proclamation,” (Kip), or: “God on His Knees: That’s Discipleship,” (Al Baird), or “Radical Men and Radical Times,” (Gordon Ferguson); So, maybe I could title this something a little more exciting like: “An Awesomely, All-World, Radical Thought: Do Members Still Believe This Crap?”

Since leaving “The Kingdom”, or the ICC, about three years ago and reading various updates on ICC leaders’ activity, I’ve become progressively numb to their scripture twisting, so I almost didn’t respond to the latest postings on the Portland Church of Christ website: “Spiritual Amnesia” and “A Taste of Heaven.” But, having lead zones and groups in The Movement for almost all of my years in it, being responsible for inflicting spiritual damage as customary of leaders of these groups have so done, not wanting to choke-down my voice of opposition as I had cowardly done far too many times as a leader, and just plain indignant with what I perceive as a lack of Godly Sorrow from the majority of the former ICC leaders and many current members, I am compelled to at least add my refute to Kip & Co.’s latest propaganda, and by doing so warn these former leaders and their followers, as one Christian to another, to stop preaching their heresy, to reform their church, and to recover from their own spiritual amnesia.

This essay represents my opinions, as spiritually pornographic™ as they may be. The ICC does not sanction this work, it’s not likely to be a DPI best seller, nor did I receive any honorarium for its publication. Facts and statements are cited from sources. ICC trademark vocabulary is recognized where indicated, but I encourage my “awesome”™ brothers and sisters to point out any accidental use of unacknowledged Kingdom-speak so I can correct as required. Comments and discussion are appreciated and invited. It is quite long, covering refutes and suggestions. Anyone may photocopy or print my essay as desired; just make sure to give credit to applicable sources.

Introduction:

“The past is whatever the records and the memories agree upon. And since the party is in full control of all records, and in equally full control of the minds of its members, it follows that the past is whatever the party chooses to make it.”

(George Orwell, 1984).

Insert “The Movement” or “ICC” for “party” in the above quote and you will read my premise against the ICC and why I am revolted at Kip’s latest articles - - And sickened at the warm reception he still enjoys from his former co-leaders. The very sad truth, which is ever deflected by the thickening shell of isolation the ICC carries around on its back, is that the leaders don’t want their members to research The Movement anymore than many of the stalwart members appear willing to have truly Berean hearts for the whole story of faith. Indeed, like a turtle, ICC leaders and die hard members seem to me to prefer the dark womb of their own, shelled world - - hidden away from God’s finger tapping on the shell - - instead of living in the daylight world of repentance and accountability to fellow believers for their teachings and decisions. And they insist theirs is the way the early church was...

In one recent posting, “Spiritual Amnesia,” Kip states

“At a class on Friday evening I was given the opportunity to address a group of ministers, campus ministers and women’s ministry leaders on the theme ‘Practicals in Campus Ministry.’ However, before practicals can make sense, I felt we needed to remember the miracles of the Spirit in the past”

(Kip McKean, ‘Spiritual Amnesia,’ Portland ICC website, March 2005).

In my opinion, inviting the Kip McKean to teach on “practicals” of ministry for an ICC-wide leadership meeting is like asking the Aryan Nation speak on racial diversity at a Martin Luther King Day rally. Implied in Kip’s transitional clause are requirements to recall how things used to be done and the successes thus attained in order for the “practicals” he unveils to make sense to the audience. Beyond setting the stage for his own comeback, Kip wants his hearers to conjure up images of the successful spread of the Movement and then, it seems, adopt these tried-and-successful practices as his practicals for campus ministries. This methodology is surprisingly not at all unique to The Movement and, like a dependable law of Physics, the “discipleship” methodology predictably creates more damage in movements that partake of it than any level of spirituality it pretends to administer, as will be seen below.

In reading the article, the reader is walked through the birth of The Movement as an enlightened, zealous offshoot of Chuck Lucas’ efforts to incorporate discipleship into the Crossroads Church of Christ, Gainesville Florida, circa 1967.

“In 1967 in Gainesville Florida, the 14th Street Church of Christ (later the Crossroads Church) initiated a pioneering effort to reach out and evangelize the campus. Chuck Lucas (later assisted by Sam Laing) spearheaded this effort. Their efforts included calling each

student to 'total commitment,' counting the cost before baptism, small group evangelistic Bible Studies on campus ('Soul Talks'), and emphasizing the 'one another passages' in paired-up relationships called 'prayer partners' These heroic efforts were propelled by a vision to put dynamic campus ministries on every campus in America!"

(Kip McKean, *ibid*).

Missing only grainy black & white footage and some over-enthusiastic narrative voice to accompany the old photos provided on the website article (authenticated by their hilariously out-of-date fashion), the origin of The Movement in Kip's article otherwise sounds exactly like something out of a cold war, Soviet party newsreel; And it predictably ignores about the same amount of realities.

Even simple Google-level research of shepherding movements reveals the existence of this philosophy well before Chuck Lucas introduced it to the Crossroads Church. In fact, the origins of one-over-one or one-on-one discipling can be traced as far back as fifth century A.D. in the Catholic Church's "Spiritual Directors" system. Over world history, various reforms have occurred birthing shepherding movements like the Methodists. In the US, in the 1960's and 1970's, there were many churches and church organizations utilizing "shepherding" or "discipling" doctrines including: One-on-one/one-over-one discipling, hierarchical leadership, demanding zealous commitments of members' lives and money, and exclusivity to the point of regarding those Christians not participating in the given organization to be at least less-off spiritually or, at worst, condemned to Hell: "The Christian Growth Ministries" (Bob Mumford & Co., Ft. Lauderdale, FL 1972), The "Worldwide Church of God" (George Armstrong, founder, 1968), "The Walk To Emmaus Ministry" (Catholic movement, 1965), the "evangelist" Watchman Nee (China, 1960's, but influence felt in the USA), Pastor Juan Carlos Ortiz (Brazil, and later USA, 1967), "The Navigators" (Around since 1934 and very present in the 1970's), "Christian World Liberation Front (CWLF)" (Yes... I'm serious about that name; from Berkeley, CA, 1969), "Campus Crusade," "the Church of the Brethren," etc.

In fact, Chuck Lucas worked for the 1960's Church of Christ campus ministry program called "Campus Advance" which in fact tried to incorporate some existing doctrine from the Campus Crusade, including authoritarian discipleship. Also interesting to understand about the origins of the ICC from Crossroads was the emergence of "The Jesus People" during the 1970's - - A movement of much more emotional appeal than the discipling movements, but likewise producing organizations that scoffed at the apparent spiritual deadness in mainstream churches, rallied youth to crusades of world-evangelism, and contained churches that also preached hard-line accountability as a means for spiritual purity, perhaps in reaction to the free-speech era of the 1960's and 1970's. Further, in the atmosphere of both zealous discipleship organizations and the rise of the empathetic Jesus People movement, one also finds in the 1970's US the birth of a host of irregular and dangerous organizations like "The Family of God" cult, Reverend Jim Jones' "People's Temple" the "Manifested Sons of God Movement," etc. In short, whether one regards it as a time of first century revival or the inevitable free-speech movement's effect on the American churches, USA society of the 1960's and 1970's was an apparent breeding ground for group after group as believers sought improved wisdom from God and man.

Earlier ICC propaganda, sermons, KNN videos, and the like, have carefully crafted the origins of the movement as being either Crossroads-based or, evolving more recently, via collective, divine inspiration from thirty would-be's lead to discipleship by Kip in a Boston living room - - anything to

overwrite or minimize the reality the ICC was just one of many shepherding groups that have not-so-coincidentally later imploded just like the Movement appears to have done.

The true history of discipling movements and the resulting damage they inflict might have scared-off too many potential recruits from the ICC, so it makes sense that Kip would consistently state theirs is the only true church teaching the one true way - - otherwise, someone might start asking questions and doing research. The broad danger of discipleship movements is the murdering of the Holy Spirit and His personal role in each believer's life. While there is a role for believers in each other's spiritual lives, discipleship movements seek to use man-made institutions, such as leadership hierarchies, personal accountability, etc., as opposed to the Spirit, perhaps because the tangibility of these institutions does give them the ability to motivate a ministry in the absence of spiritual things like true apostolic miracles as was in the first century church. But the man-made efforts of discipleship movements are not only beyond the bounds of Scripture; they fail to achieve even the oldest promise of the role of the Spirit for the Christian:

"The time is coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD. 'This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,' declares the LORD. 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.'"

(Jeremiah 31:31-34)

There is no room in God's words above for a surrogate "Father" between God and the Christian. Yet every single name-brand church pushes the surrogate idea to some extent - - whether much or little. All the churches engender an attitude in which "the church", the leader(s), or both are seen as an "umbrella" under which spirituality is practiced. And evidence of this is seen in such queries as "what does THE CHURCH say about that?" (As if "the church" has a mind and authority of its own). And look at how many believers honestly revere their preachers/leaders as being on a separate spiritual plane. Yet God promised to trump this---not to take away the roles of teachers, but to take away the necessity of teachers/priests in order for someone to make the spiritual connection to God. But any modern-day preacher/teacher, who isn't teaching the followers to know God personally, or themselves, doesn't understand the New Covenant very well---and whether unwittingly or deliberately, he's engendering an unhealthy dependence on himself and on "church".

Kip can sell "discipling" because so many of the other churches show such a great lack of character in the spiritual maturity of their members. Indeed, most churches do NOT make it their business to intervene willfully in the lives of the members. They might try to persuade from the pulpit, but intervention from pew to pew is generally taboo. And the effect is that people keep coming to church merely in hope that they are doing enough good to be OK with God.

But if you imagine a fellowship in which each person was taught well from the beginning that he was to have his own relationship with God, his own convictions, his own study, his own growth, his own purity and maturity, etc. then you have a really different dynamic from what is found in most places. And in a fellowship like THAT, the "pew to pew" talk would be there, but with a much

different flavor than Kip espouses. (*Special acknowledgement to Jack Pelham, former ICC member with articles on Reveal.org, for his contribution to the preceding three paragraphs above*).

The Twins: The Shepherding Movement and The ICC

“For the best leaders appeal to the hearts of their followers, but never to their minds.”

(Machiavelli, The Prince, 1532 AD).

The point the preceding section makes to the ICC is that Crossroads, its avowed ancestor, hardly initiated this approach and, although adding a couple of their own elements, Lucas & Co. just climbed aboard a wave of discipleship/personal accountability ministries that were emergent in the US at the time. In fact, Florida was the center to a more famous shepherding movement, the “Christian Growth Ministries,” founded by Bob Mumford, and others, in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, 1972 and the similarities in their hierarchical discipling and ex-member outcry are alarming. Indeed, Pat Robertson wrote an “Open Letter to Bob Mumford (Killian McDowell, Presence, Power, and Praise: Documents on the Charismatic Renewal, Volume 2, pp. 123-126), in which he complained about abuses associated with the discipleship doctrine. Almost prophetically for the ICC, Robertson stated that authoritarian discipleship robbed members of their ability to develop spiritual maturity in being able to make their own decisions; that disciples knew far more about their disciplers (their term: ‘Shepherd’) than of Christ; Wealthy members being forced to reveal confidential details of their finances, up to 30% tithe annually from individuals and submitted congregations; and all married members were forced to confess all aspects of their family lives. Mumford and the other leaders of their movement publicly apologized in March, 1976 (ibid). But in a careful manner similar to McKean’s and the LA ICC “apology” letters, they, also, claim the system was right but overzealously implemented by their subordinates.

“It is true that many new converts look to someone to keep them from error and to guide them into truth. However, where the individual relies altogether on another person to protect him, they will cease searching the Scriptures and fail to develop his own ability to withstand false teaching... Some find the pattern for their new order of discipleship in the relationship of Jesus with His disciples, forgetting that this was done within Judaism well before Jesus began to build His Church. Instead they should seek guidance for church patterns in the Acts and Epistles... Along with this there is a current tendency to downgrade democracy in the church in favor of submission to central authority...”

(“The Discipleship and Submission Movement”, a position paper adopted on August 17, 1976, by the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1976)

Very interestingly, and again very much to the point for the ICC and its current members, is that almost all 1970’s groups who practiced one-over-one/one-on-one discipling have later imploded, most commonly due to scandals and abuses suffered by the members at the hands of leaders of these movements, who almost without exception held themselves above the accountability they demanded for their members. The practical of “being sold-out” to movements, as opposed to individually committed to God through the Holy Spirit, generated isolation, bred arrogance, and resulted in the unchecked spread of false doctrine and doctrinal immaturity of leadership. The practical of one-on-one discipling, while benefiting movements as a vehicle of command and control, produced a myriad of emotional abuses - - in some churches it established an unholy pyramid of power - - inhibited members’ personal development, and encouraged a worldly calculation of perceived spirituality and commitment to Christ - - having requisite numbers of

visitors, surrendering more tithes, having better looks, being related to highly placed leaders, etc. - a bar that can be raised to any excluding height that is necessary. And the otherwise noble goal of world evangelism in these groups is actually logically trapping - - the inescapable consequent for the false assumption of themselves being the one true movement, or remnant, or "One True Church" (OTC) preaching the only true saving faith.

"As time passed into the later 1970s these young zealous ministers (collectively called the 'Crossroads Movement') were able to build dynamic campus ministries by baptizing scores of students. However, the majority of the other parts of these campus congregations were often very uncommitted to Christ. This brought conflict, divisions and factions between the college ministry and the rest of the members of "the church." In some cases splits occurred. These discouraging and disorienting challenges were likewise faced by Elena and I in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Charleston, Illinois."

(Kip McKean, 'Spiritual Amnesia,' Portland ICC website, March 2005).

According to Kip's most recent explanation, the Church of Christ congregations lacked enough commitment to Christ to embrace what both he and Crossroads were successfully teaching to scores of zealous college students, who were apparently enough "committed" to Christ as a result of embracing their new teaching. Please note the reaction of initial rejection by mature culture and embracing by the youth culture was hallmark of both 1960's and 1970's discipleship and Jesus People movements - - and it can certainly be argued this is sociologically the most common starting point of new movements, be they good or cultic. Implicit in Kip's recounting, the church splits, the division and conflicts his teachings caused, are apparently righteous. In fact, Kip's words: "... the majority of the other parts of these campus congregations..." indicate his revision that the campus ministries now identified their parent churches, further insinuating the parent churches' lack of commitment to Christ. Lack of commitment is defined as lack of embracing his discipleship teaching, a lack of being sufficiently fired-up™, or making new converts, lack of exhibiting excess in a certain criterion. Lastly, and most revealing of McKean's revision, the resulting factions, rejection, and "disorienting challenges" in his mind were still not at all due to any Crossroad doctrinal error meaning he still, from 1979 to 2005, emphatically embraces these dangerous, false teachings.

The challenges from Philly and more particularly Charleston that Kip refers to are documented in a now famous termination letter from McKean's then Houston church sponsor regarding their decision to stop financing and supporting his Crossroads-based campus ministry at Charleston, Illinois (Available at Reveal.org); In 1975, after graduating college, Kip served as Churches of Christ Campus minister at Northeastern Christian College, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; He resigned this post after being disturbed by a lack of commitment among his ministry, and accepted a position at Charleston, Illinois to head-up the campus ministry at Eastern Illinois University. The termination was in fact based on Kip's doctrinal errors. McKean and Roger Lamb were hired as campus minister and co-minister at the Heritage Chapel Church of Christ in Charleston, Illinois in 1976 but were receiving support from the Memorial Drive Church Of Christ, Houston Texas. Hardly confusing or disorientating, the termination letter from the elders of the Houston church clearly enumerate warnings of the practicals Kip was then teaching as well as his insistence on continuing to teach this doctrine in spite of warnings from those over him in the Lord - - or, borrowing his term, "God's Anointed" - - in his life:

"We do not feel that Roger Lamb and Kip McKean understood the seriousness of the numerous items, many of these doctrinally based, that were rehearsed to them on April 4,

1977, in the presence of the Charleston elders, the Memorial preachers and elders, and the deacons on the Memorial Mission Committee... We believe that Brother McKean has brought unBiblical practice, peculiar language, and subtle, deceitful doctrines to Charleston from the Crossroads church at Gainesville, Florida... Without detailing the arguments, the Memorial elders, four preachers, and five deacons on the Mission Committee, are 100% agreed on their evaluation and opposition to the following items:

[Quote listing points relevant to Kip's aforementioned practicals]:

1. *Prayer Partner Concept as now practiced -- This includes confession of intimate sins, peer pressure to conform to human judgmental standards, and intimation. We believe this to be 'artificially supported Christianity.'*
2. *Emotionalism -- This appeals to the feet rather than the heart, and emotions are equated with Spirituality...*
4. *The book, THE MASTER PLAN OF EVANGELISM, was written by a liberal, Holy Spirit-led theologian. Its advocated methods, if followed, are dangerous...*
6. *'Slow drift' programs - Some of these may appear all right within the limits that careful supervision can set, but they will [lead] to wrong conclusions and practices in the hands of the exuberant and inexperienced. Roger and Kip rejected all our advice and counsel on these matters.*
7. *The concept that every Christian must spend every waking hour in "sharing" by humanly set standards.*
8. *The hyper-criticism and judgments employed against our brethren in general and the wedge this drives in the church especially between the older and younger...*
11. *The judgment of humans that mature knowledge must be gained before one is allowed to be baptized.*
12. *That conversion is more than man's obedience to natural, spiritual law.*
13. *The exclusion, attitude, smugness, intolerance, and elitism that is evident in the Campus Advance ministry. -- This does not necessarily mean that Charleston is plagued with this attitude at this time, except as indicated by a failure on our part to "get through" to the two ministers.*
14. *Staking too much on one method (The Master Plan of Evangelism), one church (Crossroads), and one man (Chuck Lucas) -- Brother Lamb and Brother McKean appear to be wholly absorbed in following all three."*

("Letter to Wayne Geiling of the Heritage Chapel Church of Christ from the Elders of the Memorial Church of Christ," Delbert Burkhart, April 14, 1977).

In looking at Kip's early teaching, then the heydays, and now what he currently spews, at least one can say he is pretty consistent - - and consistently wrong. Not surprisingly, the above letter cites attributes of McKean's ministry - - the exclusivity, intolerance, arrogance, and hyper-criticalness of others - - which stirred these divisions and lead to McKean's and Lamb's termination and which would become later synonymous with the International Church of Christ

and Kip's own leadership style. Of practical interest, pun intended, are the following doctrinal points enumerated in the termination letter:

- Prayer Partner Concept (1)
- Master Plan Of Evangelism (4)
- Faith Sharing (7)
- Mature Knowledge Before Baptism (11)

Below, I will attempt to highlight the basic flaws with these doctrines and/or reference others' arguments to such ends. Interestingly, as the ICC grew in size, some of these practicals evolved to more doctrinal exclusivity and in some cases the original statements compared to more recent affirmations would likely surprise current ICC members.

Bear in mind, these doctrines represent doctrinal commonality of most discipleship movements, the exception perhaps being the ICC requiring special knowledge before baptism where, apparently, most other discipleship movements were content enough to take converts as they could get their hands on them.

The rise of these doctrinal flaws is directly related to speaking doctrine where they ought not to speak and misinterpreting key scriptures:

"[The mainline] Church of Christ has said... 'Speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent.' In other words, you must have authority – you must have it exactly in print to do what they do... I think I believe very different than that. I believe that you should be silent where the Bible speaks – if God's made it clear – and speak where the Bible is silent. In areas of opinion, you're allowed to do anything."

