

Is teaching the Bible on the decline in American churches?

by Randy Bright <http://www.tulsabeacon.com/?p=5720>

Last Sunday my pastor gave us some disturbing statistics about the growth of churches in America. The study he cited concluded that church growth is very small, only about 2 percent per year on average.

The question is why? Why would the church, which has been a central focus of American life since our founding, suddenly begin losing ground?

In my opinion, there is no formula or study that is going to reveal some step-by-step method for restoring the growth of churches. The reason I believe this is so is because the problem is primarily spiritual. And it's not just that many Americans are deliberately turning their back on God, though many are.

Over the past five decades, there is no doubt that life and beliefs have changed dramatically. During that time, faith in God has been challenged unlike any other time in America history. But some things will always be universal.

As Zig Ziglar used to say in his seminars, everybody always wants the same things. They want to be healthy. They want to be happy. They want to have good family relationships, and they want to have friends. And, they want to be reasonably prosperous. I will add to that God loves everyone equally, He wants those things for all people, and His desire is for all people to know Him and to spend an eternity with Him. Those are things that are universal for everyone.

Unfortunately, not everyone will spend their eternity with Him. As I told a friend who was struggling with the idea of trusting in God for help in life's troubles, you can't trust someone you don't know. My pastor's dismal statistics reminded me of that long ago conversation, because I think that is the crux of the problem regarding church growth. Churches aren't growing because, oddly enough, when people go to church, they really don't learn much about Him.

I had a conversation with a friend recently who said that Americans have become so consumer minded that it affects their relationship with the church. Americans have been bombarded from birth with commercials that have convinced them that they deserve those universal things in life.

Unfortunately, many churches have responded by giving people what they want, rather than what they need, and in so doing they are shaping a new generation of Americans who sort of know who God is, but not really. We need only look at Europe to see a model of what happens to churches when people forget who God is. They disappear, only to be replaced with something else to fill the void.

For the past fifteen years I have consistently advised my church clients that they need a good balance of four things in their buildings, which are parking, fellowship space, classroom space, and worship space.

Parking is just to get them on the premises, but the other three are significant to the healthy growth of churches and Christians in a more spiritual way. Not that you need a building to hear preaching and teaching or to fellowship with other Christians. In fact, the church is thriving in other countries in the world without buildings.

Over the past ten to fifteen years, most churches in America have adopted a new worship style. The praise team has replaced the songleader and the choir, and the band has replaced the piano and the organ. Some would say that this is a response to our consumer mentality, and that this is why the church is in decline. It has been my observation that in this setting more of the congregation listens to the music than participates in it. However, I think it would be wrong to conclude that this is the cause of the decline.

Our pulpits are filled with life application sermons that teach principles of Christian life from scripture, and these have had an enormous impact on the quality of our lives. Preaching is vital to understanding how we should live.

Most churches have many opportunities such as church events and small groups for fellowship. In all appearances, churches are more vibrant than they have been in centuries. So why the decline?

The answer, I believe, is that you can't trust someone you don't know. The disturbing trend that I have seen in churches is that structured teaching of God's Word is on the decline, and we beginning to produce a new generation of Christians who believe in God but don't know why and don't know who He is, even though all the other things our churches are doing wonderful.

Good worship, good fellowship, good preaching, good teaching. I believe those things in balance, especially when people deeply hunger for them, will help churches grow.

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