

Response to the Starting of a New Church in Phoenix

PVCC Elders and Ministry Staff - Sunday, September 25, 2005

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Phoenix Valley Church of Christ,

As most of you know, the elders and ministry staff recently felt compelled to address Kip McKean's article, *The Portland Story*, along with certain practices of Kip and other members of the Portland church. We quoted a paragraph of this article to help you see what our concerns were about Kip's teaching. In brief, his comments have been disrespectful of other leaders and other churches, and as such, clearly divisive in their effects. The practices we objected to concern efforts to recruit members from other churches, noting that such efforts had already involved members of the Phoenix church. On that issue, we called upon Kip and Portland members to cease and desist these disturbing efforts.

Our hopes and prayers were that changes would be prompted by our letter and by similar letters from other churches. However, such has not been the case. Kip and Portland members have contacted members here in recruiting efforts since our warning letter. Further, even after our letter was issued, one of our own house church leader couples, Chris & Sonia Chloupek, continued having conversations with Kip and other Portland members. This past weekend, they visited the Portland church and had meetings with Kip and other leaders there. They returned to Phoenix with the intent to begin a new church associated with Kip and the Portland church. Since returning, they have been attempting to recruit members from all parts of our church to join them, in a very blatant manner. Let it be noted that the Fergusons met with the Chloupeks before and after their Portland trip, and others friends also have tried to dissuade them, but to no avail. Two passages in the New Testament are particularly applicable to this situation:

Acts 20:28-31 -- "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!"

Romans 16:17-18 -- "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."

To further clarify the significance of these divisive actions, we will address two items from Kip's article and respond biblically to these false teachings:

1) He used an example from 1 Samuel 27 to justify people "choosing" the leader to whom they will give allegiance. When anyone has to resort to using a remote passage from the Old Testament to justify behaviors of those under the authority of the New Testament, it should be immediately obvious that a weak point is being made. The NT is clear about elders having the responsibility to oversee and protect the church. Read the following passages carefully:

"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" -- Acts 20:28

"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching." -- 1 Timothy 5:17

"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." -- Hebrews 13:17

"To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve." -- 1 Peter 5:1-2

2) Kip is quite clear about his "one church in one city" doctrine. In light of his strong statements regarding one true church per city, his support of starting another church here must mean that he no longer considers us to be a valid church. In spite of the serious and multiple problems of the church at Corinth, they were still addressed by an inspired apostle as **"the church of God in Corinth"** (1 Corinthians 1:2). Kip's doctrine means that the Phoenix Valley church has fallen out of this status, and must be replaced by a true "church of God." It is very significant that the NT has absolutely no example of any disciple anywhere being told to leave one church and go to another, or to start another church. In the letters to the Seven Churches of Asia (Revelation 2 & 3) we find both condemnations & commendations of these churches. The worst of the seven churches was Sardis, with no commendations at all, and although they had only a few members who were righteous, these were simply told to keep being righteous, not to leave or start another church. This was in spite of the fact that the other churches were located nearby (all in one section of Asia Minor), and both the Smyrna and Philadelphia churches had nothing but commendations given by Jesus. That example is remarkably different from Kip's assertions and practices.

Not only can you not find a biblical example of starting a new (second) church in a city, this is tantamount to dividing the church – an action strongly denounced in the NT. The first four chapters of 1st Corinthians deal with the sin of division. Consider carefully the following words:

"I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. 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?" -- 1 Corinthians 1:10-13

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? [17] If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple." -- 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

"Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not take pride in one man over against another." -- 1 Corinthians 4:6

The fact that Kip is appealing for people to align with him should sound a loud warning that something is terribly wrong biblically. Paul refused to be a part of such; Kip not only embraces it; he all but demands it. Galatians 4:17 puts it succinctly: ***"Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them."***

In view of the current actions of the Chloupeks, Kip and the Portland church, we as your leaders urge you to obey Paul's admonitions quoted above from Romans 16:17: ***"Keep away from them."*** Any fellowship or contact should be totally discontinued as of today. We are saddened to bring this matter before you, but we are totally resolved to biblically deal with divisiveness and unbiblical teachings that affect our members. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

With our love,

Your Elders and Ministry Staff