

## Kip McKean Starts The International Christian Churches

Roger Lamb, Publisher, and the Disciples Today Editorial Advisory Board

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**Editor's Note:** *Out of consideration for our subscribers, we are publishing this editorial first for you. Later we will publish it on the open access portion of the site. Our subscribers represent 93 countries and over half receive free subscriptions since they live in the developing world.*

Kip McKean recently announced he is formally starting a new movement called The International Christian Churches. This was announced in a Sunday sermon and on the website of the Portland Church of Christ. These churches and house churches, also referred to as "the Portland family of churches" only include about 16 different groups in seven countries with an estimated combined membership of 800. The Portland Church has about 400 of those members which makes the average size of the other groups around 25 each. We are not aware of any of the churches besides Portland that seem to be growing very quickly. Portland has grown from 120 members to about 400 in three years with about half of the increase being due to people placing membership.

Since McKean's announcement, at least four of the churches who were listed as part of the new movement have stated that they are not a part of it. Jay Hernandez and the Salt Lake City leadership would rather try to be a bridge than to be aligned with the new movement. ([Salt Lake Christian Church](#)) As told to Disciples Today, the churches in Chile have decided not to be a part of the new movement because they do not believe it is right to call people out of hurting churches. They are very grateful for the help from Kip and Elena and the Portland Church, but cannot conscientiously agree with this division. We are not certain whether any of the other churches announced are also not fully with the new movement.

Sadly, this announcement comes as no surprise to those who have watched the progression of events in Kip's life and the Portland leadership. The unity and growth among the International Churches of Christ began to decline in the latter part of the 1990's. After numerous leaders confronted him for a number of years on his character and leadership sins, Kip McKean was asked to step down from leading the Los Angeles Church of Christ in 2001 and to step down from leading the International Churches of Christ in 2002. At that time, Kip said that he repented of arrogance and self-promotion. However, his actions did not change. At the 2005 Portland Jubilee, he publicly boasted that he could fix any church anywhere. He followed that by printing in the Portland bulletin that he would begin "a progressive "calling-out of the remnant of disciples" from dying, former ICOC Churches. . . . In the fall the Portland leadership will begin to seek out church leaderships in congregations that are struggling to ask if we can help them build a foundation of sold-out disciples. If they are not inclined to receive help, then we will offer help to any group that would prefer to be in a new congregation composed of only sold-out disciples."

In October and November of 2005, most of the key leaders who led the planting and the building of churches of the International Churches of Christ published two letters to Kip McKean in the spirit of Matthew 18, relying on God's plan of church discipline to "tell it to the church." Their stated purposes were: to appeal for Kip's repentance and to protect the flock. (Click here for [Brothers' Letter to Kip McKean](#).) McKean's only response was, "Do what you have to do." Therefore 86 commended brothers published the [Brothers' Statement to Kip McKean](#) in which it was stated:

From our deep concern for your soul and to protect the flock, we must continue to oppose you as long as you try to divide disciples from one another. Out of reverence for God and love for you and all of his people, we commit to obeying these Scriptures which tell us to have no further fellowship with you until you repent. Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10-11

McKean never acknowledged God's discipline through the brothers' statement. Since then he has used his persuasive talents to take his new movement to numerous cities and sent his disciples to other cities to draw people out of churches so that he can once again have power and authority over them. Perhaps some good-hearted disciples, out of a pure desire to have their church be filled with greater excitement and zeal, are tempted to embrace Kip's influence, not realizing that they are being (and will be) used for Kip's agenda and divisive purposes. The message remains the same: churches not aligned with him are dead and not right with God. Though he acknowledges there are faithful disciples in other churches, according to his own words, to be in a true church you must leave your church and come be with Kip's new fellowship of churches of only "sold-out" disciples. Seasoned leaderships from around the world, including commended brothers who have known Kip for decades have condemned these simplistic and condescending judgments regarding our family of churches.

In an October 8th sermon entitled "You Might Be Fighting God" McKean stated:

You see we believe our congregation is unique here in Portland. Now I think there are other baptized disciples in other fellowships. But I don't think there is any other fellowship that is composed solely of sold-out baptized disciples.