(Kip McKean, The Dream: Super Churches, Part 1, World Missions Leadership Conference, DPI Archive Tape # 7762, 1992)

Likewise:

"Probably some critics will no doubt say that we begin some practice and then go to Scripture in order to justify it. But the issue is whether or not the Bible does, in fact, justify it.... A better motto... would be the following: 'Where the Bible speaks we are silent, and where the Bible is silent we speak.' Thus, if God has specified something, we shut up and submit. But if He has not, then we have the freedom to discover the most effective way to carry out His principles...."

(Gordon Ferguson, "Progressive Revelation," Boston Bulletin, May, 1988)

Of course, it was Kip doing the speaking where the bible - - but not several marked leaders and now thousands of former members - - was apparently silent. I am sure the logical problem that Gordon and Kip are hiding in these quotes is obvious to the readers. Basically, the position allows for the creation of any doctrine not explicitly stated in the bible, yet the ICC will damn any other church for that church's interpretation of how to implement Christ's principles. Likewise, such a position places doctrinal decisions of the movement's leaders on the same obedience level as Christ's directions. There is no room for disputable matters and little less for challenging an extra-

biblical rule since Gordon, Kip and the others have claimed the book gives them authority to make up their own rules... and it's final.

"By and large our preaching is man oriented, works oriented, mission oriented, duty oriented, and law oriented. A works oriented gospel is no gospel at all. A constant barrage of 'got to, have to, should and must' are wearisome at best, grace killing at worst.... The sheer grace of the gospel, the good news of it all, has been drowned by this kind of preaching and teaching."

(Henry Kriete, "Honest to God")

This pontificating of doctrine even proceeds from the worst possible interpretations of scripture. Take the movement's cornerstone verses of the Great Commission:

"...Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

(NIV, Matthew 28:19-20)

The Greek translation roughly states, "Go [or implied by imperative: "As you go"], teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, whatever I commanded you..." (Blue Letter Bible, Greek, online). The significant point is that the word used is *matheteusate* which means, "Teach for the point of making followers;" or perhaps in Christianity's sense: "convert." In the Greek, in Matthew, this is a verb not a noun - - the subject of the verse actually being "the peoples of the world". There is not really an equivalent verb in English only a combination: "Make followers" or perhaps "convert" to put the sentiment into one word, but this has to be understood as a verb in order to correctly translate the Greek (A synonym also might be "proselytize" but without the Judaism connotation). The "them" refers to "all nations" ("ethnos" from which we get "ethnic" since the Greek, of course, has no word for "Gentiles" as this is a Jewish word) meaning Christ wants all nations or people taught and converted, and in no ways implies a "disciples only" or "disciple first" before baptism.

Specifically, the Greek of the NIV Matt 28:19-20:

"(19) Poreuthentes oun matheteusate panta ta ethne, baptizontes autous eis to onoma tou patros kai tou huiou kai tou hagiou pneumatos (20) didaskontes autous terein panta hosa eneteilamen humin." (Matt 28:19-20, Greek Interlinear Bible).

BibleTexts.com word-by-word Greek-English translation with Strong's numbers: 19

Poreuthentes ["go" <4198>] *oun* ["therefore" <3767>] *matheteusate* ["teach" or "disciple" or "convert" in English <3100>] *panta* ["of all" <3956>] *ta* ["the" <3588>] *ethne* [colloquial: "peoples of the world" <1484>] *baptizontes* ["baptize" <907>] *autous* ["them"] *eis* ["in" <1519>] *to* ["the" <3588>] *onoma* ["name" <3686>] *tou* ["of the" <3588>] *patros* ["Father" <3962>] *kai* ["and"] *tou* ["of the" <3588>] *huiou* ["Son" <5207>] *kai* ["and"] *tou* ["of the" <3588>] *hagiou* ["Holy" <40>] *pneumatos* ["Spirit" <4151>] **20** *didaskontes* ["teaching" <1321>] *autous* ["them"] *terein* ["to guard" or "watch carefully" <5083>] *panta* ["all" <3956>] *hosa* ["that" <3745>] *eneteilamen* ["I command" or "I enjoin" <1781>] *humin* ["you" <4771>].

Thus:

“Go [you, the apostles] therefore teach [disciple, convert] of all the peoples of the world baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit teaching them to guard [watch carefully] all that I command [enjoin to] you” (Matt 28:19-20, rendered).

As the study series Kip designed proudly boasts, the word “disciple” appears 264 times in the bible. What is not said by Kip is that this word only appears in the gospels and in Acts, and never even once in any epistle. In the epistles, Christians are called by familial names like: “brother” 54 times, “brothers” 184 times, and “believers” 24 times. This familial description evidences a wholly different fellowship (play-on intended) than shepherding movements seek to create.

One can even look at the “Great Commission” or last words of Christ from other gospel narratives:

“He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.’”

(NIV, Mark 16:15-18)

“He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’”

(NIV, Luke 24:46-49)

John’s gospel is silent to the Great commission, although he writes that not everything Jesus did was written since the entire world wouldn’t be able to contain all the books. But, the common point among the other narratives of Christ’s last words is a sending of the apostles, their preaching to the nations, using baptism and repentance. Aside, why not, as the Copperheads do, have the discipleship movement leaders take hold of Mark’s account - - and insist their leaders handle snakes to prove their authenticity by surviving the venom?

The rise and existence of the ICC, like the 70’s shepherding movement that it proceeded from, requires a mixture of one leader deciding the disputable matters as doctrine amid a real or created environment of perceived spiritually-deficit alternatives. A mixture that can be claimed even in contemporary times, especially in ICC congregations that were formerly “on fire” with the movement’s doctrine.

Playing Follow the Leader

"What luck for rulers that men do not think!"

(Adolph Hitler, 1936)

Prayer Partner Concept (1):

"We need to make it abundantly clear that every brother in the congregation needs to have a Discipleship Partner. To not have a Discipleship Partner is to be rebellious to God and to the leadership of this congregation. I think sometimes we have been too soft, but the example that will be given today, as Scott said, is not just a nice methodology, but it will be based on the relationship example of Jesus to the Twelve."

(Kip McKean, *Discipleship Partners*, DPI Archive, Tape # 4007, 1987).

The *raison d'être* of the discipleship movements is that the common Christian is simply too ignorant or immature to properly compute the essential teachings of Christ and then execute them with sufficient purity or purpose, including evangelism and seeking their own advice. Thus, believers need someone to report to; be they called "Coverings" (Watchman Nee), "Shepherds" (Christian Growth Ministries or "CGM"), or "Disciplers" (ICC) or a forced-attendance group setting discipleship/covering.

Discipleship creates a hierarchy of teacher to student, especially when modeled after Jesus and His relationship to the twelve. The problem with Jesus-and-the-twelve model is that the template for imitation here is the perfect Son of God to the apostles who are given the charge of starting the church with miraculous power, plus the subsequent commands Christ gives instructing the twelve to not call each other Rabbi or even think about which of them is higher in spirituality than the others. In discipleship movements, like the ICC, the relationship remains a one-size-fits-all static teacher-to-student indefinitely, wherein questions about a discipler's (teacher's) directions by the disciplee (student) are perceived as rebellious or having a bad heart in light of the misapplied scriptures used to justify discipleship, and again in speaking where the bible is apparently silent. Staff members are never "rebukable" by non-staff as this is dismissed as not being submissive nor taken seriously since the correction comes from someone deemed spiritually defunct so as to prohibit them from being on staff in the first place. In fact, the scriptures used to silence such rebellion or bad heart facilitate the disciplee swallowing virtually any doctrine since questioning the doctrine is equated with rebellion to the divine institution of discipleship.

"If you oppose the Lord's servants, then you oppose the Lord. And see, for American Christians, that's really hard because we want to vote. That's not how it is in the Kingdom. It has never been like that. It wasn't in the Old Testament, and it wasn't in the New Testament. God picks the leaders and you gotta get behind them, amen? That's the teaching of the Word."

(Kip McKean. Indianapolis meeting, 17 March 1994, tape 1, side two).

I would like Kip to explain how it is we should all readily recognize that God has selected him as an apostle, or the sent one to restore the true church. Even more depressing in discipleship movements like the ICC are criteria for the appointment of disciplers or "God's Anointed" - - which

includes half-baked, anti-James notions of spirituality based on recruitment success, relationship or genealogy to high-level leaders, income level, marriage to or dating of an existing leader, submissiveness, etc. Indeed, within the ICC, Kip McKean and his inner circle initially established the leadership based on these criteria:

“But all (no matter how extensive their experience or Bible background) had to begin their training as if they were young Christians. For example, everyone was encouraged to take the First Principles Class. We found that these leaders had to unlearn their past traditions and misconceptions before they could really learn how to build churches... Before any man was sent out to lead a church, he had to become a proven builder in Boston or one of our plantings.”

(Kip McKean, “Revolution Through Restoration,” 1992, p. 10).

The genius of the Boston re-education camp program, like something out of Cambodia’s Pol Pot and alarmingly identical to the Ft. Lauderdale program of the Christian Growth Ministries (CGM), is that leaders moving there were apparently regarded as corrupted by past traditions and so laden with misconceptions that Kip easily marginalized any of their criticism or questioning, no doubt opening the door for easier assimilation of his discipleship ministry doctrine. Here Kip used his speaking where the bible didn’t speak. Notice, they had to prove themselves, not to the congregation, but to Kip. Like Cortez burning his ships, one can visualize these leaders not being paid very well and by this point they had also burned their bridges with their former Mainline employers by rallying to Kip’s banner, thus making them uniquely vulnerable to clawing their way for better positions in the promising infant movement. From the beginning, the movement’s leaders have had very little use and even less respect for any leader, inside or outside, who would not concede to the new doctrine. So, it is easier to understand some of their wacky quotes and the ambivalence they have today to those now trying to speak out or warn them, inside or outside.

Realizing the conditions for appointment to leadership in the ICC, it is amazing that congregations have now not elected to replace their leaders - - who for decades have upheld, defended and preached doctrine from such origins.

The logical limiting safeguard of biblical discipleship is that imitation can only reproduce another “imperfect” sinner - - Awareness of this safeguard thus precludes intrusion into areas of opinion, and when taken to mutually supportive efforts, as happens through Spirit filled fellowship, discipleship fulfills its scriptural purpose. But in “discipleship” movements, the “imperfect” does not so much disappear, as it is in fact lifted-up for mandatory universal imitation. And the doctrines of teacher-to-student and imitation are carried far over the scriptural lines, and implemented with little or no acknowledgement of the Spirit.

The New Testament has no precedent or command for hierarchical discipling for all church members, or any mention of the term “discipleship partners,” or any indication that Christians were required to report to one another in the manner the ICC, CGM, and other shepherding groups have come to expect. In fact, as will be shown later, Christian fellowship, many-on-many rather than one-on-one, provided the most powerful discipleship the believers could have imagined.

Ignoring scriptural context, other relevant verses, and the author-to-recipient relationship, discipleship movements frequently twist scripture to justify themselves, often using a quote from Paul’s writing to Timothy regarding a pretended biblical basis for one-on-one teaching, or succession training:

“You then, my son [Timothy], be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me [Paul] say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”

(NIV, II Timothy 2:1-2)

“See,” the discipleship movement leader(s) goes, “you have the command to teach from one teacher to another student(s), who are then to repeat this process, evangelizing the world in one generation...” and sooner or later, the movement has its d-tree established, the stats start looking better, mo’ money starts rolling in, and it’s back to promised land, LA.

But, examining the un-twisted scriptures closer and in their context reveals much different information. For starters, the recipient, Timothy, was a special young man who had received particular gifts through the laying on of hands by Paul (II Timothy 1:6) and some elders (I Timothy 4:14). Paul is speaking to his acknowledged and recognized evangelist-in-training (Philippians 2:20-22). Timothy was a surrogate leader to whom Paul had given particular charge in establishing and correcting doctrine in some of the first churches, just as he had given similar charges to folks like Titus, Trophimus, Silas, Demas, Phygelus, etc., - - some of whom have apparently deserted Paul, as lamented in II Timothy 1:15-18. Thus, Timothy, like these others, had some special spiritual gifts and/or certainly the particular calling to assist Paul the Apostle in his ministry to the gentile nations. Point being, Timothy was not a rank & file member of Christ’s church he was a special leader. Secondly, the particular teaching that Paul describes in the above verses is the teaching that Paul has said “in the presence of many witnesses” (verse 2). It was not to be any sort of privately confided knowledge since the whole frustrating battle Paul is encouraging Timothy to win is against additional, false teachings added to Paul’s original message by false teachers. Paul’s message was the publicly delivered, uniform gospel to the gentiles (I Timothy 2:7). It would not help for Timothy to reveal any additional teaching, if there was indeed any, especially in such an atmosphere nor should Timothy think Paul gives him any sort of license to do so. Thus, the context of verse is appropriate to what Paul writes just a few lines up in II Timothy 1:13-14:

“What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.”

(NIV, II Timothy 1:13-14)

Paul is charging Timothy to continue to take hold of the true teaching, complete with its freedoms, and refute those who are adding or changing the gospel (sounds familiar, right?). Lastly, consider that Paul is writing his last words, or at least he certainly considers they will be his last words, to Timothy. At the same time in the church, there exists this constant pressure from false teachers who are either knowingly or perhaps unknowingly introducing heresies. Paul naturally instructs Timothy to find reliable men to also instruct in the unadulterated gospel, who will likewise refute the encroachment of these heresies. The point being Paul does not want his apostolic message altered, especially after he is martyred - - A point he makes very clear time and time again, especially early on in Galatians chapter one.

Thus, I assert One-on-one discipling, or more commonly one-leader-on-a-small-number-of-their-disciples discipling in today’s movements existed purely as a means of organizational control, ensuring that all members of the church were fitted into their assigned level of the pyramid or group and that things like information, and especially tithes, run from the bottom to the top levels. There is no such organized structure to the church the apostles bring forth.

As David Anderson, RightCyberU.org, posts on his website:

"In spite of claims made by ICC leaders that "God disciplined Jesus"[Jesus himself was disciplined by the Father." Scott Green, "Discipling Partners," 1988 Boston Leadership Conference, audiotape], "Barnabas disciplined Paul" or "Paul disciplined Timothy," some New Testament conversion stories cast doubt on the presence of an ICC-style discipling chain in Bible:

- *Who "disciplined" the 3,000 converts on the day of Pentecost? (Acts 2:41) There were very few believers at the time the 3,000 were converted on Pentecost – in the low hundreds (Acts 1:15, I Corinthians 15:6). Thus it is improbable that each one of these Acts 2 converts was individually "disciplined" before baptism, in the way the ICC disciplines converts today.*
- *Who "disciplined" the Ethiopian eunuch? In the conversion story of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40), we learn that he rose from the water after baptism and "did not see [Phillip] again" (vs. 39). Instead, he "went on his way rejoicing." No potential discipling partner exists in this story – apparently no one was even present to assign a discipling partner. The Ethiopian eunuch refutes the ICC notion that there is no such thing as a "lone ranger Christian."*
- *Who disciplined Paul? In spite of ICC elder and author Gordon Ferguson's claim that "Barnabas disciplined Paul in the early stages of their relationship, and Paul loved and respected Barnabas immensely,"(Gordon Ferguson, 'Discipling: God's Plan to Train and Transform His People', DPI, Woburn, MA, 1997, p. 36). we have no reason to believe that the two even knew each other from the time of Paul's conversion. We have no scriptural evidence that Barnabas disciplined Paul – or that anyone did. In fact, Paul in Galatians 1 writes: "I did not receive [the Gospel] from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ." (vs. 12) Paul also writes that after his conversion, he "did not consult any man" (vs. 16), but "went immediately into Arabia" (vs. 17) and began his ministry. It is clear that no human being was ever "over Paul in the Lord."*

With such evidence against the presence of ICC-style discipling partners in the Bible, it is puzzling that ICC leadership requires them. The burden of proof lies with any ICC leader who claims that these relationships existed in the New Testament."

Kip, like the rest of the ICC leaders and the die-hard members, can only pretend NT inferences but never find any direct examples of a one-on-one discipling universally practiced by rank and file members because such examples simply do not exist in the bible. In fact, as will be discussed later, even the new models of discipleship groups are at best an artificial rendition of the first century church - - both forms are man made

In 1992, after years of insisting and teaching unquestioning obedience of a disciple to their discipler, McKean & Co. attempted to spin control some of the damages that the ICC hierarchical discipling system had caused by crafting an article in their internal magazine "Upside Down":

"Contained in this issue of Upside Down are admissions of error both in practice and in teaching among discipling ministries about leadership and authority."

(Marty Wooten, "Biblical Leadership", Upside Down, vol 2, 1992, p. 24).

"...I was wrong on some of my initial thoughts about biblical authority. I had felt that church leaders could call people to obey and follow them in all areas of opinion. This was incorrect.

I feel very badly for people who were hurt by this wrong stance."

(Kip McKean, "Revolution Through Restoration," *Upside Down*, April 1992, p. 15).

It is particularly noteworthy, and ought to remind us of the contemporary situation, that there was no systematic retraining of members, no corrections to handbooks or studies or disciplers as a result of these admissions - - And, no personal acceptance of responsibility from other leaders, or no seeking and publicly apologizing to those banished from their movement for not accepting this flawed doctrine, or, more importantly, any discipline/resignations handed down by elders to Kip & Co. for teaching this "wrong" doctrine - - all of which might accompany such an apology springing from Godly Sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:10-11). In practice, therefore, very little changed as a result of these declarations. In fact, with the ousting of McKean and the publishing of Henry Kreite's letter, churches around the movement began apologizing for continuing the abuse of authority through discipling, as the flagship LA church illustrates:

"4) Authoritarian discipling -- Ephesians 5:21

We participated in an authoritarian discipling structure where advice was too often perceived as command. Some felt controlled and manipulated. This was abusive and sinful. We have not been servant leaders and apologize for allowing power to be abused at the top leadership levels."

(LA Apology Letter, Feb. 25, 2003).

Of course, the "perceptions" were indeed realities, and people were in fact "controlled and manipulated," not just feeling or seeming to be that way. I can attest to being on both ends of these situations, as can almost any current and ex-member. These results and admissions are similar to those confessed and conceded by another discipling movement, the Christian Growth Ministries, who likewise "went beyond what was written." In 1975, an article in Christianity Today magazine discussed the problems with the shepherding / discipling movements:

"A dispute is taking place over issues of authority and discipleship. Powerful figures in the movement have built up a chain of command linking many local groups around the country to themselves... Discipleship involves submission to the shepherd as he points the way and points out flaws in behavior. . . . Some travel to Ft. Lauderdale to receive training directly from Mumford and his colleagues. . . . Those being disciplined must consult with their shepherd about many personal decisions. In some cases, shepherds forbid marriages, reject school and vocational plans, demand confession of secret sins"

(Edward E. Plowman, "The Deepening Rift in the Charismatic Movement," Christianity Today, October 10, 1975, pp. 65-66)

The Shepherds of Christian Growth Ministries met in Oklahoma City in March of 1976 and issued the following "Statement of Concern and Regret":

We realize that controversies and problems have arisen among Christians in various areas as a result of our teaching in relation to subjects such as submission, authority, discipling, and shepherding. We deeply regret these problems and, insofar as they are due to fault on our part, we ask forgiveness from our fellow believers whom we have offended... Insofar as it lies in our power, we will do our best to correct these situations and to restore any broken relationships."

(Killian McDowell, editor, 'Presence, Power, and Praise: Documents on the Charismatic Renewal,' Volume 2 pp. 123-126).

