

The Great Deception in the American Church

Consider these statistics of Christianity in America: Eighty-four percent of the inhabitants of this nation say they believe in the deity of Jesus Christ, according to Barna Group, and 45 percent claim to be born-again Christians. Other studies show it is closer to 33 percent.

Either way, these numbers are high. Seventy-seven percent believe their chances of going to heaven are excellent. Thirty-three percent believe one day everyone will go to heaven. Yet America has the highest percentage of single-parent families in the industrialized world, the highest abortion rate, the highest rate of sexually transmitted diseases, the highest rate of teenage birth by far, the highest rate of teenage drug use and the largest prison population per capita than any country in the world.

Consider also the great moral decline of the last generation (50 to 60 years) and these telling statistics in America. The divorce rate has doubled, teen suicide has tripled, reported violent crime has quadrupled, the prison population has quintupled, the percentage of babies born out of wedlock has risen sixfold, couples living together out of wedlock have increased sevenfold, and gay marriage is now a legalized reality in a number of states, with many believing the end is not in sight.

In this past generation, we have experienced an overwhelming increase in lawlessness, permissiveness and selfishness, even among Christians. Moral actions that were unthinkable a few decades ago are now commonplace—Christian leaders indulging in sexual sin and grossly immoral scandals, addicted to pornography and accompanied by an exploding divorce rate have greatly factored in the rapid decrease of morals in the

American church. And as the church goes, so goes the world. In fact, the results of a survey among young American adults showed that the percentage who follow biblically based values for living has now dropped from 65 percent to a mere 4 percent since World War II.

There has never been a society in the history of mankind whose moral values have deteriorated so dramatically, in such a short period of time, as those of Americans in the last 50 years. And so far it shows no sign of stopping. These statistics are eye-opening, and they serve to warn us that something is terribly wrong with our brand of Christianity. They reveal how poorly the church has communicated the true gospel to mainstream America, and thus the reason for so much deception in our culture.

When the rich man died and went to Hades (Luke 16:19-31), he was surprised to find himself there. In the Jewish culture, they equated wealth with godliness, so this man thought God favored him. The common thought, especially among the Jews, was if you were blessed financially, then you were a good person and therefore favored by God and on your way to heaven. This also explains the disciples' astonishment when Jesus told them how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 19:23-25).

Similarly, there was a church in Laodicea (Rev 3:14-22) who, due to their wealth, thought they too had attained God's favor. Jesus expressed great disapproval over their spiritual condition as well, which they were totally unaware of. They were deceived.

Are you in touch with your true spiritual condition? Or are you allowing the pop culture around you to dictate your standards? Are you conforming to the world's standards or to the Bible? Are you deceived? How can a nation of people among whom a large percentage claims to be born-again Christians experience the kind of degradation the above statistics

reveal? Such deception is the state of America today, and the above statistics reveal the fruit of it.

The problem has been that the real gospel has not been preached nor lived. Both the profession and the practice of many so-called Christians in this nation have not matched up. Our substandard message has produced substandard believers. Our departure from the preaching of the cross, repentance, holiness, and the real empowering grace of God has increased the level of deception in the church. How else can we explain the disparity of the above statistics in the church and the nation?

But what is really at the root of this deception? This is what we need to carefully discern. In one word, it is humanism—the glorification of self. Humanism has crept into much of the modern-day church and is diluting the power of the real gospel.

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