

Not by Might, Not by Power . . .

"This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty." Zechariah 4:6

[“Might and power” express human strength of every description, physical, mental, moral. Or, “might” is the strength *of many* (an “army,” literally); “power,” that *of one man*. (Source: Jamieson, Fausset & Brown – Commentary)]

The vision before us is to see the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ built, specifically here in our local surroundings. There are many ideas, schemes, methods and plans – and the lack of them – by which different people and groups of people think that vision can be advanced, but many (most?) of those ideas can easily be defined as 'might' or 'power' – basically a human approach to the question. But the LORD's word to Zechariah is clear – only the working of the Spirit of God will accomplish the task. In Zechariah's case, that task was the completion of the building of the temple as the house of God. In our case, very similarly, it is moving towards the completion of the building of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we think that our own plans and schemes can come anywhere near that, we are seriously mistaken – we need to discover and follow the direction of the Holy Spirit. There are plenty of pointers in the New Testament . . .

The nature of the church. Although we all know that the church is the people, not the building, we easily fall into the next trap of thinking that an organisation that calls itself a church or fellowship is actually 'the church' in some form. Apart from anything else, it is a convenient shorthand, but it also shields us too often from remembering that the church in a place actually consists of all (and only) those in that place who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. (**1 Corinthians ch.3**)

So we have a practical problem here: How can we see the church built within the context of the existing organisations? I suggest that there are two complementary approaches:-

1) Seek to disregard the man-made divisions and relate to other believers as members of the one local church, on the basis of our shared trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. By the very nature of things, this is a relatively slow process, but the change of heart-attitude is fundamental and potentially revolutionary. (By the way, activities to promote the working together of the separate organisations may not be as valuable as they first appear – they bring together the organisations but do not necessarily build spiritual fellowship.)

2) Within the separate organisations, operate as much as possible on 'church ground', i.e. seeking to relate to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ rather than as members of the same organisation. This is not as easy as pretending that 'our' organisation IS the local church – again, the dangerous 'shorthand' of equating any organisation with the local church!

Just a cautionary note here: If we do NOT do this, then we shall find ourselves building organisations that people can belong to without necessarily having any current and active relationship with the Lord. There is a security in 'belonging' which can sometimes take away from our awareness of our continuous individual need to 'walk with God'. By contrast, the 'belonging' which has its roots in an individual walk with God is enriching and 'upbuilding' for all concerned. (**Romans 12:5 onwards, 1 Corinthians 12:14-27**)

The need for growth. Use the word 'growth' and we tend to think of numbers – but there is a much higher priority. There is precious little teaching in meetings about HOW we can walk with God, how we can learn to live in Christ, how we can actually receive the grace of God **in practice**. This is a general observation of 99% of Christian meetings that I have gone to for the last forty years, so it is certainly not a specific local criticism! Plenty of information **about** a vast array of spiritual topics, but very little about how to take hold of what we have been given! Perhaps we think that everyone knows how to go about it, whereas in reality many folk may just be muddling along in a mixture of routine, petty legalism and 'flying by the seat of their pants'. Not the Lord's plan for his people! Compare Paul's vision for **each one** in **Colossians 1:28** !

The need for sharing. One of the keynotes of church meetings in the New Testament seems to have been that every member was free to share what the Lord had given them for the whole group. The result was that the whole body was built up and helped (**1 Corinthians 14:26**). Sharing in this way is often 'the other side of the coin' from teaching towards growth. As we begin to experience more reality and growth in our own lives, and then share it with others in fellowship, it helps everyone – including the one who is sharing! To some extent, this sharing process already takes place in home groups, but the 'worship' context of the larger meeting, plus the fact that it **is** a larger meeting, gives additional value and also encourages everyone to share – not just those who go to home groups or the naturally noisy ones!

We may think that we are not really ready for this on a regular basis, and so restrict this sort of meeting to a total of about four (or less) each year. True, having a 'service' (with everything led from the front) is less demanding on the congregation – but it is also less beneficial! It tends towards more of a division between those who take part (the leaders) and those who don't (the congregation), whereas of course we are all really on a level together. (**Ephesians 4:11-16**)

Which leads us back to the nature of the church. Clearly, an open meeting is one in which only believers can really take part. No problem for others (on the fringes) to be there, but it should be obvious to them (without any awkwardness) that it is primarily a meeting for those in relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ – and with each other. As I said before, the church in a place consists of all and only those in that place who are in Christ. (**1 Corinthians 14:23-25**)

So perhaps this is another possible reason for not having open meetings very often – so as not to make non-believers feel excluded? If so, then the regular breaking of bread each Sunday is also out of place. Or is that 'safe' because it looks quite like what goes on in other Christian meetings? A need to think this through . . . (**1 Corinthians 10:16**)

By the way, having an open meeting does not mean that visiting speakers are not welcome – quite the opposite! What better way for a visiting speaker to feel at home in the fellowship of believers than to have been part of a time of open sharing and worship, leading on into their own speaking? And what an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to 'fine tune' what is already on the speaker's heart, so that it can have the maximum value for those who hear it!

This leads us back to growth again – numbers this time! If there is a genuine process of spiritual development going on, the difference will be observed by others and some will be interested. They can talk with those believers they know and maybe meet up with others who are friends. Once they come to the point of faith (maybe before), they too will talk to their friends and more questions will be asked. The potential is there for a 'snowball' effect, but it all depends on something real and spiritual going on. Yes, numerical growth is a highly desirable result, but it starts with spiritual growth, not with special projects or special meetings. (**Acts 2:46-47**)

There is much more on my heart about this whole subject, but this is already long enough and may be more than enough to convey the main points.

Obviously, everything here is my own personal conviction but I make no claim to have the whole picture. Perhaps there are some insights that may be valuable as you consider the way forward.

Thank you for challenging us to share our thoughts about '*Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit says the LORD Almighty*'.

Dave Taylor 28 April 2015

Further copies can be downloaded from www.justonecandle.uk