

KINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH ONLINE NOTICE BOARD – 76

It's nothing new that people drift away from the claims of the gospel and become hostile to what we have been given to believe. It was the same when our Lord was on earth – they forsook him; it was the same when Paul wrote his letters to churches that were in danger of drifting away from the faith; it has been the same until the present time. And it's the same still. For us, in our time and in our county, the trend is too obvious to need any proof. Over the last twenty to thirty years there has been an astonishing drop in church attendance; a startling shift away from any notion that we might be thought of as 'a Christian country' in our laws and general morality. Unlike other religions, Christian beliefs are openly mocked; and, unlike the founders of other religions, our God and our Saviour Jesus Christ are habitually blasphemed and ridiculed. This sad shift is also found in the Christian community itself. Once we heard about God, sin, salvation and sanctification; now it seems increasingly the church is obsessed with sexual orientation, climate change and feeling good and self-accepting.

We'd be wise to ask, Why do we believe what we believe; are these beliefs to be trusted, or are we misguided and 'of all people most to be pitied'?

The foundation of our faith rests on three central pillars of faith: *i. the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ; ii. the trustworthiness of the Bible; and iii. the value and reality of the experiences of Christian people.*

1. How may we be sure of the *claims of Christ*: is he who he claimed to be? It's been popular to answer that question as if it was a case in a court of law. The idea is to put the 'evidence' on trial. This is how some have looked at the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. I've always thought this is odd. It's odd because the only evidence, the only witness, is the New Testament. And the chief witness in the New Testament is the Lord Jesus himself.

What this amounts to is putting Christ on trial, calling certain witnesses and then acting as a judge, to determine if the witnesses and their 'evidence' can be trusted. But think what this means. Firstly, Christ is put in the dock. Then we call the key witness: '*Call Jesus Christ.*' The call echoes through the courthouse: '*Call Jesus Christ*'.... The King of Glory is placed in the witness box; he's required to take the oath and is subjected to the lawyer's cross-examination. The witness is dismissed, the judge considers his verdict.

The idea is preposterous! Indeed it's blasphemous. As if we ignorant and fallen people can preside as judges over the trustworthiness of the Son of God! It's also ridiculous, a pompous charade. It claims to be an impartial assessment, to determine if the New Testament is reliable. To determine this it has one source, one witness – the New Testament itself. As if the New

Testament might, in our interrogation, condemn itself! If we begin with the New Testament as our only evidence we'll end with the New Testament pronouncing the verdict upon itself! We also have the fiction of an 'enquirer' pretending to be a *neutral* judge, a judge with an 'open mind'. But no one has an 'open mind' where Jesus is concerned! That's why Jesus appeared only to his disciples after his resurrection. No one is neutral about Jesus: *'you are either for me or against me'* he said. (Luke 9.50; 11.23) *'The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit, they are foolishness to him, and he can't understand them because they are spiritually discerned'*. (1 Corinthians 2.14) The New Testament isn't 'evidence' to be put on trial by 'a neutral enquirer'. It's God's Word! Jesus asks us, as he asked his disciples, *'You don't also want to go away, do you?'* (John 6.67) To which our answer is, *'Lord to whom else can we go, you have the words of eternal life?'*

2. The second question amounts to the same question again, *is the Bible to be trusted*, if so why? We could spend endless hours arguing and debating the question. And get nowhere! So what's the answer? Do we, as the Thessalonians when they heard Paul, *'receive the word of God ... not as a human word but as what it really is, the Word of God?'* (1 Thessalonians 2.13) If so, why? What's the difference between those who receive the Bible as the Word of God and those who don't? The difference isn't in the Bible itself; it stays the same for both. The difference is in *us*. The believer sees the Bible differently. The believer reads the claims the Bible makes to be God's Word. Those claims are accepted as true because of the light given by the indwelling Holy Spirit. He opens our eyes and hearts; we see and know that this Word is Truth. *'Once I was blind but now I can see!'* Paul explains it as a revolution in the *'spirit of our minds'* (Ephesians 4.23). Our eyes are opened, our minds unblocked: *'God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'*. (2 Corinthians 4.6)

3. The third question is almost the same again: *Can we trust our Christian experience?* Some say Christian experience is a delusion, proof of a weak mind, an emotional reaction of shallow people, a hangover of a superstitious past age. Of course it's possible to explain away the Christian's experience of love, joy and peace. But as we're told, the 'natural man' doesn't understand these things. There are two reliable answers to our question. The first is personal, and simple: *'You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart!'* *Because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"* (Galatians 4.6) The second answer is, we're not alone. We're members of a 'body', the Church – the Church confirms 'my' experience. My *personal* experience is a *shared* experience. The reality of 'my' experience is authenticated by the love I have for those who are one with me in the body of Christ, the Church – this can't be faked! *'Above all put on love; love binds us together in perfect harmony'*. (Colossians 3.14)

I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day! (2 Timothy 1.12)

When a man loves me, he keeps my words. Then my Father will love him, and we will come to that man and abide within him. (John 14.23)