

Really Good News for Born-Again Christians

People with no religious affiliation are now America's second-largest "religious" group, outnumbering Catholics and mainline Protestants. Mainline denominations have experienced a net loss of more than 4 percent of their population share, while Catholics have lost nearly 11 percent. This according to the Pew Research Center, which has just released its latest U.S. Religious Landscape Study, scrutinizing the ways religion has changed in America over the last seven years.

However, the news is significantly better for evangelicals (those who characterize themselves as "born-again" Christians). Evangelicals are America's largest religious group. While the number of Americans who self-identify as Christians has dropped from 78 percent to 71 percent, the number who call themselves evangelicals has grown from 34 percent to 35 percent.

Evangelical churches retain two-thirds of their children, while Protestants at large retain less than half. Evangelical churches gained more than 2 million members in the last seven years, while mainline churches lost 5 million members. More lesbians, gays and bisexuals identify as evangelical (13 percent) than as atheist (8 percent) or agnostic (9 percent).

This is all good news for "born again" Christians. But does God measure Kingdom growth by the number of people who call themselves evangelicals?

What we say about ourselves is not the point—what God says about us is what matters. Jesus predicted that "many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonderful

works in Your name?'” (Matt. 7:22). Preaching, exorcising, mighty works of ministry—far better proof of one’s spiritual condition than an answer on a survey, wouldn’t you agree?

And yet Jesus warned, “Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness” (v. 23). If He does not “know” us personally—if we do not have a true saving relationship with Him—our religious words and actions are “lawlessness.” Human words cannot change human hearts. (Tweet this) You and I can do nothing eternal, spiritual or God-glorifying unless His Spirit works in and through us. Jesus seeks “disciples,” fully-committed followers, not just church members. (Tweet this)

In *Love God With All Your Mind*, Christian philosopher J.P. Moreland worries that churches (evangelicals included) are producing “empty selves”—people who don’t reflect on their faith, members who value emotion and entertainment above serious Bible study and careful discipleship. He warns that such churches are impotent to resist secular culture.

God seeks Christians who submit daily to the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18), who study Scripture and seek to live biblically. Such people manifest the “fruit of the Spirit”—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). They impact their culture more powerfully than any survey can measure.

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