

Crossroads

These notes were written over a 6½ month period in 2004, when considering the 'crossroads' position of a fellowship with which we had some contact at the time. I do not believe that I ever shared the whole document with anyone in that fellowship, but several of the points were discussed with one or two. I did not feel that I had the right to thrust my perception on them and they had certainly not asked me for any input on the subject.

I share these thoughts now (preserving the anonymity of the fellowship in question) in the hope that they may be of some help to others who find their fellowship to be at a crossroads. Dave Taylor December 2016

Some ongoing thoughts about the situation

The 'need' for a pastor

I believe this is an acknowledgement of genuine need, wrapped up in the wrong words, and therefore likely to cause confusion - or at the very least a lack of clarity. So what are the real needs?

The need for a sense of direction

The fellowship does not seem to have any clear sense of direction. Some individuals have their own particular goals, some have ideas of how the fellowship could move forward, but the present leadership may be unwilling to consider more radical suggestions. This is very understandable when there appears to be a measure of success. Very tempting to try to preserve an apparently successful 'status quo'. Less comfortable to look at what the Lord has in mind for his church and to be prepared to run risks to move in his direction.

The need to check foundations

- 1) **Personal Foundations** It is not enough to ensure that the gospel is preached, though this is essential. Each person who considers themselves a part of the fellowship needs to **know** that they are in Christ by their own response in faith to the great grace of God as revealed in the good news message. Vital to have a starting point, but also essential that is a **starting** point, from which there is progress and real spiritual growth.

Continuing growth of each member in this way is one of the major responsibilities of true spiritual leadership in the local church.

- 2) Fellowship Foundations These follow on from the personal ones. It is vital that no-one thinks that they can be part of the church fellowship without having their own foundations in Christ. The temptation to 'include' people who have no clear commitment **must be resisted at all costs**.

Here the danger of having a social structure becomes very apparent. By having 'organisations' within the overall 'church', it is possible with all the best motives to include people in order to befriend them into the kingdom of God - a very effective form of evangelism. No problem, just so long as they are clear that they are not part of the church until they are joined to Jesus by a personal response of faith. But we tend to avoid making such clear-cut distinctions, and the clarity of the church of God suffers deeply as a result and 'fellowship' becomes ineffective because meaningless.

It is easy to let this vital aspect slip. There needs to be ongoing provision for individual and corporate growth on real biblical and spiritual foundations.

The need to start afresh

It is too easy to fall into one of two traps:-

- 1) Carry on in the old ways, hoping that we can make little adjustments and so gradually come round to what the Lord wants in his Church. When we are already 'walking' in obedience to him (as far as we can see), then certainly little adjustments are probably all that need to be made, but even these are accompanied by small acts of repentance as we see and acknowledge the ways in which we have got it wrong so far. If, on the other hand, we have begun to see that we have held views of our Father's plans that are a long way off his own, then

this is no time for little adjustments - we need to make some sweeping changes!

2) Throw out everything regardless. Some fellowships have done this and in the process have made members feel that they are worthless and that everything they have ever done in fellowship life is being regarded as a waste of time. We need to be sensitive. Almost certainly we shall see that some of the things that we have done and encouraged others to do were in fact pretty useless, but let us at least give ourselves credit for having done what we thought was right at the time. Now we may know better; a time to give thanks for the Lord's grace in opening our eyes to more reality and for his forgiveness of our past mistakes.

These two may seem contradictory, but the main difference is in the attitude in which we approach change. Many of us are very easily hurt, especially if there is the slightest suggestion that some aspect of our life needs to change. Have we forgotten that forgiveness is right at the heart of the Christian good news? And have we forgotten that our experience of that forgiveness depends on repentance, a total change of heart, a radical rethink of our position? My experience and conviction is that most (perhaps all?) fresh understanding and revelation of God's purposes is accompanied by the need to acknowledge that we have got it wrong before.

Forgiveness brings freedom from fear, and that includes the fear of being proved wrong! Learning from the Lord is definitely a 'grace' experience. If we are afraid of being wrong, then it will be very difficult for us to learn.

The fresh start we need, then, is not the rejection of everything so far but more like walking out of a dimly-lit room into a brighter one. It is a time to reaffirm the real work of the Holy Spirit in each believer's life and so enable growth and building on that foundation. In the process, some areas of weakness, blindness and disobedience may become apparent. If we become defensive, we shall resist the work of

the Holy Spirit. If we let him show us more of our weakness, he will have the opportunity to lead us into more reality. It may not be easy to admit failure, but resisting him is much more painful and certainly more dangerous!

The need for multiple ministry to emerge

Just thinking about this process of reaffirmation that needs to take place in each life may make us conscious of the enormous task ahead. Maybe we think, "We need a pastor to do this for us". In reality, not only could a pastor not cope with all the load of this but even if he did, the church would lose out on one of the greatest benefits - believers helping each other. Again, it is not a 'heavy' thing; we readily respond to friends who are going through difficulties, and try to help in whatever way we can. In the same way, if we are prepared to be honest with each other, we can often help each other spiritually. If we find that something is beyond us, we shall probably have some idea who else could help and call on them. We are sure to make a few mistakes along the line but we shall soon find that individuals will emerge with abilities that are useful to an increasing number in the fellowship. It will then not be a case of 'appointing' these people to responsibilities, but rather recognising that they already have these abilities and are using them. It is a short step from there to seeing gifts and ministries emerging in the church. We shall probably do well not to be in a great hurry to label people in any of these roles, but gradually the whole body will benefit from the development of each one, and that benefit has the potential to reach far outside our immediate geographical area!

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I have quite deliberately made no reference to Scripture in these notes, but not for the lack of quotable references! It would perhaps be useful to work through some or all of these headings to get a better understanding together of the issues at stake and the Lord's intended way of dealing with them.

Dave Taylor December 2004