

# BUCKINGHAM REPORT

AN IN-DEPTH CRITIQUE OF THE ISSUES, PEOPLE &  
EVENTS AFFECTING TODAY'S CHRISTIAN LEADERS

## CONTROVERSY OVER KANSAS CITY FELLOWSHIP SPUTTERING OUT

As the dust settles, the great "Kansas City shoot-out" between pastor Ernie Gruen of Kansas City's Full Faith Church of Love and Mike Bickle's Kansas City Fellowship (KCF) seems to have turned into a reconciliation effort instead.

The controversy centered around the prophetic ministry of KCF—particularly that of Bickle, age 32, and an older "prophet," Bob Jones. KCF's prophecy movement had earlier received national exposure when John Wimber of Vineyard Ministries began using the KCF prophets in his conferences. The dispute began when Gruen issued serious charges in a widely distributed tape titled "Do We Keep Smiling and Say Nothing?" Gruen has long been looked upon as one of the fathers of the charismatic movement in Kansas City. His large, well-established Full Faith Church is the hub of several smaller satellite bodies around the perimeter of the city.

In his emotion-packed message, Gruen accused KCF of sending out false prophets, of prophesying area churches to close down (and then join KCF), and of outright lying. "A prophet who admits he is right only 40 percent of the time is not only a non-prophet," Gruen charged, "he is dangerous." Gruen specifically charged that Bickle had been deceived by Satan and that KCF "prophets" were prophesying by "familiar spirits."

Following the release of his tape, more than 40 Kansas City pastors contacted Gruen saying they agreed with his position. Gruen was thrust into the role of chief prosecutor of the movement.

### Heresy Trial Requested

In April, Gruen proposed to the Network of Christian Ministries that he and Bickle bring the dispute before NCM's board of governors—a 12-man panel of leaders of some of the nation's independent ministries. Gruen's proposal would

have forced that board into the unenviable and dangerous position of an apostolic council—something charismatics have violently opposed in years past.

In May, Bickle was invited by the Charismatic Concerns Committee to attend their annual

retreat near St. Louis. He was well received, but refused to talk about Gruen or his accusations.

Others, however, were not so gracious. Several pastors, having heard Gruen's tape, preached sermons warning their people to stay away from any "prophecy conference." Pat Robertson aired some of the problems on a "700 Club" broadcast with Dick Mills. The controversy was heating up.

### Vineyard Christian Fellowship Steps In

Recent developments, however, have now thrown the controversy into a different dynamic.

In May, KCF churches submitted themselves to John Wimber's Vineyard Christian Fellowship and became Vineyard churches. In a personal letter to me, Wimber wrote: "Both Mike Bickle and the prophetic ministries represented by these congregations have submitted themselves to my spiritual authority and oversight...I have made a careful investigation of abuses and errors, both in pastoral ministry and prophetic ministry. While I have not personally found any of Ernie Gruen's charges to be substantiated, I have found certain excesses and errors that required both discipline and correction. I have taken the necessary steps to institute both discipline and correction in this matter. Mike Bickle and the individual prophetic ministries have submitted to the discipline and correction, and I am satisfied that we will not see these problems arising again in the future."

Wimber also wrote the NCM board, saying it was best for him to handle the problems rather



Jamie Buckingham



than have a heresy trial. The board members I talked to expressed great relief.

Gruen, nevertheless, released a 233-page spiral-bound "document" listing numerous charges against KCF. Most of the document is composed of excerpts from taped messages—particularly messages by Bickle, Paul Cain and Bob Jones, whose "prophecies" seemed to be at the heart of the issue.

Bickle and Cain immediately requested a meeting with Gruen and the board of the National Leadership Conference, which was then in session. In that meeting, Cain said Gruen was not playing "fair" by printing accusations against him without first contacting him. He and Bickle urged Gruen to withhold distribution of the document until Wimber could examine the issues. (It was offered free to all who called Gruen's church at 913-631-1100.) The NLC board strongly urged Gruen to consider their request. Cain said he was flying to Kansas City and would sit and wait until Gruen talked to him. Gruen refused to withdraw the book, but did agree to a private meeting with Cain and Wimber.

The outcome of that Memorial Day weekend meeting totally changed the direction of the controversy. Gruen, who later called it a "sweet meeting in the Spirit," opened by saying, "I do not have war in my heart." Wimber and Cain said they only wanted God's best. The result was the issuance of a joint statement to all factions saying:

- The opposing leaders trust each other's integrity and spirit.
- Vineyard leader Jack Deere, a former Dallas Seminary professor, will oversee a process to examine all the charges.
- Wimber and Gruen want to model to the nation a "righteous method" of handling disputes.

