

Have Christians Lost the Culture War?

The culture war may be lost, and religious liberty might not be that far behind, according to a new survey from LifeWay Research.

Seventy percent of senior pastors at Protestant churches say **religious liberty** is on the decline in the United States, and 59 percent of Christians believe they are losing the **culture war**. Eleven percent consider that war already lost.

The survey results are staggering, indicating grave concerns about the moral direction of the nation from both the pulpit and the pew.

“Ten years ago we were talking about who would win the **culture war**, and now we’re talking about how will Christian rights be protected after the culture war,” Ed Stetzer, the president of LifeWay Research, told me. “We’ve lost our home field advantage. There are going to be some things that are different.”

Stetzer says it’s a big shift.

“And it’s a shift I would not have guessed,” he told me.

Over the past few years, I’ve documented hundreds of instances of religious persecution in the United States. And the targets have been exclusively Christians.

The military labeled **evangelical Christians** and Catholics as **religious extremists**. Christian organizations like Family Research Council and American Family Association were labeled by the military as domestic hate groups. Bibles were briefly banned from Walter Reed Medical Center.

The Internal Revenue Service targeted Christian ministries

engaged in **pro-life** activities. The government demanded to know the content of one group's prayers. A Wyoming church was ordered by government officials to turn over its membership rolls. A Baptist newspaper in North Carolina was audited, as was America's evangelist, **Billy Graham**.

The list of attacks on Christians goes on and on, from students ordered to stop **praying** in front of the Supreme Court to chaplains being told they could no longer pray in the name of Jesus.

In recent days, the battleground has pitted **gay rights** groups against Christian-owned businesses who cater to the wedding industry. Christian bakers, florists and photographers have been hauled into court and brought up on state discrimination charges for declining to participate in **same-sex weddings**.

And in every single instance, lower courts have ruled that gay rights trump religious rights.

So perhaps it should not be a surprise that 70 percent of pastors and 54 percent of Americans believe religious liberty is on the decline.

Scott McConnell, vice president of LifeWay Research, says the concern is widespread.

"Half of Americans say that religious liberty is on the decline," he says. "That's a lot of people."

Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, concedes that Christians are losing the **culture war** and are losing ground every day.

"The primary reason Christians are losing the culture wars is that pastors are AWOL when it comes to informing and energizing their congregations," Jeffress told me.

Unless Christians stand up and engage the political process, Jeffress says he fears there may come a day when religious

liberty is extremely curtailed.

"A religious leader once said, 'My successor will see the tax-exempt status removed from churches, and his successor will go to jail,'" Jeffress says. "That is probably on the horizon."

But there are some pockets of resistance, like the town of Greenwood in the Mississippi Delta.

Jim Phillips is the senior pastor of North Greenwood Baptist Church. He told me that Greenwood still has a "very high respect for the historical Judeo-Christian ethic."

"Every one of my son's community college football games around the state last season began with a prayer on the loud speaker, in Jesus' name," he told me. "Will that eventually be challenged? I suspect so at some point."

But right now, he says, "pockets of religious boldness still exist."

Phillips says national trends, though, are disturbing.

"**Christians** have slowly given away their impact on culture by becoming more and more worldlier instead of confronting the culture to become more and more godly," he says.

So who is to blame for the loss? Phillips blames Christians.

"Sadly, Christians have often wimped out and grown silent instead of being bolder for the Gospel," he says. "Christians get subdued into thinking they're not supposed to rise up."

Jeffress agrees with that assessment and says the church must involve itself in the political process.

"There are 50 to 80 million **evangelicals** in America," he says. "Only half are registered to vote, and only half of those voted in the last election."

Jeffress says it's imperative for people of faith to engage

the culture.

"Every time we go to the voting booth, we are casting a vote for righteousness or unrighteousness," he says.

Pastor Phillips also urges his fellow pastors to step up to the plate.

"My calling is to keep leading the charge," he says. "As a local pastor, my goal is to keep encouraging my church to seek to raise the bar and not lower it when it comes to confronting culture."

Stetzer says he hopes the survey will spark a "fruitful national conversation about religious liberty concerns."

"The perception was that the **culture war** was once a winnable war," Stetzer says. "But it's switched from an offensive battle to a defensive battle."

Pastor Jeffress urges Christians to stand their ground.

"We ought to do everything we can to push back against this encroachment on religious liberty and protect our right to spread the gospel," he says.

I write about this very issue in my new book, *God Less America*. It will be published in May. But I'm reminded of a quote by President Ronald Reagan.

"If we ever forget that we are one nation under God, then we will be a nation gone under," Reagan once said.

A few years ago, A New York public school teacher was ordered to remove that quote from her classroom wall. She was told that it violated the U.S. Constitution.

I'm afraid we may be "gone under."

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newsletter, be sure to join his Facebook page, and follow him on Twitter. His latest book is God Less America.