

How Relevant is Faith in God today?

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According to recent religious surveys, there has been a steady but significant growth in atheism and agnosticism in Africa.

At the risk of sounding too intellectual, atheism means the lack of belief in the existence of God and agnosticism means not being sure about the existence of God.

Some 28 % of South Africans consider themselves irreligious or atheistic. Both these statistics are fairly surprising considering the rich spiritual heritage that Africa has.

I find this both interesting and very worrying at the same time. Part of my concern stems from a verse in the Bible which says fools say to themselves, "There is no God." (Psalm 14:1 ISV).

As a spiritual leader myself, a Christian pastor specifically, I found myself questioning these statistics.

There are two very worrying conclusions from these statistics which I will try to expand on further in this article.

Firstly, it clearly means that, from a Christian perspective, the Church is failing in the communication and spread of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, The Good News of salvation. Secondly, if we truly believe that God is the only hope for mankind, then mankind is in deep, deep trouble.

Let me start with the second conclusion first. It has been proven over and over that people who have a confident and active faith in God are far more optimistic, happy, content and resilient than those who do not have this faith in God.

If this trend of a lack of faith in God continues, then society is only going to become more and more pessimistic and negative.

We do not need scientific surveys to tell us that this is already happening what with suicide, depression, crime, divorce etc. spiralling out of control. People are becoming more and more hopeless instead of hopeful.

To prove this, in the area where I work in the far northern areas of Port Elizabeth, a company made a fairly good survey and study of the causes of unemployment in the area.

The main cause of this problem came as quite a shock to me. It was that most jobless people are just hopeless and have given up. Even when they find a job, they can't seem to keep it due to their negative mind-set of hopelessness.

This startling fact immediately changed and challenged the manner in which I and the church I lead tried to remedy this.

We now not only help people to find and apply for jobs, but also try to develop a positive relationship with them. In other words, we also need to be their motivators, counsellors and encouragers. This approach has worked fairly well thus far.

Concerning the first conclusion: the fact that the Church is failing in its efforts to share the Gospel effectively, I think that the Church needs to re-evaluate the message that it is communicating as the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are more preachers, churches, TV Ministries and sermons today than ever before, yet we still see a steady moral decline in our families especially. This does not make sense! Is the message, the method, the motive or the messenger at fault?

These are the tough questions that we as church leaders need to assess and answer.

Generally, are churches really focusing on preaching a Gospel for the benefit of the people or for the benefit of the church?

Are we preaching a message that makes people comfortable in sin or convicted of sin? I know it sounds harsh but only the naked truth is able to save and deliver.

A very wealthy businessman from England once told me, "Russell, when in a crisis, the best thing is to tell the truth!"

I did not understand it then, but years later I have learnt that this is the quickest and best way to identify and solve a crisis.

In conclusion, we once again need a church that will preach the pure message of the Gospel of the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ without adding all the frills and gimmicks that we have so subtly become accustomed to.

A Church that will not only preach the message, but also exemplify it through its love and compassion for the hopeless and broken.

This is the only antidote to the rising tide of disbelief in God and the desperate hopelessness that accompanies it.

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