

The World's View of Christianity

If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.... but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you (John 15:18-19).

A 2008 poll* of unchurched in America revealed that

- 72% thought the Christian church was full of hypocrites
- 79% thought Christianity is more about organized religion than loving God and loving people
- 86% believed they could have a good relationship with God outside of the church
- 44% said Christians "get on their nerves"

The only encouraging finding was that 78% said they were willing to listen to some one about their Christian beliefs.

I can't imagine this has gotten better in the intervening years. In the spring of 2014, there was an American Bible Society study conducted by the Barna group conducted on peoples' (churched and unchurched) views about the Bible as God's word**. The ABS had conducted a similar study in 2011.

- "Engaged" Bible readers (those who read it almost daily and see it as sacred) are now matched by skeptics who just see it as a book of stories and advice with both groups at 19%. In 2011, the engaged were 19% but the skeptics were 9% - an increase of 10% in 3 years.
- "Bible friendly" people (those who read it occasionally and see it as God inspired) went from 45% in 2011 to 37% in 2014.
- In 2011, 86% viewed the Bible as sacred compared to 79% in 2014.

The percentages get even worse when you look at the 18-29 age category indicating that percentages on the positive side were among older adults.

In 2012, other statistics and surveys were addressed in an article on the decline of Christianity in America***. The author quotes from a book written by David Kinnaman, the president of the Barna group. Kinnaman states that the 18-29 age group (frequently referred to as millenials) have fallen down a " 'black hole' of church attendance" with a 43% drop in church attendance. Michael Snyder, the author of the article, says,

But it is not just young adults that are rejecting the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Even large numbers of "evangelical Christians" are rejecting the fundamental principles of the Christian faith. For example, one survey found that 52 percent of all American Christians believe that at least some non-Christian faiths can lead to eternal life". Another survey found that 29 percent of all American Christians claim to have been in contact with the dead, 23 percent believe in astrology and 22 percent believe in reincarnation. Without a doubt, the religious landscape of America is changing.

These surveys were conducted among Americans. Since I travel internationally, I also know that the general perception among unbelievers of Christians is mostly a negative one.

I believe the findings of these surveys are valid. I have experienced this attitude - in America and abroad.

I have encountered people who think that Christians are comprised of a bunch of negative people - those that "don't drink, don't smoke and don't go with girls who do". They believe that church is going to be loaded with people who are going to judge their appearance, their speech and ask for their money. Who would ever want to be a part of a group like that?

That's exactly what the Pharisees in Jesus' day did. They were so full of rules and regulations that they couldn't recognize Love and Freedom when He stared them in the face.

What is clear is that Christians (or those claiming to be Christian) can get in the way of people seeing Christ for who He is. It is easy to have the wrong perspective if your focus is on a faulty church and non-committed Christians.

The apostle Paul addressed this issue in the Corinthian church. The contentions in the church were damaging their Christian testimony. *Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment... For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe... but we preach Christ crucified* (1 Corinthians 1:10, 18, 21, 23).

We must introduce people to Christ Himself. God asked His children to represent Christ, but we are obviously not doing a good job. The old saying, "You are the only Bible some people are ever going to read" should make each Christian stop short before speaking or acting.

The trend toward antagonism toward Christians, the church and the Bible is depressing, but what people believe about Christ is a matter of life and death. Even with a general negative perception about Christianity, the fact that most people are willing to hear what someone else has to say about their Christian beliefs is promising. It gives room for a personal Christian testimony. It provides an opportunity for someone to talk about Christ and the difference between a personal relationship with Him and the perceived "Christian religion."

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12). *Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter* (1 Peter 4:16).

* <http://www.christianpost.com/news/how-do-unchurched-americans-view-christianity-30793/>

** <http://www.religionnews.com/2014/04/09/bible-study-people-say-good-book-isnt-god-book/>

*** <http://endoftheamericandream.com/archives/how-will-the-shocking-decline-of-christianity-in-america-affect-the-future-of-this-nation>

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