

Sermon: What Has Happened to Christian Influence in America?

Text: II Timothy 3:12-17 ESV

Gary L. Wackler

July 24, 2022

Introduction: Christian Influence in America is waning. We have for some time now lived in what most people call a post-Christian culture. We should not be surprised. It has happened most recently in England, the home of the Great Awakening in the 1800's and the great Wesley revivals. John Howard of the Rockford Institute described the end of World War II as "a half century and a whole civilization ago." Things sure have changed haven't they?

In 2004, the European Union's 70,000-word constitution failed to include any reference to their Christian Heritage. You know "nation under God" and that sort of thing. The *Wall Street Journal* dubbed (at the time) British Prime Minister Tony Blair "a Christian leader of a pagan country." In the cradle of Methodism, the number of British who say they believe in God dropped from 77 percent in 1968 to 44 percent in 2005, and it would be considerably lower if the devotion of Muslims did not weigh in on the side of religious belief. More recently the numbers continue to decline. In a 2014 You Gov poll only 23% consider themselves very or fairly religious and only 9% attend church regularly. America is headed the same wrong direction.

In April, 2001 Barna Group did a poll where seventy-four percent (74%) of Americans reported "they were concerned about the moral condition of the United States." If the poll were retaken now 20+ years later, do you think that number goes up or down? (I truly am not sure) If you were an evangelical Christian in this poll, the concerned percentage was 92%. If you were an atheist, only 41% were concerned about morality. Right now in America, 25% of the population claims "None" as their religious belief.

I. Situation

According to research (Barna), Christian adults and teens think and act virtually no different than non-believers. It is no wonder that Christians are sometimes labelled hypocrites. And only 10% of Americans actually possess a Biblical worldview.

A. Symbols -

In his 1993 book, *Culture of Disbelief*, Yale law professor Stephen Carter once asked why Hillary Clinton was asked to remove the cross on her necklace. "Is the only politically correct symbol one of secularism, he asked?"

Things which used to be considered sacred now are treated as profane and common even offensive. Moral relativism has so shaped the culture that the vast majority of Americans now see themselves as their own moral arbiter. Truth has been internalized, privatized, and subjectivized. Absolute or objective truth is denied outright. When people say there is no “absolute truth,” you must ask them if they are “absolutely” sure about that!

Research indicates that most Americans believe that truth is internal and relative. No one, the culture shouts, has a right to impose truth, morality, or cultural standards - well, unless it is their standards.

In the Spring of 1997, *The New Republic* came out with a review of Norman Mailer’s *The Gospel According to the Son*. The magazine cover depicts Mailer as a teary-eyed Christ in stained glass, a crown of thorns pressed down upon his brow, beneath a parody of some of the last words of our crucified Savior: “He is Finished.” The subhead reads: “Norman Mailer Nails Himself.”

When serious events of faith are made fun of and trivialized, when Jesus appears on SNL played by Will Ferrell, or in a sitcom as a farcical character and there is no complaint from the Christian community - there is something wrong at least with the church - if not America. But no one cares that Christians are offended.

A few years back, NBC censored the children’s program called *Veggie Tales* because it dared to say “God made you special and He loves you very much.” It was found to be offensive. Censored were comments such as: “Calm down. The Bible says we should love our enemies.” And “the Bible says Samson got his strength from God. And God can give us strength, too.” NBC said using Bible verses or referring to God is offensive to some non-Christians. But NBC and other networks didn’t hesitate to offend Christians by showing performers like Madonna mocking the crucifixion of Christ.

On almost any TV network you want to name there are same-sex couples and supposed transgender individuals used to sell some product - all the time trying to legitimize a God-dishonoring picture of relationships and family. And in our ears we hear comments about allowing pre-pubescents to decide what gender they want to be independent of their birth assignment. How horribly sad! And Christians and biblically-approved relationships are mocked. Hallmark and Disney should no longer be trusted with your child’s heart or yours.

The removal of nativity scenes, the ten commandments, prayer in school, and attempts to remove the words “in God we trust” are all signs of a culture that is no longer post-Christian, but ANTI-Christian.

In the name of fairness, diversity, and tolerance, God's name and eventual memory is in the process of being erased, and sanitized, if you will, from the public forum. Our children can name twelve fast-food chains, but not twelve apostles. They can recognize corporate logos, but fail to see any significance in many of the long-held icons of the Christian faith. They can recite beer ads and other jingles, but could not begin to repeat any of Jesus' words. We need to do better in protecting our children, but also teaching them about Jesus.

B. Spiritualism (Pragmatism) - code word for I'll believe anything!

For many people church attendance is merely a habit connected to fond childhood memories, family tradition or a superstition that says, "things go better, if I go to church." To be quite frank there are some people who come to church for the social and business contacts that can be made.

In some parts of the evangelical church in America today, the picture of what a Christian looks like is: middle to upper class, white, suburbanite, who has a theology that includes prosperity and good health. Compared even to Jesus, let alone His followers, much of this is in stark contrast to the biblical pictures.

On the *Today Show* a few years ago they had a rabbi and a Presbyterian minister talking about forgiveness. It was approached from a purely psychological and pragmatic point of view, i.e. whatever works. God's name was not mentioned once, and THESE are our religious leaders speaking. It took an Amish grandfather of one of the victims in the 2006 tragedy in Nickel Mines, Lancaster County, PA to tell the truth AND THE HOW of forgiveness ("Because I have Jesus in my heart!").

