

KINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH ONLINE NOTICE BOARD – 77

‘Men need to change.’ ‘Men need to be more aware.’ ‘We need to start from primary school; laying foundations that will make people feel comfortable. Educate all young people to be respectful.’ ‘It goes deeper.’

Those comments were made over concern for women’s safety – even though the topic seems already to have slipped out of the news. The matter of women’s safety isn’t an isolated concern. It’s a symptom of a real and universal problem. It’s a long-standing problem of human relationships, as old as humans themselves – going back to Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel. It’s the age-old problem of how people relate in this world. The problem is with us still. The Greeks, Romans and every civilisation and culture throughout history attempted to get people to live in peace and safety.

We see, on the one hand, the staggering and impressive record of human achievement in science and technology – but still we’re unable to rid society of these outrages of human violence, cruelty, exploitation and abuse. The fact is that the most advanced societies are the very ones with the greatest problems of domestic violence and abuse, child abuse, racial inequality, pornography, modern slavery, child trafficking, abduction and prostitution.

Why? What’s wrong? We’ve more religions to choose from than at any previous time; more experts in crime and criminality; psychologists, counsellors. Yet we’ve more mental health problems than at any other time – more reports of rape, child abuse, domestic violence. It’s a statistical fact.

Here’s another statistical fact: the last 20 to 30 years have seen church attendance decline more steeply than at any time in our history, ignorance of God and his Word increases alarmingly. Our own ‘advanced’ nation has discarded more than 1,700 years of Christian heritage in a generation. And we’re surprised to find problems of violence, disorder and abuse!

Every remedy is looked at – even though history shows they have all always failed. We look in every direction, to every solution – except one. We ignore the fact that every proposed solution has failed and will fail again. History teaches that. No culture or civilisation has eradicated this human problem. Is that defeatist, or fatalistic? No. It’s realistic - ‘remedies’ that failed in the past will fail in the present and in the future.

The problem is the sinful human heart. It’s impossible to legislate for compassion, respect, love and kindness. It’s equally impossible to secure these qualities through education. The problem is deeper. The Romans, with their advanced laws, failed to legislate for morality. The Greeks, with their philosophy, failed to educate for morality. No culture or civilisation has had any better success. Our spiritually bankrupt civilisation has no answers.

I think we will agree on the nature of the problem: *every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, gossip, slanderer, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.* (Romans 1.29-31) That's the Apostle Paul's analysis of the problem in his society. Ours is the same – it's the age-old, universal problem of mankind.

So much for the boast of 'human progress'; advances in culture and civilisation of our 'modern', 'sophisticated', 'developed' age; so much for the 'evolution of human society'. The despair and dysfunction of life is painfully evident in much of the art, music, cinema and television of our time.

St Paul not only saw the problem but the solution too. I think we'll agree that our need is for the very qualities he describes: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.* (Galatians 5.22-23) The 'fruit of the Spirit' – nothing less and nothing other will meet the desperate position we're in. Anything else will fall short of what's needed.

But what of the appalling failures within the Church? What of the shameful failures of Christian people, the wrong we've done and our failure to make the difference for good we're called to make? Here we need to be clear – Christians are often condemned as hypocrites. But a person isn't a hypocrite who condemns the sins of which they have been guilty. That's a wise person - consider St Paul! No, a hypocrite is a person who hasn't **repented** of the sins they condemn! That is the reason why we must pray from the heart:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name ... your kingdom come. your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. ... Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us ... lead us not into temptation ... deliver us from evil ... for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

There is only one solution for the condition we're in, for this problem of *sin*. There's never been any other. Human society is fallen; it's corrupt. It's irredeemable. Maybe they can patch up this crack in the wall or replace a piece of broken glass in a window. But the whole house is tottering and in a state of collapse. Why? Because it's built on sand!

"Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!" When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

We want the world to be fundamentally changed; we want the beginning of the civilisation of love, the arrival of a world of justice and peace, without violence, without hunger. Yet without Christ's presence there will never be a truly just and renewed world. So we can and must say, with great urgency amid the circumstances of our time: 'Come, Lord Jesus! Come in your way, in the ways that you know'. (Benedict XVI)