

A Quick Survey Of American Christianity

Confusion and Disrespect Reign

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Given 28-Feb-09; Sermon #925c

This past week, I was sent by way of email a Fall 2007 article from *Christianity Today* magazine on an aspect of American Christianity. (Interestingly, it came from South Africa.) It is a very deplorable report, showing clearly to me one reason why this nation is in the tight grip of a growing immorality, both in its leadership and in its citizenry. So I want us to see a brief overview of the world that we live in—our culture; that which we are to come out of.

I have mentioned several times in sermons that it is a nation's religion that establishes the nation's moral standards. This is one reason why the Israelitish nations have generally been good places to live in. Their religions, regardless of where it was, have been largely biblically based, and therefore, the moral standards of that nation could hardly be any better. In the past, their churches—including those in the United States—were usually pretty well attended. None of those nations were Christian nations, but there existed in all of the Israelitish nations a broad-based and generally high morality compared to the rest of the world.

The survey that appeared in *Christianity Today* on which this article was based showed that in America today, about 70-80% of the respondents consider themselves Christian. This is consistent with what past surveys have found regarding the general population in America. From the Christians' responses to the survey questions, *Christianity Today* found five different types of Christians. They named them:

- (1) Active Christians. These made up 19% of the total.
- (2) Professing Christians. These made up 20% of the total.
- (3) Liturgical Christians—made up 16% of the total.
- (4) Private Christians—24%.
- (5) Cultural Christians—21% of the total.

That adds up to 100% of these respondents who said they are Christians. Here is a little description of each one of those:

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The Active Christians—according to this article—are committed churchgoers, Bible readers, and often in a church leadership position.

Professing Christians have similar beliefs to the Active Christians, but they are much less involved in the church, had spotty attendance records, and less committed to Bible study.

The Liturgical Christians were predominantly Catholic and Lutheran. They were regular churchgoers, believed strongly in the authority of the church, but Bible study is not even mentioned.

Private Christians were the largest and the youngest segment. They own a Bible, but they do not read it, and attend church only rarely.

The Cultural Christians have little outward religious behavior. They are aware of God, but have no interest in a relationship with him, are tolerant of other religions, and tend to believe that there are many ways to God besides Christianity. They do not view Jesus as essential to salvation. Do not forget, these are people who consider themselves Christian.

This is startling, to say the least. A quick, snapshot conclusion is that Christianity in America is all over the map, and that disunity, combined with confusion and spiritual laziness, is the central theme. Except for the Active Christians, there is a central theme of a vague, shallow belief in God, in which He is little involved with His creation, and neither He, the church, nor the Bible, has an authority which is respected as needful to one's life.

What this means in practical application is this: If you walked out on the street and asked people if they believe in God, 70-80% of them would say, "Yes!" But if you asked a specific question or two about God and His purpose, they would be almost totally ignorant, and what they are *not* doing—that is, studying their Bibles—is making sure that they are not going to know anything about it, let alone live it.

Now, think about this, just ever so briefly. One cannot be what one does not know. For example, one cannot be a pianist simply by thinking one is. These people all *think* that they are Christian.

I am sure that my conclusion would be offensive so many of them, but because churches, which are God's major tool for reaching out to and instructing people about Him, are held in such a low regard, we are witnessing that "every man does that which

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is right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). That verse also contains the truth that tells us *why* every man did what was right in his own eyes. That verse also says, "In those days, there was no king in Israel." The king represents an authoritative, central institution, providing trusted leadership and counsel to the citizenry.

You have got to give Satan a measure of credit for effectively destroying the authority of the church and the Bible in people's eyes. In so doing, he also hides God, thus making God vague, confusing and therefore unknowable, when He is not that way at all.

When this nation was founded, Satan was working then, too. However, as a general rule, people trusted the church more firmly than in our time as essential to their well-being in life. History shows that if a church was available to those people, they attended, and they participated in it. Even though those churches were not God's churches, they still had people's attention as an authority, and people were overall much more knowledgeable about God and Christian life. Therefore immorality, though it existed then too, was not on nearly such a level as it is today.

This is the reason why this nation's leaders—the Founders—were able to form a constitution framed around Christian principles. Even though they were not Christians, they sincerely believed a very great deal more that is biblically true than today's leadership and citizenry.

In that article, a man named D. Michael Lindsey, who is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Rice University and a consultant to the Gallup Institute, said,

I do think there is a decline and unbelievable degrees of biblical illiteracy that we haven't seen in previous generations among all five of these categories of Christians. People do not even know the order of the books.

Be aware. We live in an excessively tolerant, permissive, so-called "Christian" culture, in which the church and the Bible have lost their authority, and people are literally creating their own hodgepodge spiritual beliefs. So be careful, lest you be caught in this spiritual stew. Know, and know what you know. Make sure that you are diligent to show yourself approved under God. Examine yourself to make sure that you are in *the* faith. Prove yourself, Paul challenges. It's very easy to get caught up in this huge mass of self-righteousness in our own deceptive culture, thinking one stands with God, when in reality, the belief may be one's own. Let me tie that to the sermonette—check it against the Book.