C. Sex, Money and Power

The idols of Baal in the O.T. have been traded in for other images of what looks "hot" or current, and who has the most toys and designer clothes, and what does your dad do for a living?

Mount Olympus, where the Greek gods supposedly resided, could have been seen 50 miles to the south of the church in Thessalonica. Our Mount Olympus is the home of Madison Avenue that tells everyone what we cannot live without and all the must-have purchases. It is the home of big business and Wall Street where a person's worth is measured by their portfolio and where size matters in everything.

Target used to have a slogan “gotta have it; gotta get it right now” - no delayed gratification there! The fact is what we need is not for sale, but is a gift from God. Other times our Mount Olympus is found in government inside the beltway where compromise both political and moral is made everyday in order to get re-elected.

Q. What kind of idols do we have today?

A. Power, sex, money, education - literally anything which becomes a substitute for God.

Ephesians 5:5 (ESV) For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

It is very easy indeed to point the finger at pop icons, Hollywood stars, government or agencies that are not inherently Christian. However the biggest criticism should be directed at the Church because we are not leading in holiness and contentment.

Tens of millions of babies have been aborted since Roe v. Wade. Now it is no longer the law of the land. Decisions as to whether or not to murder babies in the womb or even newly-born has been given to the states. Those who think we should be in favor of this genocide sadly are even found in our churches. Picketing has already started outside churches who would dare stand up for life. When will we be bold enough to bring a resistant voice to this issue. The time for being quiet on such important issues is long past.

You know what I see many times on even issues like church attendance and Bible study? I see APATHY. I can tell you who isn't apathetic: the culture. They want us and are telling us to be quiet, to shut up and sit down, and certainly not shine any light on sin. They want us to put down our signs and go away. The truth sometimes makes people uncomfortable - even angry.

II. Solution

We have been informed of the problem. It is not hate, but apathy. We need to actively love others more, knowing that when we express love it may be viewed as intolerance! When we reach out with the Gospel some will misunderstand both our motives and even Who we are trying to share.

The Apostle Paul offers good advice for those of us who live in a post-Christian America. **II Timothy 3:12-17 (ESV)** ¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

A. Speech - teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness:

Do you see how verbal we are called to be in our Christian walk? Words should be used wisely for the benefit of Jesus and His Church.

“The mission of the Church in the midst of this cultural crisis is to proclaim the truth and reach out to the casualties. In the face of rampant relativism, the believing Church must proclaim the truth of God’s Word, the permanence of His commands, and the reality of His judgment. Given the cultural context, this task is one of the most important tests of Christian faithfulness. To proclaim biblical truth to this culture is to risk social isolation, outright rejection, and, in some cases, potent attacks.” (www.albertmohler.com)

B. Conduct (Practical Christianity)

We were created in God’s image so we ought to be doing good work so people might see our Lord in us. There must be a contrast between the unsaved and those who follow Jesus, even if only in our motives.

The “God is Dead” movement of the sixties has borne fruit. We must reach out to the casualties of this now godless experiment called American culture. “The Church of Jesus Christ is comprised of sinners saved by grace. With the message of grace, we must reach out to those whose lives have been ruined and warped in the course of our cultural decay. Only the Church has the honest and truthful answers concerning the most basic issues facing our society. Our challenge is to match truth to compassion, and mercy to confrontation.” (www.albertmohler.com)

C. Salvation is in Jesus alone.

This is not politically correct nor is it even received well in some churches, but the truth is: there is no other way to God than through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

[John 14:6 \(ESV\)](#) Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Paul says: [Ephesians 5:1-9 \(ESV\)](#) 1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. 3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. 4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. 5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not become partners with them; 8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),

Conclusion: Pollsters have collected some telling information for us on heaven and hell. With heaven and hell there is a tendency to believe if a person is generally good, or does enough good things for others during his life, he or she will earn a place in Heaven. Roughly seven-in-ten (72%) Americans say they believe in heaven — defined as a place “where people who have led good lives are eternally rewarded,” according to the Pew Research Center’s 2014 Religious Landscape Study.

But at the same time, 58% of U.S. adults also believe in hell — a place “where people who have led bad lives and die without being sorry are eternally punished.”

These percentages have changed very little over the last 20 years in other research I have looked at. The only problem with these notions is: it’s dead wrong! Only a relationship with Jesus will save a person and nothing short of that will be good enough! In 2005 Barna Group ran a survey that showed 44% of U.S. adults say having a satisfying family life is their highest priority in life. And 18% of people said that completely understanding and carrying out the principles of their faith was the highest priority in their lives.

It is past time that the church started taking seriously the need to know God’s Word and get back to Sunday School, Bible Study and small groups so we can speak for the Faith and for our Lord. We need to have more prayer in our lives and less activities that pull us away from developing a life with Jesus.

The Amish are more right than wrong when they use [II Corinthians 6:14-18](#) as a reason for being separate from the world. We could lose a lot of material things in our personal circumstances and still be just fine.

II Corinthians 6:14-18 (ESV) ¹⁴ Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵ What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ¹⁷ Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, ¹⁸ and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.”

Jesus words are true: **Mark 8:36-38 (ESV)** ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

The reason for the Church’s influence being diminished is the church has believed Satan’s lie: **Genesis 3:4 (ESV)** “You will not surely die.”

Illus. Just like our doctor’s advice, we ignore God’s counsel in the Bible - thinking that our lives will somehow be the exception to God’s rules and judgment. The Church seems to be more concerned about personal wealth rather than giving - and accumulating and collecting rather than dispensing (even the Gospel).