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FOREWORD

One cannot fully understand what one is saved to unless one also understands what one is saved from. We are saved from the consequences of our sins, which is hell. Jesus said, “If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire” (Mark 9:43). It was with the knowledge of hell that Jesus graciously and lovingly called people to repent of their sins and to trust him as Lord and Savior. He thus began his public ministry proclaiming, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

It is an unfortunate commentary, but we are living in a day when the saving message of Jesus Christ is being lost in our churches. Replacing it is a new set of concerns that are quick to speak of God’s love, mercy, and grace, but are slow to take up the implications of His holiness, judgment, and wrath. Being disturbingly silent on the significant issues of sin and judgment to come, much contemporary evangelism is producing a bumper-crop of unregenerate believers.

The erosion of gospel values first came to my attention years ago as a young proclamation evangelist in Connecticut. I was shocked to discover the extent to which the “softer, gentler” vision of God, heralded by the early

nineteenth-century Universalist William Ellery Channing, continued to inoculate scores of New England churches to the Christ of the Bible.

Years later, I served Dr. Bill Bright as his theological editor, and was privileged to work with him for seven years. Dr. Bright was well aware of the dangers awaiting the unconverted. Toward the end of his life, his great trepidation for the lost led him to author two additional books: one on the Ten Commandments, and another on the vital subjects of heaven and hell. I was delighted that he was addressing such important topics. The hours I spent editing those two books further solidified in my heart the importance for people to be exposed to the genuine gospel of Jesus Christ.

About the same time, I discovered the evangelism of Ray Comfort. Upon watching his videos, which include Kirk Cameron, it became clear to me that Ray had his finger on the problem. He had made a monumental advance in reclaiming the evangel—all of which he had condensed in an exciting and easy-to-learn approach called “The Way of the Master.”

Once I became the pastor of a church, I couldn’t wait to implement Ray’s materials. So far, I have been privileged to lead our people in several training sessions of “The Way of the Master.” The results have been nothing short of remarkable. Not only have trainees developed a greater understanding of the gospel, and a love for the lost, but also we have exposed scores of people to the gospel with the result that many have become Christians. I am also encouraged that some of these new believers have joined our church and are now active participants.

Foreword

There are many ways to articulate the gospel. But before you begin chapter one of this book, let me ask you to set aside any preconceived thoughts you have about personal evangelism and judge everything you read according to the Scriptures. I believe that you will find here an approach that takes its cue from the very way Jesus of Nazareth called people to the family of God.

JOHN BARBER, PH.D.

PHENOMENAL GROWTH

We live in exciting times. All around us we are seeing the phenomenal rise of megachurches with congregations in the tens of thousands; pockets of revival have sprung up in the United States and other parts of the world; and we have heard of millions of people in Russia, China, and Africa coming to the Savior.

One evangelist, for example, claims that his world-wide tour has led nearly 1 million people to make decisions for Christ since 2007.¹ A denomination reported nearly 2.5 million decisions for Christ in 2008.² One international organization reported over 10 million decisions for Christ in 2009,³ and another ministry has seen an incredible “45 million documented salvations” world-wide in just six years.⁴

These are indeed exciting times.

Yet, with all the excitement about the growth of the contemporary Church, it seems that many have overlooked a few statistical inconsistencies. Before we look at these, I am reminded of a doctor who said to his patient, “I have some very bad news for you. Your heart is extremely weak, and any bad news could kill you.” So, how is your heart? I have some really bad news for you. As you hear it, please be consoled that there is a cure.

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An October 2003 survey conducted by the Barna Group found that 45 percent of those who profess to be born-again Christians believed that gambling was morally acceptable. According to the survey, 49 percent believed that “living with someone of the opposite sex without being married” was morally okay. Just under half of those questioned (49 percent) were comfortable with “enjoying sexual thoughts or fantasies about someone,” while one-third (33 percent) of those professing to be born again thought that it was okay to kill a baby while it is still in the womb.⁵

In 2001, a survey conducted by the Alan Guttmacher Institute in New York found that “13 percent of abortion patients describe themselves as born-again or evangelical Christians.”⁶ That is, of all those who actually murdered their own unborn children, nearly one in eight professed faith in Jesus Christ. That is difficult to reconcile with the fact that Christians are supposed to love God and love others as much as they love themselves.

