

MOST PEOPLE IN THE VISIBLE CHURCH ARE NOT CHRISTIANS

IF YOU LOOK AT THE RAW NUMBERS, it looks like Christianity has done an amazing job of conquering the world. After all, according to Wikipedia there are about 2 billion Christians in the world today – more than any other religion. By that estimate about a third of the world is saved. That's really pretty impressive – but it's also pretty misleading.

If you break that number down you will find that of the 33% of the world that is supposedly Christian, 19% is Catholic, 8% is Protestant, 5% is Orthodox, and 1% is Anglican ($19 + 8 + 5 + 1 = 33$). After reading the previous chapter of this book it should be obvious that the Catholic Church is *not* a Christian church. Since the Orthodox Church believes many of the same heresies as the Catholic Church, that removes them as well – and let's not forget that Anglicans aren't that far from Catholics either.

So what about the 8% that are supposed to be Protestants? Well, remember, that includes all denominations that fall under the Protestant banner – no matter how liberal or heretical. A few years ago George Barna did some polling of these so-called Protestants. This is what he found out:

For a long time many of us have followed the work of George Barna, the Christian researcher who knew that there was something wrong

when most Americans identified themselves as “Christian”. Common sense tells us something is wrong with that kind of response because if the majority were truly “Christian” then how could we be experiencing so many moral and spiritual problems today? Why wouldn’t every law passed in America conform to scriptural standards? How could America not obviously be anything other than “Christian” if such a majority claimed to be so? Why would we ban prayer in school, the Ten Commandments from courtrooms, or promote Islamic practices in our schools? Barna realized that he had to narrow the requirements in order to uncover the truth.

He chose to determine who exactly was an “Evangelical” rather than simply a “Christian” because Evangelicals were supposed to be closer to the definition of someone who practiced what they preached rather than merely being a cultural Christian in name only or someone who just “goes to church”. Barna developed a set of criteria he calls “the 9-point evangelical”. Such people are defined according to the following rules:

1. They say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today.
2. They believe when they die they will go to Heaven because they have confessed their sins and accepted Christ as Savior.
3. They say their faith is very important in their

life today.

4. They believe they have a personal responsibility to share their beliefs with non-Christians.

5. They believe Satan exists.

6. They believe eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works.

7. They believe Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth.

8. They assert that the Bible is accurate in all it teaches.

9. They describe God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today.

In other words, if you ask everyone in a given room if they consider themselves to be a “Christian”, practically all the hands will instinctively go up. If you then ask, “How many of you are ‘Evangelical’ Christians?” the majority drop their arms and only 38% of hands are still in the air. But if you ask everyone to keep their hand in the air to affirm they believe in each of the above nine points as they are read one by one, the end result will be that only about 8% of the room will still be holding up a hand to affirm all nine of the basic criteria. (D E Isom)

Notice that Barna didn't ask any really strange or difficult

questions – he just stuck to very basic matters. Even then, hardly anyone qualified! By even these incredibly lax standards, *hardly anyone admitted to being a Christian*. These supposed Christians didn't even believe in the very basics of the faith!

Of the 8% of the world that is supposedly Protestant, I would be astonished if even a tenth of those people were actually Christians. I strongly suspect that significantly less than 1% of the world's population is actually a genuine Christian. This means that the *vast majority of people who claim to be Christians are not actually Christians at all*.

If you doubt me, ask yourself this question: can you actually tell the difference between the average church member and the average unsaved person? According to polling, the answer is a resounding *no*:

“We live in an age when it is statistically impossible to distinguish the difference between someone who goes to church from someone who does not. . . Pick any moral issue which is supposed to differentiate the saved from the unsaved and, in America at least, there is no statistical difference. They both have the same divorce rate, the same attitudes toward sex and relationships, the same opinions on homosexuality, and in spite of their public stance to the contrary, the same percentage of abortions. In the face of these facts, do you really believe that everyone at church today is a member of the “faithful remnant”? Do you believe that even half of the average congregation qualifies?” (D. E. Isom)

People have this grand idea that if Jesus were to suddenly come back today, the world would be practically depopulated as billions of people suddenly disappeared. I think that the truth is

very different from what most people think:

