

“My Initial Thoughts on the ‘Elder Accountability Team Recommendations’ for Michael Brown” —Bob Gladstone

The report was basically what many of us expected, but for me, it was more disappointing than I thought it would be.

* The LoF board publicly stated that their “outside team of elders/leaders... will include at least one trauma informed counselor.” But none of the team listed on their report today included such clearly stated credentials. If one of the four men, or one woman, is in fact the trauma informed counselor, I find it odd that this was not mentioned clearly in his or her description. Instead, the team’s credentials include mostly leadership over ministry organizations, accomplishments and degrees in other fields, and books authored.

* If there is a trauma informed counselor among the Accountability Team (AT), I did not read his or her professionally informed comments about the way Michael Brown’s behavior, outlined in the Firefly report, would impact those mistreated—Sarah in particular. It actually seemed to avoid making such comments, even dismissing the need to, which, in my opinion, should actually have been one of their reasons for existence. How else can they really help Michael Brown and the larger church, unless they accurately assess what happened and how it was handled? They cannot help—and they did not help. Instead, the AT stated: “Our hearts go out to Sarah and her family along with the husband and family of [Kim] for the pain they have experienced.” Later the report insinuated that Sarah should have voiced her trauma sooner, without regard for the way these emotional injuries typically unfold in those wounded by powerful leaders. This does not seem trauma informed to me.

* However, if the failure to identify the “at least one trauma informed counselor” means that no one in fact filled that role, then the AT broke its word and set back its credibility right out of the gate. Only in that light, then, can we process their “opinion” that the Firefly investigator’s terminology was not valid. They switched the investigator’s conclusion of “sexually abusive misconduct” to “moral indiscretions” and “leadership misconduct.” They deemed their own chosen terminology “more accurate.” But again, it is confusing to me that they reached this conclusion without clearly stated expertise in such matters. The Firefly investigation was conducted by a professional investigator who specializes in sexual abuse investigations. This switch of terminology seemed totally out of order to me and lacked a compelling explanation.

* The Firefly report also concluded there was an attempted coverup: “It is believed that over the past 25 years, BROWN has deliberately deflected questions about allegations of sexual misconduct involving IS #1 and IS #2 Sarah. This pattern of deflection appears to be a calculated effort to evade accountability, suppress the allegations, and protect his ministry’s reputation. By maintaining silence and avoiding direct answers, BROWN has seemingly sought to shield himself from scrutiny, potentially enabling these stories to remain hidden and preserving his position within the ministry.” As one of Michael Brown’s co-leaders who was kept in the dark at the time, and as one who has talked to several of those who confronted him, I concur. Yet the AT concluded, “Dr. Brown has been repeatedly questioned about these two situations and has answered his interrogators consistently with honesty and remorse.” I cannot imagine how they came to this conclusion. It ignores the investigator’s conclusion, as well as the credible reports of changing stories and contradictory explanations to people who confronted MLB throughout the years. These are attested by several witnesses. Do all these people really have it out for this one man? They include former close friends, former family friends, former co-leaders, graduates from his ministry schools, former members of his church, and former employees. Did this many people who loved and favored Michael Brown at one point, some of whom followed him after a disastrous split and believed in his mission, now all simply join a satanic attack against him? In view of Scripture’s requisite two or three witnesses, that thought badly strains credulity.

* While the AT’s recommendations failed to account for the changing stories, it did emphasize the supposed isolated nature of the abuses. But as I have stated before, they were not isolated to the past. They continue with the victims’ pain and the alleged ongoing lies. In other words, in my opinion, the AT rewrote history regarding the original problem, calling it something they prefer and then isolating it to the past, and then they disregarded a very credible account of cover up. The Firefly report stated that one Fire leader was “forbidden” even to tell his wife what happened with Kim, which by itself should have set off alarms. Further, the rest of us leaders were completely uninformed of the details regarding Michael Brown’s need for a lengthy restoration, and therefore the local church’s need for well-being—not to mention the well-being of our families. How is all this not recognized, let alone emphasized, in the AT’s recommendations? To me, this is a definitive failure.

* The AT surprisingly endorsed the Browns’ way of handling Michael’s sins as biblical due process. But that is precisely what it was not. In their words, the Browns made “a sincere effort... to follow Biblical Due Process as those involved understood it.” But in fact, they had a biblical obligation to inform their local leadership team and church. That was non-negotiable. They simply failed to do this. The AT does admit that, “We believe not confiding

in [the local team of elders] and seeking their forgiveness, spiritual understanding and support was unwise.” But this is a shockingly weak statement, and it reveals the root problem. Michael Brown needed more than personal reconciliation and a bit of encouragement from his church and leadership team. He needed their discipline, which was their responsibility, not his, nor that of his wife, nor that of the other couple. And he needed transparency, without which we could not have true fellowship nor a God-fearing resolution. So, in contrast to the AT’s statement that this was merely “unwise,” it was in fact a colossal failure that is now revealing itself. And the AT continues to make the same failure by ignoring this fact—even commending the Browns for the way they handled it. In my opinion, their report calls the problem the solution, and the solution the problem.

* I personally conclude that the recommendation report is the opposite of what it should be. I believe it insults the survivors, further injures them, ignores many who testify of Michael Brown’s coverup and lies, completely misjudges the need for public exposure, and then commends a man back into ministry while giving those he mistreated further pain. The injustice continues.

* Thankfully, more and more people in the church are waking up to these sad realities, lifting their voices, and working together to make things right.