



ACTS ONE EIGHT

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." ACTS 1:8

Excerpts from *The State of the Church 2002*

The Barna Research Group of Ventura, CA has published *The State of the Church 2002* based on research conducted from 1992 through 2002. It is available at www.Barna.org ... and is a convicting analysis of Christianity in the United States. The following quotations, condensations, statistics, and conclusions are gleaned from that study.

Church attendance has been stable or declining for a decade. Weekly attendance at Protestant churches decreased 12% from 1992 to 2001. Small group participation and personal prayer time has been stable since the mid-nineties.

Christians have maintained a high acknowledgement of the importance of personal evangelism ... and an equally high distaste for their involvement in the process. They want to see it done ... done by someone else. Almost one trillion dollars has been spent on domestic ministry in the past two decades ... with no measurable increase in the number of believers. Somehow, despite the billions of dollars spent on evangelism and Christian education, the message of the Gospel has failed to penetrate the minds and hearts of most Americans.

The number of evangelical born-again has declined significantly, while the number of non-evangelical born-again has drifted upward. This represents a significant downward shift in the overall adherence to the core beliefs of the church. Only 50% of those who say they are Christian say they are absolutely committed to the faith. More than 50% of non-evangelical born-again believe that Jesus sinned. A powerful illustration of the theological weakness of the born-again community is the finding that a majority does not believe that Satan is real. For more than a decade teens have been among the most spiritually interested ... but we have seen no significant increase in conversions. During the past quarter century, the teenage born-again figure is virtually unchanged. But the number of evangelical teens has declined from 10% in 1995 to just 4% today. Weekly attendance at church youth events jumped from 29% in 1990 to 37% in 2001 ... without an increase in conversions ... and with a significant decline in adherence to core beliefs.

Can you imagine really knowing Him and being merely lukewarm about being His disciple? That's exactly what we have in America. We have made it too easy to be part of the Church. Christianity has no cost in America. At what stage do we bite the bullet and acknowledge that God does not need a majority to accomplish His will, instead He seeks people who will surrender their own grand plans in order to live for Him? When do we get to the point at which we accept smaller numbers of intensely devoted people rather than feverishly investing in filling auditoriums and stadiums with massive numbers of "Christians" that Jesus has promised to spew from His mouth (Rev. 3:16)?

Churches are crying out for strong, visionary, godly leadership. For the Church to become strong again we must heed the guidance of the leaders God has called and gifted for that purpose.

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