

The Real Reason Liberal Churches Are Losing Members

Almost every day conservative Christians are told that if we don't become more enlightened and progressive, we will become irrelevant to society as our numbers continue to decline.

In reality, the opposite is true: We will only be relevant to the extent we honor God and hold fast to biblical truth, which is why the more "progressive" and "enlightened churches" are the ones losing members the most rapidly.

God will back His gospel, not some man-made, watered-down message.

God will back the exaltation of Jesus, not some muddled, every-path-leads-to-God nonsense.

God will back the call to take up the cross and live for Him, not some flesh-pleasing success formula.

God will back biblical standards, not some meet-me-halfway, worldly-wise compromise.

The truth be told, most people who are serious about spiritual things are looking to join with people of like mind, while most people who don't take God's Word seriously will not take spiritual commitment seriously either.

Why bother going to church if you don't believe what's being preached? Why go to a prayer meeting or a Bible study if you're not sure any of it is real? Why make a serious commitment to church life if you view committed Christians as radical extremists?

In 1974, a German theologian named Gerhard Meier wrote a bold and controversial book entitled *The End of the Historical Critical Method*, explaining that what the seminaries were

teaching the pastors was not helping the people.

Maier argued that pastors in training would attend seminary, where they would learn the “historical critical” method of interpretation, being told that Moses didn’t write the Pentateuch, that the prophets didn’t predict the coming of the Messiah, that Jesus didn’t really rise from the dead, and that the Bible was not truly God’s Word, among other things. Then they would go and preach to their congregations, but they had nothing to give them.

The congregants came to church services to find strength and guidance, to grow in faith and hope, to learn how to cope with difficult circumstances, but the pastors were full of unbelief. And so, cathedrals that seated 3,000 people would have 30 in attendance on Sunday morning.

Recently, in light of a steep decline in attendance at Church of England services, Baroness Brenda Hale, one of England’s top judges, told a conference at Yale Law School that the Church of England is in decline precisely it makes so few demands on its adherents: “It has no dietary laws, no dress codes for men or women and very little that its members can say is actually required of them by way of observance.”

How remarkable. It appears that Lady Hale is aware of the old adage that if something costs nothing, it is worth nothing.

To be sure, some church groups will grow because of an “itching ear” message, as the preachers tell the people what they want to hear. This is one of the reasons that Jesus said that the road to destruction is broad (see Matthew 7:13). But over the long haul, there will not likely be sustainable life and growth on a denominational level where compromise is the hallmark.

And there are, it is true, conservative denominations like the Southern Baptist Convention that have seen a decline in membership in recent years, although the reasons for that

appear to be varied.

But it is the liberal churches, those which embrace abortion and homosexual practice and which compromise biblical truth and biblical standards, which have experienced the steepest decline in membership. In all likelihood, they also have far lower commitment levels from their people.

Wikipedia notes that, "At the time of its formation, the UCC [United Church of Christ] had over 2 million members in nearly 7,000 churches. The denomination has suffered a 44 percent loss in membership since the mid-1960s ... As of the 2014 Annual Yearbook of the UCC, membership is listed as 979,239 members in 5154 local churches."

The Episcopal Church had a membership of 3.4 million in the mid-1960s; today, that number is slightly over 2 million.

The Presbyterian Church (.) has dropped from a membership of million in the mid-1960s to 1.8 million today, a number that is expected to decline rapidly in the coming years.

Yet these are some of the churches which have led the charge on liberal causes like the redefining of marriage.

I thought young people were leaving our churches because we weren't liberal enough. I thought young people and old people were flocking to these enlightened, progressive churches. Perhaps the reports about why people are leaving the churches are not as accurate as they seem?

I don't dispute that many Americans, especially young people, have been turned off to "religion" and have left the church because they view Christians as hypocrites or because they are turned off by the politicizing of American Christianity.

But it appears that many of those who have left were affiliated with liberal denominations more than conservative denominations. As noted in a 2011 report by the National

Council of Churches, while many liberal, so-called “mainline” Protestant churches were declining in membership, “strong figures from the Assemblies of God and the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.) suggest an increase in the number of adherents to Pentecostal groups ...” (quoting Rev. Eileen Linder; recent reports from the AG do confirm this growth trend, both in the USA and abroad).

This is true around the world (primarily outside of Europe and North America), where Bible-based, Spirit-filled churches that hold to conservative moral values are outgrowing all other religious expressions, as the respected statistician David Barrett has documented for more than three decades. When people truly encounter the Lord, they will gladly forsake everything and follow Him.

Let’s not believe the lie that the way to win the world is by becoming worldly.

Let’s hold fast to Jesus, let’s ask the Lord to cleanse us from all hypocrisy and compromise, let’s renew our love for the Lord and for our neighbor, let’s ask our Father for a fresh touch of His Spirit, and let’s live out the high and lofty standards of the Word, without compromise or apology.

No doubt, opposition will come. But so will the people—hungry, thirsty, hurting and ready to give their lives for something that counts forever.