“There is a YouTube video which depicts what is probably the most mainstream concept of how the Rapture is envisioned to work. It shows a Sunday morning church service where the pastor is preaching about the Rapture to a congregation of a couple hundred when the dramatic sound of thunder takes all but a handful “in the twinkling of an eye”. (1 Co. 15:52) The miserable few who are left behind are dazed and shocked in a now almost empty church as more than 95% of the congregation were instantly translated in the Rapture. At the risk of filling up my email beyond its theoretical capacity, I am going to ask you to consider whether it is really going to happen like that. Do you think everyone currently attending church is going to be snatched up as portrayed in the video? I think it is opposite of that. If I were making the video, 190 people would be sitting there wondering what happened to the 10 or so whose disappearance was so unobtrusive to that Sunday morning service that they begin with a search to see if they are in the bathroom or parking lot.” (D. E. Isom)

Jesus Himself warned that when He returns, there will be *many* who will be astonished to discover that they were not actually Christians at all:

Matthew 7:21: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Just because many people call themselves Christians doesn't mean that they actually *are* Christians. There are a great many people who have deceived themselves, and who will one day discover to their eternal horror that they weren't actually saved at all.

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GENUINE CHRISTIAN?

We don't have to spend our lives wondering if we are truly saved or not. The Bible has actually given us a way to know for sure if our faith is genuine. One of the reasons I John was written was to help people know if they are actually saved:

I John 5:13: "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."

That book of the Bible establishes some objective criteria that we can use to determine if our faith in Jesus is actually real. According to I John, people whose faith in Christ is genuine have certain characteristics. For example:

1. They Admit That They Are Sinners

In fact, we cannot become saved *at all* if we don't admit to God that we are a sinner and ask Him for forgiveness:

I John 1:8: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

I can say unconditionally that if you have never admitted to God that you are a sinner and have never asked Him to forgive your sins, then you are not a Christian. *Period.* There is no such thing as a saving faith that says “I have no sins; I am perfect and need no forgiveness.” In order to be saved you *must* repent and ask God to forgive your sins.

2. They Submit To The Lordship Of Christ

This means that those with genuine faith acknowledge that Jesus has authority over them and that they must do as He says. Genuine believers seek to obey God and follow His commands, instead of simply doing as they please. This does not mean that they obey perfectly, for even the strongest Christians still struggle with sin. But it *does* mean that we have submitted ourselves to Christ's authority:

I John 2:3: “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his

commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him."

In other words, *you cannot be saved if you have rejected the authority of Christ*. All of those who look at Jesus and say "Don't you dare tell me what to do!" are not saved. There is no such thing as salvation that rejects Jesus as Lord.

As Christians we may do a terrible job of following Jesus and we may often find ourselves struggling with sin, but the one thing that true believers do *not* do is tell Jesus "You have no right to tell me what to do. I am in charge and you are not."

3. They Have A Love For Other Believers

This means that people with genuine faith have a heartfelt love for other Christians and try to help them. Now, this doesn't mean that all Christians are easy to get along with or that there won't be arguments or disputes. However, it *does* mean that those with real faith *do not* categorically hate other believers *simply because they are Christians*:

I John 2:9: "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

10 He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

11 But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes."

I John 3:15: “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.”

I John 3:17: “But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”

If you find yourself hating other Christians *because* they are Christians then you are not saved. If you hate or mock people because they demonstrate goodness, or because they love God, or because they lead a righteous life, or because they are godly, then you are not saved. Despising goodness and hating people for their faith is a very strong sign that you have never known God at all. Genuine faith will give you a love for godliness and a love for other Christians. This doesn't mean that you are always going to have warm fuzzy feelings whenever you're around other Christians, but it does mean that you will seek their welfare and do what you can for them.

Now, some might argue that when John used the phrase “brother” he was actually talking about all of mankind and not just other believers. I do not believe this is the case. John was actually very specific about what he meant:

I John 3:14: “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.”

Notice how John specifically refers to *the brethren*, and then equates “the brethren” to “his brother” in the very next sentence. Now, should Christians love other people? Of course – Jesus said that the second greatest commandment was to love

your neighbor as yourself, and He was definitely referring to all of mankind. But here, in this passage John is *not* referring to all of mankind. What he is saying is that genuine Christians love *each other*.

