

PHENOMENAL GROWTH



We live in exciting times. All around us we are seeing signs of the end of the age. Nation is rising against nation. There are wars, earthquakes, famines, and violence. The Jews are back in Jerusalem. The city has become a “burdensome stone” to the nations. Jesus said that iniquity (lawlessness) would abound, and it certainly is. At the same time, we have seen the incredible phenomenon of the rise of megachurches with congregations in the tens of thousands. We have heard of *millions* coming to the Savior in Russia, China, and Africa. Pockets of revival have sprung up in the United States and different parts of the world. These *are* exciting times.

With all the excitement, it doesn’t seem that many have noticed a few statistical inconsistencies. In 1996, a survey conducted by the Alan Guttmacher Institute in New York found that “eighteen percent of abortion patients describe themselves as born-again or evangelical Christians” (*U.S. News & World Report*, August 19,

1996). That is, of those who murdered their own child, nearly one in five professed faith in Jesus Christ. That is a little difficult to reconcile with the fact that Christians are supposed to love God and to love others as much as they love themselves.

In 1994, the Barna Research Group found further evidence that all is not well in the contemporary Church. A survey revealed that one in four American adults who said they were born-again believe Jesus “sinned”

One in four American adults who said they were born-again think that Jesus “sinned” while He was on the earth.



while He was on the earth. 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. Therefore, they believe the Bible 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 guile found in His mouth” (1 Peter 2:22). This also means Jesus

wasn't the “spotless” Lamb of God the Scriptures say He was. His sacrifice wasn't perfect, and when God accepted His death as an atonement for our sins, He sanctioned a “contaminated payment” and is therefore corrupt by nature.

Sadly, these multitudes who profess faith in Jesus are perhaps strangers to true regeneration.

Some years ago, the Barna Research Group revealed that sixty-two percent of Americans claim to have “a re-

lationship with Jesus Christ that is meaningful to them.” Yet a Gallup Poll taken around the same time found that, of those Americans who say they have a relationship with the Savior, approximately ten percent were what Gallup called “a breed apart”:

They are more tolerant of people of diverse backgrounds. They are involved in charitable activities. They are involved in practical Christianity. They are absolutely committed to prayer.

That sounds like *normal* biblical Christianity. That means there is a great mass of people who say that Jesus Christ is meaningful to them, but who are not “a breed apart.” They are not involved in good works, nor are they tolerant of others. Neither are they involved in practical Christianity nor committed to prayer. That means there are millions of people in America who insinuate that they belong to Jesus Christ, but whose lives don’t match their claims. Another Gallup Poll found “very little difference in the behavior of the churching and unchurching on a wide range of items including lying, cheating, and stealing.”

We are told that ninety-one percent lie regularly at work or home, eighty-six percent lie regularly to parents, and seventy-five percent lie regularly to friends (*The Day America Told the Truth*). A massive ninety-two percent own a Bible, but only eleven percent read it daily. Surveys also show that ninety percent of Americans pray, but eighty-seven percent do not believe in all of the Ten Commandments. To top it off, according to the Roper Organization, sixty-one percent believe that “premarital sex is not morally wrong.”

When I find myself in a hotel, I usually channel-surf in an effort to find something wholesome. This often means crossing the polluted and shark-infested waters of MTV. If anything epitomizes this foul-mouthed, sexually perverted, depraved, blasphemous, and rebellious generation, it is MTV. An article in the December 1995 *Youth Leader* magazine stated:

More Christian teens watch MTV each week (forty-two percent) than non-Christians (thirty-three percent), according to a Barna Research Group survey of evangelical teens.

The article went on to quote Barna surveys showing that of these same teens, sixty-five percent said they prayed daily. An amazing seventy-two percent believed the Bible. However, over a three-month period, sixty-six percent confessed that they had lied to a parent or teacher, fifty-five percent had had sex, fifty-five percent had cheated on an exam, and twenty percent either got drunk or had used illegal drugs.

A Christian youth leader was interviewed recently on a popular national radio program. He spoke with great concern of the fact that young people were “leaving the Church in droves.” Then he cited the number-one reason they were turning their backs on God. He had taken a survey to find out why and discovered that it was a “lack of opportunity in the Church,” inferring that the Church should get its act together and give young people more opportunity.

Ask any pastor if there is “opportunity” to serve within his church and he will no doubt tell you of the lack of people to teach Sunday school, to visit the sick

and the elderly, to go out with the evangelism team, to clean the church building, etc.

The truth is, if someone's heart is still in the world (if he is a "Judas" at heart), he will find *any* excuse to go back there. If Judas had been given a survey form to fill out, no doubt he would have had many justifications for his betrayal of the Savior and his falling away:

- He was publicly humiliated by Jesus when he suggested giving funds to the poor.
- He felt a deep sense of rejection because he was not part of the "inner circle."
- He needed the money.
- The chief priests made him do it.
- The devil made him do it.
- The responsibility of looking after the finances became too much for him.
- He was abused as a child.
- He had a betrayal syndrome.
- He lacked a father figure.
- He didn't think his actions would have the grisly repercussions they had.

There are some who don't believe that Judas was even a Christian. There is a good reason for this: Jesus said of him, "One of you is a devil." That's not something one would be likely to say about one of God's children.

Judas Iscariot was a hypocrite—a *pretender*. He had no idea who Jesus was. He complained that an act of sacrificial worship was a waste of money. He thought the expensive ointment with which a woman anointed Jesus should have been sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus of Nazareth just wasn't worth such extravagance. In his estimation, He was only worth about thirty pieces of silver.

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 (John 12:6).

THE PARABOLIC KEY

When Jesus gave His disciples the Parable of the Sower, it seems that they lacked understanding of its meaning: "He said to them, 'Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?'" (Mark 4:13). In other words, the Parable of the Sower is the key to unlocking the mysteries of all the other parables. If any message comes from the parable, it is the fact that when the gospel is preached, there are true and false conversions. This parable speaks of the thorny ground, the stony ground, and the good soil hearer—true and false converts.

Once that premise has been established, then the light of perception begins to dawn on the rest of what Jesus said in parables about the kingdom of God. If one grasps the principle of the true and false being *alongside each other*, then the other parabolic teachings make sense: the Wheat and Tares (true and false), the Good Fish and Bad Fish (true and false), the Wise Virgins and

the Foolish (true and false), and the Sheep and Goats (true and false).

After the Wheat and Tares parable, Jesus gave 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.” Jesus said to them, “Have you understood all these things?” They said to Him, “Yes, Lord” (Matthew 13:47–51).

Notice the good fish and the bad fish were in the net together. The *world* is not caught in the dragnet of the kingdom of heaven; they remain in the world. The “fish” that are caught are those who respond to the gospel—the evangelistic “catch.” They remain together until the Day of Judgment.

Judas was a false convert. It would seem that he was a thorny-ground hearer. The Bible says of the thorny-ground hearer: “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

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4:19). Some of these professing Christians stay within the Church; others leave it in “droves.”

False converts *do* have a measure of spirituality. Judas did. He convinced some of the disciples that he did truly care for the poor. 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 the faithful treasurer, but instead suspected themselves, saying, “Is it I, Lord?” That’s why it’s not surprising that so few within the Body of Christ would ever suspect that we are surrounded by those who fall into the “Judas” category. However, alarm bells should go off when we look at statistics such as those just cited. A warning should sound when it seems that the Church ought to have massive clout in society, but sadly lacks it when push comes to shove. With our millions of professed believers we can’t even outlaw the killing of the unborn. Something is *radically* wrong. But before we look at the remedy, we are going to consider the cause.