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RELIGIOUS DESTRUCTION IN AMERICA

The lead story in today's USA Today was very disturbing. Based on a survey that was first taken in 1990, and just retaken recently (with the results released today), organized religion is waning in America. I had to read that story twice to make sure I was reading it correctly!

The story said that the number of people who call themselves some type of Christian (whether it be Catholic, Baptist, Protestant, or generic Christian) dropped 11 percent in that 19 year span. That equals one generation. That number is absolutely staggering to me, not to mention, very scary. You want to know something even scarier? The only two categories that showed any significant growth - "No Religion" and "Don't Know/Refused to Answer."

The other thing that disturbed me greatly was that "Wiccan" is recognized as a religion, but that's a topic for another day.

You don't have to look further than this study to see why our country is in tremendous moral decline. From people like Bernie Madoff to the CEOs of banks and Wall Street companies, the moral fiber of this country is eroding at a record pace. Just a generation or two ago, people in those positions of leadership were the people we looked to for guidance - not just guidance in business, but guidance in life. Those with great entrepreneurial spirit got where they were by doing the right things, treating people the right way, and trusting and believing in something bigger than themselves. These days, the people running our largest companies don't think there IS anything bigger than themselves.

Now, before you think I'm coming off as "preachy (and maybe I am)," let me tell you why this bothers me so much. It's because, until a few short years ago, I was one of those people - one of the "Nones," as the USA Today story so eloquently put it. I was a non-believer, someone who frowned on organized religion. I called them zealots, Bible-thumpers, or more often, I'm now ashamed to say, hypocrites.

But I, like I suspect many of the people answering this survey, didn't fully understand organized religion at the time. You see, meeting every Sunday (and for us Baptists, most Wednesdays) isn't about shoving the Bible down people's throats like I once thought. It isn't about people living their lives one way all week, just to come on Sunday morning, hung over, and ask forgiveness. And it certainly isn't about the scandals that many religions and churches have experienced in the past. It's about something else. It's about God. It's about learning how to have a relationship with Him. It's about learning how to act properly with other people, and show them respect in a Godly way - you know, that whole "Do unto others..." thing.

One of the main reasons of organizing into religions and churches is to have people to help hold you accountable. To have people to turn to when things are going bad, and to ask how to handle those things the right way, the Godly way. Are there hypocrites within the church? Maybe some. But most of those people that I used to think were hypocrites weren't. They were people who lost their way, or people who made mistakes, or people who simply did what it is in our nature to do - sin. And if they were true Christians, they were forgiven for their shortcomings.

So for me, the organized part of religion is, next to God and His Son, Jesus, the best part. When I go to church, and listen to the preacher, I'm a better person for a little while. When I don't, I fall back into those horrible habits and sinful ways. I could use a good preaching about every other day and I would be a pretty good person. When I go to Sunday School, and maybe to lunch afterward with another family, I absorb so much more than trying to stay away from the organized religion and "Do it myself." Even if you are a trained evangelical, with a Doctorate in Theology, the do-it-yourself method just doesn't work. For those who say, "Well, I believe in God, but I just don't believe in organized religion," unfortunately for you, it just doesn't work that way. We all need help. We all need accountability. And we all need organization, especially in our religion.