

Luke 6:43-45

What Fruits Do You Bear?

March 7, 2021

Have you noticed that the religious landscape in the United States has been changing very rapidly? America is facing a religious polarization. Pew Research Center did a telephone survey in 2018 and 2019 which revealed a clear trend of this change. Pew Research Center does this kind of survey every so often to see how society is changing. This survey revealed that between 2009 and 2019, there was 12% decline of the Christian population in the United States. Back in 2009, seventy-seven percent (77%) of the US adult population claimed that they were Christians but that number dropped to 65% in 2019. And the number of people who have no affiliation with any religion or who do not believe in God has increased from 17% to 26% in the same period.¹ We are losing much of the general religious ethos that dominated this country for many years.

What could be some of the reasons for this change? Why do people move away from religion, particularly from Christianity? I am sure there are many identifiable reasons.

One, prosperity and affluence divert people from regular church attendance. Decades ago, many stores and businesses were closed on Sunday. In some places, local sports teams didn't play or practice on Wednesday night because that would interfere with church prayer meetings. Family events and business and community calendars were constructed in deference to Church activities and Christian traditions. We no longer have that privilege. Now, family events, sports events, school activities, or other affairs take precedence over church activities. Not only this, but because many businesses open on Sunday now, people have to work on Sunday and cannot go to church.

As the people's participation in the church has become less frequent, their Christian identity has also slowly eroded as well.

Two, postmodernism, which is prevalent in our society, makes it difficult for people to accept the claims of Christianity that it has the absolute and universal truth. Postmodernism believes that all religions are equally valid; and all lead to

¹ <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>

“salvation.” It rejects the claim of Christianity that Jesus is the truth and he is the only way to be saved. Postmodernism believes that no religion can claim to have absolute, universal, or exclusive truth.² Many people are influenced by this philosophy and have left Christianity.

Three, when people see hypocrisies and conflicts in the church which sometimes happen, they don't just go to other churches, like they used to, but they leave Christianity altogether.

I am sure there are many more reasons as to why Christianity is in decline.

Decades ago, Christianity was the culturally accepted religious identification. Most of people in this country identified themselves as Christians regardless of how often they attended church or how they lived. People felt that they needed to have a church affiliation.

But now, people no longer have that sentiment. Things have changed. People's view of religion has changed. Many people believe that all religions have the same goal, and many people also believe that you don't need an organized religion in order to be spiritual.

The question we need to ask ourselves is how shall we live each and every day as followers of Christ in this climate? Jesus said, “A good tree produces good fruit and a bad tree bad fruit. Each tree is known by its own fruits.” In other words, the followers of Christ will need to have the evidence of being his followers. If we are the followers of Christ, we would have the evidence of it.

Then Jesus said, “A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.” Whatever is in the heart comes to the surface: beliefs, prejudice, attitudes, grudges, love, hatred, pride, humility, and all kinds of emotions. Jesus speaks of them as seeds in the garden, the seeds that grow. These seeds don't stay dormant in the dark. They grow in our hearts and eventually come out in our words and actions.

What Jesus is saying is that every life bears fruit, every life has an influence. Your life influences the lives of everyone around you. Your character is contagious, good or bad.

² <https://www.learnreligions.com/what-is-postmodernism-700692>

There is a beautiful story about a young man named Preston Sharp from Redding, California. On Veteran's Day in 2015, Preston visited his grandfather's grave in Redding to put on a flag and some flowers. There he saw many veterans' graves that did not have flags on them. This upset this young man. He thought the veterans needed to be honored at least with flags. He was ten years old at the time. He wanted to do something about it. So, Preston began working odd jobs and started a Facebook fundraising page to raise money to put flags and flowers on every veteran's grave in Redding, California.

Every week, rain or shine, Preston went to the cemetery and decorated every grave he could. His passion was contagious. Many people responded to his cause. He not only had donations but also had volunteers to join him. He started a non-profit organization called Veteran's Flags and Flowers. He has many volunteers. He and the volunteers not only decorated all veterans' graves in Redding but this movement has spread out to 35 other states. His organization has decorated more than 260,000 graves so far.³

Preston's commitment to honor the veterans influenced other people to respond. As young as he is, he is already bearing good fruits.

What you store up in your heart determines your character. What you store up in your heart also determines what impact your life will bring into this world. That impact could either be positive or negative. Your character and your influence are not only contagious, they are also lasting. Your beliefs, values, and priorities will be passed down to your children and grandchildren. The life you live will leave a lasting impact in the society.

In Muslim countries, there are strict rules about touching garbage, and because of that no one wants to be a garbage collector. So, the job of garbage collector often falls to the non-religious people or the "least desirable" members of the society. That includes Christians.

In Cairo, Egypt, a very poor Christian man had that job. One day, he was sorting through a huge pile of garbage when he came across an \$11,000 watch with the owner's name engraved on the back. This watch was worth many years' wages to this man. It would have provided him a very comfortable living but because he was a follower of Christ, he tracked down the owner, a wealthy business man, and returned the watch.

³ <https://prestonsharp.net/>

The Egyptian businessman later told a reporter, “I did not know Christ at the time, but I told the garbage man that I saw Christ in him. I told him, ‘Because of what you have done and your great example, I will worship the Christ you are worshipping.’”

As the wealthy businessman studied the Bible and tried to live by its principles, he and his wife gave their lives to Christ. In 1978, this business man was ordained by the Coptic Orthodox Church. Since then, he and his wife have been leading a ministry to the poor in Cairo.⁴

The Christian garbage collector’s decision to return the watch to the owner was flowed from years of storing up God’s words in his heart, years of storing up the Spirit of God and the principles of God in his heart. When the time came to choose between selfishness and integrity, this man’s choice changed the lives of the wealthy business man and his wife, and the lives of all the people who were affected by their ministry. How far will this garbage collector’s influence go? No one knows but one thing we know is that his influence did not stop with the wealthy businessman.

Every human life will produce fruit. The question is “What kind of fruit will we bear, and how will it affect the world around us?”

⁴ Rick James, *A Million Ways to Die* (David C. Cook, 2010), pp. 14-15. Cited in Barry L. Davis, *52 Sermons From the Book of Acts* (Pulpit Outlines 4), p. 173. GodSpeed Publishing, Kindle Edition).