

A Church Under Judgment

The Age of Judgement has arrived for much of the church in the UK, especially the Church of England, which I know best. But also for other denominations including the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church, the Church in Wales, the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church. However, there is hope if we listen carefully to what God is saying.

THE AGE OF WARNING

The 1980s and 1990s were an Age of Warning, especially for the Church of England. I played a part in that on the General Synod and through contact with all the clergy throughout England, reaffirming three major areas of biblical teaching. We challenged a new bishop who had denied the Virgin Birth and cast doubt on the bodily Resurrection of Jesus. We strongly affirmed those two doctrines, warning the church to take note and to seek to prevent this being repeated. We also dealt with the undermining of the uniqueness of Jesus as the only Saviour through inappropriate interfaith worship in Anglican churches, warning the church of this trend. This included petitioning the Queen to urge an end to interfaith worship which undermined the uniqueness of Christ as the only Saviour, in the Commonwealth Day Service in Westminster Abbey. We also warned about the threat to the biblical teaching which clearly affirms that sexual activity is intended to be only in the context of heterosexual marriage. In 1987, as a result of my private member's motion, the General Synod reaffirmed this biblical teaching by a 98% majority.

THE SUBSEQUENT REBELLION

However, since then it has become clear that the synod decision about sexuality was tolerated, rather than accepted, by many leaders, especially bishops, because they were afraid of conservative reactions. In the last 25 years the C of E has, tragically, gained the courage to defy biblical teaching. What the General Synod has done this year, at the instigation of the House of Bishops, is to approve Prayers of Love and Faith to be used to bless same-sex couples in church. This means that same-sex couples could have an official service in church in which there would be prayers of dedication, thanksgiving or for God's blessing on the two people concerned, following a civil marriage as well as a civil partnership.

At the last minute, the Bishops published a statement that this decision "will not change the Church's doctrine of Holy Matrimony." But common sense clearly indicates it will be blessing gay sexual relationships in practice, even where a marriage has taken place.

Also, if people are persisting knowingly in unbiblical behaviour, how can we expect God to bless them? And how can we confirm them in this by using a liturgical blessing? God loves them (and so should we) but he does not bless their behaviour.

The Bishops pushed the decision through. Prominent Anglicans are saying the "process is 'unlawful, unconstitutional and illegitimate' because it really required a two thirds majority in each of the three houses in the Synod. That was only achieved in the House of Bishops. The House of Clergy was 111 in favour, 85 against; the House of Laity, 103 in favour, 92 against. It is clearly very controversial and the decision must be reversed.

Whereas the sexuality issue is the most prominent, there are numerous other serious failings to obey the Lord which have contributed to the arrival of the Age of Judgment:

- "Doing church" – singing hymns and songs, and saying prayers without seeking God's anointing. Preaching unchallenging sermons – rather than seeking to be radically biblical in the power of the Spirit, which the NT says we should. Most ministers don't challenge people to holiness, don't correct the impenitent, spend little time in prayer.
- Not entering into the grief of God over so many people heading for a lost eternity and over the failings of the church and society.
- Running the church through managerialism (committees and synods) rather than corporate prayer seeking God's guidance. (Even when there is corporate prayer in a church it can be limited to personal and local needs).
- The terrible scandal of child abuse went unchecked for far too long, especially in the Roman Catholic Church, and, although there has been some repentance, has led to falling attendance.

EXAMPLES OF JUDGMENT

Again, I use the Church of England as an example. Much of the judgment will be decline. One diocese referred to “shrinking, ageing congregations; a financial deficit; congregations ‘overwhelmed by financial and practical demands’; and clergy ‘increasingly stretched by the size and scope of the responsibilities laid on them’”

- Attendance is falling. This fall in attendance became worse in the Methodist Church after the decision in favour of gay marriage.
- Churches are closing (as is the case in the Methodist denomination). As already elderly congregations become older, many are likely to close down.
- There has been a serious fall in the number of clergy. The old system of the well-known, available parish priest has been undermined by lack of clergy. So, one priest (plus, perhaps a curate) can be appointed over, say, 12 parishes. This will be seriously less effective than the old system, even with good clergy.
- The church is seriously divided (including internationally). As with the establishment of women priests a new system of episcopal oversight (divided from the main body) is being set up for clergy who reject the sexuality decisions. Much of the wider Anglican Communion overseas has rejected that decision.
- The church has become more officious. The old system of relationship between clergy and bishops worked well. The clergy had to respect the bishop, but had legal protection in their ministry, so they could only be removed for serious misdemeanour. Nowadays the clergy are much more bishop-dominated, much more centralised, and treated like employees. The church will be damaged if it is run through managerialism

However, there are likely to be other serious events by way of judgment.

Of course, there will be some exceptions - those churches, in every denomination, which are seeking to be radically biblical in the power of the Spirit. Many new independent churches are full of life

THE RIGHT REACTION

We must not fondly imagine that God goes along with such serious disobedience to his Word - like many of us do to a greater and lesser extent. Some of us strongly disagree but don't take any serious action. God strongly disagrees and **does** take action. We must open our eyes and recognise that the church is under serious judgment and not just drift along, disapproving of its unbiblical decisions, but making the best of it.

If we want to know God's reaction we must heed Jesus' words in Revelation 2-3.

- He said the church in Ephesus had lost its first love and, if it didn't repent, he would “remove its lampstand” (Rev 2:4-5).
- He said the church in Pergamum had eaten food offered to idols and committed sexual immorality. If it didn't repent, he would “fight against them, with the sword of his mouth” (2:14-15).
- He said the church in Thyatira had fallen into the same sins and, if it didn't repent, he would cause them to “suffer intensely” (2:20-23).
- He said to the church in Sardis “You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.” If they did not repent, he would “come like a thief” (in judgment) (3:1-3).
- He said to the church in Laodicea that they were spiritually “lukewarm” and added “I am about to spit you out of my mouth” (3:14-19).

It is clear that Jesus would strongly condemn many churches today, including over nominal Christianity, spiritual lukewarmness and the issue of sexual immorality.

So, the right reaction is one of serious repentance, and separating from the sins of the church, which is not a characteristic of many modern churches.

THE HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

The 1980s and 1990s were an Age of Warning. The first decade of the new millennium saw more rapid, serious unbiblical developments. We are now living in the Age of Judgment. But there is hope, not just for those churches, in every denomination or none, which are seeking to be radically biblical in the power of the Spirit.

God called me to end my contribution to the ministry of warning the church in 1998. Things have changed radically since then, in the church and in society. However, I had a complete surprise in 2015. God called me to major on prayer and preparation for Revival, and to create a mailing list. All C of E clergy were invited to join and many did (although there are many other people, from different denominations, on it too). The emphasis of my vision for

Revival is on holiness – an overwhelming awareness of God’s holiness and a serious call to repentance and personal holiness.

We need special divine intervention (including in churches not involved with the sexuality issue) - Revival - with an emphasis on holiness - the holiness of God and personal holiness. Warning is over. Judgment is coming on the persistently disobedient. Revival is coming to those who seek it wholeheartedly and prayerfully. Meanwhile, we need to obey God to the best of our understanding and ability.

Tony Higton

If you want to know more about my Network for Revival and teaching about Revival, go to [Network for Revival](#)