

Forming a Crisis Intervention Team - Discussion Paper - Alan Vincent June 2006

Definition

A group of Apostles, Prophets and other Eph.4:11 ministries within the City who seek to serve the whole Church in the City by coming to the help of any Local church that is facing a major crisis by :-

- 1) Giving advice and wise solutions to help a Local Pastor resolve what seems to him to be an insurmountable difficulty.
- 2) Resolving conflict and strife within the Local Church or between Local Churches and thus restoring peace and harmony.
- 3) Bringing impartial judgments to prevent splits and divisions in the wider Body of Christ.
- 4) Addressing schisms that already exist and seeking to resolve and heal them.
- 5) Helping a Local Church walk through a major Crisis such as failure of the Pastor or other Major Leader.
- 6) Helping to develop true unity within the City Church but avoiding the error of trying to establish a false compromised unity with that which is "another spirit" and "another gospel" and a "false Christ".

Where Does the Final Authority Lie?

In the frustration and tension of working out these relationships this is a question that is often asked. Usually it is the wrong question to be asking at that time. It is often being asked out of frustration when a collision of authority has occurred. The very question is an admission of failure and we are lost once we start trying to "pull rank".

The ultimate authority over all things in the church is the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph.1:22). The next level of authority is His Word, the Scriptures.

The New Testament also recognizes four other authorities to be at work in His Kingdom

- a) Apostolic authority (Eph.4:11; 1Cor.12:28; Cor.10:8; 2 Cor.13:10).
- b) Headship authority (Act.15:13,19; 1 Cor.11:3; Eph.5:22,23 etc.).
- c) Elder authority (Act.20:28; Heb.13:7,17 etc.).
- d) Congregational authority (Matt.18:17).

There is a definite order to these authorities but they are intended to compliment, safeguard, reinforce and strengthen one another. They were never intended to be in competition.

You see all four working together in Acts 15 as the church judges the issue of whether the Gentiles are to keep the Law of Moses. All the different parties in the Church are free to have their say (Act.15:4,5) The Apostles and the Elders sit in council to consider the matter (Act.15:6). James (the head) finally brings a judgment (Act.15:13,19). This

judgment is good to the Apostles, the Elders and to the Whole Church (Act.15:22).

The motivation for exercising or receiving any spiritual authority must be a mutual submitting to one another in the fear of the Lord (Eph.5:21). Only then do the various specified submissions which follow on through Ephesians chapters 5 and 6 really work.

For any of these authorities to function biblically they must be exercised in humility and be in the Spirit and not in the flesh. If any of these authorities becomes fleshy or carnal, the devil quickly finds opportunity to bring control, manipulation, self seeking, strife, lies, deception and the demonic into the situation (1Cor.3:1-3) with the motive to control and not to serve.

(Gal 5:24-26 NKJV) And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. {25} If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. {26} Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (6:1) Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. {2} Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. {3} For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

These authorities must also function in the "wisdom which comes down from above". (James 3:13-18 NKJV) Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. {14} But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. {15} This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. {16} For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. {17} But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. {18} Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

What Happens When Things Go Wrong?

The two models given to us most frequently in Scripture and sometimes even in the same passage of Scripture, are Christ as the Head of the Universal Church and the husband as head of the wife (e.g. Eph.5:22-33) and of the natural family. From these we can often extrapolate as to what we should do in any crisis at any other level in the Kingdom such as the Local Church, a Regional Center or a so called ðpara-church organizationö.

When we have no clear guidelines from scripture, as is often the case, we need to ask two basic questions.

1) How would we handle this scripturally if this was a crisis between a husband and his wife or a father and his family? - and then extrapolate up

2) How do the Scriptures deal with this in terms of Christ and the Universal Church? -

and then extrapolate down.

This often brings clarity as to how we should proceed when there is a breakdown of God's order.

Trouble in the Local Church

Unfortunately it is frequently in the local church where trouble occurs. Some of the common problems can be summarized as follows:-

Problems with the Pastor

- 1) The overall leader (i.e. Pastor or Set Man), instead of being a father /servant /head begins to exercise oppressive authority with manipulation and control.
- 2) There are legitimate questions raised over the overall leader's wisdom and/or integrity in handling the finances of the church.
- 3) There is a breakdown in the overall leader's marriage.
- 4) There is a moral failure on the part of the overall leader.
- 5) There is some other breakdown on the part of the overall leader in terms of integrity or truthfulness which destroys his credibility as a leader.
- 6) The overall leader or his wife is suffering from a worsening physical disability, from burn out, from mental breakdown and is no longer able to continue leading effectively.

In all these cases the Eldership should be involved at an early stage and should be in touch with the apostolic authority to which the leader and the church relates. Where sin or carnality are involved, depending on it's seriousness, there must be rebuke and discipline leading hopefully to genuine and thorough repentance.

This may involve the leader stepping down for a period of time for the process of repentance and recovery to be worked through. But the purpose must always be to gain our brother not destroy him (Matt.18:15). The purpose, according to Gal.6:1, is to restore our brother in a spirit of humility. We must not be harsh and judgmental and just dismiss him without providing some path of hope, recovery and restoration. We must recognize that apart from the grace of God, we could easily be in the same position.

In the case of physical or mental breakdown, this must be handled with great love and proper support including the financial. It may require a period of Sabbatical rest or a permanent honorable retirement with someone else, preferably a true son, taking over the church.

