

Reaching Secular America by Doug Hamilton

Part 1

In Thee We Shrug by David.Knowles@thedaily.com (October 9th, 2012)

Americans are fast souring on organized religion, with a record 20 percent now saying they are not followers of any specific denomination. The findings of a new survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life show that the number of U.S. citizens who self-identify as not being affiliated with a specific religion has jumped by 15 percent over the past five years alone.

Known colloquially as the “nones,” the segment of the population that says it has no use for organized religion shows no signs of abating. One-third of adults younger than 30 now say they have no religious affiliation, this year’s annual survey found. The “nones” — which encompass atheists, those who describe themselves as “spiritual” but not “religious,” and those who do believe in God but don’t see themselves as part of an organized religion — have steadily grown since 1990, when just 6 percent of the population was identified as such. “Their ranks now include more than 13 million self-described atheists and agnostics, as well as nearly 33 million people who say they have no particular religious affiliation,” the report states.

The reasons that so many people seem to be turning away from organized religion over the past few decades are varied, the survey found. Josh Green, a specialist in religion and politics at the University of Akron who advised Pew, said that societal attitudes have changed about the need to be associated with a given church. “Part of what’s going on here is that the stigma associated with not being part of any religious community has declined,” Green told the Associated Press. “In some parts of the country, there is still a stigma. But overall, it's not the way it used to be.”

A majority of the “nones” who were interviewed, however, also cited a negative opinion of organized religion. “The unaffiliated say they are not looking for a religion that would be right for them,” the study states. “Overwhelmingly, they think that religious organizations are too concerned with money and power, too focused on rules and too involved in politics.”

Such negative views pose a serious problem for religious institutions like the Catholic Church, “... But Catholicism isn’t the only religion hemorrhaging adherents. The Pew survey found that the percentage of Protestants in the U.S. had fallen to a low of 48 percent, the first time the number has ever been recorded below 50 percent.”

Across denominations, the survey found a growing number of people who had been a part of a specific religious institution, but had decided to sever ties with it. “In 2012, just 50 percent of those who say they seldom or never attend religious services still retain a religious affiliation — a 10-point drop in five years,” the study stated. “These trends suggest that the ranks of the unaffiliated are swelling in surveys partly because Americans who rarely go to services are more willing than in the past to drop their religious attachments altogether.”

While Pew found that the United States “remains a highly religious country” in comparison to most Western European countries, the study also concluded that the nation is undergoing a “gradual decline in religious commitment.”...“Two-thirds of Americans, including 64 percent of the religiously unaffiliated, say religion as a whole is losing its influence on American life,” the report stated. “A large majority of those who think religion’s influence is on the decline see this

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as a bad thing. ... [But] atheists and agnostics overwhelmingly view religion's declining influence as a good thing for society.

Other Reasons:

There are many reasons that the article could have listed for this freefall from organized religion. Much of it has to do with the constant assault of the liberal media in their portrayal of Christians in a negative way. Some of it has to do with the secular leaders in our country that have sought to indoctrinate our children from the time they enter the public schools. Still others might blame the Internet and other mass media that brings secularism to society's doorstep. These for the most part are really not the things we have much control over.

The causes I would like to focus on are within our power. Since judgment begins at the household of the God (1 Pet 4:17), we must also begin with us as a religious people.

What have we done that have assisted in reaching this point?

1. Putting Brand Name Ahead of Christ's Name

When someone becomes a Christian, they are added to the body of Christ by Christ. We are not joining a church family when we become a Christian, but a Savior. He cleans us up so that we can come in among the people of God.

Jesus adds Christians to His organization referred to as the church.

- Acts 2:47 And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

The church is not to be a denomination, but a group of people that are bound by Christ.

- Ephesians 1:22-23 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

The church is not a corporation, but a kingdom headed by Christ.

- Colossians 1:18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

The Bible knows nothing about being promoters of denominationalism. Too many times we are trying to convert people to the church instead of Christ and the result is spiritual chaos. Yes, there are many teachings that are extremely important to the believer such as the gospel, walking in the faith and loving one another, for these are all pointed out in scripture. One might even stand strong on the relevant absolutes of Ephesians 4:4-6. The Christian cannot believe whatever he or she would like. On the other hand, when someone from the world is hurting for a more meaningful personal relationship with God, don't try converting them to the church, but Christ. The church is filled with dysfunctional human beings saved by the blood of Christ. Convert them to CHRIST! Don't be guilty of putting Brand Name ahead of Christ's Name.

