



America's changing religious landscape

By Alexander S. Brown, Minister

A COUPLE of weeks ago, a report was issued by the Pew Research Center entitled, "America's changing religious landscape," that indicated Christianity in America is declining. It was a report that was quickly seized on by the mainstream media who immediately started to figure out what it meant both for the current state of our Union and the future that lies ahead of us.

However, the sensationalizing of the article muddied the waters and what the report was actually saying was lost in the midst of all the hyperbole and faux-outrage.

Fortunately, there were some within the Church who approached the release of this report with a more measured approach and laid out the true findings of this report, which was not that

Christianity is declining in America, but that cultural Christianity is.

One of these commentators was Ed Stetzer, who is the Director of Lifeway Research for the Southern Baptist Convention, one of the largest research bodies in the U.S. that deals with the health and strength of the Church in our country. In an article he wrote for *USA Today* in the wake of the Pew report, Ed Stetzer commented,

"Rather than predict the impending doom of the church in America, this latest study affirms what many researchers have said before. Christianity isn't collapsing; it's being clarified. Churches aren't emptying; rather, those who were Christian in name only are now categorically identifying their lack of Christian conviction and engagement."

What this report revealed was not really anything that had not been revealed before. There was little new information in this Pew study, and what Stetzer said in his article was essentially what Tim Keller had said in 2013 in response to a similar study:

"[T]he number of the devout people in the country is increasing, as well as the number of secular people. The big change is the erosion in the middle. The devout numbers have not actually gone down that much."

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The decline of
 nominal Christianity in
 America will lead to a
 greater opportunity
 for the Church.

June Calendar

Sunday

9:30 a.m. Sunday School
"Why We Trust the Bible"

10:30 a.m. Morning Worship
"Joshua"

6:00 p.m. Evening Worship
"The Servant Songs of Isaiah"

Children's Church, Nursery available

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- Sun 5/31 New Sunday School series begins (9:30 a.m.)
 - Sun 5/31 Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (10:30 a.m.)
 - Mon 6/1,15 Ladies Bible Study (6:00 p.m., Chilton home)
 - Wed 6/3 Book Group for Women (9:30 a.m., Brown home)
 - Wed 6/3 "First Wednesday" Social Dinner - see pg. 2
 - Sun 6/7 Guest Minister Rev. Soren Kornegay, RUF/SCAD (AM & PM)
 - Mon 6/8-6/12 43rd PCA General Assembly (Chattanooga)
 - Sun 6/21 "Father's Day" *CareNet Change for Life ends*
 - Sun 6/28 Guest Minister Mr. Ed Forester, IPC (AM & PM Worship)

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America's religious landscape

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What the mainstream media are not emphasizing (probably because good news makes bad headlines) is that according to Pew, Evangelical Christianity grew in America, from 59.8 million in 2007 to 62.2 million in 2014. What has changed over the past few years is that cultural Christianity, which held a façade of devotion to Christ but did not submit to Him as Lord, has gone into a noticeable decline.

Over the past few years the shift in our cultural attitudes and preferences has meant that a Christian profession has come at an increasing cost, and those who took the name “Christian” because it was the socially acceptable thing to do are now doing the current socially acceptable thing and jettisoning their allegiance to the Church.

Now, we must understand that this cultural shift is going to come at a cost to the Church. As nominal Christianity declines, the voice of the Church in the culture will necessarily have a reduced weight, and already we are beginning to see a rise in open opposition to Biblical Christianity that is, perhaps, unprecedented in this country.

But what I want you to see is that this is not necessarily a bad thing. Certainly it will make your life more uncomfortable, but Jesus never promised that life as His disciple was a comfortable calling. In fact, He promised just the opposite, telling us that to follow Him will incur the anger of the world in which we live (John 15). However, our discomfort will open the way for a greater witness to the world in which we live as it becomes more and more evident that we follow Christ— not because it is “the thing to do” or because it gives some kind of social advantage, but because we have beheld Him in His Redemptive Glory and we have reckoned that He is worth losing everything for.

The decline of nominal Christianity in America will lead to a greater opportunity for the Church to stand out and declare that we live by another standard, that we are citizens of a different Kingdom and we submit to the rule of a different King. As the muddy waters of cultural Christianity dissipate it will make the Gospel distinctive all the more clear, giving us greater opportunities to witness to the worth of our Savior and awakening people to their true spiritual state.

OVER the course of the 20th century it has been dangerously easy to call yourself a Christian in America. It is a profession that came at little cost, and in many situations came with considerable advantage. Church became “the thing to do” – being a respectable and advantageous place to be seen. Church Membership became for many just another part of the American Dream – a family of four with a house in the suburbs, two cars in the driveway, a membership at a local church. It was a safe place to let kids socialize and instill in them good morals, and it was a useful place for making connections within the community.

However, it was easy to fit into this pattern of social Christianity without actually submitting to the Crown-Rights of Christ. It was easy to declare that Christ was your Savior without actually submitting to Him as your Lord. It was easy to have a very self-centered approach to Christianity – what one observer has called a “therapeutic, moralistic, deism” - seeking the benefits of Church Membership without actually yielding dominion of your life to the Lord.