## HANDLING PERSECUTION

In his newsletter, *The Morning Star*, Rick Joyner of Pineville, North Carolina, has written a strong defense of KCF. I have edited out much of his counterattack at Ernie Gruen simply because reconciliation has begun and it no longer applies, but I am reprinting that part which gives clear teaching on the vital principles of attack and defense that young ministries can expect.

"Recently some very serious accusations have been brought about Kansas City Fellowship...I understand the young leadership

at KCF has made mistakes just like everyone else...

"The only Christians I know who have quit making mistakes are in the cemetery. KCF... has as many problems and makes as many mistakes as any other young, growing church. However, they do represent a new movement, a new kind of leadership and a new vision. Whenever there is a new movement, there is going to be misunderstanding and often persecution. This has happened with every previous move of God, and it will happen with this one.

"Persecution helps prepare us for the authority we will one day carry. The attacks on KCF have already helped them possibly more than anything in their history. This will help to prune them in preparation for the growth that is coming, and they will grow because it is their calling and destiny. Already, the spirit in which the tape was made is creating a great curiosity about KCF. It is obvious that such a bold attack of the enemy would not be made unless something of God with significance was being born there...

"KCF has been as candid about their failures and mistakes as any people I have ever known, sharing them on tapes and in conferences, so that the whole church could benefit from the lessons they paid such a high price to learn. Every new movement makes mistakes for the rest of the church, so that the rest can follow and not have to make them. In their short history they have had some embarrassing setbacks but have also had some of the greatest victories witnessed by the church in a very long time...

"The advancing church is progressing resolutely toward the greatest outpouring of the Holy Spirit yet witnessed on the earth. The onslaught of the accuser is meant to snuff out this new movement. KCF is just one of many new streams starting to flow in the body of Christ, each of which is destined to receive furious and unrelenting attacks for a season, much of which will come from those who may have a great influence in the church, but have long ago lost the anointing. This is simply a biblical and historical reality...

"I do not fully agree with everything going on at KCF, either in doctrine or practice...but I have yet to find anything more real than what I have found at KCF. Their leadership team has as much integrity and pure devotion to the Lord as I have ever seen. I cannot remember ever hearing one of their leaders say anything negative about another brother. I am not



# BUCKINGHAM REPORT

ashamed to call KCF brethren because I know that Jesus isn't, and I know by revelation that what is happening at KCF will one day touch the ends of the earth with a true gospel about the One who is the truth."

## PICKING UP AFTER AN AFFAIR

As we enter the '90s, more and more Christian leaders are going to fail—shot down by Satan's fiery darts. Others are going to have *past sins* brought into the light. At least once a week I get a letter and/or phone call from a church leader who is in, or has been in, an adulterous affair. The situation has almost reached the epidemic stage. The old answers—leave the ministry, take a "sabbatical," submit to counseling, drop out for two years—are no longer applicable. Each instance needs the clear word of God applied.

There are no easy answers. However, I thought you would benefit by reading a typical letter from a minister in trouble—and looking over my shoulder at my answer. Remember, this is my answer to one man. Each situation is different. But some of these principles may help you if you are trapped yourself, or if you are trying to get someone else out of Satan's snare.

## The Letter

This is not an easy letter to write, but for the sake of my family and the ministry to which God has called me, I must write it.

Six years ago I committed an act of adultery and I need to know what to do. My sin was discovered by my wife and the other woman's husband. Our spouses confronted us. We both admitted our sin, repented before God and asked each other's forgiveness. We asked our spouses to forgive us.

I then asked the offended husband (who was an elder in our church) what he wanted me to do. I was even willing to resign from the ministry altogether if he insisted. He and his wife agreed that since we had followed Scripture in dealing with the sin, I should continue pastoring our non-denominational church. They felt it best—since no one else was involved and since Scripture had been followed for repentance and forgiveness—if none of us discussed my (our) sin with anyone in the church or the community. We agreed, with the stipulation

that if anyone else did find out we would not lie and try to cover things up.

Not long after this, my wife and I submitted ourselves to a man of God, asking him to be our pastor. One of the reasons I got in this mess was I had operated independently. As we prayed we came to believe that God did not want us ministering without a covering. The pastor agreed to our request. In the process of telling him of our background and call to the ministry, I told him of my sin and asked him what I should do. He agreed with our decision to keep the problem silent since it was dealt with. He also asked a series of gut-level questions and gave me further counsel and instruction related to responsibility, accountability, relationships and trust. In addition, the Spirit of God made me realize my basic sin was against God—not against man—and I needed to walk in the fear of God from now on.

Things went along well for the next three years. Then, because they disagreed over the ordination of my wife and other policy changes in our leadership structure, the elder and his wife left the church. Six months later, they moved out of state.

