

Guideposts For Our Future

Franklin Church of Christ
Edwin Crozier
December 21, 2003
PM Worship

Introduction:

At times, we may view the early Christians through rose-colored glasses. Because we speak so highly of the Biblical pattern, we may forget that it is actually revealed to us through the difficulties and struggles that the early Christians and early churches had keeping the faith. The New Testament picture of the early church is not a picture of heaven on earth. It is a picture of people struggling with one another and with themselves grappling over who and what they were supposed to be. Recognizing this, we find comfort, realizing our situation is not unique. We can learn what we must do as we struggle to be what we are supposed to be – as individual Christians, and also as a church.

Discussion:

- I. A look at New Testament churches.
 - A. New Testament churches repeatedly struggled. The Jerusalem church struggled to maintain sound doctrine (**Acts 15**). Corinth struggled to maintain unity (**I Corinthians 1:12**). Ephesus struggled to have true devotion (**Revelation 2:1-7**). Pergamos and Thyatira both struggled to have proper fellowship (**Revelation 2:12-29**). Sardis struggled to have real life (**Revelation 3:1-6**). And Laodicea struggled to have true spirituality (**Revelation 3:14-22**).
 - B. In the New Testament, churches were not always stable, but were constantly changing. The Jerusalem church is an obvious example. Before Pentecost, 120 disciples were awaiting the coming kingdom (**Acts 1:15**), following Pentecost there was a church of about 3000 (**Acts 2:41**) and the growth continued. The changes were not always in the direction of growth however. In **I John 2:18-19**, John explained the changing face of the church by talking about the many brethren who left. Both growth and attrition brought their own set of problems. Jerusalem's growth caused a major problem in **Acts 6**, when the Hellenistic widows were being overlooked. No doubt, the loss of so many brethren as described in **I John** caused emotional and spiritual problems among those who remained.
 - C. The real issue in all of these situations, for all of these brethren and congregations however was not what they were actually dealing with at the moment. The real issue was an issue of identity. These brethren constantly had to wrestle with the question, "Who are we and what are we supposed to be now that we are Christians?"
- II. We are in the same position.
 - A. The beginning of a new year is a natural time to look back. This year, as we do so we recognize that we are not different from the churches in the New Testament. The Franklin Church of Christ has gone through hard times over the past few years. Every single member of this congregation has been faced with the emotional difficulties of these times.
 - B. The church family that was here just a little over a year ago has been divided. Physical families who were once united in service to God and in following God's pattern have become separated over spiritual issues. Parents have watched their children put down the mantle of upholding God's pattern and choose a more emotional route. Children have been separated from their friends as their parents have chosen a different path.
 - C. The church's work has been affected by these changes. Some things have been removed. No doubt, we have lost teachers and other workers. Our ability to support foreign evangelism has been severely limited. But there have also been some new things added. At the end of last year, two new elders were appointed. In the middle of this year, a new evangelist was hired. Just recently, a new deacon was appointed. New teachers have come on board.
 - D. But in the midst of all this upheaval and distress, the crux of the matter remains for us to look forward and wrestle with the issue of who and what we are supposed to be. We cannot answer that question simply with a sermon. However, we can start to answer it by noting eight biblical guideposts that will get us on track and keep us on track to be what God wants us to be.
- III. Eight guideposts to help us be what we are supposed to be as individuals and as a congregation.
 - A. *Guidepost #1 – This is Christ's church (**Matthew 16:18**)*. This is not my church. This is not your church. This is not the "brotherhood's" church. This is not some school's church. This is Christ's church. Jesus is the head who decides what this church is supposed to be and how it is supposed to work. We must submit to Him in all things.

- B. *Guidepost #2 – Our duty is to glorify God (John 15:8)*. If we do not glorify God, we are not Christ's disciples. Our lives are no longer about ourselves. This church is not here to honor and please us. We must glorify God and cause others to glorify Him as well.
- C. *Guidepost #3 – Being like Christ is our goal (Ephesians 4:11-13)*. Our goal is not the removal of poverty from the world. Our goal is not to keep kids off the streets. Our goal is not to entertain, feed or educate the masses. Our goal is to come to the unity of the faith, the knowledge of Jesus and to measure up to the full stature of Jesus Christ. Since none of us are there yet, we certainly have to keep working, but we must keep our work focused properly.
- D. *Guidepost #4 – Christianity is about growth (II Peter 1:5-11)*. Becoming like Jesus is certainly a daunting objective. However, we need to remember that Jesus died because we sin and He does not expect us to be perfectly like Him right now. Rather, He expects us to grow to be like Him. As such, we expect to see changes in our lives and in the congregation as we become more and more what God wants us to be. There will be things we must stop doing and things we must start doing. Change and growth are not always easy, but they are necessary.
- E. *Guidepost #5 – We must seek first God's kingdom and righteousness (Matthew 6:33)*. We will have many decisions and wrestle with many problems, personally and congregationally. As we strive to choose the best path to follow, this guidepost leads us. We must seek first God's kingdom and righteousness. What does His rule and will say? That is the basis for our choices.
- F. *Guidepost #6 – The Bible is our guide (II Timothy 3:16-17)*. To help us know God's rule and righteousness, He revealed His Word through the Holy Spirit. This Word is our guide for how we live and act. The preacher's word is not our guide. Brotherhood consensus is not our guide. Papers and magazines are not our guide. Schools are not our guide. Neither the "Restoration Movement" nor its preachers are our guide. God is our guide through His Word – the Bible.
- G. *Guidepost #7 – God expects us to perpetuate His kingdom (Mark 16:15)*. We are not to sit in our holy huddle on Sundays, but rather to take the saving message and spread it out. We must not get so caught up in ministering to one another that we forget the lost. If we are Christ's church, we must get Christ's message out.
- H. *Guidepost #8 – Do not be discouraged when few want to join us (Matthew 7:13-14)*. While we work to spread the borders of the kingdom and bring others to Christ, we must not grow discouraged because the majority of people will not join us. We must simply focus on those who do and help one another get to heaven. This point implies some facts about our place in the world. We will be different. Most people will not like us. They will think we are strange. We will be the "odd man out" on most issues. We simply need to be ready for that.

Conclusion:

As we conclude, we need to remember the principle Paul demonstrated in **Philippians 3:12-14**. Too often, churches spend their time longing for what they had in the past. We cannot do anything about the past; we can only look to the future. We are not here to recapture our glory days; we are here to press on for the real glory of heaven. We are here to be what Christ wants us to be. Therefore, when we, like those early churches, go through struggles and life-changing events, instead of getting bogged down in the past, we must pick up the pieces, follow the guideposts and look forward to heaven. That is where we are going. Are you willing to head in that direction?