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“First Wednesday” Social Dinner

**Wednesday, June 3rd
6:30 p.m.**

All are invited to a potluck dinner on June 3rd at Cottage 117, 240 West 25th St., Sea Island. Grandy's Chicken will be provided; please sign up in the foyer to bring a side or dessert (and include names of all those planning to attend). *Questions? Contact Bill or Nancy Wood.*

Finance

Loan Update

Loan Balance 4/27/15 \$727,529

May Payment:

Interest	\$ 3,070
Principal	\$ 2,878
Total Payment	\$ 5,948

Significant Sessional Actions

- approved moving Communion from June 7th to May 31st
- approved Clay Huddleston as new Session Clerk
- approved changes to the Shepherding Groups/Call List

Rev. Brown is scheduled to attend the 43rd PCA General Assembly in Chattanooga, TN, June 8-12. Pray for wisdom and unity among the church leaders as they meet to discuss, debate, and vote on issues of vital importance to the PCA.

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It was a deadly pattern, as many were fooled into believing that their nominal Christianity had salvific power. In such a situation it was easy for the sheep to be confused with the goats, and the wheat to be confused with the tares. And over time, it compromised the integrity of the Church. It was the pervasiveness of this understanding of Christianity that let in increasingly liberal theology, as the "distasteful" parts of following Christ were replaced with more acceptable interpretations, and socially offensive positions were replaced by those more acceptable to the culture.

It was the case with the introduction of women elders and clergy. It was the case with the Church essentially baptizing the cultural view of marriage and divorce. It was the case with the move away from Expository Preaching, which simply sought to explain and apply the Word of God, to shorter devotional or motivational homilies designed to leave the worshiper with a good feeling.

But, as the Pew Study revealed, this façade of religion has no longevity. As D. A. Carson commented, "a church is never more than three generations from losing the Gospel: one generation to believe it and proclaim it, a second generation to assume it, and a third generation to lose it."

For some who discern the changing of the culture, the commitment to Christ is easily jettisoned, for others who maintain the façade, their children see and eventually declare that there is no substance to this faith of their parents, and the churches decline.

So, what this means for us is that our fundamental act when we think about church growth and evangelism has to be prayer. Programs, events, and advertising will gain less and less traction as Christianity becomes less and less attractive to the culture, and so God, in His grace, is making us increasingly powerless and therefore dependent upon Him.

If we want to see the Gospel impact a culture for which it holds no worldly advantage, we must pray that the Spirit would show people their deep need of a Savior and the wonder of Christ as that Savior and grant them the gift of faith that they might lay hold of Him and join us in worship.

May we be diligent in praying that God would move, and the surpassing worth of Jesus would be made evident in these days of cultural shift. ☞



Women in the Church

The Monday Evening Bible Study will continue into the summer, meeting at 6:00 p.m. on the first and third Mondays of each month at the Chilton home, 106 Arthur J. Moore Drive. The current topic of study is *Praying the Names of Jesus*.

Look for the Wednesday Morning Bible Study to resume in the Fall.

The monthly Book Group for Women will be discussing *Maisie Dobbs*, by Jacqueline Winspear, at their next meeting on Wednesday morning, June 3rd; 9:30 a.m. at the Brown home, 614 Dellwood Ave.

Care Net's

Change-for-Life Campaign

Please return your coin-filled baby bottles to GIPC on *Father's Day*, June 21st. All proceeds benefit the CareNet Centers of Coastal Georgia.

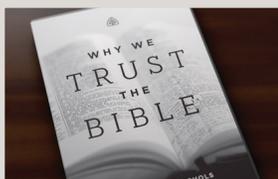


Thank you for supporting this life-saving ministry!

Care Net Pregnancy Center is a Christ-centered ministry dedicated to advancing the Sanctity of Human Life and sexual purity.

For more information or to find other ways to assist, visit:

coastalcarenet.org/volunteer



Adult Sunday School

9:30 a.m.

God's revelation: where would we be without it?

In this helpful six-week series produced by Ligonier Ministries, Dr. Stephen Nichols covers topics such as *The Authority of Scripture* (Inspiration and Inerrancy); *The Development of the Canon* (Why Sixty-Six Books?); *The Clarity of Scripture* (Why So Many Interpretations?); and *The Sufficiency of Scripture* (Scripture for Life). Christians will be equipped to know why they can trust Scripture in an age that continually issues attacks against it.