From his proclamation, we are hearing the old refrain that proved disastrous once before among us – that the Portland Church and the others in their movement are the One True Church. This is a false premise and elitist claim. To us this is more of the same judgmental, divisive teaching that serves to draw people to himself as the only truly godly leader of the only true church. Sadly, the arrogance and the divisive spirit have not changed. These are all the signs of one who "loves to be first." This is not the narrow road of Matthew 7:13-14. This is a tight, elitist circle.

### Disciples Today Decision

Since these churches of Kip's new movement have removed themselves from our family of churches, Disciples Today is removing them from our Church Directory. We will gladly add churches back to the Directory if they will notify us they are not joining the new movement. Here are the reasons for this action:

1) The International Christian Churches have identified themselves as being a part of a new group of churches to the exclusion of our fellowship or any other. He stated in his own article that these are the only churches he considers to be his "partners in the Gospel." If they agree with Kip's teachings, they apparently also do not believe that any other churches are godly churches. Though our family of churches desire fellowship with them, they have separated themselves from our family of churches.

2) We trust God's plan for calling a brother to repentance. (Matthew 18:15-20; Titus 3:10, 11) Kip McKean never acknowledged the 86 brothers who signed the [letters](#) following God's plan for church discipline to call him to repentance nearly a year ago. The long-term results of his leadership are seen in the relationships with the people he was the closest to and led for up to 30 years. Though he makes claims of repentance, his words and his actions remain the same. (See Doug Arthur's statement: "[Unity in the Spirit Through the Bond of Peace.](#)") Unfortunately, Kip continues to rephrase God's discipline on him as persecution, suffering and politics.

We stand by the brothers who signed the letters and pray for God to continue to work on Kip's heart. The steps for Kip's repentance are clearly specified in the letters. The brothers forgave Kip and are not motivated by bitterness. In love they stand together trusting God's Word, ready to help him repent and ready to protect the flock. (See the plan for repentance offered in the [Brothers' Letter to Kip McKean](#).) We stand with open arms ready to embrace a brother who truly has godly sorrow.

3) Sadly, regardless of the hype, the common denominator in churches being included into the new movement called the International Christian Churches is neither commitment, unity, baptisms nor spirituality. The common requirement is being under Kip's control. This is the very reason he is not willing to work among our churches or any other group of churches. Kip was offered to work as a team player with the other brothers, but his response was that he was the star. We must follow God first, not men.

4) We believe there are many churches of committed disciples who have not given up on Jesus' dream to see the gospel go to all nations and all people. They want to evangelize the world (in God's timetable), to unashamedly preach the gospel and to build healthy discipling relationships that truly have matured from God's discipline. We cannot approve of sowing the same judgmental, divisive seeds of arrogance, elitism, condemnation, bitterness and blame-shifting that will reap the same harm that we once experienced in our movement. (Galatians 6:7,8) In our fellowship of churches, God disciplined us for our sins and we are just now beginning to reap the harvest of righteousness and peace. (Hebrews 12) Many of our churches actually began to stagnate in the 1990's and are still healing from much of the damage suffered. They are healing, unifying and turning their attention back to the mission. We want to encourage this new spirit of revival and mission learning from the ministries that survived the fire because they were built well. (1 Corinthians 3)

4) The purpose of Kip's churches is not just to evangelize. Their published intent is basically Kip's agenda he announced publicly and in private a year ago:

- To "call out the remnant" from the movement he led.  
*Do not lie in wait like an outlaw against a righteous man's house, do not raid his dwelling place. Proverbs 24:15*
- To build a movement for him to lead and to build a legacy for himself. (1 Peter 5:5)  
*Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence, and do not claim a place among great men. Proverbs 25:6*  
*Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips. Proverbs 27:2*

- To build it by causing division and factions (Galatians 5:20) calling good-hearted people out of churches of disciples. This is not about more than one church in one city. This is about arrogance, selfish ambition, disrespect and divisiveness. Portland members have even called teenagers trying to get them to turn against their disciple parents You can ask the church leaders in each of these cities. The Scriptures say:

*I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. Romans 16:17-18*

- To build his movement with an ethic that sells out godly principles for short term results. The ends do not justify the means. (1 Corinthians 3) (See the [Brothers' Letter](#).)