Additionally, according to an article titled “Porn Nation” in *World Magazine*, of the men belonging to the Christian organization Promise Keepers (who make a promise to be “committed to practicing spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity”), 53 percent visit porn sites *every week*.⁷ This alarming finding is not confined to the pews. An Internet survey of 6,000 pastors conducted in 2002 found that 30 percent of *pastors* had viewed Internet porn in the last 30 days.⁸ This is despite the fact that these men are to be the spiritual leaders of their flocks and their families.

In 2009, the Barna Group found further evidence that all is not well in the contemporary Church:

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Among individuals who describe themselves as Christian, for instance, close to half believe that Satan does not exist, one-third contend that Jesus sinned while He was on earth, two-fifths say they do not have a responsibility to share the Christian faith with others, and one-quarter dismiss the idea that the Bible is accurate in all of the principles it teaches.⁹

Think for a moment of the implications of such a theology. Here we have millions of “believers” who supposedly confess that Jesus is Lord, and yet they think He sinned. They either don’t know what the Bible teaches about the Son of God or they believe it is inaccurate when it says that Jesus “knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21), that He was “in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15), and that He “committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth” (1 Peter 2:22). Furthermore, if Jesus sinned, it would mean that He was not the spotless Lamb of God the Scriptures say He was (see 1 Peter 1:19); that His sacrifice was not perfect; and that when God accepted Jesus’ death as an atonement for our sins, He sanctioned a “contaminated payment” and is therefore corrupt by nature. Sadly, the multitudes who profess faith in Jesus, yet deny His sinless perfection, appear to be strangers to true regeneration. The Jesus they believe in isn’t capable of saving anyone.

In addition, 41 percent of self-proclaimed Christians believe that “the Bible, the Koran and the Book of Mormon are all different expressions of the same spiritual truths”¹⁰—despite the books’ vastly contradictory teachings on truth, salvation, and the nature of God. And only 46 percent of born-again adults believe in the existence of absolute moral truth.¹¹ So that means the other 54 percent

don't think that God has moral absolutes, which perhaps explains why so many live their lives as though there is no moral accountability at all.

Pollster George Barna, in observing these troubling trends, noted, "Although most Americans consider themselves to be Christian and say they know the content of the Bible, less than one out of ten Americans demonstrate such knowledge through their actions."¹² With over 173 million Christians in the U.S.,¹³ there are tens of millions who say that they love God and yet they are liars, thieves, fornicators, adulterers, and child-murderers. Paul's warning to Titus seems to be true of much of the modern Church: "They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him" (Titus 1:16). Neither their beliefs nor their behavior aligns with biblical Christianity.

Leaving in Doves

Sadly, young people today are exhibiting the same theological confusion as the preceding generation. Despite 8 out of 10 teens describing themselves as Christian, 61 percent believe a place in Heaven can be *earned* through good works; 63 percent believe Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Jews, and all other people pray to the same God; and 58 percent believe all religious faiths teach equally valid truths.¹⁴

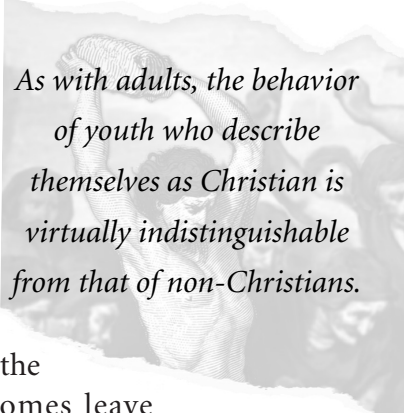
As with adults, the behavior of youth who describe themselves as Christian is virtually indistinguishable from that of non-Christians. An "Ethics of American Youth Survey" found that in the prior 12 months 74 percent of *Christian* teens cheated on a test, 93 percent lied to a parent, and 63 percent physically hurt someone when angered.¹⁵ The Barna Group also found that teens who

profess to be born again and attend church regularly were just as likely as secular teens to engage in Internet theft of music and to illegally copy CDs (77 percent to 81 percent, respectively).¹⁶

