

My Concerns about Bethel Church, Redding, California

2018

I have listened to the teachings of most of the recent speakers advertised to the whole BICF community. I did not personally attend. (I realize that the recordings do not get everything completely.) I have concerns about their ministry paradigm and specific objections to the content of their message. But I want here to focus my comments on the wider impact to us as a BICF family of churches.

When speakers/seminars focus on teachings/ideas that are outside the BICF doctrinal statement instead of majoring on the areas where we have agreed to unite in fellowship there is going to be conflict within BICF. This does not mean we could never explore topics we don't agree on, in fact we should sometimes, but perhaps in a discussion/debate format?

It is not enough to cite the Bible in snippets. When short phrases are quoted, rarely looked up together, almost never read within the wider context of an entire chapter, it is much less likely to discern what the original author intended for the original audience. One Bethel speaker cited 2 Corinth 5.16 then went off into a lot of strange ideas about "seeing each other by the spirit." Paul's meaning is how we see Jesus! When Christ was regarded from a worldly point of view, men rejected and crucified Him as a blasphemer and troublemaker. But from the divine viewpoint, Christ is the Messiah and Son of God, in whom the new creation and reconciliation with God is given.

Given the short amount of time we have to serve our congregations, we should seize every moment to equip them with the clearly spoken Words from God in the 66 books acknowledged as divine and inspired by the global church for millennia. Do our people know the books of Scripture so thoroughly that we have the luxury of inviting people who claim to be giving additional words from God? Have we taught our people how to carefully handle the widely acknowledged and clearly revealed Words of God so that they can discern and interpret the teachings they hear like the Bereans (Acts 17.11)? Encouraging people to receive extra-biblical teachings, before – and in some cases instead of (many of the people in our church/meetings are new to us!) – a Biblical foundation is dangerous. I have spent a long time studying Scripture and I am struck by how much I don't know and am eager to spend the rest of my life learning!

Examples of healing in the Bible are spontaneous, never scheduled, and specific and effective. Jesus and the Apostles never spoke to a random crowd fishing for people with backaches and kidney troubles. They never said, "someone out there is depressed." But always looked at needy individuals and fully delivered them, even when they were unbelievers (John 5). These signs attested to their authority to bring new revelation about redemption. That is the pattern of the Bible, God speaks because God will save. In Jesus death, Salvation is finished and now Scripture is final. The Holy Spirit now is ours to reveal the Savior through the Scriptures.

Young believers, some who have never been overseas, and know almost nothing about the people in BICF, are given a platform here to speak dogmatically and divisively. In listening to recent speakers I heard... "The Southern Baptists never taught me about the Holy Spirit" "if you don't speak in tongues you don't have the Holy Spirit" "God wants to do a Miracle in your life right here in this service!" If everything is a miracle, nothing is a miracle! A miracle defies the normal order of nature! In my current study of 1 Corinthians I have been rebuked and humbled to see how even Paul the Apostle so carefully and considerately applies the Word pastorally to that flock. Singles, married, widowed, fornicators, and ascetics hear the Word sensitively applied to their unique situations. And even then Paul allows plenty of wide latitude for the distinctive character and situation of each individual Corinthian Christian. He does not use a 'cookie cutter' approach.

Inviting novices to speak dogmatically to your congregation, extending promises that are beyond the promises of Scripture – often ignoring the strong biblical emphasis on waiting, suffering, and not knowing everything – is creating a pastoral train wreck! Hours will need to be invested in members who have real problems that can't be solved by dogmatic sound bites and whose hopes got over-inflated by people who are now long gone.

The Apostles to the Gentiles and Jews final messages (2 Timothy and 2 Peter), written when they know their own deaths are imminent, call the Church back to Word-based Christianity. They make no mention of the need for performing miracles, speaking in tongues, expecting prophecies. Rather they call the church to preach Scripture...

¹⁴ Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. ¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. ¹⁶ But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, ¹⁷ and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸ who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. ¹⁹ But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

2 Timothy 2.14-19

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ⁵ As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

2 Timothy 4.1-5

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1.16-21

This, is in keeping with the post-Pentecost instructions for the task of the local church which emphasize the teaching and living out of Scripture (Acts 2.42, 1 Timothy 4.1-16). "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

With love for you my colleagues in Christ, and prayers that God will be glorified in the BICF, and we will be unified in Him,

Mark Blair