

## Where Have All the Christians Gone?

In a recent article by Bruce Feiler entitled *Where have all the Christians Gone*, Feiler comments on a recent survey by the American Religious Identification Survey. Feiler writes, “Christianity is plummeting in America, while the number of non-believers is skyrocketing. The American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) reveals that those claiming to be protestant are down almost 20 percent in the last twenty years. In the coming months, America will become a minority Protestant nation for the first time since the pilgrims. The number of people who claim no religious affiliation, meanwhile, has doubled since 1990, to its highest point in history. Non-believers now represent the third-largest group of Americans, after Catholics and Baptists. The number of Christians has declined since 1990, to the lowest percentage in American history. Young people are fleeing faith. Nearly a quarter of Americans in their 20’s profess no organized religion.”

I believe if we the church do not reverse this trend, the church as we have historically known it in the United States will become irrelevant to the culture of the day and just be a religious monument of little influence in the culture. If we are to reverse the trend the church must return to being the church. We must start acting like the church of the living God. We must embody a vibrant spirituality that is real and relevant for this culture. The church must be a counter balance to this post-modern culture, not a mirror image of it. The church must be bold to be different and be unafraid to be faithful to our Savior Jesus Christ. We must be a church that is deeper than just trying to be slick marketers to get warm bodies in the doors to occupy the sanctuary. We must be a church that truly walks by faith and has an undiminished confidence in the power of God’s Word to both change lives and empower us to live our lives for Christ. The church must be a people of God that calls people to God in this present culture that

we live in if we are to leave a spiritual heritage for our children and grandchildren.

To accomplish this task of rebuilding the church so that it impacts this culture and reverses the trend toward a post-Christian nation, we must be a church of large vision. We must cast a vision based on God's Word of reaching our community, nation, and the world for Christ. The Apostle Paul had such a vision. In Acts 26:19 Paul says, "...I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." All throughout Paul's ministry he never wavered from the heavenly vision of preaching the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the remission of sin. Paul continually called people to repent of their sins, turn to Christ, and live for him. Paul died living out that vision, but God used him to plant perhaps 100 churches, evangelize the known world at that time, and wrote half the New Testament. Paul's influence lives on today because he had a vision that was consistent with God's plan and purpose.

If the church is to impact this culture we must be a people of courage. We cannot quit the first time a little opposition comes our way. We must stand and lovingly and courageously proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in this post-modern culture. The Apostle Paul writes in second Thessalonians chapter three, "Pray for us that the word of the Lord may have free course,...and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith." The foundation for strong churches, marriages, families, and governments is rooted in the foundation of the Word of God. Therefore, we must courageously proclaim the Word of God.

If we are to build afresh and revitalize the church where the church is impacting the culture instead of the culture impacting the church, we must be a people that learn again what it means to live before a Holy God who demands righteousness from his people. Jesus himself admonishes the church at Ephesus regarding this very subject in Revelation chapter two. Jesus says of the church at Ephesus, you have labored and you did not faint in the midst of

persecution, but I have somewhat against you “because thou hast left thy first love.” This does not mean they have lost their salvation. They did not lose their first love; they left their first love. This is perhaps where we are in America. There are a lot of good things that go on in our churches, a lot of good labor doing good things, but they are not necessarily the best things. While the church has been laboring away in busy work we have forgotten that the main thing is proclaiming Gods Word and living like Gods people before a lost and now hostile world. The appeal that Jesus gives to them is to “remember from whence thou art fallen and repent and do the first works or I will come quickly and remove thy candlestick (their influence, testimony) except thou repent.”

If we as a church are going to impact our community and reverse the spiritual slide away from our Christian moorings, we must get much more serious about our relationship with God. We must cease from trying to be a supermarket church trying to serve all the finicky and changing appetites of religious consumers who have a myriad of religious tastes, and we must confront the culture as a counter balance that expresses true spirituality rooted in Gods Word and applied through vision, courage, and righteous living.

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