In a joint statement, youth specialists Josh McDowell and Ron Luce made a sobering announcement: “Incredible as it may seem, ‘accepting Christ’ and making a profession of faith makes little to no difference in a young person’s attitudes and behaviors. The majority of our churched young people are adopting ‘a Christianity’ but it is not true Christianity.” While this is a shocking admission, McDowell and Luce are not alone in their conclusion. Ninety-eight percent of youth ministers and pastors McDowell surveyed agree with that assessment.¹⁷

If that isn’t alarming enough, another trend is helping to further paint a bleak picture of the state of the American Church. In researching families in the U.S., the Southern Baptist Council on Family Life discovered a gut-wrenching statistic: “88 percent of the children raised in evangelical homes leave church at the age of 18, never to return.”¹⁸ This mass exodus is seen not just among Southern Baptist churches, but across denominational lines.¹⁹

In an interview on a popular national radio program, a Christian youth leader spoke with great concern about how young people were “leaving the church in droves.” He had taken a survey to find out why these teenagers were turning their backs on God, and he cited the number



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one reason as “a lack of opportunity in the church”—implying that the Church should get its act together and give young people more opportunities. Ask any pastor if there are opportunities to serve within his church, and he will no doubt tell you of the lack of people willing to teach Sunday school, visit the sick and the elderly, go out with the evangelism team, clean the church building, etc.

Perhaps there is another reason that young people are leaving the Church in droves. As these statistics show, there are many today who name the name of Christ, but who have failed to “depart from iniquity [lawlessness]” (2 Timothy 2:19). They are false converts who have “asked Jesus into their hearts,” yet they remain unconverted because they have never truly repented.

I cannot put into words the heartbreak of seeing so many spurious converts who have left the Church, and the multitudes of false converts who stay within the Church. Prolific author and pastor A. W. Tozer writes,

It is my opinion that tens of thousands of people, if not millions, have been brought into some kind of religious experience by accepting Christ, and they have not been saved.

Tozer is not alone in his conclusion. The late pastor D. James Kennedy, of Coral Ridge Ministries, made a similar observation:

The vast majority of people who are members of churches in America today are not Christians. I say that without the slightest fear of contradiction. I base it on empirical evidence of twenty-four years of examining thousands of people.

Many of us, if asked which U.S. denomination is most evangelistic, would point to the Southern Baptists. But in trying to determine why there is so much “evangelistic apathy” in their churches, Thom Rainer, president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, found that the cause could be their “many unregenerate members.” Rainer stated, “If our research approximates eternal realities, nearly one-half of all church members may not be Christians.”²⁰

How could this tragic situation have happened? How could vast numbers of people have been led to believe that they are Christians when they are not? If you have struggled to understand why a loved one who made a “decision for Christ” has no desire for the things of God, or why so many church members show little to no evidence for their faith, there is an explanation. And there is something you can do to change the situation.

The Parabolic Key

Though the idea of false conversions may be new to us, the problem of false converts has existed since the beginning of the Church and it is actually a topic Jesus spoke often about. For example, in Mark 4:3–8, Jesus taught the crowd the well-known parable of the sower:

“Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.

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But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.”

When Jesus told His disciples the parable of the sower, they did not understand what it meant. When they asked Him about it later, He said, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?” (Mark 4:13). In other words, if they could comprehend the parable of the sower, they would hold the key to unlocking the mysteries of all the other parables.

If there is one message that comes from the parable about the stony ground, the thorny ground, and the good ground, it is this: When the gospel is preached, there will be true and false conversions.