JUNE

"Blessed is the one who reads...and blessed are those who hear." (Revelation 1:3)

Family Worship

Old Testament Reading

Date	Book	Chapter	✓
1	<i>Deuteronomy</i>	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
2		6	<input type="checkbox"/>
3		7	<input type="checkbox"/>
4		8	<input type="checkbox"/>
5		9	<input type="checkbox"/>
6		10	<input type="checkbox"/>
7		11	<input type="checkbox"/>
8		12	<input type="checkbox"/>
9		13,14	<input type="checkbox"/>
10		15	<input type="checkbox"/>
11		16	<input type="checkbox"/>
12		17	<input type="checkbox"/>
13		18	<input type="checkbox"/>
14		19	<input type="checkbox"/>
15		20	<input type="checkbox"/>
16		21	<input type="checkbox"/>
17		22	<input type="checkbox"/>
18		23	<input type="checkbox"/>
19		24	<input type="checkbox"/>
20		25	<input type="checkbox"/>
21		26	<input type="checkbox"/>
22		27-28:19	<input type="checkbox"/>
23		28:20-68	<input type="checkbox"/>
24		29	<input type="checkbox"/>
25		30	<input type="checkbox"/>
26		31	<input type="checkbox"/>
27		32	<input type="checkbox"/>
28		33,34	<input type="checkbox"/>
29	<i>Joshua</i>	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
30		2	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Family Worship

Psalms Reading

Date	Book	Chapter	✓
1	<i>Psalms</i>	88	<input type="checkbox"/>
2		89	<input type="checkbox"/>
3		90	<input type="checkbox"/>
4		91	<input type="checkbox"/>
5		92,93	<input type="checkbox"/>
6		94	<input type="checkbox"/>
7		95,96	<input type="checkbox"/>
8		97,98	<input type="checkbox"/>
9		99-101	<input type="checkbox"/>
10		102	<input type="checkbox"/>
11		103	<input type="checkbox"/>
12		104	<input type="checkbox"/>
13		105	<input type="checkbox"/>
14		106	<input type="checkbox"/>
15		107	<input type="checkbox"/>
16		108,109	<input type="checkbox"/>
17		110,111	<input type="checkbox"/>
18		112,113	<input type="checkbox"/>
19		114,115	<input type="checkbox"/>
20		116	<input type="checkbox"/>
21		117,118	<input type="checkbox"/>
22		119:1-24	<input type="checkbox"/>
23		v. 25-48	<input type="checkbox"/>
24		v. 49-72	<input type="checkbox"/>
25		v. 73-96	<input type="checkbox"/>
26		v. 97-120	<input type="checkbox"/>
27		v. 121-144	<input type="checkbox"/>
28		v. 145-176	<input type="checkbox"/>
29		120-122	<input type="checkbox"/>
30		123-125	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Private

Old Testament Reading

Date	Book	Chapter	✓
1	<i>Isaiah</i>	33	<input type="checkbox"/>
2		34	<input type="checkbox"/>
3		35	<input type="checkbox"/>
4		36	<input type="checkbox"/>
5		37	<input type="checkbox"/>
6		38	<input type="checkbox"/>
7		39	<input type="checkbox"/>
8		40	<input type="checkbox"/>
9		41	<input type="checkbox"/>
10		42	<input type="checkbox"/>
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15		47	<input type="checkbox"/>
16		48	<input type="checkbox"/>
17		49	<input type="checkbox"/>
18		50	<input type="checkbox"/>
19		51	<input type="checkbox"/>
20		52	<input type="checkbox"/>
21		53	<input type="checkbox"/>
22		54	<input type="checkbox"/>
23		55	<input type="checkbox"/>
24		56	<input type="checkbox"/>
25		57	<input type="checkbox"/>
26		58	<input type="checkbox"/>
27		59	<input type="checkbox"/>
28		60	<input type="checkbox"/>
29		61	<input type="checkbox"/>
30		62	<input type="checkbox"/>

JUNE

"Blessed is the one who reads...and blessed are those who hear." (Revelation 1:3)

Private

New Testament Reading

Date	Book	Chapter	✓
1	<i>Revelation</i>	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
2		4	<input type="checkbox"/>
3		5	<input type="checkbox"/>
4		6	<input type="checkbox"/>
5		7	<input type="checkbox"/>
6		8	<input type="checkbox"/>
7		9	<input type="checkbox"/>
8		10	<input type="checkbox"/>
9		11	<input type="checkbox"/>
10		12	<input type="checkbox"/>
11		13	<input type="checkbox"/>
12		14	<input type="checkbox"/>
13		15	<input type="checkbox"/>
14		16	<input type="checkbox"/>
15		17	<input type="checkbox"/>
16		18	<input type="checkbox"/>
17		19	<input type="checkbox"/>
18		20	<input type="checkbox"/>
19		21	<input type="checkbox"/>
20		22	<input type="checkbox"/>
21	<i>Matthew</i>	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
22		2	<input type="checkbox"/>
23		3	<input type="checkbox"/>
24		4	<input type="checkbox"/>
25		5	<input type="checkbox"/>
26		6	<input type="checkbox"/>
27		7	<input type="checkbox"/>
28		8	<input type="checkbox"/>
29		9	<input type="checkbox"/>
30		10	<input type="checkbox"/>

Week beginning MAY 31

Matthew 6:1-2

Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

Week beginning JUNE 7

Matthew 6:3-4

But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Week beginning JUNE 14

Matthew 6:5

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

Week beginning JUNE 21

Matthew 6:6

But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Week beginning JUNE 28

Matthew 6:7-8

And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.