

The Real Reason Atheism Is on the Rise

In 1991, 17 percent of the U.S. population were religious skeptics; today nearly one-quarter either reject or are unsure of God's existence. And among young people under 30, that number rises to more than one-third, according to a recent study by the Barna Group, "2015 State of Atheism in America."

Religion and culture expert Dr. Alex McFarland, host of the national Stand Strong Tour, says the numbers are disturbing but not surprising.

"In the past several decades, we've seen the rise of militant secularism in America," McFarland says. "This belief system says that if you are a Christian who believes in the authority of Scripture and in absolute morals, you are intolerant, and your beliefs are not acceptable in society. We've seen this secularism take hold in our schools, our entertainment, our culture, our politics and even our churches. And one of the results has been a steep increase in the number of young people who reject God."

Indeed, a separate Barna study found younger generations are increasingly less likely to believe that Jesus was God. Among millennials, only 48 percent believe in the divinity of Jesus, while 35 percent believe he was simply a religious or spiritual leader and 17 percent are unsure.

McFarland added that tragically many churches have neglected their call to uphold biblical truth in the face of secularist aggression, instead diluting their messages in response to cultural pressures.

"It's no wonder that the Barna study shows that more than two-thirds of skeptics have actually attended church, and many for a significant period of time," McFarland added. "When there

are self-proclaimed ministers of the gospel who, by their own admission, do not believe in God, and others who pursue the praise of society more than obedience to God, how can the church equip individuals to stand strong in their faith?"

Although some claim religion is a "private" matter, McFarland emphasized that the rise among young people of skepticism—which the Barna Group defines as including both atheism and agnosticism—will have consequences for America as a nation.

"From a societal standpoint, any time we reject a belief in God and, thereby, a belief in absolute morals based on the Word of God, we see the disintegration of a healthy society," McFarland continued. "From the breakdown of the family and the killing of the unborn to the rejection of the rule of law and of moral boundaries, the consequences are far reaching.

"But there is hope. America still has a choice between going down the path of moral chaos or returning to the Judeo-Christian principles that made our nation great. But the change won't come from political leaders or from the culture; it must begin with the church."