Hierarchical discipleship in these movements invariably leads to those on top lording it over those below. This leads to intrusions of personal opinions mixed with genuine teaching; our Lord warns against such discipleship:

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

(NIV, Matt 23:20-28)

"He also told them this parable: 'can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ... You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.'"

(NIV, Luke 6:39 – 42, abb.)

"But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven."

(NIV, Matt 23:7-9)

" 'Do you understand what I have done for you?' he asked them. 'You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.'"

(NIV, John 13:12-15)

Current ICC members should not be duped into thinking the recent apologies are significant changes in the discipleship doctrine. Although the ICC "appears" to have redefined discipleship, making noise quoting various "one-another" verses, one should realize leaders meetings are still occurring, with a selected, "spiritually qualified" set of members attending. The same leaders who participated in the abuses of discipleship, knowingly or ignorantly, continue to draw salaries and attend their own meetings. First Principles are still being used in most churches, and one must still swallow discipleship before being baptized. The ICC continues to seek man made ways to implement spiritually natural results of a spirit-filled first century fellowship.

Effectively, the change has been a concession for the rank and file to pick their partner. In some cases, one-on-one has been replaced with group discipleship and, while certainly much better, membership or attendance to such groups should be voluntary, not compulsory or assigned.

The problem is the conversion growth potential, command and control superiority, and purpose-for-life appeal of shepherding ministries makes them very difficult to reform or to release Christians to their own recognizance, relying on the Holy Spirit.

Massah's Plan of Evangelism

"But if anyone should anger these wasps, they'll sufficiently revenge themselves in their public sermons and so point out their enemy by circumlocution."

(Erasmus of Rotterdam, The Praise of Folly, 1511 AD)

Master Plan Of Evangelism (4):

The Master Plan of Evangelism was written by Dr. Robert Coleman and had been used as a resource for discipleship movements, including the ICC, as soon as its ink had dried. Unfortunately, shepherding / discipleship groups usually twist enough scripture and misinterpret enough chapters from Coleman to justify themselves - - Essentially going from the Master Plan to their "Massah's" Plan - - "Massah" being the leader of the movement - - of enslaved, submissive obedience to the movement's particular doctrine, or else. Movements also may require a certain number of conversions over a particular time, such as at least one per year, or the member may be removed from membership roles. In such movements, the Master Plan becomes Massah's Plan, and is implemented with statistics, evangelism quotas, campaigns, rebukes for too much "inward focus," etc.

Below is an excerpt from an interview with Dr. Coleman (RC), author of The Master Plan, by Chris Lee (CL), Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary student:

"CL: Have you heard much about the abuses over your book and how its been twisted?"

RC: You mean for instance with the [International] Church of Christ? I never was involved with the Church of Christ, nor did I intend the book to be twisted in this manner. But people will be people, and they will twist anything."

("Conversation with Robert Coleman, regarding Master Plan of Evangelism, Chris Lee, 2/26/02, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary;" As available on: Rightcyberup.org, as of March 2005).

Coleman's book, The Master Plan Of Evangelism, was first published in 1963. Other figures in the 1970's shepherding / discipleship movements have published shepherding manifestos as well, such as: Watchman Nee: The Normal Christian Life, 1977; Bob Buess: Discipleship: Pro and Con, 1975; Bob Mumford: Take Another Look At Guidance, 1971; Juan Carlos Ortiz: The Call to Discipleship, 1975, etc. A study of theological differences in the all discipleship ministries is a beyond the scope of my essay, however it should be understood that these figures agree that personal one-on-one mentoring is essential for the Christian to properly grow and to fulfill the "Great Commission" of Matt 28:18-20 by replicating themselves into another.

Discipleship, then, represents a revolutionary change to the Preacher Paradigm where: Believer-sits-in-pew, fights-to-stay-awake, and tosses-in-support, while preacher-preaches and missionaries-go-out "missionizing"; Discipleship Paradigm enrolls each believer into a life-time purpose of worldwide evangelism in imitation of Christ.

Based on the Great Commission verses, the logic of such discipleship is essentially circular:

"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given

to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

(Matthew 28:18-20, NIV)

Per these movements' logic, Matthew 28:18-20 teaches that Jesus commands his apostles to go into all the world, make disciples of all nations, baptize them ("disciples"), and then teach them all things Jesus commands; Especially their own 'Commissioning,' since in these very verses the last words of Christ are teaching the apostles to go into the world, baptizing others; So, the true disciple will thus make more disciples.

When all cylinders are firing, growth in the Discipleship Paradigm is then excitingly geometric (insert sound bite: Mozart symphony by Vienna Orchestra), as opposed to the boring additive growth (insert sound bite: Scratching violin shrieking "Twinkle Little Star" by a novice third grader) of the Preacher Paradigm; the believers march to one drum, becoming a worldwide movement, obeying their fearless Man Of God, the world is evangelized and subdued for God, in our day, and Christ returns, sending those lukewarm, cotton-pickin' "denominations" away, never to persecute God's Anointed again, and to Him be the glory (to God, I mean)! Victory is ours!!!

Actually, it doesn't go that way in most discipleship movements, nor especially in the ICC. For starters, there is that very powerful, always succumbed-to temptation for these imitated leaders to teach, and a nasty susceptibility of converts to willingly be taught, impure mixtures of their movement's rules and Christ's teaching, with the same standard for acceptance and compliance expected of the rank & file for both ingredients in the blend. Another danger is the inevitable rise of a pyramid structure where those in charge must somehow properly direct the subordinates. In their own spiritually dead way, and symptomatic of the lack of the Spirit's involvement in these programs, most discipleship movements make appeals to scriptural arguments, often packaged in portable handbooks or ready-to-use study series, as opposed to using the presence of a disciple's personal example obeying scripture, influencing nonbelievers to conversion through their daily observation of the Christian linked with correct preaching of the word - - which appears is what Dr. Coleman meant, and certainly what the apostles and Christ did for believers in the early church; a very different, less exciting, and more difficult-to-capture-on-KNN-videos discipleship, indeed. Further, being fellow sinners, most discipleship movement leaders failed to justify or explain their credentials to be the principal template for mandatory, down-the-chain imitation; Although in the ICC's case, much noise for justification was made via growth statistics and the leader's success in creating the movement, which, while publicly reporting baptisms, actually left out the other side of the story - - the alarming number of those who left the movement. Although a mentoring system might be of some benefit to Christians in deepening their understanding of living-out Christ's teachings, the corruption starts because shepherding systems become the engine for growth. Christians who are Spirit filled, in their bibles, and know God really don't need much guidance to be godly.

Like stirring-up the Kool Aid at Jonestown, shepherding / discipling movements such as Christian Growth Ministries, the ICC, and others, delivered the very basic, refreshing message of Christ mixed with toxic doses of rules, requirements, and exclusivity which eventually poisoned hundreds of thousands of believers' faith. The effect of the mixture is seen in the sermons, propaganda, and actions of the movements' members and leaders. As Pat Robertson reported in his 1975 rebuttal letter to Bob Mumford, of Christian Growth Ministries: "... one leader of the shepherding movement stated if he knew that God was telling him one thing and his shepherd told him another, he would follow the shepherd's command." (Killian McDowell, Presence, Power, and Praise:

Documents on the Charismatic Renewal, Volume 2, pp. 123-126). Kip repeats this dictum to ICC members in a quote below and consistently maintains the necessities of one-over-another discipleship through the movement's history:

"Get disciplined by men. Most of you have discipling relationships. Some of you don't. You need to find them. It's biblically commanded! How could you not have them?"

(Kip McKean, 'The Saints in the Kingdom of Light' presented in England at the 1984 'United Kingdom Missions Conference')

"Even if he [discipleship partner] calls you to do something which disobeys your conscience, you still have an obligation to study it out and prayerfully change your opinion."

(Kip McKean. Boston Seminar, 1987).

"And when they [a disciple] start filtering out, they're going to filter out what seems best to them, and the whole point of being a disciple is that they don't know what is best for them. But their discipler knows what is best for them."

(Kip McKean, Boston Leadership Retreat, 1989).

"The point is this: We are not going to throw-out the perfect institution of discipleship simply because sinners are in it. Discipling is God's plan. It's not a choice! You don't get to vote on it. You can't go halfway with it any more than you can go halfway in a marriage."

(Kip McKean. Indianapolis meeting, 17 March 1994, audiotape one, side two).

"Jesus, our perfect example, disciplined them as a group. He disciplined them one-on-one. And, yes, even one-over-one. And then he paired them up and sent them out on their first mission."

(Kip McKean, "Revolution Through Restoration III," July 13, 2003).

"Today many churches in the ICOC fellowship have either abandoned discipling relationships or compromised them by teaching there is no such thing as teacher-student (one-over-one discipling) relationships in the Scriptures. This is devastating false teaching. (2 Timothy 4:1-4) No wonder so many disciples are confused, lonely, lukewarm and lacking zeal for souls. One person teaching another is the essence of the method and ministry of Jesus."

(Kip McKean, "The Mandate From God For World Evangelism, Part III," March 14, 2004)

The mixing that spoils the Master Plan to “Massah’s Plan” starts as a result of the movement using the hierarchy of one-over-another / one-over-others discipleship to enforce personal interpretations and rules with the same veracity as Christ’s commands. No maturing is possible since the discipling is from leader to student and the best the leader can do is replicating his own flawed self into his subordinate. In the ICC some opinion-that-became-doctrine examples have been dating rules, communal living exclusively with other members, reading only such books and propaganda as written or sanctioned by leadership; More sinister examples include who to marry or date, who is considered leadership potential and the resulting prejudice by a leader’s down-line disciples against those not making such a grade in his opinion, career or school schedules that are allowable, how many converts must be made or reached out to, and how much members ought to “cheerfully give.” These are all requirements of “Counting the Cost” study.

What’s particularly telling of their regard for discipling is that rank & file disciples in the ICC or other discipling movements are never graduated by their disciplers - - that is, the teachers never acknowledge a student has become fully trained and now needs a new, more advanced teacher or is in fact equally ready to disciple their former teacher on identical matters of opinion. You’ll find no such testimony from Kip or other highly placed leaders touting their success at teaching an underling to such a state, that the student should now be considered equal to the master. Grievous sins aside, the underling’s discipling station is a situation of convenience, a product of having exhibited sufficient acquiescence, sharpness, or blood relation so as to be situated at their particular height in the discipling tree - - Indeed, the only time the tree is shaken and the branches rearranged is when a leader moves in, marries or dates; or at three rights of passage in the disciple’s life: Graduating school, moving, and marriage, where there is a change in both husband and wife’s ministries. Although the obvious need is for peers to be matched (i.e.: singles to singles, campus to campus, marrieds to marrieds), the ICC and other discipleship movements get it wrong here since discipleship is more about fellowship and imitating Christ through interaction with the body and scripture, not about rewarding conformity and allegiance to their movement or its rules or elevating the immature to be templates for imitation.

Bearing Fruit or Sowing Wild Oats?

“Passive acceptance of the teacher's wisdom is easy to most boys and girls. It involves no effort of independent thought, and [it] even seems logical because the teacher seems to know more than his pupils; it is, moreover, the way to win the favor of the teacher, unless he is a very exceptional person. Yet the habit of passive acceptance is a disastrous one in later life. It provokes a man to need and to seek a leader, and to accept as a leader whoever happens to be established in that position at the time.”

(Bertrand Russell; English Mathematician and Philosopher; 1872 – 1970).

Faith Sharing (7)

In the discipling movements, the concept of faith sharing or “bearing fruit,” taught by sycophantic leaders using “Massah’s Plan,” has long been synonymous for the production of converts - - the necessary result of “a disciple” properly executing the Great Commission and thus proving oneself to be a true disciple of Christ. While Watchman Nee, Christian Growth Ministries, The Jehovah’s Witnesses, The ICC, and others differ on the degree of their feverancy, all share the mission to fill the world with more disciples of their respective movements. Indeed, many discipleship movements, lead by immature leadership and eager to implement their massah’s plan, follow the ICC’s lead in misinterpretation of Jesus’ teachings to justify their own ends:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

(NIV, John 15:1-8)

The ICC stance on fruit is best exemplified by a brief chronology of quotes on the subject from Kip McKean:

“...The acid test of the ministry is the fruit of making disciples. You bring glory to God by bearing much fruit. John 15, verse 8--he’s talking about disciples right there, that have been baptized in to Jesus Christ.”

(Kip McKean, Congregational Meeting, Boston, May 6, 1990)

“Everybody’s expected to bring visitors every week! They don’t bring a visitor, we ask why. Not pressure, I’m concerned about the soul; you’re not fruitful, you’re going to be sawed off the vine.”

(Kip McKean, Super Church, Boston Leadership Conference, Aug 92)

“Have you been personally fruitful, and let me spell it out for you. Someone you met, someone you studied with, and someone you personally baptized. Who’s been personally fruitful since last year? Raise your hand. Well, it’s better, but I want you to look around. These people with their hands raised are not to be commended, they’ve simply done their duty. But you that don’t, you need to be rebuked! You’re in sin! The Sin of cowardice, the sin of unbelief, and the sin of laziness! And you need to talk to someone right after this message.”

(Kip McKean, “Preach The Word,” Johannesburg World Leadership Conference, Aug 95)

“Right here, the text is very, very clear. It centers in verse 16 of chapter 15. Jesus simply says: ‘You did not chose me, but I chose you for a purpose; to go and bear fruit - - fruit that will last.’ And this is our theme this morning to go and bear fruit. I do not think this is the fruit that Paul speaks about in Galatians... Do you have lasting fruit? Are the people you’re discipling staying faithful and producing other people?”

(Kip McKean, “Go and Bear Much Fruit,” DPI archive, 1999).

“For us over 2600 years later, it is almost unimaginable that our "brothers of faith" could have lost the entire Book of Deuteronomy! In our day, something especially shocking has been lost; God's plan to give everyone on earth the opportunity to be saved. Truth: Jesus is God's only path for salvation. (John 14:6) Truth: there is only one Biblical response to be saved - faith, repentance and baptism. (Acts 2:38) However, hidden in God's Word for centuries, most have lost God's only plan to save the entire world in a lifetime - the multiplication of disciples. Truth.”

(Kip McKean, “The Mandate From God For World Evangelism, Part III,” March 14, 2004)

Obviously, the ICC interprets the “fruit” Christ is speaking of in John 15:1-8 as being the disciple’s generation of recruits, a definition in continuum with shepherding movements’ general interpretations both of discipleship and of Coleman’s book The Master Plan. In compelling but misguided zeal, in subordinates’ corrupt spurring of wordy evangelism quotas, in high-level-leadership scripture twisting falsity, the ICC and McKean have venomously decried that to not bear fruit, or make converts, will mean God will revoke that disciple’s (or that church’s) salvation as accurately quoted above - - a concept called: “fruit inspection.” Not much could be more horribly anti-Christ than this teaching, except perhaps the pre-baptismal-knowledge doctrine.

Simply using a concordance and a Bible, one can discover there are different uses of the word “fruit” in the New Testament:

Edible fruit: Such as figs.

“Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, ‘May you never bear fruit again!’ Immediately the tree withered.”
(NIV, Matthew 21:19)

Fruit of the Spirit: Such as characteristics evident in a person who has the Holy Spirit (i.e. a Christian).

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, . . .”
(NIV, Galatians 5:22)

Fruit of the Sinful Nature: Such as a penalty or evidence for condemnation.

“For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.” (NIV, Romans 5:7)

Fruit of Repentance: In repenting from one’s sinful nature, the acts of remediation that are corrections of prior sinful behavior.

“John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” (NIV, Luke 3:7-9)

Manifestation of a Condition: I define this as outward evidence discerned of internal condition. For Christians, it may be synonymous with Fruit of The Spirit, above, but since this is used before the Pentecost account, I separate this meaning.

“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.” (NIV, Luke 6:43-45)

Material and Monetary Contributions: As voluntarily given, in this instance to aid in famine relief for the Jewish people in Judea.

“For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way.” (NIV, Romans 15:27b–28)

Conversion or Life Changing(?): Although this use could certainly be indicative of the maturing-good of the believers, I am inclined to separate this example as a connotation for numeric growth.

“...The faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth.” (NIV, Colossians 1:5b-6).

Metaphorically: Praise: The passage below states when believers praise God, it is a fruit of their lips.

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.” (NIV, Hebrews 13:15)

One can argue other or different classifications. But, the point is there are many fruits in the New

Testament that we are commanded to bear, or can voluntarily bear, as Christians. Whether extensional definitions (as in physically defined, “the juicy fig hanging on the tree over there”) or metaphorical (as in proverbially defined, “fruit that will last”), all these uses of the word “fruit” imply the produce or result of a particular state or volition. Obviously, one cannot possibly assign each use of “fruit” the same interpretation, even if one wants to claim the problem with the cursed fig tree was its lack of baptisms (metaphorical application) or if one wants to see Christ foist a hygienic rebuke on those poor apostles, warning they soon would be walking around with lasting fig buds dangling from their dirty beards (extensional application). Likewise, one gets other hilarious, and more importantly very dangerous, interpretations of the Great Commission if one applies “making disciples” to certain interpretations of “bearing fruit.”

So, if “fruit” means more than just replicating disciples, what does Christ mean in John 15:1-8? While Christ may use any metaphor he wants at any time (he is God, after all...) or indeed be talking about multiplying disciples, but notice “people” are “branches” and “he” [Jesus] is the “vine.” Fruit is what is borne by the branches if they stay connected to the vine, or remain in the vine, and apart from the vine the branches cannot bear anything. Please note that once a branch bears fruit it is useless until the grape falls off the branch. This connotes the apostles not so much bearing other branches, but living examples that are the evidence of Christ’s teachings on things like the Beatitudes, love for one another, and purity - - that is the fruit, and is much more aligned with true discipleship, imitating Christ and shining good works before men. In fact, in verses seven and eight, Christ adds another fruit by likening the bearing of fruit to the promise of granting whatever the apostles pray for, as long as they “remain in” Christ - - or follow His teachings (John 15:10). If Christ were using fruit as a metaphor for production of converts, then he is telling the apostles they will establish the church being eternal branches whose usefulness would extend beyond their deaths through their teaching and writing. Through those teachings, much fruit would be borne throughout the generations. Yet, Kip and other discipleship movement leaders get this wrong as they would have members go to these massahs for their teachings as opposed to going to the apostles themselves, through their NT writings. Fruit of converts and of the apostolic messages were born immediately in the first century and continue to be born in spite of the mishandling of God’s word between the ICC and other churches out there today. In discipleship movements, like the ICC, bearing fruit cannot be defined as an individual using their portion of the Spirit and the spirit filled fellowship to grow and encourage others since such growth, while biblically correct, simply doesn’t have the tangible manifestations that movements rely on for control. In their zeal for conversions, or more sinisterly in their greed for ever more tithe making disciples to thrust below themselves on the d-tree, smacking their lips when both “bear” and “fruit” appear on the same page of the bible, the ICC leadership has ignored what Christ defines regarding bearing fruit.