In 1987 I discovered that this couple, before leaving town, had told several people in the church of my affair. (By this time we had another elder and had decided to inform him so he would not feel he was being deceived.) Our new elder agreed that we should talk to our pastor. We did. Our pastor then asked to meet with me, my wife, our elder and those who had been told. At that meeting, he gave his counsel: The sin had been confronted and confessed; the sinner had repented and sought forgiveness; scriptural principles had been observed; the blood of Jesus had been applied; there should be no further discussion with anyone else for any reason. He then asked if they were willing to forgive me and seek to go on with the Lord. All said yes.

Last January we discovered those to whom our pastor had given his counsel in 1987 were now spreading the story of my sin to others—both inside and outside the church. When I confronted them they argued that, contrary to the pastor's counsel, they believed everyone in the church should be told. Furthermore, if I didn't do it, they would. In their opinion, I had been deceiving the people and I had not dealt with the situation properly. I was totally baffled, and I refused to submit to their demands for a church meeting to "confess."

Ultimately, because of their refusal to stop spreading the story, I was forced to call a



church meeting. At that time I laid all the cards on the table. Interestingly enough, the three who were most adamant about the need for such a meeting declined to attend. The majority demonstrated their support and committed to stay in the church.

Since then, however, several friends, both in and out of ministry, have told me I should give serious thought to turning the church over to someone else, moving away and seeking a place as an assistant pastor. This has crushed my wife, since it's only one step away from what our detractors are advising—that is, to leave the ministry altogether. I'm inclined to heed our pastor's counsel to stay where I am, but I also recognize that these others have given godly counsel in the past.

I can't get a clear word from the Lord.

### My Answer

Neither your friendly advisors nor your detractors will answer for you in the judgment. Nor will they, in the long run, stand with you in the present kingdom. Ultimately, you must do what God wants you to do.

The best I can do is ask questions. Otherwise I become like everyone else who is giving you advice.

1. Apart from everything everyone is saying, what do you want to do with your life?

2. Apart from her hurt, disappointments and confusion over all the words swirling around you, what does your wife want you to do?

3. As the two of you pray together, what is God telling you to do? Is it different than (and sincerely doubt if it is) what your heart desires?

4. Do you have any genuine friends in your church? Especially men of quality and caliber who will stand with you when you are right, stand against you when you are wrong, but will never reject nor forsake you? If not, why not? What have you done to form these kinds of friendships? Is it not time to start? I'm not referring to people who have an agenda for your life. I mean men who will respect the call of God on your life, can know everything about you and still want you as their pastor.

5. Go back to your original call. Does adultery cancel that call in the light of Romans 11:29 any more than gossip, envy, lying, etc.?

6. Can you "set your face like flint" to follow the calling God has on your life regardless of the detractors, the advisors and your own sin's constant reminder of your unworthiness?

7. If you have been forgiven, and if you have accepted God's (and your wife's) forgiveness, why are you still vacillating over

your worthiness and your call?

8. Why should you come down off the wall and fight word battles with those who have an agenda for your life but will not walk it out with you?

9. If you are not qualified to be a pastor, why are you qualified to be an assistant pastor? Now if God is calling you to be another man's assistant, to learn from him, that is a different matter. Have you considered God's call in this direction? If He calls you to do that, He will also show you—and the other pastor—to whom you are to submit.

In short, get alone for a few days. Hear from God. Have it confirmed by your wife (you must not walk separately from her guidance). Have it confirmed by trusted men who will stand with you. If there are no such men—then go it alone. In the end, that is where you will have to stand anyway.

One final word. There is no way to go wrong in the decision-making process if you do your best to hear God, are willing to die to self and have no agenda but to please God. If you meet those conditions, even if you make a terrible mistake, God will change the circumstances to make it His best will for your life.

I'm believing with you that God will do for you what He did for me—and my wife—24 years ago when we were going through an almost identical struggle, for many of the same reasons.

### HIKING THROUGH ISRAEL

Many have asked when I am going to lead another hiking tour in Israel. The dates are October 21 to November 2. We're planning a daily major hike or mountain climb plus a couple of free days in Jerusalem. We'll climb down Mount Arbel's steep cliff overlooking the Sea of Galilee, climb to the ruins of Gamla in the Golan Heights and make the long downhill hike from Nimrod's Crusader Castle to Caesarea Philippi. We'll hike some fascinating canyons in the Negev Desert, splash in waterfalls and hike from Jerusalem to Jericho. Women are welcome. Those who don't want to hike can shop or swim. Nights will be spent in luxury hotels and food will be scrumptious. Write CBU Travel, P.O. Box 1000, Montreat, NC 28757 for a brochure.

