

# A Revived Church Is America's Only Hope

What happens when a nation loses its conscience? When the light barely shines in the darkness? When truth is obscured by lies? We can answer those questions with another question: What does America look like in 2019?

We are a nation adrift. A nation confused. A nation in danger of completely losing our moral bearings. A nation where right is now wrong and wrong is now right. A nation where evil is celebrated and virtue is denigrated.

But I don't primarily blame the society at large for these problems. I don't primarily blame the people of the world (although, to be sure, each individual will give account to God for his or her actions).

I blame us, the believers, the followers of Jesus. We who claim to speak for God.

I blame us, the ones who are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

There is too much compromise in our midst. Too much carnality. Too much worldliness. Too much hypocrisy. Too little encounter with the living God. And that's why so many churches are bleeding members.

As the brand new Gallup poll reports, "U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades." Yes, "Half of Americans are church members, down from 70% in 1999." And "Membership has fallen nine points among those who are religious."

In my view, one of the biggest reasons people are leaving the church is because they are not truly encountering the Lord (or are no longer interested in Him). And, quite naturally,

decreased church membership quickly translates into decreased church influence.

Put another way, less light shining means more darkness. And the less brightly that light shines, the more the darkness prevails.

Really now, how can we change the world if we have become like the world? How can we point people to Jesus when we hardly resemble Him? How can we call for social transformation when we haven't experienced (or, are not currently walking in) personal transformation?

I'm truly thankful for the millions of committed Jesus-followers in America today. They are swimming against the tide and going against the grain, no matter the cost. They are raising their children in godliness and keeping their marriages holy. And as singles, they are living with real integrity.

They are good witnesses on their jobs. They are making a difference in their communities. They are rich in good works. They are sharing their faith with friend and foe alike.

What great examples they are, even as the world scorns and mocks them.

But, for the most part, they are exceptions to the rule. And that's because, for the most part, the American gospel is a watered-down gospel, a cheap substitute for the real thing. It bypasses the cross, promises happiness and prosperity and neglects the call to consecration, to sacrifice, to service.

No wonder we can number in the multiplied tens of millions yet our spiritual impact is so minimal. No wonder we can have an almost endless number of outlets—from TV to radio and from our pulpits to the internet—with such meager results.

Gallup reports that, "U.S. church membership was 70% or higher

from 1937 through 1976, falling modestly to an average of 68% in the 1970s through the 1990s. The past 20 years have seen an acceleration in the drop-off, with a 20-percentage-point decline since 1999 and more than half of that change occurring since the start of the current decade."

Worse still, "Most Millennials were too young to be polled in 1998-2000. Now that they have reached adulthood, their church membership rates are exceedingly low and appear to be a major factor in the drop in overall U.S. church membership. Just 42% of Millennials are members of churches, on average."

That is a cause for real concern.

That alone should get us crying out to God afresh.

That alone should cause to ask some deep and searching questions.

In his book *The Signature of Jesus*, Brennon Manning made this striking statement:

*If indeed we lived a life in imitation of his, our witness would be irresistible. If we dared to live beyond our self-concern, if we refused to shrink from being vulnerable, if we took nothing but a compassionate attitude toward the world, if we were a counterculture to our nation's lunatic lust for pride of place, power, and possessions, if we preferred to be faithful rather than successful, the walls of indifference to Jesus Christ would crumble. A handful of us could be ignored by society, but hundreds, thousands, millions of such servants would overwhelm the world. Christians filled with the authenticity, commitment, and generosity of Jesus would be the most spectacular sign in the history of the human race. The call of Jesus is revolutionary. If we implemented it, we would change the world in a few months.*

He was not exaggerating at all, and this is America's most

pressing need: to recapture the revolutionary nature of the gospel and to live it out for the world to see.

Organized religion is not the key. Another new strategy is not what we need. Improved methodology is not the issue.

What we need is a fresh encounter with Jesus. A return to our knees, to the Word, to holiness, to the power of the Spirit, to sharing our faith afresh, to boldness, to passion, to compassion.

When that happens in the church, the world will be affected—dramatically. It is America's only hope. It is revival or we die!

*Listen to the podcasts below for more of Dr. Brown's commentary.*