We have already seen the fruit reaped from former unbalanced emphasis on numeric goals, arrogance, competition and outward signs of success" still being exemplified by McKean. Although, some of our churches may have given up on the dream of evangelizing the world, most have not. Many of these new International Christian Churches are having far less impact than the churches they are trying to pull people out of.

If a church is in the hospital, we need to serve it and help it heal and get it back to serving God and others. Certainly some churches will die, but church euthanasia is not found anywhere in the Bible. The sad thing is that these churches are in many ways the family of Kip McKean that he has now exasperated, rejected and condemned.

Sadly, it seems that Kip has yet to learn from these Scriptures:

*" Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!" James 2:13*

*"Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city." Proverbs 16:32*

*"Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud." Proverbs 16:19*

*"It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way. Proverbs 19:2*

*"For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin." Psalm 36:2*

These are cities where small groups have been started under the accusation that the local church is not "sold out": Brisbane, Australia; Chicago, Illinois; Hilo, Hawaii; Honolulu, Hawaii; Kiev, Ukraine; Los Angeles, California; Phoenix, Arizona, San Pedro Sula, Honduras; Stockholm, Sweden; Toronto, Canada. As the pattern continues, other attempts to divide continue. The fruit is predictable because the seed has not changed. Some will be saved even though the preaching of this new movement is often through envy, rivalry and selfish ambition. We rejoice for every saved soul and pray for them to mature in Christ. (Philippians 1:15-18) We are grieved over our brother who refuses to accept God's discipline and the people who are confused and hurt in the process.

5) This is not a Peter / Paul confrontation of Galatians 2. Nor is it a Paul / Barnabas difference of opinion of Acts 15.

- In neither of these cases were any of the people involved taken to the church for discipline as directed by Jesus in Matthew 18.
- When Peter was confronted with sin, he admitted it and repented. Their fellowship grew stronger and Peter never preached against Paul nor did he start his own group of churches. Kip has yet to even respond to God's plan of church discipline from the brothers.
- When Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement over a single decision, neither one started a new church nor condemned the other's ministries. In fact we see admiration and partnership in the gospel. And in time Barnabas judgment proved right about John Mark whom Paul judged to not be committed enough to go with him.
- To our knowledge, only one brother who has worked with or under Kip through the building of the Boston Movement and the International Churches of Christ is with him now.

6) This situation is not the same as the events in the early 1980s. There were significant differences of conviction between the typical traditional Churches of Christ and the Boston Movement including the biblical expectation that every disciple be committed to God, the church, discipleship and evangelism. While the separation process was not always a godly one on either side, the need for a new movement was well established by the differences of convictions. As clearly expressed in the [Brothers' Letter to Kip](#) and in the [Unity Proposal](#) committed to by over 300 churches and shared by many more, in most

of our churches, our convictions clearly have not changed. We are committed to evangelizing the world and to learning from our mistakes to build mature churches that glorify Christ. We encourage you to review the news on the DisciplesToday.net website and in Disciples Today videos as well as the numerous websites of our churches to see God being glorified in baptisms, missions, church plantings, sermons, seminars, mature teaching and daily lives of disciples in 150 countries. (**See Church Locator.**)

Lest anyone be fooled, this division is not over life or doctrine -- it is over following a man.

*You are still worldly. 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? (1 Corinthians 3:3-4)*

God is not honored by division or by bitterness. We continue to pray for repentance, unity and humility at the foot of the cross for us all. We also trust that God is moving among all disciples of Jesus just as he is opening the hearts of others every day. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10) He came to heal. (John 4:18-19) He also came to mature us into his character. (Ephesians 4:14-16) May we never sell out God to our own egos or to a comfortable life in this world. May we fight to honor God through our commitment to Christ's prayer-- *"to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."* (John 17:23)