The Apostle and the Elders would work together and the church would need to be kept

informed without necessarily revealing all the confidential details. The Elders need to recognize and receive the particular authority that God gives to His apostles in this kind of situation. It cannot be seen simply as advice or an internal church matter. Neither the Elders nor the congregation have the authority or the wisdom to decide these things alone and they heed to recognize their need of outside help.

The marriage covenant between a man and a woman is unique and there is no other relationship that is quite the same and there is no other covenant that binds one so unconditionally. However, without pressing the analogy too far, there are a number of similarities in the way an Apostle deals with the fallen father of a church and the way a Pastor deals with the fallen father of a family. In the family, the goal would never be divorce but restoration of the father, the marriage relationship and the family. In a similar way when dealing with a fallen leader in the church the goal is the same.

In both situations the problem is not only the issue of sin and it's forgiveness but even more the issue of betrayed trust and it's re-establishment. In the family, the wife and the children wonder if they can ever really trust their husband or father again. In the local church, the Elders and the congregation often feel the same way to their former head and would rather the fallen leader moved on to some other situation while they find someone else. They wish him well, but not here! Maybe only after years of proving himself again can that trust be restored. Wherever possible, the ideal solution is that the leader is restored back to the church which he formerly lead. But it is rarely achieved in practice because of the hardness of men's hearts.

Sometimes, although the sin can be forgiven, the consequences cannot be removed and it may be necessary for the leader to begin again elsewhere, not because God requires it but because of the irretrievable situation or the hardness of the hearts of the Elders and/or the people. No leader can lead people who no longer trust him and will not follow him anymore.

If there is denial on the part of the leader and there is no real and obvious repentance, although the case is proved, finally the church has to be told. Then, according to Scripture, he must be put out of the fellowship of the body until he learns to truly repent (Matt.18:17). But, if there is true sorrow and when there is a real turning and thorough repentance, then there is to be immediate mercy and a plan for restoration, because this is always the heart of God [eg. Mannaseh (2 Kings 21:16; 2 Chron.33:10-20), and the man committing incest in Corinth (1 Cor.5:1-5; 2Cor.2:3-11)].

Only an apostle has the authority and the wisdom to handle this kind of situation. According to Scripture a charge against an Elder (and this would include the Pastor) should only be received at the mouth of two or three *witnesses*. This is the wisdom of God to protect leaders from the malice of false accusations. If there is only one witness it cannot even be received.

Trouble When an Individual Elder Rises up, Challenges or Seeks to Take over from the Head

The overall leader or Pastor along with the rest of the Eldership need to confront the person and discipline him. If he responds, well and good. The apostolic oversight needs to be informed but does not need to get involved unless the rebellion continues, in which case the Elder would have to resign or be dismissed. Once again the purpose of confrontation is conciliatory without fudging the issues and always to gain our brother not push him into deeper rebellion.

Trouble When the Whole Eldership Rises up and Seeks to Control, Discipline or Dismiss the Head

The apostolic oversight needs to be brought in to judge the matter. A single Apostle may feel it necessary to call on others to help him. All parties should submit to this apostolic judgment and seek reconciliation. If the Elders continue to rebel and resist that authority then it gets very messy! Usually there is a "Korah" stirring the whole thing up. He possibly can be isolated and removed. If not the church should be informed and depending on where the heart of the people is, either the Pastor should walk away from the situation as David did with Absalom (2 Sam. 15:13), because you cannot lead people who will not follow you.

If the people's heart is generally with the Pastor then the Elders should individually decide whether they can still honor him and follow him. If not, then they should resign and go elsewhere as individuals. They cannot stay if they are unable to work under his leadership and are actually in rebellion against him. They should not try to pull people away and they should seek to harm the body as little as possible. They should always seek the welfare of the sheep as a first priority.

Trouble When the Congregation Rises up and Seeks to Control, Discipline or Dismiss the Pastor Head and /or the Eldership.

This should never happen but unfortunately it does, especially in Baptist and Congregational circles where congregational authority can sometimes go way beyond its limits. Usually there is a "Korah" or one or two strong controlling families stirring the whole thing up. It all depends on where the majority of the hearts of the people are.

Moses only had one weapon in these situations which was to get on his face and pray. It may be better to walk away or stay and fight, but never in the flesh. You just have to remain meek and in the Spirit and hear from God. A good Shepherd does not run away when he sees the wolf coming. The goal is always to do what is best for the sheep. But if they really are united and unrepentant concerning their attitude to control or get rid of "their Pastor" then it is only possible to walk away and leave it to God to bring right judgment.

Trouble When an Apostle or a Prophet begins to abuse His Authority and Lord it over the Church.

This ought never to happen but unfortunately it does. This often occurs with self-styled apostles whom the Lord Jesus never appointed. But even the genuine can sometimes get deceived and go wrong. That's one important reason why Apostles themselves must be in plurality and be in accountable, submitted relationships with other Apostles also with a wise loving Apostolic Father to whom they relate.

When a Pastor and a church receives an Apostle to have input and oversight and to be a father to them, then it is necessary for them to know to whom they can appeal in the event of difficulties coming in the relationship.

Before resorting to this step, every effort should be made first to resolve the matter privately between them. If it cannot be resolved, then the Pastor and his Elders must be free to appeal to that previously designated authority without it being seen as a disloyalty or betrayal.

Once an appeal is made and upon investigation by apostolic peers the case is proven, then the apostle needs to be disciplined and corrected by his brothers. If he mends his ways and the relationship is healed, well and good. If the relationship is irreparably damaged then it needs to be terminated for it will not work unless there is faith, life and joy in it.

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