Our Lord’s teachings include love God and love their neighbor; and a life of purity not proscribed by a list of do-on-do, rule-on-rule of the Old Testament but lived from a personal responsibility for repentance aided by the Spirit. Previous criticisms of the ICC’s stance on bearing fruit have often ended like: “Yes, the ICC absolutely is wrong about what Christ meant on bearing fruit. But, we still ought to evangelize, that’s the Great Commission.” There are fifty-seven uses of the verb “preach” in the NT, and each of them is connected with men who had special spiritual gifts, and not just talents for speaking. While missionaries can and indeed should be supported to travel to areas of the world as yet untouched by The Word, and these are becoming fewer these days, the believers’ role in evangelism is not defined by exactly the same paradigm in nations or regions where Christ has been worshipped for almost two thousand years. In such places, the church “bears fruit” of maturing its members, of expanding the love of its fellowship, and its charity to those inside and without - - again, the fruit of maturing those who believe and the fruit of budding

faith in those unbelievers who visit such a church. But in all cases, imagine the impact that could be created by believers really imitating the first century church - - meeting in homes, sharing and considering revelations of insight from the scriptures, and banding together to help and encourage one another to stay pure, their walks saturated by the familial-like love within their fellowship.

Again, Christ's is a very different discipleship than the ICC practices, but one that escapes such shepherding movements as they implement the "Massah's Plan." The reason Kip and others like him can sell "discipleship" so easily is that most of today's churches aren't places of biblical fellowship. So, Kip is able to sell it to his members because they don't know any better and they likely won't ever get it, either.

How to Earn Your Free Gift

“Exercise, when compulsory, even does the body good; but knowledge which is acquired under compulsion obtains only a little hold on the mind of the learner.”

(Plato, The Republic, 360 BC)

Mature Knowledge Before Baptism (11):

“...I want us to be really of one mind and of one heart about the purpose of these studies. You might have stuck-in another scripture, you might have had another study. Listen, amen, and perhaps that might have been a little bit better, perhaps not. But this is the plan that we’ve got. It will work, if we work the plan with our hearts, amen?”

(Kip McKean, “First Principles: Follow-Up Study #1: After Baptism, Now What?” DPI, Tape # 10076, 1989)

“Most impacting was called ‘Discipleship’ where from my study of scripture, I taught what was clear in Acts 11:26: Saved = Christian = Disciple, simply meaning you cannot be saved and cannot be a true Christian unless you are a disciple also... I taught that to be baptized, you must first make the decision to be a disciple and then be baptized.”

(Kip McKean, “Revolution Through Restoration I,” 1992, p. 3).

“Once you become a disciple, then you can be baptized, but you cannot be baptized until you become a disciple. And that’s where, as far as I know, the rest of the entire religious world got it all messed up. I don’t know of any religious group in this world that teaches you gotta be a disciple to be baptized, and yet that is what Jesus said two thousand years ago. And it’s as clear as any verse in the Bible. That’s as clear as John 3:16. That’s as clear as Acts 2:38. That’s as clear as any verse you’re gonna read, and yet I don’t know of any other religious group that teaches you gotta be a totally committed disciple (emphasis added) of Jesus to get baptized into Christ.”

(Nick Young, “Tulsa Reconstruction,” 1992, tape 1, side 2)

“If someone’s not denying himself every single day. If someone’s not asking himself the question, ‘Okay, what would Jesus do’ and if his [own] will goes against it, saying, ‘...I’m going to do what Jesus wants.’ If someone’s not living that way every single day, is that person living the life of a disciple? No. So is that person a Christian? No. So is that person saved? No.”

(Dan Conner, GSL, “Discipleship: Equipping Classes for Men,” 1996).

“When you preach who is really saved: that you gotta have faith, you gotta repent, you gotta become a true disciple of Jesus, and then you gotta be water immersed for the forgiveness of sins received through the Holy Spirit, that excludes all other denominations . . . everybody else that’s out there.”

(Kip McKean, “Preach the Word,” DPI Archive, August 1995, tape #10091)

Instead of preaching a more correct, but of course less-than-KNN-Videogenic salvation - - by grace freely given through faith in Christ, ala Ephesians 2:8-10:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

(NIV, Ephesians 2:8-10)

As an aside, I believe the bible is clear that one must be baptized (Mark 16:15-16), and that it is the pledging of a good conscience towards God (I Peter 3:20-22), though not necessarily the arrival of a perfect heart. I don't believe that if one believes in Christ and dies on their way to the water that such a person is lost to hell because they weren't baptized. Likewise, one cannot mock God by pretending to be persuaded and then be baptized, relying on such a hollow faith to be saved. Obviously, the status of all people's hearts is fully visible to God who is the final judge and shepherds each son or daughter to opportunities for not only conversion but also subsequent understanding and repentance.

With its unbiblical version of discipling, combined with its twisted implementation of the Master Plan, and in its salivating lust to generate underlings faster than fall-aways, the ICC has added sequential steps and requirements before even a Regeneralist salvation will be approved for the potential recruit; thus one huge chasm in their split from even the Mainline. One must become a disciple, which by ICC definition includes changing one's life to conform to the movement's standards for a disciple, proving their commitment, and then be baptized, literally earning this freely given gift of salvation.

As mentioned earlier, most shepherding groups, especially given the prerequisites in the ICC, rely on a pre-packaged study series or set of books completed in proper order to perform a conversion, as opposed to a conversion that is lighter on printed information and heavier on the personal example demonstrated by the Spirit-filled member. In such movements, conversion becomes a choreographed performance, a sequential staging of teaching and inspection of progress towards swallowing the requirements. You'll find nothing like this in the bible.

As anyone familiar with the First Principles Study series can certify - - this better and should be all members and ex-members since they have proceeded through them at one point - - to become a disciple, the prospective convert must complete some or all of a series of studies with one or more ICC members: Having finished the Word study the recruit will inadvertently agree to use the ICC interpretations of scripture to be delivered in the subsequent studies; After completing the Discipleship study the recruit realizes they are not a disciple and are not saved since they are not doing enough of one or more of the ICC definitions of what disciples do - - a discipler may be assigned at this point or during the cost counting depending on how much the recruit is buying it and if the sector leader has the interest in assigning a partner at this point; Having completed the Kingdom study the recruit realizes the mission of the church is to seek the lost world and that the ICC is indeed the current movement of God to achieve this end, all others failing miserably; Next, completing both doses of Light and Darkness, which are intended to show the recruit they are lost due to their own sin as intimately confessed - - but the recruit is not allowed to be baptized yet, even if they are broken by sin or the doctrine; The recruit next studies the Cross to understand the response of being cut to their heart, but unlike Pentecost day, the recruit's baptism is again still a few more studies away; The next study is the critical Church study: The: "Church-is-the-body-

there-is-one-body-therefore-there-is-one-church-and-lucky-for-you -that's-us" study; and at this point most recruits will buy it no questions asked. Finally, after getting through the Church study, it's time to meet the sector leader - - unless he's already hijacked the study from those "fully trained" underlings who brought their friend out, in the name of "moving them," being more spiritual, or trying to satisfy a pressure from his bosses to personally convert someone.

The sector leader needs to make sure he/she "feels good"™ about the recruit's readiness to be baptized as evaluated by a Counting The Cost study wherein the recruit will be required to commit to tithing plus Special, dating or marrying only in the Kipdom (err... Kingdom), obey their leaders, abstain from spiritual pornography (especially the Internet and all those bitter fall-aways), be assigned a discipler unless already done, attend all of the following: services, devotionals, midweek, bible talks, campaign rallies, jubilees, morning prayers, all-night prayers, woman's & men's days, their own better-soon-be-bearing-fruit study sessions, follow-up studies, new Christian meetings, d-times, birthday parties, child-sitting for the leaders, baby and marriage showers, retreats, other meetings of the body such as leader's meetings, and household times... Oh, yeah, they need to move-in with some brothers / sisters since living on one's own is selfish and now of course it is not even affordable.

Like a human sacrifice in old Azteca, the baptismal date can conveniently be delayed or occasionally rushed by the sector leader to fall on a whatever day within the following hierarchy of dates: Whenever Kip or some big shot is visiting, the upcoming church-wide jubilee or retreat, the religious holiday service, SMC collection day, a service wherein bearing fruit is re-taught, after a service wherein the congregation is scolded for not reaching-out enough, before a sermon wherein the congregation is scolded for not reaching-out enough, the last week of the month when numbers have not looked too great, the first week of the following month when the current month's numbers look awesome™, etc. (At one point, the very early Catholic church did this, too, waiting until Easter to baptize most converts or on particular saints' days).

For the ICC, the prospective member's eligibility for salvation depends on their leadership determining if the candidate accepts these requirements and is ready for baptism. Baptisms have and can be withheld indefinitely. Ultimately then, receiving God's grace in ICC depends on faith plus the completion of many works, the presumptuousness of the leaders judging another's heart, and finally baptismal regeneration.

All of these practicals are the consequence of the ICC having roots in the Shepherding Movement, use of the "Massah's Plan," unrestrained discipleship, and an unbiblical conversion style. Add these doctrines up and you get a very un-biblical church. With such requirements, one is left to wonder if their ICC baptism was indeed an act of saving grace or the public show of an unbiblical union between the believer and this program.

The Return Of The King?

*“... Naturally, the common people don't want a war; neither in Russia, nor in England, nor in America, nor for that matter in Germany. That is understood. But, after all, it is the **leaders** [sic, in emphasis] of the country who determine the policy and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy or a fascist dictatorship or a Parliament or a Communist dictatorship.’[HG]*

‘There is one difference,’ I pointed out. ‘In a democracy, the people have some say in the matter through their elected representatives. And in the United States, only the Congress can declare war.’[Dr. GG]

‘Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of their leaders, and that is easy to do. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in any country.’[HG]”

(Hermann Goering [HG], Nazi Reichsmarshall. Interviewed by psychologist Dr. Gustave Gilbert [Dr. GG] while Goering was jailed at Nuremburg, on the evening of 18 April 1946; Documented in Gilbert's book: Nuremburg Diary)

A very dangerous possibility exists that Kip McKean will be invited by current leadership or rank-and-file members to reclaim a leadership title or position of influence similar to his old post over what remains of the ICC while holding to his miserable practicals. In his recent article, “A Taste Of Heaven,” Kip summarizes points for his latest Portland ICC sermon; but, like many of his recent articles, he certainly intends “Taste of Heaven” for universal reading in and out of the ICC. Examining the assertions of this sermon, the reader can easily see Kip advocating a return to the “practicals” which got the ICC into such an ungodly mess, pun intended, to begin with:

“Friday morning, I delivered the keynote lesson, ‘My Grace Is Sufficient’ focusing in on chapters eleven and twelve of 2 Corinthians... My first point was from 2 Corinthians 11:1-5, 13-15: ‘Wickedness In God's Church.’ Here I addressed concerning reports we have been given by many who have recently visited Portland that in our worldwide fellowship a ‘different Jesus,’ a ‘different gospel’ with a ‘different spirit’ is being preached by some individuals masquerading as ‘servants of God.’ They preach ‘Jesus did not command each generation to go to all nations,’ yet Jesus commanded the eleven faithful to go to all nations... They teach discipling is not in the Bible or is optional, yet Jesus teaches that each disciple must ‘make disciples’ by teaching obedience to His commands...”

(Kip McKean, “A Taste Of Heaven,” Portland International Church Of Christ Website, March, 2005).

Using the technique of persuasion Goering describes, and in the same kindred spirit of arrogance that the Nazis used in executing their go-around with it, Kip appeals to his current supporters and the next would-be followers within the ICC by telling them their real faith is under assault, slanting any apparent change by other ICC churches away from former, false doctrine as being unholy and

even warned-about by the apostles themselves. By the way, not one former high-ranking leader has publicly called Kip to account for these statements nor has Kip been publicly warned. Given the fallacies and lack of biblical basis for Kip's practicals (Four of which are dissected above: Discipleship, Massah's Plan, Bearing fruit, and his absolutely worldly notions on baptism), ICC members should be rejoicing like on a Palm Sunday that even the illusion for change in these doctrines exists in their branch of the ICC.

What some of the ICC Churches have apologized for, said about changing or perhaps promised to change:

"...The ministry staff of the New York City Church of Christ would like to offer in writing an apology for the sins and shortcomings, which we have committed over the years. We know that many of you have suffered much pain and hurt because of our mistakes... Listed below are the sins and shortcomings that we have seen: Pride and arrogance... Elevation of leadership to the status of 'Expert' in all matters of life... Self-righteousness that led to a false understanding of the one true church... Irresponsibility and lack of wisdom... Worldliness... Cowardice and people pleasing; a reservation to speak the truth in love to those over us in leadership..."

(New York City International Church Of Christ, "Letter from the Elders, Evangelists, and Ministry Staff of the NYCOC.")

... Words cannot express how sorry we are and how much we want to change everything that has been ungodly or humanistic about our leadership and character. After much listening, Bible Study, soul searching and prayer, the following is a list of the areas we have seen that need to change and changes we immediately want to make... Authoritarian Leadership... False Teachings/Practices... Forced tithing and coercive giving... We have also come to realize that we have created a "clergy/laity" system... To ensure an open line of communication in the future, we wish to hold regular open meetings, so the elders and evangelist can be open to anything you would like to express. Also, in addition to our Board of Directors, we wish to develop other specially appointed committees in the church to make recommendations in such areas as Benevolence, Adoptions, Compensation, Facility Search and Improvements, and Budgets..."

(Nashville International Church of Christ, "A Letter from the Elders and Evangelist of The Nashville Church.")

"Why are we replacing the old study series? Primarily because the old series was too focused on man's performance and not nearly enough on God's grace as our primary motivation for serving him."

(Phoenix Valley Church of Christ website, March, 2005)

"...Over the last 15 months, many things have had a deep impact on us -- including the articles and lessons of several teachers, evangelists and elders that were preached, taught, published, mailed and e-mailed as well as many conversations and correspondence with other members of the church. This input has helped us to develop deeper realizations of needed changes and a godly sorrow for our sins. These understandings have also come

about through much prayer, study, reflection, soul-searching and discussions with many others inside and outside the LA Church..."

(Los Angeles Church Apology Letter, Feb. 28, 2003)

"...During the past few months different unspiritual practices and attitudes that have pervaded our movement over the years have been uncovered. Different talks, letters, discussions, "family talks," and most of all what we believe to be God's Spirit of conviction have caused the staff of the MMCC to re-examine its leadership of God's people ... We see the depth of pain we have caused God and His people. We desire to hear so much more from you, in order to solidify and deepen our brokenness and convictions. We are sorry for the sins we have committed against God, against many of you, and as well against many who have left the church. We are convicted to see a root sin and various other faults at different times in the history of the churches of the Philippines..."

(Metro Manila Church of Christ, "Unless the LORD Builds the House, Its Builders Labor in Vain.")

Etc.

Apologizing is simply the first step, albeit a giant one for ICC leadership considering their historical totalitarian style and their fury against those who had spoke-up and were marked in the past about these issues they now ironically apologize for. Sorrow needs to always accompany action, which is actually the same medicine ICC folks deliver to recruits when they are broken by their sins; And although they call them to the action of joining the ICC (yikes) for forgiveness, the sorrowful churches, members, and their leaders ought to swallow the same medicine - - and gallons of it - - and act in repentance.

As Paul writes:

"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done."

(2 Corinthians 7:10-11)

Most ICC churches have a long, long, long way to go in repenting and changing past teachings, these statements and "promises" aside, since, no doubt, Kip would have preached a 'spit-a-flying' firebrand on Revelation's horned beast being among us, giving out its mark, if, say, even ten of the ICC churches had already implemented but one quarter of the necessary changes - - "You see, the tens horns are the churches in the following ten cities... and, the ten heads are the following ten leaders... and the mark is the word 'autonomy,' ... So, let's all wear only Nike shoes so we can tell one another from the beast. Now, pass the Kool-Aid around, Amen, CHURCHHH-zzz?!" - - Thankfully, not yet.

Without pointing to specific churches or leaders in his article, Kip asserts that the worldwide fellowship is no longer teaching discipleship, and they are teaching a 'different Jesus,' a 'different gospel' with a 'different spirit' by some individuals masquerading as 'servants of God;' and that

Jesus did not command each generation to go to all nations. Interpreted as a restatement of his practicals:

- Prayer Partner Concept = “No longer teaching discipleship.”
- Massah’s Plan = “... That Jesus did not command each generation...”
- Bearing Fruit = “... a different gospel...”
- Mature Knowledge = “... with a different Spirit...”

I’ll not belabor my own refute of these practicals again (probably to my very patient readers’ immense joy), but I do want to point-out that in Kip’s mind clearly they are still essential to distinguishing his true gospel from that which is preached by other ICC leaders who are “those masquerading as servants of God.” Again, implicit is Kip’s claim that he is preaching the uncorrupt gospel, now in the ICC as well. So, changes or corrections to his version are nothing less than false gospels being taught by servants of Satan. Even more sinisterly, Kip links the concept of him preaching the only solid gospel with the notion of there being a single leader for the churches.

“Some teach there should be no overseeing evangelists to tie churches together as a brotherhood. They believe each church is autonomous, and not the responsibility of anyone outside their local congregation. In contrast in the New Testament, Paul sent Timothy to Corinth without an interview or discussion with the Corinthian leaders (1Corinthians 4:15-17); Paul sent Titus to all the churches of Crete to ‘straighten out’ issues; and Paul received financial support from other congregations to plant and minister to weaker churches, such as Corinth. (2 Corinthians 11:8). For there to be a brotherhood, there must be ‘fathers of faith’ that unify us through relationships.”

(Kip McKean, “A Taste Of Heaven,” Portland International Church Of Christ Website, March, 2005).

Three guesses, though the answer is self evident, as to who Kip thinks is qualified to be a - - or while he’s on the exclusivity roll, perhaps the - - modern “father in the faith” to all the ICC churches... Since Kip correctly cites Paul, Timothy and Titus’ roles in evangelizing and establishing churches, being sent to either counsel local leadership or perhaps replace it for a time, the biblical role of leadership in the church bears some examination. Indeed, leadership is at the very heart of why Kip is active, and many local congregations are stagnant, about the future of the ICC organization.

As such, I will attempt to convey my findings and interpretations on both interchurch (between) and intra-church (within the church) leadership.

Interchurch Leadership:

The first Christian church was, of course, in Jerusalem and was the only recorded church for at least several years. As one of Kip's favorite verses describes, it wasn't until the church arrived at Antioch, years later, that the church earned the name "Christians" (Acts 11:26). By the way, it is highly likely that "little Christs" were named as scornfully as would a "little Kip." Until that time, Luke calls them: "The believers" (Acts 1:15) or in Greek: "the brothers;" Romans referred to them as "The Way;" the Talmud called it an "apostasy"; and, as is still used by some conservative Middle Eastern Imams today, we might even be called: "Followers of the Nazarene, peace be upon his name." The Jerusalem church had close alignment with both the Temple, as it met in Solomon's Colonnade, and the Jewish rites, as it was first delivered to the Jews. It wasn't until the scattering and the Gentile ministry of Paul, with his doctrinal conflicts against Judaizer brothers, that the first elements of interchurch leadership are documented:

"Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: 'Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.' This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them."

(NIV, Acts 15:1-2)

Since Kip's latest posts, I now wonder if these men from Judea arrived because they were concerned about the "commitment level" among the gentile Antioch brothers - - but again note the word used, not always "disciple;" here it is "brothers." Whatever the reason, this encounter demonstrates some implications of the interchurch leadership of early Christianity.

Absent in Acts, unlike as documented numerous times in the gospels, including that of Luke who also wrote Acts, there does not appear to be anymore questioning among the apostles as to "who is the greatest" (Mark 9:34) or "who will be the greatest" (Luke 9:46). The relationship between the churches and the apostles appears to be one of brotherhood and collegiality - - that there would even be a meeting or "council" ("*The apostles and elders met to consider this question*" NIV, Acts 15:6) to resolve this critical question demonstrates the lack of a recognized single leader making the decisions. The reason for this is the apostles' recognition that Christ was the head of the church.

