

WHY CHRISTIANITY

ISN'T

WORKING

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Family Care Publications

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Dedication

To my parents, Ron and Marilyn Greenhalgh who not only brought me up in the Christian faith but demonstrated their faith on a daily basis. For them I will be eternally grateful.

“I love the Grace of the book...”

**Steve Brown -Key Life Network
-Author**

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Why Christianity Isn't Working

by

Gordon Greenhalgh, Ph.D.

Introduction

Since 1991 the number of Americans who express no religious preference has quadrupled to fourteen percent. Barna Research Group reports that in the United States, apart from Easter or Christmas, about ten million self-proclaimed born-again Christians have not been to church in the last six months. Although nearly all Christians consider their spiritual life to be very important, statistics indicate that approximately twenty-three million, or thirty-five percent, of those people claim that they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Gordon Conwell's Center for the Study on Global Christianity reports that, except for Islam, every major religion in Western Europe is declining. The drop is most evident in France, Sweden, and the Netherlands, where church attendance is less than ten percent in some areas.

According to the Pew Research Center, almost every American has a religious story, yet America is an increasingly secular nation. In a recent survey of 35,000 American adults, the

number of Americans not a part of any religion has grown from 16 to nearly 23 percent of the population. About one in ten Americans say religion is “not at all important” to them.

Research shows that accepting Christ and making a profession of faith today makes little to no difference in young people’s attitudes and behavior. Sixty-four percent of young people in the United States believe that they will earn a place in heaven if they behave reasonably well or if they do enough good for others during their lives. (*Operation Solid Rock, February 2006*).

Today born-again married adults are just as likely to become divorced as are married adults who are not born-again. Because the vast majority of born-again marriages occurred after the partners had accepted Christ, it appears that their connection to Christ makes less difference in the durability of their marriages than one might expect.

In his book, “*The DNA of Relationships*,” Gary Smalley states that “Baptists have the highest divorce rate of any Christian denomination and are more likely to get a divorce than atheists and agnostics, according to a national survey.” George Barna, the president of Barna Research Group, said about this report, “While it may be alarming to discover that born-again Christians are more likely than others to experience a divorce, that pattern has been in place for quite some time”. (*The Associated Press, 12/30/1999; from the Smart Marriages Archive.*)

George Barna, in his book “*Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*,” also states that for year’s research has shown that born-again adults think and behave very much like everyone

else, and that their faith often seems to make very little difference in their lives. A new study helps to explain this. When exposed to the same influences, children of believers are not trained to think or act any differently than the children of non-believers. Generally, the children of believers are not guided to interpret their circumstances or their opportunities in light of Biblical principles. It is no wonder that they grow up to be just as involved as everyone else in adultery, cohabitation, divorce, excessive drinking, and other unbiblical behaviors.

These are only a few of the current statistics reporting the ineffectiveness of Christianity. After reading these statistics, it is clearly evident that something is wrong. I realize that these are only statistics and that there are other studies that show how well Christianity is working. However, we need only to look at Christianity in the world around us and in our own lives to recognize that much of the teachings of Christ are absent from those who claim his name.

In Philip Yancey's book, *"Soul Survivor,"* he states,

"My deepest doubts about the faith can be summed up in a single question: Why doesn't it work? As I travel around the world, I see that Christianity's many improvements to culture, education, science, medicine, human rights, democracy, art, charity - all these grew most vigorously from Christian roots, and are stunted in some of the non-Christian countries I visit. Yet when I talk with devout Muslims or Hindus, they bring up the many wars that beset Europe during its most Christian era, and the crime, decadence, and family breakdown that mark the Christian West today. I have no offense against their arguments.

I have never met a serious follower of any religion who lacks appreciation for Jesus, but what about the church?...

As I think about individual Christians I know, I see some people made incomparably better by faith, and some made measurably worse. For every gracious, kind-spirited, forgiving Christian, I can point to a proud, mean-spirited, judgmental one. In my own experience, those who strive the hardest and believe the most fervently are sometimes the least attractive persons. Like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, they get caught up in competition and end up self-righteous rather than righteous. Politicians tell me their nastiest letters come from people who quote the Bible and claim to speak for God – which I easily believe since my mailbox shows the same pattern. How do I resolve the tension between the ideals of the Gospel and the actuality of those who profess it?"