Judas Iscariot, for example, was a false convert. He was a hypocrite—a pretender—whose desire (it seems) for riches and power choked out his affection for Christ. In terms of the parable, we would say that he was a thorny-ground hearer, in whom “the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful” (Mark 4:19).

Judas had no idea who Jesus really was. When a woman anointed Jesus with an expensive ointment in an act of sacrificial worship, Judas complained that the ointment should have been sold and the money given to the poor (see John 12:3–6). In his estimation, Jesus of Nazareth wasn’t worth such extravagance—He was worth only about thirty pieces of silver. Moreover, the Bible tells us that Judas was lying when he said that he cared for the poor. He was actually a thief who so lacked a healthy fear of God that he was stealing money from the collection

bag (see John 12:6). Nevertheless, to all outward appearances, Judas was a follower and disciple of Christ.

If one grasps the principle that true and false converts will be alongside each other in the Church, then the other parables about the kingdom of God also make sense: the wheat and tares (Matthew 13:24–30), the good fish and the bad fish (Matthew 13:47–50), the wise virgins and the foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1–13), and the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31–46). Take, for example, the parable of the dragnet:

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”
(Matthew 13:47–50)

Notice that the good fish and the bad fish were in the net together. Notice also that unbelievers are not caught in the dragnet of the kingdom of Heaven; they remain in the world. The “fish” that are caught are those who hear and respond to the gospel—the evangelistic “catch.” They remain together, the true and the false, until the Day of Judgment.

In Matthew 7:21–23, possibly the most frightening passage in Scripture, Jesus spoke of *many* who would consider themselves Christians and yet not be saved. Jesus warned, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven... Many will say to Me in

that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”

Look at how seemingly spiritual people can be and still not make it to Heaven:

- They called Jesus “Lord.”
- They prophesied in His name.
- They cast out demons.
- They did many “wonders” in His name.

These people are more spiritual than most of us, and yet they will be rejected by the One they call “Lord.” False converts *do* have a measure of spirituality. Judas certainly did. He had apparently convinced the other disciples that he truly cared for the poor. And he seemed so trustworthy that he was the one who looked after the finances. When Jesus said, “One of you will betray Me,” the disciples didn’t point the finger at Judas; instead, they suspected themselves, saying, “Lord, is it I?” That’s why it’s not surprising that so few within the Church today would suspect that we are surrounded by those who fall into the “Judas” category.

I would like to caution you at this point: In case you think the problem of false converts affects only those “other churches,” let me say that statistics show otherwise. As we will see in a subsequent chapter, 80–90 percent of those making decisions for Christ—whether through large crusades or local church efforts—will fall away. We will explore numerous statistics later, but here is one example:

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In the March/April 1993 issue of *American Horizon*, a major U.S. denomination disclosed that in 1991, 11,500 churches had obtained 294,784 decisions for Christ. Unfortunately, they could find only 14,337 in fellowship. This means that, despite the usual intense follow-up, they could not account for approximately 280,000 (95 percent) of their “converts.”

For a more personal example, consider one individual’s account following a crusade:

Our church, which participated at every stage, received about 25 names for follow-up. These were mostly people in our area who did not identify with a church. We were instructed that many of these decisions might be fuzzy about what happened at the crusade and we should make sure they really understood the gospel. But, we had cold receptions and not even enough interest to even begin the recommended Bible study class for new believers. To my knowledge none of those twenty-five even visited our church after several contacts and pastoral visits.²¹

With the vast majority of “converts” falling away, could some of those whom you have led to the Lord be among the “many” who will hear Jesus say, “Depart from Me”? As much as any of us would be horrified to think we are creating “Judases,” it is likely that you too may be leading people into false conversions through your evangelism efforts. The Body of Christ is not as healthy as we might like to believe—and the problem is systemic. *Something* is radically wrong. Before we look at the remedy, however, we must consider the cause. For the sake of the lost, please keep reading.