

# Kington Baptist Church

## MESSAGE BOARD – 70

There's a story about the Welshman marooned on a desert island. After many years he was rescued by a passing ship. His rescuers marvelled at the way the man had managed to survive. They noticed the shelter he had built for himself and, to their surprise, they also noticed he had built two chapels, one either side of his shelter. When they asked why two chapels, the answer was, 'That's the one I go to. And that's the one I don't go to!'

The world is ripped apart by divisions; we live in a divided world, a world full of divisions. Nations are divided from each other by politics, religion, customs, economics; nations are divided within themselves, political parties are divided, churches are divided, families are divided. These divisions are often deep and bitter. Our own nation is dominated by divisions. Why is this so; what are the roots of these divisions? The answer was long ago – and the Bible takes us there.

The first sinful division in human history occurred in the Garden of Eden. I say 'sinful' division because even before human history there were divisions, for example, light from darkness. That division, in the act of creation, was not a destructive division – but it has given us a picture of destructive human divisions: between *light* (goodness) and *darkness* (evil).

The first sinful division was a division over the Word of God, about what God had said. We are told, '*God said*'. And then we're told, '*The serpent said*'. And what the serpent said was the complete opposite of what God had said. That was the first human division – to choose to follow the lie; it was a division over faith and unbelief, obedience and disobedience, joy and peace or exile and sorrow. That division produced another division, *hatred*. Cain envied his brother Abel, and killed him. From there on the world's history has been a record of divisions, conflict, strife, protest, lies – and *self* against *God!* All sinful divisions are divisions between God and his truth, and the serpent, self and lies – between '*God said*' and '*the serpent said*'.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the deeply divided Corinthian church: *When you come together as a church, I hear there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. These divisions are unavoidable, so that those who are approved may be recognized.* (1 Corinthians 11.18-19) Paul says that in this fallen world, divisions are unavoidable and they serve a vital purpose. Divisions mark out those who are 'approved' from those who are not; those who choose the right from those who choose the wrong; those who choose truth from those who follow the lie; those who listen to God and those who do not.

Not all divisions and differences are as serious as that. We are to be patient and accommodating towards those who differ from us but who nonetheless trust in Christ and remain faithful to him. There are many things believers

differ over and disagree about that ought to make no difference to fellowship and mutual respect. Paul refers to differences about certain days and certain foods. These, he says, are matters for individual conscience. (Romans 14.2-5) But other differences and divisions may matter, and may matter greatly. The pattern is: 'In all things necessary unity, in all things indifferent liberty, in all things love'.

But when we come to those things that are vital and indispensable, then divisions and differences do matter. They matter greatly, for this reason: they mean we either walk with God or we walk away from God. These are the divisions that have shaped human history. Differences over these vital truths are responsible for the dreadful catastrophes that have occurred throughout history. There is no doubt about this – it is absolutely clear from the Bible that this is *the* explanation for the appalling state of the world.

The first great such catastrophe was the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. The division that occurred when they chose to obey the word of the serpent, instead of the Word of God, created a separation from fellowship with God. This led to the dreadful state of the world and its calamities. Choosing to believe the lie rather than believe God produced the moral chaos that brought about the flood in the time of Noah, the destruction of the Tower of Babel and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. In time it led to the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt, the ten plagues, the destruction of Pharaoh's armies, the forty years wandering in the wilderness. Then the fall of Nineveh, of the Babylonian Empire, of the Greek Empire, the Roman Empire and every world Empire ever since – and will be the destruction of any world Empire in the future (read Daniel chapter 2). This division is the deep cause of the plague, of famine, of 'natural' disasters and wars (read Revelation chapters 9 and 16).

God lets the world go its way. The world becomes arrogant and careless in its blatant ungodliness. People think God doesn't see, doesn't know and doesn't care – as it was in the days of Noah. Nothing is further from the truth. God waits – because he is gracious! But, when people will not listen, he allows these catastrophic events to occur – but that is also because he is gracious! They are desperate 'wake-up' calls and warnings; glimpses of the final terrible catastrophe. They say 'Stop, think; listen to God and obey him'.

It is the height of human folly to imagine that we ourselves are able to put all this right, to prevent these disasters and make the world a place of peace and perfection. The truth is that as long as the world refuses to repent, as long as it chooses to reject the Word of God and listen to the word of the serpent, these things will occur. But, for those who listen to God and reject the lie, the promise is that none of these disasters – even if we have to endure them – are able to divide us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Remember Abraham pleading with God over Sodom and Gomorrah? Read it in Genesis 18. Then pray that the Holy Spirit will help us plead for our generation: *Now therefore amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God, and the LORD will change his mind about the disaster that he has pronounced against you.* (Jeremiah 26.13)