Obviously we live in a fallen world. We all have our issues, weaknesses, and faults. We cannot change those closest to us, let alone change the world. In fact, many of us who do recognize the things that we don't like about ourselves will seek professional help to change those things. Unfortunately, many current psychological theories are often ineffective in producing desired change. They are based on false principles and do not go to the core of the problem. Some theories and interventions do contain some truth, but are incomplete. Hence, for the most part, psychological interventions do not bring about real change or healing.

For the last thirty years of my life as a psychotherapist, my focus has been to help people to change their lives for the better. Sometimes this goal has been achieved, and sometimes it hasn't. My goal was and is to help people address the emotional, psychological, behavioral, and spiritual aspects of their lives to enable them to change those things that are wrong.

Most people who come into my office have been damaged to some degree, not only psychologically but spiritually as well. They have been used, abused, neglected, abandoned, negated, and invalidated. As a result, they are operating in the world from an unhealthy psychological perspective as well as from an unhealthy spiritual basis. I try to help them to heal from their pain and to become healthy. I try to help them adopt a psychological and spiritual foundation that works because it is based on the truth. The truth will free them to be themselves in order to live fulfilling lives and to reach their greatest potential. What is the truth? Jesus is the truth. Jesus is the answer. This is the core of Christianity

But even with its message of love, forgiveness, hope, and healing, Christianity does not appear to be working. Take a look at the church. Look at the numerous denominations. Look at most Christians. It is not working. What I am saying might be disturb you, but we need to be honest. Something is wrong and it needs to change.

Can Christianity work? Is Jesus really the answer? I hope that reading this book will help will help you to see how Christianity can and should work. You will see how it can change our world. You will see how you can experience the reality of Jesus and know the truth.

Chapter Five

Be Healed!

“Christians aren’t perfect, just forgiven.” Have you seen that bumper sticker? I like it. It sends the message that I don’t have to be perfect. Even better, I am forgiven regardless.

There is an underlying assumption by both Christians and non-Christians that if you profess to be a Christian, then you are supposed to be better than everyone else.

Several years ago I read in the paper about Mel Gibson being busted for driving under the influence, and that he was spouting off criticisms about Jewish people. Strangely, I wasn’t surprised nor was I angry with him. I don’t keep up with the lives of movie stars, and I know next to nothing about Mel Gibson. I only know that I liked some of his films, and of course, that he produced “*The Passion of the Christ*.” I have read a little about his faith and I think he is a fellow believer. I feel sorry for Mel. I know that he let himself down. We Christians might feel like he let us down, too. Mel is no different than any of us. Because of his profession, he is in the limelight and all the world knows when he messes up. I am so glad that I’m not famous, that my life has not been so closely scrutinized, because if I was then someday I might end up on the front page, and probably you, too. It is why I am not surprised. Christians are not perfect, just forgiven.

But, you might ask, aren't we supposed to be setting an example for the world? How could Mel let us down like that? How about Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggert, and so on and so on. You could easily come up with a list of a hundred famous or not so famous people that have let you down, people that have not been that "good Christian example." But being a Christian does not make you good. It makes you want to be good. It does not make you psychologically, relationally, physically, or spiritually healthy. What it does is it gives you the power to move toward healthiness and to be forgiven in the process. To once again quote Mike Yaconelli's book, *"Messy Spirituality,"* he states,

"Spirituality is not a formula; it is not a test. It is a relationship. Spirituality is not about competency; it is about intimacy. Spirituality is not about perfection; it is about connection. The way of the Spiritual life begins where we are now in the mess of our lives. Accepting the reality of our broken, flawed lives is the beginning of Spirituality not because the Spiritual life will remove our flaws but because we let go of seeking perfection and instead, seek God, the one who is present in the tangledness of our lives. Spirituality is not about being fixed; it is about God being present in the mess of our un-fixedness."

But... I thought that Christianity made us whole. I thought I would be healed and healthy. I thought that I would become a better person. What good is Christianity if it doesn't offer me health,

wealth, and happiness? I thought I became a new person in Christ. It clearly says so in the Bible. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 it says,

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old one has gone, the new has come. All of this from God...”

