

The Church of the place

According to the New Testament there is only one church in each place whether it is Corinth, Rome, Ephesus etc. The apostle Paul writes “To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints”,¹ “To the church of God in Corinth”,² “To the saints in Ephesus”³ It is not that there were no expressions of the body other than the whole church but that they were all part of the one body, the body of Christ.

In this day and age, here in the city of Norwich, we have multiple local churches of every kind of description; large and small, local, national and multinational. We are separated from each other by ethnicity, doctrine, denomination, liturgical style and church government. Some years ago a letter to the church in Norwich in the style of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation was written at a Transforming Norwich AGM by a gathering of people from a cross section of denominations and congregations. “I have this against you. Your congregations and denominations separate you from one another and you love to have it so! Independence has become a stronghold which keeps you from one another and prevents My Kingdom purpose from being achieved through you. “(extract)

How should we view the present dilemma in the light of the New Testament? The Apostle Paul writing to the church at Corinth has something to say about just such a situation. The church is divided, or at least in danger of such division, because of growing party spirit in the congregation. “My brothers and sisters, 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.”⁴ Paul’s response is to ask, “Is Christ divided?”⁵

Let’s look at how he addresses what is happening. First in his opening remarks he elevates Christ. In the opening nine verses of chapter one he mentions Christ in each of them. All that the Corinthians have as Christians is because they are in Christ and Paul’s appeal to them is “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁶ He reminds them that they are brothers and says that they should “all agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions (*schism*) among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.”⁷ Paul later points out that Jesus Christ is the one and only foundation of the church which is God’s building, that is it does not belong to another, of whatever shade of opinion or theology or organisation!

¹ Romans 1:7

² 1 Corinthians 1:2

³ Ephesians 1:1

⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:11-12

⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:13

⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:10

⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:10

So am I crying for the moon to believe that we should replicate the New Testament model in this day and age? No, far from it, just as in other areas of the faith we seek to be obedient to the scriptures, so too we should live and work in the church in line with the word of God!

We need in the twenty-first century to recapture the vision of the church as our Lord Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone and Head of the church which is His body, intended it to be. "Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained, but happy is one who keeps the Law."⁸

"Write down the vision and inscribe *it* clearly on tablets, So that one who reads it may run. For the vision is yet for the appointed time; it hurries toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it delays, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay *long*."⁹

It is my firm conviction that He who is the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last has purposed that His church which He said He would build, has not changed His mind and that in the end times He will restore His church to the pattern revealed to His holy apostles and prophets and recorded in the scriptures.

It is high time that we respond to the call of the Spirit to return to the original vision and work according to the pattern once for all revealed to the saints. That is not to say a conglomeration of the apostate, the liberal, the heretical, but a fellowship of all those who are in Christ, living and working in line with His will and purpose and committed to fulfill His vision for the church. One church, God honouring, Christ exalting, Holy Spirit filled. Amen.

To all such I say let's explore the way ahead together in a spirit of love and faith with a desire to be the Church in Norwich after His own heart.

⁸ Proverbs 29:18

⁹ Habakkuk 2:2-3