2. Putting Tradition Ahead of Applicability

The apostle Paul warns the church at Colossae *"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ" (Col 2:8).*

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- The Colossians were allowing traditions from the world to creep into the church family, such as delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels (2:18). These were not the teachings of Christ, but of men, for they served no purpose to the workings of God. They were teaching and carrying out that which carried no applicability in their lives.
- Many times the religious world promotes practices which serve no meaning or purpose to the outside. There simply is no Christian applicability for them. These are bad traditions and serve no purpose for those who already view organized religion with disdain.
- From praying to dead saints, candle lighting, fish-Fridays, bead-counting and hundreds of other practices, Christianity is often seen as going through the motions. This often goes into direct opposition to what God wants in the believer's heart.
 - Mark 7:8-9 “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men. ⁹ He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.”
 - Mark 7:13 "...*thus* invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.”

If we are going to promote Christianity in such shallow terms, then we must not be surprised to find people fleeing anything to do with religion. They are searching for a faith with which can play a meaningful part in their lives.

3. Putting Hypocrisy Ahead of Practice

There is a term that is used for people who do not practice what they preach. They are called hypocrites. Jesus used this term many times to describe the religious leaders of His day in Matthew 23.

verse 13 A hypocrite can tell you the way to get to heaven, but does not make it himself in the end.

verse 14 A hypocrite will pray for the widows while they foreclose on their homes.

verse 15 A hypocrite proselytizes, but makes converts for hell.

verse 23 A hypocrite can give great amounts to charity and yet neglects justice, mercy and faithfulness in his actions toward others.

verses 25-28 A hypocrite looks good on the outside, but is filled with evil on the inside.

verse 29 A hypocrite demonstrates his honor and respect for the slain prophets, but attacks Jesus, the One whom sent the prophets.

In this chapter Jesus wanted to paint a true picture of these evil leaders. He was allowing everyone to see the real leaders behind the fancy garments and public displays. They say one thing and do another. Their public life does not often line up with their private life. Jesus expects us to walk with Him.

- James 1:22 says "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."
- Matthew 7:26-27 “Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ “The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

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The sad part is that many in the secular world know that a true disciple of Christ will live a moral life. Nobody likes a hypocrite, not the people of God or the secular people in the world. Because of this they end up not wanting to be associated with such.

"The moral fruits of theism are meager at best: theists do not seem to live more moral lives than atheists. Neither church history nor Draper's personal experience support the claim that theists are morally superior to atheists. On the assumption that theism is true, one has reason to believe that theistic belief has significant moral fruits, that worshipping God is a source of moral strength. Thus, on the assumption of theism, the fact that theists do not seem to live more moral lives than atheists is surprising." [a blog quoting Paul Draper in his debate with William Lane Craig](#)

4. Putting Subjectivity Ahead of Objectivity

God expects His people to be logical and reasoned, not emotional and feelings-based.

- Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord...
- Isaiah 41:1 "Present your case," the Lord says. "Bring forward your strong arguments,"
- Acts 17:2-3 And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."

Our Father has never wanted us to feel good before we fact good. Somewhere along the way we have failed to teach this concept to the followers of Christ. We have defined the faith as something that cannot appeal to the logical man and adopted the perspective of a feelings-based faith. We have allowed the subjectivity of society to define the church and the relativistic to trickle into absolutes.

- In an October 2000 Gallup Poll it was determined that, out of those polled, only 37% of church members read the Bible on a daily or weekly basis.
- "Nationally there are at least 170 million Christians who have read -- at best -- only part of the Bible. A poll by Barna Research indicates that 72% of these people want to try to read the entire Bible sometime during their lifetime."
- Statistical research shows that less than 10% of professing Christians have ever read the entire Bible. The church as a whole is Biblically illiterate! -Bill Keller Ministries 2007
- William Proctor, editor of the Light Speed Bible, claims that his informal research finds that around 10% have read the Bible from cover to cover..
- In the words of one blogger:
"I do not think it is possible that a person could actually believe the Bible was written by God and yet not have read the entire thing - every single word of it. A document that was written by the "creator of the universe" for them to read, and that they have readily available to them, and they haven't bothered to read all of it? I don't buy that. Because they have chosen not to read the whole Bible I do not believe they are truthful in their claim that they actually believe the Bible originated from God."
[-Blog by Leopardman "Bible believing Christians that haven't read the Bible? 02/06/2011](#)

How can the people who are "Christians" represent the Bible as being the word of God, yet not having ever read the entire book for themselves? There would be nothing to reason, hence they

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must base it on feelings rather than fact. That places us in the same subjective world of the secularists. We tell them the Bible is the "Word of God" and the "Book of Life". When we are not regularly reading the whole word of God, then we lose the right to persuade others to do the same.

Conclusion:

There are many reasons that the world tends to move secular, but it is for the reasons that we do have control over that we must be most concerned about. It is already difficult enough to reach out to the world with the gospel of Christ. We must make sure we are not erring in these four areas of our own life.