

# Where Is Christianity Headed?

Statistically speaking, organized religion has been on the decline in America for quite some time. All Christian denominations are in decline, including evangelicals. At the same time, however, we are seeing a simultaneous rise in spirituality. According to a Pew Research Center survey taken earlier this year, about 27% of adults regard themselves as spiritual, but not religious. This represents an 8% increase over the past five years.

I personally believe that there are many positive aspects to this trend.

There are many teachings of today's Christian orthodoxy that in my view need to be discarded or revised, because they contradict the original message of Jesus and His disciples. According to Jesus, God is the loving Heavenly Father of all, and Jesus came to save the entire world, not just a privileged few. He didn't come to hand out "get-out-of-jail-free-passes," but instead warned everyone that they will be reaping in direct proportion to what they sow. He taught that God loves sinners and will not be satisfied until every last one of His straying sheep are returned to the fold. He taught that God never ceases to be our loving heavenly Father, even when we reject him and fall into grievous sin. Like the father of the Prodigal Son, our Heavenly Father will always be waiting for us with open arms when we are ready to return home. Jesus taught that God loves us all unconditionally with unfailing love and His mercy never ceases. Jesus taught that if you are an adherent of a different religion, as in the case of the Good Samaritan, you are still worthy of God's love and acceptance. Demonstrating love and compassion to those who are suffering and in need is far more important to God than what religion one subscribes to. God not only loves, but actually is love. His love is unfailing. In the words of the hymnist, *"it goes beyond the highest star, and reaches to the lowest Hell."* Everything God does is motivated by love. Jesus commanded us to forgive our enemies and return good for evil, because that is what God is like, and Jesus wants us to become like Him. The purpose of God's fiery judgments is cleansing and purification, not retribution.

All of these teachings are clearly taught in the Bible, especially in the Gospels and the writings of the Apostle Paul. Unfortunately, after Christianity became institutionalized it lost touch with the original spirit and intent of Jesus' message. A lot of bad stuff became mixed in with the good. What is happening today is a gradual "deinstitutionalization" of the Christian religion. People are instinctively being drawn to the original spirit and intent of Jesus' message, and are rejecting all the bad stuff that crept in later.

So, what lies ahead for organized Christianity? I believe that because God is ultimately in control, the Church will continue declining until it is forced to reexamine its beliefs and bring them into harmony with the actual teachings of Christ. As that begins to happen, I think you will see a resurgence of organized religion in America, but it won't look at all like it does today. Instead, it will probably be more ethnically and culturally diverse, and it will be far more appealing to people who are in desperate need of love, acceptance, healing and spiritual restoration.