Let's take a closer look at scripture as well as at some general principles about healthiness. Suppose we put a person's degree of healthiness on a continuum from one to one hundred. Those above fifty might be considered on the healthy side. Those under fifty are considered on the unhealthy side. Of course, this is only an arbitrary number with no specific psychological test to measure it. For the purpose of discussion, let's say that those people above fifty on the scale will demonstrate and manifest the following behaviors or characteristics: healthy self-esteem, an ability to love and give without ulterior motives, be able to feel, identify, and express emotions, be able to communicate with others, not be controlled by addictive, destructive, or neglectful behaviors, be able to adequately care for self, to be a responsible citizen, and to be able to maintain employment. The higher one is on the scale, the greater the above characteristics will be manifested. Now a person on the unhealthy side of the scale might reflect the following characteristics: lack of self-love and care, inability to love others, self-destructive or other destructive behaviors, difficulty in maintaining healthy relationships, difficulty in maintaining employment, and an inability to manage negative emotions. The lower a person is on the scale of healthiness,

the more troubles that person will encounter, with the worst being incarcerated, hospitalized, or incapacitated in some way.

But being a Christian does not make you good. It makes you want to be good. It does not make you psychologically, relationally, physically, or spiritually healthy. What it does is it gives you the power to move toward healthiness and to be forgiven in the process.

My question is what determines where a person ends up on the scale? Is it biology, environment, spirituality, free will, experiences, education, financial status, parenting, psyche, or just fate? Of course all of these factors may be significant, but none are the primary cause. What will determine where a person ends up on the scale is the healthiness of the family they grew up in. Before you get upset, let me explain my conclusion.

First I believe that genetics (biology) is the most powerful determinant of a person's personality, strengths and weaknesses. This will make us very similar to our parents. Keeping this in mind, it is our childhood experiences that tend to shape how we manifest our personalities, whether our strengths are being nurtured and developed, or if our weaknesses will become more prominent. The healthier parenting we receive, the more likely it is that positive characteristics of our personality temperament will be exhibited. Dysfunctional parenting typically brings out the more negative qualities. Of course there are exceptions to this rule.

Now in addition to our temperament and nurturing, we have to consider how the overall environment has shaped us. If we grew up in poverty, if we experienced abuse, neglect, or trauma, these will be strong factors that will help determine where one falls on the healthiness scale. On the other end, if one grows up with fame, extreme wealth or talent that also helps to determine where one is on the scale. Regardless of where you fall on the scale, becoming a Christian does not automatically move you up the scale. If you put your faith in Christ, you do not receive instant healing if you have been damaged mentally, physically, or emotionally. What does happen is that you receive God's Spirit, His Holy Spirit. Having received His Spirit brings about three major benefits immediately. First, you are forgiven. All sins in your life, past and future, are now covered by the blood of Christ and God remembers it no more. Second, because you are forgiven and there is no longer a barrier between you and God, He now adopts you into His family and the Holy Spirit now lives in you. As you mature in Christ you will be able to access and utilize the new power within you. As the scripture says, you become a new creation. This is why it is called the Good News.

Our goal in life then is to become more Christ-like and to allow His Spirit to live and manifest through our lives, moving us up on the scale of healthiness.

Now for the bad news. You are not necessarily healed emotionally, mentally, physically, financially, or relationally. Though you now have the Spirit of God in you, you will continue to struggle with both the weaknesses of your temperament and the damage to your psyche. Our goal in life then is to become more Christ-like and to allow His Spirit to live and manifest through our lives, moving us up on the scale of healthiness. However, if you started at twenty on the scale, you will still be a twenty after salvation. The good news is that now you are more likely to move up the scale due to the following reasons:

- 1) God's Spirit in you craves for more; more intimacy with Him, more love for others, and a desire to be like Him.
- 2) Because you are God's child, He desires more for you. God will provide hope, direction, and discipline to help you along the way.
- 3) You have power in you that will increase the likelihood of health, motivation, and wisdom, to get healthier (more Christ-like).

