

A Biblical Church

As a retired Anglican clergyman, I was able, one Sunday, to go to a church of a different denomination. But, as I was leaving, I was asked, ‘Do you usually go to an Anglican Church because you are an ordained Anglican clergyman?’ It was an unusual question—not one that I was used to being asked. But the question hit a nerve, not least of all because I had asked myself that question many times before.

Because over the years, I have sat in many different Anglican Churches. I have also conducted and participated in services in churches of other denominations. And in many ways, I have never felt truly comfortable in the Anglican Church. As far as I was concerned, it was simply that it was there that God had placed me.

As a consequence, I have often asked myself, ‘Where would I truly fit in?’ After all, I may feel more comfortable in some churches than in others, but the reality is that none of the churches that I have ever been to, or have associated myself with, have ever met the criteria that I look for in a biblical church.

So I replied to the question with the only true answer I could give. And it was not because of denominational loyalty, but rather, ‘Because I believe that that is where God wants me to be.’

Having said that, the question that I had been asked was a reminder of how uncomfortable I was (and I am sure many others are) about the state of the church universal. After all, it is supposed to be God’s church, and I should fit in. But I don’t. And so, with this in mind, I put down on paper some of the basic aspects of the kind of church to which I would like to belong. And using the formula of the Ten Commandments this is what I came up with:

Principle 1: True Loyalty—A church that has its focus 100% on the living God. A congregation that puts God before family, friends or any other distractions. A church where the people are wholehearted in their beliefs, and where God always comes first.

Principle 2: True Worship—A church which gives God his true worth. One which is centred around God and not the balance sheet. One that is based on God’s message, not on the things that we like. One where the buildings and aids to worship have little value in comparison to the worship of God.

Principle 3: Reverence for YHWH—A church which reveres God’s name. One in which the people provide 100% of the income, and where fundraising outside of the community of faith has no place. One that does not muddy the waters by trying to meet the expectations of people outside of the church.

Principle 4: Holy Time—A church that takes seriously the need to meet regularly and on other occasions, and discourages a less than 100% commitment to God and the community

of believers. A church that does not encourage activities that compete with the need to meet together and worship God as a community.

Principle 5: Family Responsibilities—A church that encourages the Christian community as a whole. A church that teaches, builds up, encourages, and supports the members of the family of believers.

Principle 6: The Sanctity of Life—A church that recognises the importance of life from conception, and takes a stand against anything that devalues life. Furthermore, a church that actively supports its poorer members.

Principle 7: The Sanctity of Marriage—A church that acknowledges the basic family unit—father, mother, children—and encourages fidelity in marriage among its members. A church based on a biblical view of marriage, not coloured by modern traditions and practices.

Principle 8: Respect for Other People’s Property—A church that practices the right of its members to own possessions. Particularly the need for families to own enough to support themselves.

Principle 9: Justice—A church that practices fairness and justice. A church that upholds the rights of others.

Principle 10: Right Thinking—A church that looks at the world through God’s eyes, and not from the perspective of individuals or even the community in which they live.

Now in one sense what I was (and still am) looking, even yearning for, is a church that probably doesn’t exist. Because what I have listed are ideals to be sought for, rather than what I could possibly expect. Unfortunately, I have never found a church that even remotely aspires to the kind of challenge provided by these ten principles. And in that lies the real problem. Because the kind of church that I’ve described is the kind of church to which we should all aspire, no matter what denomination we belong to.

So am I an Anglican? Do I fit into the Anglican church? Well, the answer to both questions is ‘No!’. And because I became more and more dissatisfied (and even appalled) by the direction the church was taking, I have since resigned my ministry from the Anglican Church.

But, regardless of that, I’m not sure I will ever truly fit in wherever I may be. But that may not be because of the original principles on which the various denominations are based. Rather, it may well be because of what the churches have become. Because that seems a long way away from the principles that God laid out for his people so long ago.

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