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Just When You Thought it Couldn't Get Any Worse

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In 2020, Christian pollster George Barna came out with some polling that was utterly shocking to most Christians – to say the least. At that time, his polling indicated that only 6% of the total population of American society held a biblical worldview. But it was even scarier than that. Of those who self-identified as Christians, only 9% actually had a biblical worldview. And even scarier still, only 19% of born-again Christians held a biblical worldview.

Well, it was hard to imagine at that point that it could get any worse, but it has. In just three short years, the total American population holding a biblical worldview is down to 4%, self-identified Christians with a biblical worldview are down to 6%, and born-again Christians with a genuine biblical worldview has dropped to 13%.

Of course, ultimately the blame for this stunning failure falls on individual Christians who simply have not been concerned about their own spiritual condition and growth. But while the ultimate responsibility is on individuals, another thing we see is that churches are also falling down on the job. And if this situation is going to turn around at all, churches are going to have to be the agents of change by becoming more intentional in equipping their people in this vital area. Without a biblical worldview, Christians are not going to see the value of attending church, they are not going to personally grow in their faith, they are not going to share Christ to our increasingly lost world, and they are not even going to know how to stand up to the increasingly non-Christian and anti-Christ-

tian beliefs and values that are sucking the population into Hell.

The Source of the Problem

One of the big problems for Christians in dealing with this issue is the religious pluralism that exists in America. We often think of pluralism being the result of massive immigration from other places that have different cultures and different worldview beliefs. And that certainly is a part of the equation.

Over the last several decades, the U.S. has opened up the ability for people to legally immigrate, and a tsunami of people from all over the world have taken advantage of the opportunity. In more recent years, that has been compounded by the massive amount of illegal immigration that is taking place. With all of these new people who come from backgrounds that are not based on America's traditional Christian Theism, other beliefs have become increasingly prominent.

But there is another source of pluralism that is even more prominent in modern American society. Over the last century and a half, naturalistic values have increased in prominence to the point that they have come to dominate virtually all of the institutions of American society. These home grown atheistic values have been deliberately promoted. And besides the dominance they have achieved in society, those promoting it have made a deliberate effort to eradicate America's traditional biblical worldview foundation, and even now work to mitigate the influence of Christians. This influence not only reaches into the arena of beliefs, but also into the values that dominate society. The relativistic values of this naturalistic worldview are diametrically opposed to the traditional American

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(Christian) values of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (a good and flourishing life). Those kinds of values are based on an objectively real foundation found in relationship to God. Relativistic values, on the other hand, emerge out of the personal preferences of individuals.

Why Churches Struggle Addressing the Problems in Society

So what can churches do to help turn things around? To really get at this issue, we need to carefully define what we mean by the church. In its most personal form, the church is made up of the people of God – those who have entered into a personal relationship with God by faith in Jesus Christ. We, as individuals, are the bride of Christ.

But the most outwardly visible expression of the church on earth are the various organizations we call churches that dot the landscape. This is the place where the community of believers worship God together and fellowship with one another.

The reason this is so important to point out is that the very idea of discipleship, as we typically deal with it, crosses those boundaries. It is individuals who must ultimately become disciples of Christ as we conform our lives to His image. But the most prominent place where we formally engage that process is in our local churches. Of course, it is certainly possible, and even proper, that we work on this individually in our personal spiritual growth efforts. But there is also a profound need for the local church to facilitate that kind of growth by providing training opportunities. In fact, the local church should be the lay person's theological seminary.

Sadly, most churches are not very good at that. It is certainly not because they believe it is a frivolous

activity (at least not for most). But a lot of things get in the way of that kind of effort. So, exactly, what are the problems churches face in that arena? Every church is different, of course, but here are some of the more common issues:

1. No felt need for discipleship training

Every church already has its priorities, traditions, and emphases. It could be evangelism, worship, fellowship, community service, and any of a number of other things. With other priorities, some simply don't see the great need for extra discipleship training.

2. No time for discipleship training

Often times, because of the strong priority of other activities, there simply is not time in the church calendar to incorporate discipleship training. This is sometimes a corollary of number one.

3. No tradition for discipleship training, and not knowing how to break tradition

Different churches, and even different denominations, have traditions that guide what they do. Some simply don't have a tradition that incorporates discipleship training. Sometimes this is deliberate, but perhaps more often than not, is it not something that is ever even thought about.

4. The pastor does not see the importance of discipleship training

A pastor's work is never done, and he must prioritize what he does with his time. Because of so many other demands, some feel that there simply isn't enough time to take on discipleship training efforts, as well.

5. The pastor does not know what to do

No one can be an expert at everything, and often people have to discern where God wants them to put their focus. As a result, even the pastor sometimes does not have the exper-

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tise to be able to develop an effective discipleship training opportunity for his church.

6. Little interest by church members

There are many cases where even if people know they ought to focus on discipleship training, and even if the pastor wants (or even tries) to develop something in that arena, the church people simply will not support it.

7. Most discipleship training opportunities do not focus on the core foundation

One more major problem lies in the curriculum. There are a lot of "programs" in existence that teach various discipleship knowledge and skills. However, there are not a lot that lay the kind of foundation that truly provides a comprehensive spiritual foundation able to help believers effectively engage our increasingly antagonistic world.

Get on the Right Path

The most important thing to keep in mind regarding discipleship training is that it is not a program to be worked on individually or implemented in the church. It is a process of spiritual growth. Doing programs will not cause a person to grow.

There is a careful distinction to be made here, though. While doing a program will not cause a person to grow, the programs are a very effective vehicle to guide people to growth. And in most cases, there needs to be a special programmatic opportunity to give people the knowledge they need to facilitate their spiritual growth. Knowledge alone will not cause spiritual growth. At the same time, one cannot know how to grow without knowledge.

Let me point you back to the original point at the beginning of this article. In 2020:

- only 6% of the total population of American society held a biblical worldview, and it is now down to 4%,
- self-identified Christians with a biblical worldview was at 9%, and is now at 6%,
- and born-again Christians with a genuine biblical worldview was at 19%, and is now down to 13%,

... all in three short years.

The point here is not to place blame. That is a totally useless exercise. Rather, the point is to make dramatically clear the current state of affairs and the need to do something about it. There is a really simple fix. Keep in mind, though, simple does not mean easy. Implementing this fix will, no doubt, require a lot of effort and hard work. The fix is to prioritize and implement an effective discipleship training program to equip faithful believers to be effective ministers of Jesus Christ in our increasingly non-Christian society.

While God is able to do His work without using us, that is not the way He generally works. His primary methodology is to use believers to get the message of the gospel out. So what is our part? We can't change people's hearts, only God can do that. But we can become equipped to become God's instruments to do His work out in the world – and we should be all in.

At this point, I want to strongly encourage you to figure out how to get all of the active Christians in your church equipped to be effective in taking the gospel out into your world. We can't put this off any longer!

[Note: It is the very purpose of MarketFaith Ministries to provide resources to help churches and individual believers become equipped to be more effective Christians out in the world. There are many resources at the Market-

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