In fact, both scripture and early church authors record that none of the twelve even personally lead the church in Jerusalem; leadership there was given to James ("The Just" as sometimes referred to), who was one of Jesus' recorded "half" brothers (Matthew 13:55). Eusebius records: "*Now Clement [of Alexander] ... says that Peter, James, and John, after our savior's ascension, though honored by the Lord, did not contend for glory, but made 'James the Just' the overseer of the Jerusalem church*" (Eusebius, History of the Church). Also note Peter's directions to his brothers upon his release and subsequent exile from Jerusalem and the leadership recognized from James: "*Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. 'Tell James and the brothers about this,' he said, and left for another place*" (NIV, Acts 12:17). A final kicker, as mentioned above, the earliest record of Christianity in the Jewish *Talmud* refers to it as "The heresy of James," again indicating the apostles weren't interested in making a name for themselves or in micromanaging the show or being "God's Man." And throughout the NT, James, despite his apparently powerful influence over Judean brothers (Acts 15 and Acts 21), doesn't appear to direct the affairs of any other church than the one in Jerusalem. Neither the apostles nor anyone claimed to be the "lead evangelist" of the new movement or even "God's Man."

"We have very clear vertical lines of authority. I am the lead evangelist."
(Kip McKean. "Super Church." July 1992)

In fact, the ruling from the meeting of Jerusalem (Acts 15:23 – 29), first voiced by James then consented to by the leaders, through the Spirit, indicates the believers were of consensus on four basic tenants for new Gentile believers: abstain from blood, meat of strangled animals, food sacrificed to idols, and sexual immorality. Aside, the question weighed here by the church may have been reveling of an evolution in Paul's, James', and the other apostles' understanding of the place of the Law with its traditions in the new church. Apparently, some believers, particularly among churches in Judea, appear to have clung to some traditions of the Law, thus James' statements later in Acts 21, and those churches among the nations, founded by Paul, that did not appear to have such a powerful cling: Peter's rebuke from Paul regarding eating with "gentiles; the High Priest tolerating The Way being within 100 meters of him every day at the temple, until Stephen is martyred; The purpose of the book of Hebrews; Paul's return to Jerusalem in Acts 21 and his voluntary participation in a Nazarite ritual; Paul's later contemptuous wish that Judaizers not practice just circumcision but full emasculation; Paul's appeals in his epistles for tolerance in Christians' observing or not observing days or diets to honor God; The ruining of whole households in Paul's ministry by legalistic teaching; etc.; But I digress, sorry.

Christianity was indeed apparently much, much simpler than the ICC and many other of today's denominations have made it out to be, as the meeting or "council" determination clearly underscores. Bottom line™, this council demonstrated the apostles' and elders' desire to hear questions of salvation and by consensus of the Spirit bring forth Christ's wishes. Note the apostles stated it seemed good to the Spirit and to them.

The situation is parallel to Israel seeking a king in I Samuel 8:5-20 and God letting them know that He is their leader and a king or monarchy leadership by man is not what he intended, and would be a dreaded thing actually. By the way, some "Monarchists," I'll call them, have advocated that in the absence of a king, the people doing as they saw fit was a terrible thing thus the parallel need for a "king" in God's church or "movement." Although not having a king sometimes led to crises and in times of need God raised up judges to save them, the tribes were expected to be obedient to the covenant of the Law, which served as a very particular, theocratic, and God-abiding society for the Israelites. Provided they were behaving themselves, the Israelites' not having a king was good and exactly what God wanted to have been at the time.

In another parallel to the tribal leadership, and perhaps intentional from God, Paul, Timothy, and Titus, etc, were sent only to churches within the ministry of Paul. Paul does not presume to send someone to Jerusalem or to Caesarea or into the Samaritan churches, for example, to take over the leadership there.

Paul was an apostle as surely as Peter, and some have argued Paul was the intended twelfth apostle to replace Judas. Christ called Paul to apostleship in general and specifically to evangelize with Barnabas among the "Gentile" nations. While Paul preached in synagogues to Jews and in city forums to Gentiles, clearly God set apart Paul and Barnabas for a specific ministry (Acts 13:1-3) of the one, true gospel among gentile nations. The apostles thus understood Paul & Co.'s particular authority over these churches so as to establish the faith among "the nations" as Paul & Co. evangelized them.

This is also why the apostles, like Bartholomew and Levi for example, aren't appointed and didn't demand appointment or any authority over Paul's churches; they were quite busy evangelizing to their own appointments from God, being likewise martyred, and, again, preaching the very same gospel of salvation.

Apostles also had special authority from Christ to establish the church, and they had the ability to work miracles to demonstrate their appointment; Their authority allowing them to bind things in heaven as on earth, and vice versa. Obviously, one can hardly expect scriptures or of course God's charge to the apostles to allow the justification for the spread of any heresy or false doctrine on salvation by a given apostle in the vain of: "Well, if Paul & Co., for instance, wanted to preach human sacrifice in their churches, then it's okay for him to replace leaders there at will since that's the ministry he was given to work in..." It is likewise not allowable for James' men to insist on circumcision in the new church or for a leader to replace or reeducate local Church of Christ leadership in the name of spreading his own false doctrine.

I Corinthians 4:14-17 reveals that Paul planned to send Timothy to Corinth.

"I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church."

(NIV, I Corinthians 4:14-17)

Here a "father in Christ" is a spiritually mature person, they type of overseer who can correctly guide the church and the believers through living a day-to-day example of Christian life. Corinth apparently has few mature members, thus their numerous problems associated with individual pride and the need for Timothy. Paul wanted Timothy to remind the Corinthians of Paul's way of life so that they could imitate Paul - - not in any unspiritual or worldly things, but the imitation of the traditions and way of life consistent with being a Christian. Note, Timothy was not permanently assigned to Corinth and his leadership was by influence and apostolic appointment to correct a crisis, using the virtues of patience and correction he is extolled to practice in both of Paul's later letters to him, I and II Timothy. Uniformity of practice, or apostolic tradition, is implied in 1Corinthians 4:17. Paul's way of life in Christ was consistent with ("agrees with") what Paul taught "everywhere in every church". There was a uniformity of practice that grew out of Paul's teachings. Please recall, Paul wrote very often of not enforcing disputable matters upon Christians, in a balance to apostolic authority to command.

In Titus 1:5 Paul wrote to Titus, *"The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished . . . "* (NIV, Titus 1:5). It is evident from Titus 1:5 that the apostles did indeed have a definite way they wanted things done. Also clear is that Paul had absolutely no intention of micromanaging churches he established, he left the day to day shepherding to local leadership. Balanced with Paul's declarations on disputable matters, there was obviously some kind of order, pattern, or tradition, which was followed in organizing the churches and an expectation for their worship. Likewise, Paul also wrote, *"And when I come I will give further directions "* (NIV, I Corinthians 11:34).

It is interesting to note how Paul silenced those inclined to be contentious about church order. He made an appeal to the universal practice of all the other churches: *"If anyone wants to be*

contentious about this, we have no other practice - nor do the churches of God" (NIV, I Corinthians 11:16). Regardless of the reason for this statement, probably rooted in Judaism, the point is that Paul showed and expected all churches to be doing the same thing, and not just his congregations nor those in Judea. In I Corinthians 14:33 - 34, something else was said to be true in "all" congregations (plural): *"As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches"* (NIV). Again, regardless of the correct application of this verse, notice how Paul again appeals to a universal pattern in all the churches as a basis for conformity.

Paul further indicates a uniformity of practice among NT churches:

"Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored."

(I Corinthians 14:36 – 38)

Evidently all the churches were expected to follow the same patterns in their church meetings. Steve Atkerson, of the "New Testament Restoration Foundation" and whose sources have been used to frame much of the above discussion, perhaps summarizes it best when he writes:

"The pivot point hangs on whether or not God has revealed a universal pattern for the church in the New Testament. If He has not, then anything will do so long as it works. But I am convinced that nothing so dear to the heart of Christ as His Bride should be left without explicit instructions as to her corporate conduct. I am further convinced that the 20th century has in no way simulated this pattern in its method of 'churching' a community . . . it is incumbent upon me, if God has a pattern for the church, to find in the apostles' teaching, and to establish, that pattern at all costs."

(Steve Atkerson, "Shadow of The Almighty: Life and Testimony of Jim Elliot").

And the patterns were implemented without a top leader, pontificating doctrine. This was only accomplished by yielding to the Spirit through mutual consensus by the local leadership and there was no ramming home of disputable matters.

Another very important point regarding the lack of centralized leadership is seen in Paul's response to the always-troublesome Corinthian church. Apparently, certain individuals were trying to give their allegiance to various ministry high rollers, but Paul was not having it:

"My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?"

(NIV, I Corinthians 1:12-13)

And:

"For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, 'I follow Paul,' and another, 'I follow Apollos,' are you not mere men? What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe - - as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the

seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow... For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."

(NIV, I Corinthians 3:3-6,11)

If he had been seeking to be the leader of the movement, Paul's scolding would have been directed at those leaders like Apollos, who would have apparently undermined his authority, instead of at the entire church. Tradition arising by their sharing the same Spirit allowed a unity in certain important matters of early church leaders. But, clearly, neither Paul nor any other apostle dictated singular interpretations of doctrine unto all the churches. Likewise, they recognized disputable matters.

So, is Kip correct in saying that the church needs lead evangelist(s), "fathers in the faith," "Awesome™ World Missions Leaders," whatever title, who are equipped with the authority to replace or assign leaders to local congregations as that world leader(s) sees necessary to support his goals? Not if they are to police some man's wrong doctrine that is out of step with apostolic instructions or the very teachings of Christ.

The apostles served to bring about the uniform practices and doctrines of the early church, since they were specifically appointed to do so.

"We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with Him on the sacred mountain. And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophesy of scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophesy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you... In their greed, these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up."

(2 Peter 1:18-21, 2:1)

Per Peter, the apostles were simply implementing the Spirit's desires and their consensus leadership proves their commitment to this. There was no one man leading the church; Christ was, and still is, its head. And Peter, who with James and John actually beheld Christ in His glory knowing then for certain the authenticity of Christ's teachings, exhorts the believers to pay attention to the apostle's message that fulfills the OT prophets, so that they may be saved.

All of these examples point one to imagine a much simpler church, each congregation adhering to the same gospel but none lording themselves over another. The check and balance of leadership needing to be persuasive to those within the home congregation as well as outside, among the other churches of the body ensured no one man could usurp Christ's seat leading it.

Intra-church Leadership:

The meeting of Jerusalem demonstrated that neither Jerusalem, the mother church of The Way's movement (in ICC terminology), nor even the apostles themselves were to dictate to the umpteenth detail doctrine or even manage the church at local levels. The church would rely on the simplicity of the gospel, consensus of the Spirit, and the character of the believers, as Christ called them "good soil," to help raise-up and guide local congregations. These leaders were called "elders" or "overseers" or "shepherds" or "pastors" or "bishops," all meaning the same title, at least in the first two hundred years. Unlike teachers of the law, these leaders, while fallible men, were to be the living examples, stamped out of true "discipleship" in imitation of how Christ walked, so as to lead by personal example and concerned love, not pontification, pedestal, or hypocrisy.

"The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless - - not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it."

Elders, or in Greek "*presbyteros*," were to be plural, that is more than one per city, perhaps meeting in more than one house church, and they shepherded their city or area by consensus without one man in charge, as was the problem John the Elder laments (Possibly to the Gaius of Corinth and the church in his home):

"We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth. 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."

(NIV, III John 8-10)

They were to be of very high character, honest, and by the account above, very decent men. The local overseers were to be called to anoint the sick and to defend the flock from false teachers. In addition, some elders in local congregations were the sole source of teaching and preaching:

"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,' and 'The worker deserves his wages.'"

(I Timothy 5:17-18)

Paul sets the pattern intended for local church leadership.

"They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them

to remain true to the faith. 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,' they said. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia."

(NIV, Acts 14:21-25)

"Appointed elders..." or "Had elders elected" (New International Version) "in each church" in Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, etc. Unlike the heavily sycophantic or nepotistic ICC and other denominational leaders, the Greek word "*cheirotones*" used here by Luke, a Hellenistic Jew, shows Paul and Barnabas did not choose these leaders. The Greek "*cheirotones*" literally means, "*Elect by raising of hands.*" (Blue Letter Bible, Greek, online) Also, consider Titus: Paul commands him to "Elect by raising of hand" elders in every church on Crete. Paul tells him what morals an elder must have, but the churches on Crete appointed their own initial leaders, with Titus then officially recognizing them. (Titus 1:5). Elders were to withstand scrutiny from their flocks, and then be appointed to serve, honored as a leader. There was an empowerment in the establishment of the initial local leadership of the churches. (By the way, election lasted almost three hundred years until the end of the third century and faded as a clergy rose, more on this below).

Recall, the ICC began as a reconstruction movement, and the leaders insisted that any existing leadership move to Boston to be re-educated, the ones most absorbed by the ICC teaching were returned to leadership - - a very hostile take-over indeed. The point was to install leaders loyal to the ICC agenda and Kip & Co., even from outside the local congregation. In fact, the ICC repeatedly moved leaders to new stations rather than use existing leaders within a local congregation. This is an un-empowering practice.

Look at these examples of decision empowerment in the early church:

1. Replacement of Apostles:

When the time came to replace Judas, the Apostles solicited the input of the entire church (Acts 1:15-26) - - Note in the scripture, Peter is speaking to the entire 120 members. They nominate two persons, Mathias and Joseph, and the church casts lots letting God choose between these two nominees.

2. Appointment of Deacons:

As we have all read at one time, a complaint arose between the Grecian and Hebraic Christians in the Jerusalem Church (Acts 6: 1 – 7). The apostles gathered all the disciples together and had them elect seven men who would be responsible for the allocation of the considerable benevolence the Church was giving out.

3. Ministry of Barnabas:

When Antioch was being converted after the Great Persecution, following Stephen's death, the Jerusalem church, collectively, appointed Barnabas to go there and encourage the new church (Acts 11:19-24).

4. Jerusalem Council:

To define the doctrine of the early Christian church - - That is, whether the Christians would have to obey the Levitical laws - - neither Paul, nor the other apostles assumed "God's Anointing" for answering this question, nor did the elders (Acts 15:1-35). Verse six the elders and apostles

consider the question, and in verse 22 the entire church commends Paul's position, and the entire church sends his mission on its way with additional brothers selected by the church.

5. Letters' Audience:

Paul writes directly to the churches in Galatia, Philippi, Rome, Thessalonica, and Corinth. Paul did not write the elders to straighten out these problems, he wrote the members stirring them to collective repentance. Peter likewise writes at least two letters to the believers at large.

The last thing the early church appears to have wanted was either strong central leadership or the emergence of a priestly class, which would be shuttled around to congregations, replacing inferior leaders. After all, per Peter, all believers were a royal priesthood. One thing the church did appear to have was an involvement, or enrollment if you will, of its believers:

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming."

(NIV, Ephesians 4:11-14)

And:

"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good... And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts."

(I Corinthians 12:7, 28-31)

Clearly, all members are given particular manifestation of the Spirit, in some cases different from those who might be assigned to "disciple" them in today's discipleship movement churches. Notice also in writing to a church like Corinth whose members appear to struggle with elitism and superiority, Paul reminds them of the greatest way - - love. In such a brotherhood, all members can more clearly see how they belong to one another, how they are capable of helping and learning from one another.

In light of the past ICC twisting of the "Parable of the Talents" in Matthew - - twisted into a self-serving explanation for making a sufficient quota of converts - - it is enriching to consider that parable of Christ as perhaps speaking to his envisioning of the church and its individual members; particularly in context to its preceding "Parable of the Virgins" and their clear symbolism of those waiting wisely, and unwisely, for the return of their groom, which will be the believers waiting for Christ's return one day.

The "Parable of the Talents" similarly indicates all members of the church had identical charge from their master before his return, but here the thing that angers the master is the lazy servant doing nothing with his given talent - - not even depositing it in a savings account - - and then trying

to justify with an excuse that the master is a hard man, which he clearly wasn't given his treatment of the first two servants:

“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability... After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’ His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ ... The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’ His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant!... [same]... Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! ... Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest... Throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

(NIV, Matthew 25:14-30, abbr.)

By the way, a talent of gold represented approximately \$425,000.00 today, or 6000 blue-collar days wages, depending on where one lives (and depending if you have an expense account, housing allowance, travel budget, and severance package). ICC leaders usually focus on the money, or, that is, the wicked servant's lack of re-producing more money, which in their sermons are converts. Really, the talents might be apportions of the Spirit given by God to further the church. The master, after all, gives the talents and then departs, perhaps either in reference to the Law being fulfilled through Christ, or rather in prophecy to Christ's death and the charge he gives to His people, the church, until he returns. The servants are charged over their own talents, not the estate as a whole or collectively. Some ICC leaders have even gone so far as to reinforce this lazy servant's slanderous mischaracterization of God being "a hard man" by insisting God expects us to earn our keep, through acceptable amounts of additional converts like earning talents, or He'll saw them off the vine - - completely blinding their hearers to the insightful meaning this story relates about the Spirit and true fellowship.

Digressing into this parable a little more, since there is a great point to see about the church and its members using their Spirit given gifts, "The Talents" parable represents the same ignorance of the foolish "Virgins Parable" above this story in the gospel - - that they fell asleep wasn't wrong, since all the virgins, both wise and unwise, snoozed - - It's that the unwise didn't take things remotely serious enough to even bring oil since how in the hell, pun absolutely intended, can one light a lamp without oil? - - Representing a deficient faith or unbelief; or perhaps not having even the basic Spirit that make the potential brides being ready to meet their groom that night, who's return they all certainly knew to expect - - again, as the church so expects Christ. Perhaps the oil indeed represents the Spirit. Notice the distinction is what's inside or not inside the lamp - - oil.

Likewise, "Talents" is the same with the "Sheep and the Goats," the parable that Christ follows "Talents" with. Notice the more clear expression of final judgment that is in tempo with the "Virgins" and "Talents." In the "Sheep and Goats," the condemned, who are in this parable believers as well, certainly would have fed, clothed, visited, or given a drink to God or Christ - - Imagine seeing God in all His splendor needing a drink, etc. Who then in their right mind wouldn't

give Him help especially for such a powerful king, expecting the favor it would return? But the goats are precisely condemned because they wouldn't give anything to even the most needy, or as Christ says least, brother of his. While the goats may have been keeping themselves on-fire, pointing out one another's sins and not daring to date the sheep (weird pun intended), there is no true fellowship, no acts of giving to the very least among them or to the other animals (sheep). It follows the way they all could have been saved was in fact having fellowship of mutual giving and helping those inside, and outside, which is precisely the Christian life that Christ and the Spirit teach over, and over, and over, and over again. The goats are totally out of touch with the message of following Christ. In fact, the major "oops" for the goats here is just like the preceding two parables, the "Virgins" and the "Talents" - - The Spirit of God is manifested differently in believers (like different quantities of talents) but universally enables them to be like Christ giving to one another and to outsiders, even to and from the least of us "Sheep", and these basic, call them "spiritually instinctive" acts - - as plain as taking oil for a lamp or even putting one talent forward - - are what will make us visible in the darkness of the world at the end of time and we will be thus recognized by our groom (Virgins) to receive that reward which is promised.

