

According to Barna Research, in “The New Sunday Morning”—

- ▶ 1 in 3 practicing Christians are still attending their pre-COVID church
- ▶ Another 34 percent are digitally church-hopping
- ▶ One-third (32%) are doing neither

Further analysis reveals that half of practicing Christian Millennials are not attending church; of the previous generations of Gen X and Boomers, the percentages are 35% and 26% respectively.

In reality, these statistics underscore what was already a substantial trend toward a “self-curated” practice of Christianity.

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

THE TRUE NATURE OF A DISCIPLE

TRUE GOSPEL, REAL DISCIPLES

UNDERSTANDING “DISCIPLESHIP”

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.”

MATTHEW 28.19-20 NLT

- ▶ “disciple” (*mathetes*): a follower; a pupil
- ▶ “make” (*matheteuo*): to follow as a disciple; to train in discipleship; to be trained and disciplined
- ▶ Note that the command of Jesus to “make” disciples has (1) a beginning (*baptizing in the name*), (2) a process (*teaching to obey*), and (3) a specific standard (*commands I have given*).

THE UNAPPEALING JESUS

“I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.”

LUKE 14.24

Why does Jesus make it so unappealing to follow him?

- ▶ *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.”*
- ▶ *“Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”*
- ▶ *“Those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciple.”*

(Luke 14.26, 27, 33)

MORE THAN JUST A DECISION

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

ACTS 2.38

- ▶ In his command to make disciples, Jesus established a beginning point for those who follow him: baptism.
- ▶ Baptism follows repentance—the recognition that my way is wrong, that I am a sinner, and that my choices lead to death. In repentance, I turn to accept and follow Jesus. Thus, baptism becomes my public testimony that I have rejected my life and way to embrace the life of Jesus and follow his way.

- ▶ Baptism represents a transforming spiritual work, a work that Jesus called being “born again” (also known as “regeneration”). When one is truly born again, he is brought into union with Christ, into a new life in him—

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. . . . The death [Christ] died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

MORE THAN JUST WHAT YOU KNOW

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.”

MATTHEW 28.19-20 NLT

- ▶ The person who is truly saved is born again—she has a new life, one in which she is spiritually alive, able to follow Jesus, and live the “Christ-life.” In other words, she has a new nature. That nature will be evidenced by the presence and working of the indwelling Spirit.

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

ROMANS 8.5

- ▶ The reality now is that we have two natures at work within us: our human nature that is inherently self-oriented and sinful; the other, the now-alive spiritual nature that gives us the desire to follow Christ, to obey him, and to live like him.

Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. . . . Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

WHY JESUS SPOKE AS HE DID

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

GALATIANS 5.24

Now we can better understand why Jesus spoke as he did—

- ▶ The sinful nature cannot please God.
- ▶ There is no middle ground of accommodation between our human sinful nature and the Spirit; they are utterly incompatible.
- ▶ The nature of Christ within a true disciple does not seek the affirmation of self, but rather, the death of self. Only through this work of the Spirit can one be a true disciple of Christ.