Christians are in the best position to become healthy psychologically and spiritually. But the myth that you are completely healed and transformed by Christ is a bit misleading. God will use many elements in our lives to gradually transform us to His image and move us up the scale of healthiness.

Unfortunately for us, this process of healing is slow and gradual. It isn't that God can't or doesn't heal instantly. I believe that

there are times when that does happen. But in general, the healing process will take time, and it can be a long time.

Christians are in the best position to become healthy psychologically and spiritually. But the myth that you are completely healed and transformed by Christ is a bit misleading. God will use many elements in our lives to gradually transform us to His image and move us up the scale of healthiness.

What God is most interested in is not that we are healed. God certainly wants wholeness and healing, but more important is what happens in the process. It is in the process that we actually grow emotionally and spiritually. Apart from the process of healing, I doubt that most of us would grow or mature very much. I know that for me, most of my growth has come in the midst of pain. As the saying goes, “no pain, no gain.” God can use your pain in instrumental ways if you allow Him to do so. Paul must have learned this principle and in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 he states,

“My Grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecution, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

This is after Paul pleaded with God to heal him of a “thorn of the flesh.” Biblical scholars aren’t sure what the thorn was, but God chose not to heal him. He somehow used his pain to serve His

purpose. We all want healing. Nobody likes pain. God doesn't want or enjoy our pain. He only wants what is best for us.

*“For I know the plans I have for you.” declares the Lord,
“Plans to prosper you and not to harm you.
Plans to give you hope and a future.”
(Jeremiah 29:11)*

We live in a fallen world and we have fallen. The result is misery and pain. Hence the need for healing.

God created a world that He said was good. He then created mankind and said it was very good. So what happened? Two things happened: free will and the influence of evil.

God created a world that He said was good. He then created mankind and said it was very good. So what happened? Two things happened: free will and the influence of evil. I will discuss the influence of evil in a subsequent chapter, but the option of choosing against God has taken us down this destructive path that leads to pain. Jesus even said to us,

“I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Our focus is on our pain. God's focus is on our faith. We want to be healed. God wants us to be His. We want to be happy.

God wants us to fulfill our purpose. We want control. God wants dependence on Him. We want what we want. God wants us to want Him. God will use our pain to bring about what is best for our lives. Because of our free will, we still have a choice about what to do and how we respond to our pain.

Our focus is on our pain. God's focus is on our faith. We want to be healed. God wants us to be His. We want to be happy. God wants us to fulfill our purpose. We want control. God wants dependence on Him. We want what we want. God wants us to want Him.

The worldly religion of Christianity gives us two wrong messages. The first is that if we have faith and are “good” Christians, we can somehow bypass pain and suffering. The second wrong message is that if we have enough faith, God will heal our bodies, relationships, finances, or emotions. There is some truth in both messages. God may indeed protect us from certain evils because we are His. But He does not protect us from all pain and suffering. He also wants our healing and our faith is related to that, but not necessarily contingent upon it. God does not heal just because you believe it. He heals when He chooses to, when healing or not healing brings about His higher purposes. In his book, *“When God Doesn’t Make Sense,”* James Dobson states,

“Apparently most believers are permitted to go through emotional and spiritual valleys that are designed to test their faith in

the crucible of fire. Why? Because faith ranks at the top of God's system of priorities. Without it, He said, it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6). And what is faith? It is the 'substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' (Hebrews 11:1). This determination to believe when the proof is not provided and when questions are not answered is central to our relationship with the Lord. He will never do anything to destroy the need for Faith. He guides us through times of testing specifically to cultivate that belief and dependence on Him. (Hebrews 11:6,7)

Dobson goes on to state that pain and suffering do not cause the greatest damage. Confusion is the factor that shreds one's faith.

So it comes back to our response. We will have pain and suffering. There is no way around it in this world. Therefore we will want and need healing. Healing may not come at all or it may come quickly, or it may come very slowly. Regardless, the real question is how are you going to respond to your pain? Maintaining faith, not confusion, is your only hope for peace. Believe that He will fulfill His purpose for you. Believe that He will use your pain to bring about something better. Believing God will bring you peace. Not believing God will lead you into confusion. I hope that you believe the truth.