To return from so much digression, all believers are given particular gifts and/or doses of the Spirit, and in some modern cases these would be different from those who might be assigned to "disciple" the believer in today's ICC; Thus the need for all parts of the body. So, how could "discipling" be any way but one with everyone else in the entire church, to maximize the opportunities for mutual growth and use of the body's gifts? Unless you think your discipler is indeed Jesus Christ and you think you are indeed an Apostle in training - - in which case you need to stop reading this immediately and seek professional Psychiatric help - - the "discipleship" believers are otherwise called to is a mutual love, teaching, and life of obedience to Christ through the unity of the Spirit, as biblically substantiated, to help one another get to heaven, shining before the world as we go about it. In fact, one-on-one discipling for rank and file Christians is a divisive practice, fragmenting a body that was designed to be shared whole by all.

The early church certainly grasped their empowerment and this responsibility and did not need a corporation-like structure to tell them they can have some authority to humbly teach and help one another. They had the teachings of Christ, the urgings of the apostles (particularly Paul's teaching on love) and the mutual inner voice of the Spirit. There was Spirit empowerment without emotional-appealing charismatic movement. There was enrollment, unity, obedience, order and mutual value based on real gifts and apportions of the Spirit as described in Ephesians.

Notice also in writing to a church like Corinth whose members appear to struggle with elitism and superiority, Paul reminds them of the greatest way - - the intangible, non-KNN-videogenic, doesn't-matter-if-you're-God's-Anointed, you-can't-compensate-with-anything-if-you-don't-have-it way of love.

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."

(NIV, I Corinthians 13:1 – 8)

Sounds to me like “love” is somewhat important for faith to mean anything; And, recall, God is of love and love is of God. And the Spirit is God, who is supposed to inhabit the body, which explains a lot about Christ saying love one another and being shown as His followers for it. But discipleship movements seldom have time for such “nonsense” that creates too much “inward focus.” When was the last “love” sermon, anyway?

Coming back to topic, another very interesting look at church authority seems to appear in Revelation:

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lamp stands: I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false... Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love... But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”

(NIV, Revelation 2:1 – 7, abbr.)

In verse 6, Jesus complimented the Ephesians for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans. Eusebius in his book, The History of The Church, approx. 300 A.D., mentions a story supposedly related to him from Clement of Alexander regarding the eventual apostasy of one Nicolus, purported to be one of these original seven deacons in the Jerusalem church: *“They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, ...and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them”* (NIV, Acts 6:5-6). The accuracy of Eusebius here is questionable, as are the inaccuracies of this story as recorded by Clement, himself, in his own writings. But, regarding leadership relevance, it is possible the author of Revelation had a different meaning for “Nicolaitans.” The word “Nicolaitans” is actually a compound Greek word, “*nikao*” which means: “to conquer”, and “*laos*” which means: “the people”. Put it together and you have: “conquer the people”, or here: “conqueror of the believers.” Combined with Christ’s exhortation on this church’s intolerance of false teachers, and imagining this would lead to overzealous isolationism from outside teachers, and a resulting forsaking of love within fellowship, this “Nicolaitans” could then have been a reference to an attempt to usher in a priestly order or oligarchy at this church, which would certainly be in conflict with other NT teachings. It is a minor and not-so-clear point to see possibly repeated even in Revelation.

Further, Christ’s instruction on how to discipline a believer reveals more evidence of the mutuality of the congregation and the leadership of the church:

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

(NIV, Matthew 18:15-17)

Christ's system of escalating confrontations regarding sin implies all members being equally accessible and answerable to one another, whether in leadership or not. So, there is no special insulation for leaders, and thus no evidence of a caste system here. In addition, the entire church is to hear the matter and attempt to persuade the sinner, before the church is to shun the unrepentant. Of course, this was not the case with the ICC or other movements who marked individuals who spoke out against the doctrine or refused to go along with the unbiblical programs - - Their "sins" were known only to the leadership providing them a very convenient method of censorship. The ICC very much practiced and still practices a caste-type leadership system, especially seeing how many former bosses and their lieutenants are still in power. The point is the entire early church was allowed access to these types of serious incidents, not just the leadership or even eldership. It goes all the way back to selecting Matthias, the meeting in Jerusalem, the letters written to the churches at large, etc.

"Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning."

(I Timothy 5:18-19)

Elders, or local leaders, of their congregations are to be rebuked publicly in front of their local congregations, and I estimate this is not so much to demonstrate a more strict discipline but to allow the entire congregation to understand a particular sin as manifested in such a devout person so as not to commit this same sin themselves. This public rebuke of elders, then, serves as an example of biblical discipleship wherein the Godly character of shepherds is imitated but not shoved forward, down the throats of members. Sadly, in many churches out there, leaders are usually re-assigned by their bosses rather than face open discipline or rebuke - - in violation of both Paul's and Christ's (Matthew 18) instructions.

Bottom line™, the early church was governed by local elders originally elected by their flock, as is stated even in documents from the third century A.D. The church was Spirit lead, which fostered an enrollment of the rank and file in many aspects of the ministry and there appears to be a strong command against the rise of any clergy group. Elders lead in a manner from sources such as scripture, letters, and apostolic tradition. They were men of character, truly deserving of imitation to the proscribed biblical limits.

But, to reinforce, they were definitely not lords over their flock. Two of the favorite ICC leadership-lordship justification verses are:

"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."

(NIV, Hebrews 13:17)

"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching."

(NIV, I Timothy 5:17)

When read in the NIV and read with the particular ICC veracity of such chosen scriptures, these verses appear hopelessly confirming of Kip & Co.'s right to call all their believers to subdued submission, and implies this was the case in the early church. But a closer examination of the Greek words used provides translation that is much more consistent with other verses, such as Christ's commands about not lording over and not being first. In Hebrews 13:7 and 17, the "watching over" is "*hegeomai*" in the Greek. This word is translated correctly, but can have several parallel meanings, including "to guide" and "to lead." This Greek word can potentially have a stronger meaning, such as to govern, or be a chief. However, the exact word "*hegeomai*" is only mentioned three times in the New Testament, and all three in Hebrews chapter 13, with regard to the elders of the church. Most New Testament references to the "rulership" of governors, kings, and people with high authority, use the Greek word "*archon*." But "*archon*" is never used to describe a church leader, for to use it in that manner would contradict God's plain teaching regarding pastoral leadership. Therefore, the word "rule," as used in Hebrews 13, must mean to rule in the sense of guiding or leading.

In I Timothy 5:17, the word translated "rule" is "*proistemi*" in the Greek, which literally means, "*to stand before*." The same word is also used with regard to a father leading the home in I Tim 3:4 and 12. The Greek to English translation into the word "rule" is correct, but this is a benevolent leadership, not an authoritarian rule. This same word, "*proistemi*," also means, "*to attend with care*." Thus we see that according to I Tim 5:17, overseers are to be benevolent leaders who lead with care and diligence, and not authoritarian rulers. They stand before their flock by virtue of behavior and character. The concept of standing before the congregation is consistent with their being worthy of honor, not to some subdued obedience from the congregation.

The “Way” That Was

“The best cure for Christianity is reading the bible.”

(Mark Twain, 1835 – 1910)

So, what would the early church be like? Reading Corinthians one can understand the early church had plenty of challenges just like today’s churches. No doubt, over the past two thousand years Christianity (“The Way”), or more precisely the Christian church, has undergone radical™ transformations from its original form. Whether the changes were well intentioned adjustments in uncertain times, or accidental departures, or outright deviations, or the result of let’s-get-back-to-what-we-think-it-was modern day movements, there are now thousands upon thousands of denominations and thus thousands upon thousands of different churches - - Some meet on one day others on another; some teach baptism others do not; some claim they are the only correct church others do not make such claims; some follow only the bible others embrace additional works; etc. In such an environment, a believer might in their own dissatisfaction awaken to a search for a more correct church, finding either rewarding Spirit lead enlightenment or again being victim of ignorant vulnerability to a dangerous group like the ICC. Therefore, just as the early church leadership was explored above, it is beneficial to examine the early (*Ante-Nicean*) church practices, from 50 A.D. to 200 A.D., to provoke believers’ Berean hearts to search for their own enlightenment and, as Luke puts it: “...so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:4).

Below I will attempt to relate some of the practices and beliefs of the early church including conversion and meetings. Of course, I will not cover everything there is to cover about the early church since what will I explore is certainly taxing enough thus far to even the most patient reader. Please understand my own level of knowledge here is still growing, but there are some obvious practices, documented heresies, and first hand accounts that provide substantial understanding of the early church especially on baptism and meeting together. Corrections and comments are most welcome, because, after all, the purpose here is to spur our Berean hearts.

One word of caution before beginning: Obviously, there are numerous early church authors, some *bona fide*, some best left as historical fiction, so to speak. Some address particular contextual themes and some purportedly espouse universal doctrines. Some works are of established origin; and some, like even Mark 16:9-20 as noted in the NIV, are possibly not original or might have been imperfectly copied; although NIV footnote aside, in Mark’s case it is literally only four texts out of over a thousand that do not have the later portion of Mark 16, hardly many (Pelikan, Jaroslav. The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 3, 1977). A good bibliography of early church writers by their time period might be: Ignatius (35-110 A.D.), Irenaeus (130-202 A.D.), Tertullian (155-250 A.D.), Hippolytus (170-245 A.D.), Cyprian (~220-258 A.D.). I will refrain from addressing all books’ and works’ authenticities as this is not only way beyond my essay but also very, very far off-road of my education or training - - Suffice to say with regard to early Christian works: Berean, beware! But, this is all the better to continue the discovery, to understand our Christian church - - Christ’s bride and the apostles’ labor. Understanding “the Way that was” is essential since so many churches and denominations are so far away from the original teachings one should not accept at face value every doctrine: “*Test everything, hold on to what is good*” (I Thessalonians 5:21). One can also see the history of various teachings in the church and better understand their origins as either from God’s command or man’s opinion.

Nevertheless, the best sources for what Christ wants remain the gospels and the apostles' letters, then the Old Testament, as applicable, and the early church authors.

Baptism and Salvation:

Based not only on Christ's commands but also the teachings of the apostles from their letters as well as on the narrative of the most famous and arguably the first church historian, Luke, the church began with the requirement of baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit for salvation:

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

(Matthew 28:19-20)

"He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.' "

(Mark 16:15-16)

Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.' "

(Acts 2:38)

"In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead."

(Colossians 2:11-12)

"...In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also - - not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ..."

(I Peter 3:20-21)

Baptism was an inseparable part of the Christian conversion, having even a further personal connection of believer and Christ, again the theme of empowerment through the promised Holy Spirit. Note: baptism was available immediately in response to a heart being cut by the message, and there is no record of an interlude of either time or ritual prior to baptisms in the bible.

As a friend of mine well stated recently: Baptism by immersion is a command and a reflection of what only God can do in His giving of the Spirit. Baptism remains a debatable and sometimes-contentious issue among Christians, even today; so let me first continue to emphasize some key points from the earliest of Christian times and the Bible. Mark 16:15-16 says that those who believe and are baptized are saved. Logically one cannot simply be baptized without intent or evidence in their subsequent life to obey God and then expect salvation simply because they got

wet anymore than the Jews could say Abraham was their father and they are thusly saved. Similarly, no one can truly obey Christ, even if they could somehow walk blamelessly, but never be baptized, if there are such opportunities to do so, since Christ commands baptism.

Of course, God isn't the God of another covenant of legalism. To the hypothetical situations of the apostles being lost since their dunking isn't recorded (LOL!), and regarding the converts who cannot get to the water - - which plagues legalists among us Christians: For the apostles: Although one can throw the argument back by saying "just because their baptism isn't recorded doesn't mean they weren't baptized" [*ad ignorantum*], the bible records in I Corinthians 12:28 that God firstly "appointed" (Greek literally: "*physically set in place*") apostles in His church, and also Christ's own words in John 15:3, saying the apostles were clean by Christ's word, to clarify the apostles were indeed in the church of God and saved - - They were really special people unlike any leaders today, remember? For those died before they got to water: Early Christians, like Tertullian, universally believed the martyred converts who could not get into the water were in fact "baptized with their own blood" (Tertullian, *De Baptismo*) and just as saved or right with God as those who underwent the baptism ritual. This is a route of salvation similar to the thief on the cross, whom Christ pardoned because Christ personally not only could and did forgive sins during his ministry, but because God always sees the heart of people - - It's just us weak and adulterous people who need the signs; and there is a baptism connection with OT foreshadowing ala circumcision. Nevertheless, Christ does command it, which was why even Cornelius was baptized after the Spirit came on him (Acts 10).

Baptism by the Spirit was a promise, sometimes confused with Christ's command for baptism with water. John the Baptist baptized Jewish people as an outward, cleansing sign simultaneous to their desire to repent, just as the Jewish rabbis would baptize a proselytized gentile, after their circumcision and before a blood offering on their behalf at the temple. Understandable, then, John's drawing the scorn of the teachers of the Law who would have been concerned that in their mind John's baptism could mean those ancestor's of Abraham who consented to John's baptism were being treated like gentiles or outsiders to God's covenant and/or that the immersion act of water consecration could somehow have something meaningful to their forgiveness outside of the innumerable ritual temple sacrifices the covenant Law commanded.

More graphically, just like the surgery of removing foreskins doesn't magically impart righteousness, so water baptism alone does nothing to impart salvation - - In both cases, it's the accepting of the covenant that makes the difference, and today the promise of the covenant is the Spirit (And in the case of the Old way, the physical acceptance was almost irreversible, perhaps an effective reminder in absence of the not-then-given Spirit). It is precisely this tangible, observable testimony of the act of a convert being immersed or baptized that has lead to so much church abuse of conversion, just like all the tangibles associated with the Law.

Regarding baptism, then, the bible captures seven accounts during the apostolic period of conversions involving baptism that provide some basic understanding of conversion in the first century church:

- Pentecost (Acts 2:38-41) – Repentance, spontaneous.
- The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–39) – spontaneous, second person (Phillip).
- Samaria / Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:12-16) – Spontaneous, needed Spirit.
- Paul (Acts 9:17-18) – calling on name, forgiveness, second person (Ananias).
- Cornelius the Centurion (Acts 10:1–11:17) – Even after receiving the Holy Spirit.

- Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:30-33) – Spontaneous, for salvation.
- Ephesian Brothers (Acts 19:2-6) – Believers who still needed the Spirit.

Because of the variance in these conversion narratives by Luke, that there is not a consistent, ritualized pattern for baptism, only broad conclusions can be drawn such as the immersion for forgiveness, baptism of John or even Jewish practice versus baptism into Christ, the importance of being given the Spirit, even through laying on of hands, and a spontaneous response of conversion.

The book of Hebrews was written towards the end of the apostolic age, arguably between 60 to 95 A.D., probably before the 70 A.D. destruction of the temple but some argue not long afterwards, and serves as the next mile point in understanding the early church's practice of baptism as well as brings forth the first possible ritualizing of the conversion: Hebrews 5:11–6:6 and Hebrews 10:19–25. The first passage recalls certain features from the believers' first admission to Christianity that should not need repeating and perhaps cannot be repeated: learning "□the first principles of God's word□," "□the elementary teachings of Christ,□" which are likened to the milk that is succeeded by solid food; a "□foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God□"; "□instruction about baptisms [plural in Greek, "*baptismo*"], the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.□" Here, Hebrews appears to reference the initial sermon or encounter the convert might have with the church, which elicits the epiphany of repentance and faith; But, these passages could also refer to the instructions to the recipients in basic Christian beliefs and in the significance of the rites of baptism in water and the imposition of hands which seal their entrance into the Christian community. Significantly revealing of these instructions being "the plural *baptismo* due to the need for converts to be taught the difference between Christian baptism and other religious ablutions current at the time." [Craig Williamson, Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Christian Baptism, 2003].

Following chronology, then, one then observes a hatching of legalism. The "Didache" [pronounced "did-a-kay"] is a document from an unknown author purported to be from 95 – 120 A.D. (most consensus is 100A.D.) and supposedly records universal practices and rites of the early church, most likely from those at least in Syria, possibly even from Antioch, itself. On baptism, the Didache author(s) states:

"And concerning baptism, baptize this way: Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living water. But if you have no living water [Greek: "hydra zon," or "running water"], baptize into other water; and if you cannot do so in cold water, do so in warm. But if you have none, pour out water three times upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. But before the baptism let the baptizer fast, and the baptized, and whoever else can; but you shall order the baptized to fast one or two days before."

(Didache, Chapter 7, Roberts-Donaldson English Translation)

Some theologians are skeptical of the legitimacy of this document since arguably there appears to be two separate authors simultaneously writing it, based on style and grammar; but even they and secular historians confirm the work is genuinely of at approximately third century A.D. or older, whether legitimately describing the church doctrines or not. Among other rituals defined in the Didache are: Communion, particular prayers that must be said, and required responses from the congregation. Interestingly, in chapter 15, the document instructs the members to "elect by raising of the hands" their own overseers and deacons, to a point made well above in this essay. If the

Didache is accepted, then there appears to be a requirement for one or two days fasting prior to conversion, which was out of step with the apostolic spontaneous conversions. One must also have the right water. These could be due to the church's survival of persecutions, and the rise of doctrines wherein the legitimacy of the convert was in question - - after all, even the Jerusalem church was skeptical, and outright fearful, of Paul at first. But, bottom line™, the church seemed to require a fasting period and also adhered to certain rituals including baptism.

Continuing to follow baptism chronologically among the early church, we have the Christian apologist Justin Martyr, writing his *First Apology* in Rome, around mid second century (~150 A.D.) to emperor Antoninus Pius. Justin describes baptism and conversion as follows:

"I will also relate the manner in which we dedicated ourselves to God when we had been made new through Christ . . . As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we praying and fasting with them. Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, 'Except you be born again, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.' . . . This washing is called enlightenment, because those that are experiencing these things have their minds enlightened... And in the name of God, of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets foretold all things about Jesus, he who is enlightened is washed... After we have thus washed him that is persuaded and declares his assent, we lead him to those who are called brethren, where they are assembled, and make common prayer for ourselves, for him that has been enlightened, and for all people everywhere, that, embracing the truth, we may be found in our lives good and obedient citizens, and also attain to everlasting salvation. When we have ended the prayers we greet one another with a kiss."

(Justin Martyr, First Apology, chapter 61 and 66, abbr.)

Note the instruction related in the first lines above to the potential converts. The term for such converts-in-training becomes "catechumenate□" by the start of the third century, and such instruction may have taken months or even up to three years in later times, as we shall see. Additionally, notice the period of fasting prior to baptism, apparently in-line with Didache teachings. Baptism at this point is decidedly not spontaneous and requires more sure knowledge and training before salvation can be awarded. (Sounds familiar?) Obviously, this is out of step with the gospel accounts of conversion, but may have had to do with intolerance for apostasy and threats of persecution.

Going further, one sees legalism then maturing then into formalized doctrines and rituals as unrecorded in the bible; one encounters another early church writer, Tertullian, approximately 210 A.D., and his work "De Baptismo" or "On Baptism" written as one of many of his apologetics of the day.

"□ Those who are at the point of entering upon baptism ought to pray, with frequent prayers, fastings, bendings of the knee, and all-night vigils, along with the confession of all their sins, so as to make a copy of the baptism of John in its aspect of repentance□..."

(Tertullian, De Baptismo, Chapter 20).

Among the new rites in the baptism, Tertullian records the baptismal water is blessed in a prayer of invocation by the presiding bishop:

“□All waters, when God is invoked, acquire the sacred significance of conveying sanctity: for at once the Spirit comes down from heaven and stays upon the waters, sanctifying them from within himself, and when thus sanctified they absorb the power of sanctifying□...”