What makes this sad is that all too often those who call themselves by the name of Christ show contempt for their fellow Christians. John says that anyone who hates his fellow Christians “is in darkness even until now”, and later on he goes further to say that those who are full of such hate *have never known God at all*.

4. They Believe That Jesus Is The Messiah

This may seem obvious, but it still must be said: if you do not believe in Jesus then you are not saved. If you deny that Jesus is fully God then you are not saved. If you deny that Jesus is fully man then you are not saved. If you deny that Jesus was crucified and then rose bodily from the dead you are not saved. In other words, in order to be saved it isn't enough to believe in *a* Jesus. You must believe in the *Biblical* Jesus:

I John 2:22: “Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

23 Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.”

I John 3:23: “And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.”

1 John 4:1: “Beloved, believe not every spirit,

but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”

I John 4:15: “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.”

There are many different ways to deny what the Bible has to say about Jesus. Many cults talk about a person whom they call “Jesus” but who is actually *radically* different from the Biblical Jesus. For example, Mormonism teaches that Jesus was once a man who rose to prominence and became God. That is *not* the real Jesus because they deny that Jesus eternally existed as God and they deny Jesus' role in the Trinity. Therefore, since they deny the Biblical Jesus, I John 2:23 states that they are lost. If you deny the Son then you deny the Father as well, and that means you are not saved. It is not any more complicated than that. As John said:

I John 5:12: “He that hath the Son hath life: and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”

5. They Lead A Righteous Life

This is a very difficult point that will need some

explanation. First, however, here are the verses:

1 John 3:6: “Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

I know this may seem counter-intuitive, but this passage does *not* teach that Christians never sin. It is *not* saying that if you sin then that means you're not a Christian. The reason I know this is because later in the book John tells us that if we see a fellow Christian caught up in sin we should pray for him so that he can be rescued from that sin. John obviously believes that someone with genuine faith can sin.

So what does John mean? Well, it's worth noting that John is talking about a *particular* sin. In verse 10 John specifically talks about people who do not love each other. Later in the chapter we see that theme repeated:

1 John 3:22: “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are

pleasing in his sight.

23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.”

This is the same language that we saw earlier, but here John explains precisely what he means: genuine Christians are people who “believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ” and “love one another.” *Those are the commandments that John is talking about.* Someone with real faith will believe in Jesus and will love those around them – which, in turn, constitutes a righteous life.

What did Jesus say the two greatest commandments were? To love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. A person with true faith will do that, and a person whose faith is counterfeit will not. Those who do not love God and do not love those around them are not righteous, have not known God, and (as John plainly says) are “of the devil.”

So, then, a genuine believer leads a righteous life, and that righteous life consists of *believing on Jesus, loving God, and loving others*. People who do not do this are not saved. If you hate God or if you hate other people, then you should seriously stop and consider whether you are actually saved.

6. They Seek The Things Of God, Not The Things Of The World

John made this very clear:

I John 2:15: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

Christ told us that no man can serve two masters; we will either serve God or we will serve something else. These verses echo that point and reemphasize the fact that we *cannot* love the things of this world and the things of God at the same time – we will either love one or the other. The reason for this is because the things that this world has to offer (such as pride, lust, ambition, fame, riches, power, etc.) are not godly things but are carnal things. If we spend our lives trying to obtain these things then we are serving ourselves, not God.

People with genuine faith will lead lives that are dedicated to serving God. They will have little interest in “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” because their priorities are different. However, the lost don't have that passion for God, and because of that they will be caught up in all sorts of things. John is quite clear: those who lead self-centered lives do not have the love of God dwelling in them.

7. They Continue In The Faith

What I mean by this is that people who have genuine faith keep that faith all their lives. They don't abandon it when life gets hard, and they don't abandon Christianity for a different

religion. John puts it this way:

I John 2:19: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."

People whose faith only lasts for a time before it is discarded *never had genuine faith at all*. As John says, the fact that they drifted away is proof that they were never a Christian in the first place. Genuine, saving faith is something that sticks with you for life.

I urge you to examine yourself to see if you are in the faith. There are many people who think they are saved but who are actually lost. *Do not be one of those people*. Take the time now to examine yourself, before it is too late.