(Ibid, Ch. 4)

The act of baptism is described as:

“□...When, on the point of coming to the water, we then and there as somewhat earlier in church under the bishop’s hand affirm that we renounce the devil and his pomp and his angels. After this we are thrice immersed, while we answer interrogations rather more extensive than our Lord has prescribed in the gospel□... □Next follows the imposition of the hand in benediction, inviting and welcoming the Holy Spirit...□”

(Ibid, Ch. 8 and 13, abbr.)

Note the laying on of hands to receive or acknowledge the Holy Spirit and the interrogation by the church being admittedly more severe than accounted in the gospel. By this age, there is no spontaneous baptism but instead a required period of training. Baptism further involves invocation rituals, and the successful answering of questions. Again, this evolution could be due to ever-present persecution or the rise of clergy and their attempts to codify practices.

Lastly, in pursuing early documents on baptism, one arrives at the rather mysterious and otherwise lost “Apostolic Tradition” of Hippolytus, of Rome, from around the turn of the second century into the third (roughly 215 A.D.). This document is of some questionable authenticity, since no complete original survives, but it represents additional insights into the evolution of church practices. Hippolytus was a bishop in the Church of Rome at the time and was distraught over the practices and insinuations of Zephyrinus who held the not-so-newly-created office of Pope over the then universal (“Catholic”) church.

Conversion according to Hippolytus [This is a long excerpt and by this point, baptism legalism has apparently started walking and is speaking its first words ala some of the more ridiculous, beyond-Old-Testament-comeback ceremonies below]:

“Those who are newly brought forward to hear the Word shall first be brought before the teachers at a house, before all the people enter. Then they will be questioned concerning the reason that they have come forward to the faith. Those who bring them will bear witness concerning them as to whether they are able to hear. They shall be questioned concerning their life and occupation, marriage status, and whether they are slave or free. If they are the slaves of any of the faithful, and if their masters permit them, they may hear the Word. If their masters do not bear witness that they are good, let them be rejected. If their masters are pagans, teach them to please their masters, so that there will be no blasphemy... Catechumens will hear the word for three years. Yet if someone is earnest and perseveres well in the matter, it is not the time that is judged, but the conduct...

After the prayer, the teacher shall lay hands upon the catechumens, pray, and dismiss them. Whether such is one of the laypeople or of the clergy, let him do so... When they are chosen who are to receive baptism, let their lives be examined, whether they have lived honorably while catechumens, whether they honored the widows, whether they visited the sick, and whether they have done every good work. If those who bring them forward bear witness for them that they have done so, then let them hear the Gospel... When the day approaches on which they are to be baptized, let the bishop exorcise each one of them, so that he will be certain whether each has been purified. If there are any who are not purified, they shall be set apart. Those who are to receive baptism shall fast on the Preparation of the Sabbath. On the Sabbath, those who are to receive baptism shall all gather together in one place chosen according to the will of the bishop. They shall be commanded to pray and kneel. Then, laying his hand on them, he will exorcise every foreign spirit, so that they flee from them and never return to them. When he has finished exorcising them, he shall breathe on their faces and seal their foreheads, ears and noses with the sign. Then he shall raise them up...

At the hour in which the cock crows, they shall first pray over the water. When they come to the water, the water shall be pure and flowing, that is, the water of a spring or a flowing body of water...A deacon shall hold the Oil of Exorcism and stand on the left. Another deacon shall hold the Oil of Thanksgiving and stand on the right...

When an elder takes hold of each of them who are to receive baptism, he shall tell each of them to renounce, saying, "I renounce you Satan, all your service, and all your works. After he has said this, he shall anoint each with the Oil of Exorcism, saying, "Let every evil spirit depart from you...

Afterward, when they have come up out of the water, they shall be anointed by the elder with the Oil of Thanksgiving, saying, "I anoint you with holy oil in the name of Jesus Christ. Then, drying themselves, they shall dress and afterwards gather in the church..."

(Hippolytus, Apostolic Tradition, Chapter 15 – 21, abbr.)

This sort of ritual makes the “Counting the Cost” study of the ICC seem like a regular bargain and makes it hard to throw stones at the ICC given their perversions of baptism pale compared to what was around in the early third century. Clearly, by this time, there had evolved rituals surrounding baptism that were simply not present in any of the gospel accounts or in Luke’s book, “Acts.” By

Hippolytus' time, there were then oils of exorcism, thanksgiving, required three-year training periods including an evaluation if the recruits' acts had been sufficient; isolating the convert from the body until baptism, the role of bishop as separate from elder, etc. Bottom line™, the implications from this evolution of baptism are the formation of a very different "early church" by even the third century than what Christ and the apostles had set up.

One may be shocked by tracing the evolution of baptism from insinuations of pre-knowledge as perhaps found in Hebrews to the absolute program-like stipulations of the third century ala Hippolytus - - And you probably thought I could write on and on without end, try reading the entire conversion requirements in The Apostolic Traditions! - - And one may suppose foreknowledge or a catechumen period is then what was intended for believers since the book of Hebrews. If such knowledge were required, then Christ's apostles did a terrible job indeed of insisting on this before baptizing the three thousand on Pentecost, for instance, or the jailor, or the eunuch, etc. Similarly, one in doubt can be comforted by Paul's to-his-deathbed arguments against salvation by the nonsense of any works (substitute "law" to completely understand Paul's context when he uses that word), as well as John's message that we were saved at just the right time, when we didn't know Christ. One cannot imagine any requirement more than originally outlined by Christ in Matthew 28 and as first executed by Peter in Acts 2:38 - - Repent and be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Again, the departure of baptism may have been due to persecutions, fear of "unforgivable" apostasy (even as early as Hebrews), blended with some leftovers from Mosaic Law, and perhaps a mingling of various contemporary superstitions and ideology, thus the innumerable third century pre-baptismal exorcisms.

A similar evolution can be observed in the early church meetings, including their leadership and their purposes, such as communion.

The Meeting of the Body:

Perhaps there are only a couple more overused Kingdom-speak terms than: "Meeting of the Body," indicating an ICC mandatory-attendance function. As we will explore, to say "meeting of the body" in biblical times might be understood as to connote only three events. In the NT, for church, the word used in the Greek is "*Ekklesia*" and it literally means "assembly" or "gathering" (Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament, Bauer). In fact, Luke uses the "*Ekklesia*" in Acts 15:12 to describe the believers' "council" of Jerusalem as well as to describe the unruly Ephesian rabble in Acts 19:32. Particular churches or single assemblies are named in the bible, such as: "*To the church of God in Corinth...*" (NIV, I Corinthians 1:2) and "*Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace.*" (NIV, Acts 9:31) or: "*To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...*" (NIV, I Thessalonians 1:2), etc. When the sum total of all believers are meant, the terminology used is "Body of Christ" or the word "church" (*Ekklesia*) in context with the "Body of Christ," as in: "*And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.*" (NIV, Colossians 1:18) and "*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink*" (NIV, I Corinthians 12:12-13), etc. And Spirit is absolutely the key.

Not to strain their intent beyond intended jargon, but if the ICC leaders were then to call for a true "meeting of the body," biblically they would need to summon the entire living contingent of Christians from across the globe - - But, those of us who are in, or were in, the ICC understand

“meeting of the body” to mean our compulsory attendance to a function, typically a service, devotional, bible talk, someone’s wedding, a congregational rebuke session, or other such meeting. Their use of “meeting of the body” is simultaneously yet another symptom of their exclusiveness and their subtle reinforcing of such a mindset into their members. Aside, one cannot imagine the ICC leaders wanting to summon all Christians nor even having the authority to do so. The problem with too many of today’s “meetings of the body™” is that they are little better than certain large-headed parts summoning portions regarded as beneath them to feel some overdoses of hot wind about not doing or giving enough, when the original meetings were all-enrolling, cheerfully given love feasts that refreshed believers’ faith and converted their visitors.

It is worth saying, and of course obvious, that the phrase “meeting of the body” is not used in the bible. Similarly, it is certainly worth investigating, but definitely not desired by the ICC leaders, to understand that the early Christians met both as an entire citywide congregation as well as in house churches organized by their elected elders, even from the very beginning. This has very much to do with the obvious points regarding Spirit, and fellowship, including innumerable accounts of meals in the bible, that are related in this essay many times above, and again missed by the ICC and far too many other churches.

“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

(NIV, Acts 2:46-47)

The believers met in Solomon’s Portico, connected within ~100 meters of the Temple, but they also met in each other’s homes to break bread. That the church first started on Pentecost - - or in Hebrew: “*Hag Hashavuot*”; or “*Shavout*,” meaning “The Feast of Weeks” (Ex. 34:22; Deut. 16:10), thus the Greek “Pentecost;” literally: “fiftieth” day- - is a fact supersaturated with prophetic fulfillment that is mostly beyond this essay, and my own present understanding, but a couple of aspects are applicable to the formation of the church including Jesus’ hinting of this very event.

Pentecost was one of three feasts (“Passover” and “Tabernacles” being the others) that the Jewish people celebrated with their own “meeting of the body™,” pun intended - - every Jewish person was compelled to go to Jerusalem for these feasts, with only a few exceptions permitted. The feast focused on the harvest being a blessing to the Jewish people in promise with their obedience to the Law, and the From Luke’s account in Acts the church’s Pentecost occurred in our present, Western reckoning in mid May, approximately 33 A.D. In an elaborate ceremony featuring people playing flutes and other instruments, farmers joyfully paraded before their brothers to the Temple with an offering of their first fruits - - wheat, and barley; such grapes, figs, pomegranates, olive oil that they might also have, and honey; and thanking God for the bounty. The people also were commanded to bring two loaves baked with grain from wherever they were living and wave these before the Lord (Leviticus 23:15-20 and in the *Talmud*), which would become slightly more important on that particular day in 33 A.D.

By the way, an older message in this feast is deliverance from Egypt (Deuteronomy 16:9-12) and the Jewish tradition fifty days of crossing the Red Sea. Other traditions include King David being born and dying on the day of the feast, thus the Spirit perhaps prompting these applicable remarks in Peter’s sermon. Also, the book of Ruth, David’s ancestor in fact, is read and taught on this occasion, since she was a convert to Judaism during the harvest time. Further, there are special foods to eat, such as regular Sabbath *challah* bread, but baked in the shape of a ladder according to the rabbinical tradition that Moses climbed a ladder to receive the Law (*Talmud*) from heaven

on the feast's date and, accordingly, the meal on the day of the feast contains dairy products since the rabbis teach the Israelites therefore received the newly given law as babies, requiring milk - - perhaps one could argue another prophetic point of light aligning to Jesus' teaching that we must all receive the Kingdom as infants, or little children, and then not adding adult-crafted messages to it. As I confessed, there are potentially many prophecies being fulfilled at Pentecost, many we don't understand. All in all, *Shavout* is a happy, less somber festival than, say, Passover. I personally knew one rabbi who described this feast to me as a combination temple service, Thanksgiving feast, and a national parade.

So, other than rehearsing the fulfillment of the promises that ICC members are already acquainted with through their "Kingdom" study, why am I bringing this up here, and what does it have to do with the early Christian meetings? Because "discipleship" is a movement of man focusing on "church," and the ICC's Kingdom study ignores the wonderful point that Christ makes on that day. During the forty days he remained with the apostles after his resurrection, opening their minds to scriptures, Christ said:

"On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'"

(NIV, Acts 1:4-5)

More than the birthday of the "church" or "movement," Pentecost was the day God's spirit began to be available for those who would convert to the new "law" and become the first fruits of faith (James 1:18). It was the arrival of baptism in the name of the God's Holy Spirit and the opportunity for God's spirit to dwell among his new people, like treasure inside us human clay jars (II Corinthians 4:6-8). In fact, the Spirit, as I am emphasizing *ad museum* in this paper, is so marginalized - - I will daresay "murdered" despite some of my reviewer's comments about such an impossibility - - by human effort in discipleship movements like the ICC, that one must question whether such baptism these groups afford is indeed saving, placing the recipients within the Body, or even really in the name of the Holy Spirit; or is it more like the Ephesian brothers who needed to be re-baptized (Though for stats sake alone the ICC would no doubt immediately re-re-baptize their members the moment they understood this, never mind for their correct faith):

"While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' They answered, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.'"

(NIV Acts 19:1-2)

Although men were filled with the Spirit in the Old Testament and in the gospels, this ministry of the Spirit on that mid May day in approximately 33 A.D. was new, beginning in Acts 2:1-4 on the Feast of Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks. The new "law" arrived, similar to the honoring of the law given to Moses. And through the new baptism one enters the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13). A believer enters the Body by means of Spirit-baptism, and the Body is the Church, according to Colossians 1:18. Therefore, the "church" was born with the arrival of baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit, and apart from Spirit-baptism the "church" cannot and does not exist! Spirit is what allowed the body to meet in small and large groups, across the known world, and still maintain unity. The birth of the Church is absolutely the fulfillment of the old Feast of Weeks. And with this called to one's mind, one can then appreciate Peter's message:

“In the last days,’ God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit on all people’... Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day... But... God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear... Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - - for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

(NIV, Acts 2:17, 29, 31-32, 38-39; abbr.)

In addition to joyfully recognizing the arrival of Joel’s prophecy, the loaves they presented before the Lord as part of the feast also explain that the Jewish people were in fact unhesitant in understanding Joel’s prophecy of salvation extended to the “gentiles” and not repelled enough to stone Peter & Co. then and there. While some have argued the loaves represented the two tablets of the commandments, the loaves were leavened, or made with yeast, which represented the bread having a rising or life; throughout Exodus and Leviticus symbolically yeast represented being unclean, thus anti-Law, and is universally excluded from other important feasts; and in the gospels, Christ describes yeast in dough as being good like the Kingdom of Heaven and bad like the yeast of the Pharisees. Thus, also per some rabbinical interpretations of the *Talmud*, one loaf waved before the Lord at the feast was to represent Israel and the other to represent the Gentiles, or possibly just the Samaritan people, as the Jewish people were commanded to have certain mercies on the gentiles as a part of the Law; Thus humbly remembering even unclean gentiles in the celebration of their bountiful harvest and entreating God on their behalf to show mercy on both Jew and Gentile (see “Ruth” for the mercy afforded in gleaning, after all). By the way, these loaves were not sandwich sized, but because they are made with an *ephah* (or ~16 cups) of fine flour these raised, baked loaves were likely in excess of 20 inches wide and long, and several inches thick - - Dr. Atkins would be terrified. (The loaves of Pentecost also bore mentioning particularly in keeping with communion, although they are not exactly the same thing).

In keeping with this, wheat in one of Christ’s teachings represents his life, being given to allow a later harvest:

“Jesus replied, ‘the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.’”

(NIV, John 12:23-25)

Again, one can detect the joyful foreknowledge Christ has in another use of the symbolism of harvest:

“But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it. Listen, then, to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart ... But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and

understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

(NIV, Matthew 13:16-23, abbr.)

As Christ uses harvest in His teachings while in “gentile” Samaria, to show the eventual embracing of the coming faith and the harvest the apostles would receive:

“Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks... Do you [later, to apostles] not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor’... And because of his words many more [Samaritans] became believers.”

(NIV, John 4:21, 23, 35-38, 41; abbr.)

Coming back to the point of this section, which is supposed to be on the evolution of the early Christian meetings, it is important to make sure any reader first has a very secure understanding of the role of the Spirit among Christians so that one can appreciate what would otherwise be regarded by those today summoning “meetings of the body” as almost uselessly simple and apparently recruit-wise fruitless gatherings of the early church. So, being now more secure in the Spirit and to return to the promised topic, what, then were early meetings (“*Ekklesia*”) like?

“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.”

(NIV, Acts 5:42)

Not surprisingly, the basic organizational level in the apostolic church was meeting in the home of another believer. This is also why Paul went from house to house to destroy the church:

“But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.”

(NIV, Acts 8:3)

Per Acts 2 and 5, above, the believers met in homes even before persecution. Consider these passages from Paul’s establishing churches throughout his ministry;

In Romans, Paul greets several house churches:

“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus... Greet also the church that meets at their house... Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus... Greet

those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord... Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers with them. Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them."

(NIV, Romans 16:3-5, 10, 11, 13, 16-16, abbr.)

In Colossians, again:

"Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house."

(NIV, Colossians 4:15)

To Philemon:

"To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home..."

(NIV, Philemon 1:1-2)

Some believers had such large homes they could and did host entire congregations, as Gaius of Corinth did for the Corinthian church:

"Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings."

(NIV, Romans 16:23)

While Paul and the other apostles may have preached in synagogues and in open forums, the churches they established met in households, and occasionally met as an entire congregation, perhaps indeed to hear such apostolic letters or celebrate communion. And early Christian meetings were all about familial fellowship and breaking of bread together, just as Jesus' last meeting with the apostles was a meal of fellowship. Paul's admonition to the Corinthians provides some indication of what occurred in these meetings:

"In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it ... When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? ... When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation ... if anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should be quiet in the church and speak to himself and God. ... Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged... Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way."

(NIV, I Corinthians 13 and 14, various verses, abbr.)

Notice the activities of the meetings: Unity of the various house churches when the city-wide congregation assembles, communion as part of an actual meal shared among the believers, common membership enrollment in speaking or singing before the congregation, teachers [prophets] speaking instruction with the allowance for the congregation to respond if there is an enlightenment, and all members being allowed to prophecy in turn. The reason all could participate equally was the Spirit. Christians didn't necessarily all sit facing forward like in a church building that we think of today but rather they're in someone's dining room and the center of their activity really is the fellowship meal or the communal meal.

Tracing their meetings through early church writings one sees these traditions being maintained until the time of Constantine.

The Didache (~100 A.D.):

"But every Lord's Day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one who is at odds with his fellow come together with you, until they are reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned. For this is that which was spoken by the Lord: 'In every place and time offer to me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great King, says the Lord, and my name is wonderful among the nations.'"

(Didache, chapter 14)

Justin Martyr, ~150 A.D.:

"And on the day called Sunday, all who live in the city or in the near country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reading has ceased, the president ["an elder" or "the bishop"] verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead."

(First Apology, chapter 67)

By Justin's time, the paradigm of a single person preaching a sermon has begun to infiltrate, most likely due to the subtle rise of the office of bishop. The believers still maintain a communal association, giving is voluntary towards their community's needs. But, the single preacher or the teaching coming from elders only was due to the efforts of the elders to communicate with one another across the various cities and lead to the rise of the clergy/laity gap.

Tertullian, ~210 A.D.:

"We are a body knit together as such by a common religious profession, by unity of discipline, and by the bond of a common hope... We assemble to read our sacred writings, if any peculiarity of the times makes either forewarning or reminiscence needful. However it be in that respect, with the sacred words we nourish our faith, we animate our hope, we make our confidence more steadfast; and no less by inculcations of God's precepts we confirm good habits ... The tried men of our elders preside over us, obtaining that honor not by purchase, but by established character. There is no buying and selling of any sort in the things of God. Though we have our treasure-chest, it is not made up of purchase-money, as of a religion that has its price. On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it were his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. They are taken to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church..."

(Tertullian, The Apology, chapter 39)

By Tertullian's time, the original concepts of communal support and eldership are still maintained. But, the congregation is meeting to consider the apostles' teachings instead of inspiration from members of their flock in response to these teachings. Teaching and reading the scriptures is being reserved for the leaders. This is again understandable since by that time, there had been numerous false teachers, and false doctrines released. But it is precisely this drifting that gives slow rise to the Christian priesthood and the schism of clergy/laity, which dooms the believers to the Levitical pattern of private interpretation, ascendance of the office of Pope, and birth of the Catholic church.

"I suppose a distinction between clergy and laity goes all the way back to the Bible, in the sense that church officers are to "shepherd" (I Pet 5:2) and even "rule" (I Tim 5:17) the flock. The concept of "laity," meaning the people as opposed to the leadership, is found clearly in I Clement 40:5, where he derives the concept from the Old Testament. But what begins as a healthy division of labor grows into a canyon between the two groups. It is obvious (if you are a Protestant) that the growth is gradual and traceable, and that the further one gets from the Apostles, the more pronounced the novelty in doctrine has become. Yet, all through the history of the church, every writer declared unanimously that whatever was practiced at that time was a faithful, accurate transmission of the Apostolic teaching. It is important to note that they were exactly right about this assertion when it came to the obvious heresies. But, while they were "earnestly contending for the faith once delivered to the saints" in several areas of doctrine, they were allowing church practice and church liturgy to drive a wedge between them and everything the Apostle Paul had worked so hard for."

(Professor M. A. Ritchie Th.D., Community Bible Chapel School, Texas; Lecture: "The History of the Early Church," 1999)

Emperor Constantine, in 313 A.D., announced toleration and actually a favoring of Christianity throughout the Empire. By this time, local churches had developed formalized offices of bishop and archbishops, which were no longer appointed by the congregations but selected by preceding officers. Similarly, churches began to insert those imitations of the Levitical Law that would be to

their benefit or advance their agenda such as tithing, special training and separation for clergy, the wearing of special black robes, construction of ever more amazing and lavish buildings, worship within which became to be insisted as the only acceptable place for the believers to meet since the grounds were considered more special and the service more formal. The result of all of this was the gradual decline of Christians meeting in their homes, sharing fellowship meals and encouraging one another at the community level as is the pattern in Acts, and the replacement of such with volumes of legalistic doctrine and absurd, even blasphemous, traditions. Communion, correctly associated with the command of Christ at the last supper, even developed its own sacredness being administered only by certain leaders to the most devout members.

Theodosius in 380 A.D. proclaimed Christianity as the new state religion of the empire, abolishing paganism, and church buildings rapidly began to replace temples. By that time, as is somewhat true today, the meeting of believers together in a house church began to be regarded with disdain and in increasing instances such meetings were regarded as an apostasy by perhaps selfish fringe members, as it is regarded today by many churchgoers. Thus, this was the end of the biblical house-churches, and more sadly the loss of the familial bond of the believers, giving rise to corporate churches, soon maturing into the world-power Papacy, with gulfs between clergy and laity birthing reforms and other versions of the faith, with trained speakers espousing their sermons characteristically seasoned by their speakers' spiritual breeding kennel or denomination, and the ever re-circulating calls for members to give more money and oath tighter allegiance to their church, and to evangelize the world with whatever hybrid seed the denomination is sowing.

The More Things Change...

“There is nothing like returning to something that remains unchanged to see the ways that you, yourself, have altered.”

(Nelson Mandela, A Long Walk To Freedom)

Having studied some of the changes that have taken hold on the faith since its earliest times, it is revealing that so many churches have gone astray from the original sound doctrine. And even more disgusting that we who call ourselves “Christians”, or “Truth Seekers,” or “Disciples”, or “Followers of the Nazarene”, who in our time have the written Word, and have divorced ourselves from insisting on the pure faith in favor of the idolatry of our church or our trained speakers.

From the fourth century A.D., with the ever rising tide of rituals, doctrine, and hierarchy spurred by the association of such things with being sacred, the Christian faith began its ~1700 year transformation arriving at its present multiple thousands of churches, some with corporation-like structures and even “mission statements” that could be the covet of Wall Street or Amway. Even from its earliest generations, like the natural process of plate tectonics birthing the continents, reform, corruption, heresy and inspiration pushed the faith into several directions and one after another new churches rose and fell - - sometimes grinding out unnoticed over many centuries, sometimes arriving with climatic quakes shaking the faith’s world to its foundations. Unfortunately, even those organizations that espoused New Testament restorations, like the discipleship movements, have succumbed to the long-standing curse of placing the organization ahead of the Spirit or leaders maintaining clergy-laity structure or simply adhering to one person’s interpretation. Probably, this is another reason why Christ used twelve equal apostles rather than just one. It is also why John laments:

“Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him.”

(NIV, II John 1:9-10)

Whatever happened to that simple world-wide fellowship, meeting together in one Spirit, sharing meals in each other’s homes, collecting free-will offerings for the needy among or around them, sharing spiritual insights with one another, equally accepting each other as common sinners and helping each other as one would want help applied to themselves to living in the purity of obedience to Christ? Today, Christianity has split on so many points, many over those correctly identified as unbiblical and many more on either matters of opinion or an individuals’ pride. Once the rise of clergy-laity was established, the clergy could then implement any laws or traditions that they pleased, and typically these included rationalizations to even Old Testament regulations such as tithing.

From the Dark Ages (~475 A.D.) to the Reformation (~1500 A.D.), the Church actually collected the ten-percent tithe/tax on even national incomes, in exchange for many things including recognition of the divine right of the nation’s king. But, according to Paul’s epistles (II Corinthians 9:7) as well as even the early Christian authors works above, giving was to be completely voluntary. Can you imagine if a church today actually preached that there are to be no collections,

just encourage the believers to seek out others in their fellowship who may be in need or those in their community that may need help? I daresay no structure-leasing preacher would teach this and few followers would understand it or feel familial-enough to do it. Imagine the same with sharing scriptural insights, such as a few persons would share or speak and the community would weigh carefully what was being said; and especially since we now have the Word. Or, imagine instead of a church service all sitting facing the podium, the believers sat on benches at long tables filled with their potluck dishes, all facing each other, fellowshiping and sharing. We've been invited, and can take any friends we can get, to a marriage reception in heaven as the guests of honor, after all! Not, thank God, to someone's endless "Jubilee" of ignorant windbags forever there to remind us on and on of how little we gave to them or how few we plugged-into their cue-carded bible study while they themselves are corrupt hypocrites, not even following their own teachings. But, just like the Israelites wanted a calf, like the tribes wanted a king, like the early church developed the papacy, like the Charismatic need tongues and healings, etc., one of our condemning faults in our relationship with God is our idolatry; Our need to see, touch, feel, taste, and hold tangible what should be spiritual. We want knowledge to remain special, our leaders to be elevated, all of this to demonstrate ourselves as saved instead of those other poor fellows who don't subscribe to our church's program. We want, really, man or his concoctions to usurp the seat of the Spirit, not to cooperate or have the church submit as another tool for Him.

In fact, there is a new wind of teaching blowing in the church world today, the Church Growth Movement, which shares some shadowy similarities of the discipleship movements in that it is a cross-denominational growth pattern of expanding church membership which borrows certain aspects of what is called Total Quality Management (TQM) and various marketing appeals. While presently not as dangerous as the Shepherding movement, this latest approach also misuses man's concoctions in the place of the Spirit. Like the dissatisfaction with apparently stagnant church growth that helped the Shepherding movement be accepted, this movement involves modernizing the practices of subscribing churches in harmony with society's aesthetic and sometimes philosophical appetites so as to attract members, all in the name of saving souls. The movement stems partially from the deduction that churches' antiquated practices are at the heart of shallow growth or even decline in membership, thus the need to change the practices to contemporary, and become all things to all men, including the modern man. There are plenty of traditions, as we've no doubt read about above, that indeed need some breaking-away from. While the upside is more exciting, modern, and appealing church services, the danger of this movement is in the appeal it makes to our human cravings rather than our spiritual persons. The result is a mass marketing of Christianity, a widening of a narrow road, and a shallowness of faith and fellowship.

"The Church seems afraid to invest in new modes of being the Church, breaking free from antiquated models and irrelevant traditions toward living the gospel in a twenty-first-century context."

(George Barna, Leaders on Leadership Regal Books, 1997, p 29)

"...There is a substantial critical mass of people and churches that are already moving ...While acknowledging that there are still many unhealthy churches, there is a justified change in basic premises, basic attitudes, basic mind set... on the whole, we are on the march...."

(Peter Drucker, "On the Church and Denominations," The Leadership Network website, 2005)

Incidentally, the "we" being on the march above are literally thousands of pastors and churches that have embraced marketing plans to re-energize church growth. Mr. Peter Drucker is a prominent management consultant who began teaching techniques of TQM in the 1980's that included approaching business from understanding the customers' needs. When customers' needs are met, they come to buy, they tell others, they are repeat customers, and so the business grows. Mr. Drucker is not the only prophet of applying TQM and other marketing tactics to the church. How and where this approach seems to be applied will surprise some:

"Rick Warren is well known as the pioneer of The Purpose-Driven Church paradigm for church health. More than 250,000 pastors and church leaders from over 125 countries have attended Purpose-Driven Church seminars in 18 languages. Peter Drucker calls him 'the inventor of perpetual revival.' Rick's other book, The Purpose-Driven Life, has sold over a million copies in 20 languages. Winner of the Gold Medallion Ministry Book of the Year, it is used as a textbook in most seminaries, and was selected as one of the 100 Christian Books That Changed the 20th Century."

(Website: pastors.com, founded and operated by pastor Rick Warren)

Rick Warren is the founder and leader of the Saddleback Church in Orange County, California. With over 25,000 members on the church roll, no doubt Rick at least has very faithfully implemented his own instructions on how to generate a growing church (One can even hear Kip snapping disgusted fingers and stammering an envious "Oh yeah, huh? Darn!" because of Rick's church being the largest). At one extreme, and this is not the case with pastor Warren, are those who make the modern church appealing to even the unrepentant, such as to homosexuals, in fact inviting some to stand before them and preach on the "new found" toleration God must have for what He certainly condemned over and over again. The problem with making the church appeal more to its market is that messages like calling one another in love to repent from sin and fearing the Lord are no longer attractive, even though Proverbs says this is the beginning of wisdom and Paul warns us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12-13). In fact, in The Purpose Driven Life, Rick paints God as an almost out-of-touch benefactor who resembles a too permissive parent open to being taken advantage of by his children who watch their DVD and scream for more all too loudly as dad unthankfully drives them to and fro in the mini-van, apologizing for not spoiling them more rottenly:

"The moment you were born into the world, God was there as an unseen witness, smiling at your birth... your arrival gave him great pleasure."

(Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Life, Zondervan, 2002, p. 63)

"You are a child of God, and you bring pleasure to God like nothing else he has ever created. The Bible says, 'Because of his love God had already decided that through Jesus Christ he would make us his children -- this was his pleasure and purpose.'"

(Ibid, p64)

"God enjoys watching every detail of your life, whether you are working, playing, resting, or eating."

(Ibid, p74)

There is nothing wrong with our understanding the pleasure God takes in us, His children, especially since we are indeed purchased at the price of the blood of His son - - We are certainly specially loved by God, and personally I need the reminder now and then. But, when these messages are sprinkled with TQM and stem from membership agreements which direct the members to submission to "the church" rather than to God and one another's needs, and when promulgated through marketing plans, such reminders are unbalanced with the unattractive realities that the Christian road is by Christ's description a narrow one, albeit one protected by the Spirit, and only a few who become like children in their "knowledge" will ever find it. We should understand today as it most certainly was by Christ and the apostles that "being relatable" to gain the lost has its limits since some who see the pearls of wisdom will turn and trample us, not every heart is a bed of good soil, or every servant a good steward of his master's talents, nor did every virgin bring oil, nor obviously will everyone be saved simply because God is in fact loving. Peter warns that some men who stray are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, who will end up fulfilling a different purpose driven life - - that of being born only to be caught and destroyed (II Peter 2).

Even as Christ says:

"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.'

But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'

Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'

But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'"

(NIV, Luke 13:24 - 27)

Not to pick on him, but in the fall of 2003, Pastor Warren introduced the Saddleback PEACE Plan:

"A strategy to have every small group in our church, and then tens of thousands of small groups in other churches, become engaged in solving the five biggest problems in the world: Spiritual Lostness, Lack of Godly Leaders, Poverty, Disease, and Lack of Education... We believe it is part of the beginning of a Spiritual Awakening, a Global Movement, a New Reformation... The PEACE Plan will address these five 'giant' problems by planting new churches... Equipping leaders... Assisting the poor... Caring for the sick... and Educating the next generation... The bottom line is that we intend to reinvent mission strategy in the 21st century. As I stated, this will be a new Reformation. The First Reformation returned us to the message of the original church. It was a reformation of doctrine - what the church BELIEVES. This Second Reformation will return us to the

mission of the original church. It will be a reformation of purpose -- what the church DOES in the world."

(Pastor Rick Warren, Saddleback church website, 2003 archive)

This Church Growth Movement proclamation reverbs where the noise made by other worldwide declarations is fading, including ICC's own such words. The danger is always in using man's creations, appeals to pop culture, and marketing strategies as a substitute for letting the power of the Spirit, the witness of the community of believers (the church), and the message of the Cross break the hearts of the good soil out there. I should add, I fully hope the best from this program and I don't attend this church, so I am not completely familiar with its details. But among certain "successfully growing" churches today there is an unholy association between marketing consultants and the faith; while not yet marriage it is a living-in-sin, and this could be the start of a new worldwide movement again purportedly aiming at NT Restoration but being but another brick in the wall of man's failure to go back to the "Spirit" of the apostolic times, again separating believers from the simplicity of biblical faith.

Being encouraged, one can remember that nothing happens without God's will or knowledge and He is certainly not blind to our faith and struggles today - - And He didn't just forget His promise that He would one day return. Today's confusion and multitude of teachings are just the seed taking-root in various soils. In good soil, the true seed will do what it has always done, prosper and deliver a crop of righteousness. We don't have the apostles or Christ alive to personally scatter the seed into our hearts, but we do have Christ's message via the bible. It is imperative then that those of us who espouse to be Christians thoroughly test everything, holding on to the good. After all, Christ didn't just rise from the dead; He's certainly been very much alive all this time.

Conclusion

"Those who failed to oppose me, who readily agreed with me, accepted all my views, and yielded easily to my opinions, were those who did me the most injury, and were my worst enemies; because, by surrendering to me so easily, they encouraged me to go too far... I was then too powerful for any man, except myself, to injure or stop me."

(Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of France 1769-1821)

It is unfortunate that we are not in the early church so we can all see the way things were done, both those recorded and the oral teachings, so we might all know for sure all the correct ways. By the way, I do not think there is a single church out there that is practicing all aspects of the apostolic church, except perhaps some house churches. However, I think there are some churches far, far less dangerous than others and there are many churches wherein believers can find support, friendship, help evangelize the world and provide brotherhood. As believers, we are indeed responsible for our path, so I encourage everyone to stop looking out for a church to be "church" to you, and start looking in towards how one can practice the greatest commandments among a fellowship of other believers: Love the Lord your God, and love your neighbor as yourself - - basically start being "church" to others around you. As James writes:

"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

(NIV, James 1:27)

Though I am leaning more to it every time I read his garbage, I am not yet entirely convinced Kip means to spread false teaching, especially given the path the early church ended up following; but I do believe Kip has had plenty of unheeded warnings about the errors and dangers of his doctrine. Based on his numerous meetings with current leaders of influence, his rhetoric against seeking reunification with the Mainline Church, and his stream of articles, Kip intends to continue to promote his doctrine as the only saving faith. He has not learned from his past lessons, nor the lessons of other movements.

The ICC is at a crossroads, pun intended. Congregations might have seized the opportunity afforded by the removal of high-level leadership to implement radical™ changes, truly restoring more of the first century teachings. The sad reality is that many congregations have either sat idly or, worse, refused to acknowledge the problems and silenced those who were motivated to try change. Some haven't taken a step down either road, waiting things out.

There is little if any Godly Sorrow as evidenced by few tangible changes.

The churches need to return to what is written and not go beyond it, ever again. My advice to members who ask it is to leave the ICC and don't look back. This movement is more about power and money, and far less about the NT church restoration. But, to those who can't or won't leave and want my advice, I believe change will happen only with a significant change in leadership and doctrine. The secret that keeps leaders up at night is that members really "control" their "church," anyway, through exactly what the leaders are so desperately craving to keep their hands on all this time - - the money. Stop tithing until changes occur, and instead give your money to the poor

within your congregation and in your neighborhood, or better yet pay off your debts so that you are not a slave to anyone and can then give and help others. Demand to see an accounting of your church's finances from, say, five years before HK and now the years since Kip's removal, including all companies (HOPE, World Sectors, special tennis camps, etc) that gave or received money from your hands - - Such information ought to prove or destroy my above charge about the money. Congregations at least ought to seek outside assistance such as joining religious financial watchdog organizations, membership in which could potentially silence the critics if a history of accountability and honesty can be demonstrated. Those who have been marked for speaking out need to be apologized to publicly, and those leaders who performed the markings need to step down. The ICC should return to the Christian baptism, no longer protracting or adding to that message, no longer insisting on their wrong interpretation of Matt 28. Non-staff, the common members, need to speak and preach before their congregations and they should meet in homes more often than in a rented "sharp" hotel; And in most congregations churches should move towards no more than one couple per region on any paid staff basis, and this only for the sake of communicating to other churches worldwide - - inside and outside the ICC. Elders need to step down since the reality of their complicity and ambivalence disgraces them - - all the abuses occurred on their watch. Leaders ought to be "reconstructed" again and those who show promise in implementing reforms retained as the region couple, those who stubbornly cling to the old ways need to be removed, they are a cancer in the body.

However, I doubt any of these will happen, so I say to those who want to ask: "Leave."

Whether Kip busts his own Christ-like move, like rising from all-but-dead to resume worldwide leadership, the ICC and Kip have some formidable repentance to be done in order for them to be right with God.

- To date, there have been no public "unmarking" services; wherein those who spoke against things the ICC is now ashamed of or apologetic about have been invited to stand before their congregations, facing those who erred, and receiving their pleas for forgiveness and efforts at reconciliation.
- To date, there are few new leaders from among rank and file disciples among existing churches, despite the NT examples and in some churches published apologies promising such.
- To date, no ICC leader will acknowledge, by name, other churches that preach the correct message of salvation, despite veiled concessions that people are somehow saved outside the ICC.
- To date, few of the local leaders who held office prior to H.K. have resigned - - the same leaders who either knowingly, to save their jobs, or unknowingly, in the same misguided immaturity of the rank and file, perpetrated heinous spiritual crimes like enforced tithes, shunning, arrogance, exclusivity, judgment, etc.
- To date, the full accounting of the use of missions' funds and church monies has not been revealed, despite the payment of severance packages to former leaders, accusations from HK, etc, and revelations of staff salaries.
- To date, Kip and many leaders in other churches have insisted their doctrine is sound, but was unsoundly executed by subordinates, indicating they will return to business as usual, despite the ICC members having their own movement's history to warn them.
- To date, Kip and many ICC leaders believe their church is the only church preaching correct salvation doctrine, despite numerous outsiders, insiders, and former leaders pointing-out flaws with their practicals.

- To date, ICC members refuse to investigate the origins of their church, despite the example of the Bereans, and so continue to support its wrongdoing.
- To date, the ICC churches have an estimated worldwide membership of slightly over 100,000, despite having generated over 270,000 damaged former members who either left or were forced out.

“ I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that... I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. ... I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with [the apostles] in the things they boast about. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.”

(NIV, II Corinthians 2, various, abbr.)

David Paul, 05-12-05, former member 1996 – 2002.

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