

NORTHERN LIGHT

Digest

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Living As A Minority

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It is becoming increasingly obvious that committed Christians are now a minority in our nation. Though only God knows the hearts of people, external indicators such as regular church attendance are now below 20% on the average weekend. What academics call the Judeo-Christian ethic is no longer the dominant

moral compass in the land. In other words, biblically based moral values are not embraced by the majority. The clear consequence of this is that as committed Christians we must come to terms with the fact that we have to live in a society with which we won't necessarily agree.

Canada, along with much of the Western world, shares in a democratic, pluralistic culture, in which individual values and choices are treasured. There seems to be general agreement that people should have a maximum amount of freedom, with only the most minimal number of restraints placed upon that freedom. Of course, this sort of open society emphasizing human freedom is in many ways a huge blessing to us all. We can exercise the freedom we need to live out our Christian lives, though at times it does seem that barriers can be thrown up in unusual ways. Nevertheless, compared to the many closed, restricted and intolerant societies in the world today, we are indeed blessed to live with such freedom.

The challenge we face, however, is how to live consistent with our faith and the moral values we are taught in the Bible, as we respond to the Spirit in our lives, in a culture that is not fully aligned with those values. Culture exerts an enormous influence on all of us—even deeply committed Christians. Due to this pervasive influence it can be very easy to allow our Christian convictions to slowly erode, and over time, simply adopt the morals and values of the wider society. So then, do we compromise, or rather follow the instruction found in the book of James: "...to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27)?

The problem with compromise is that we in effect no longer honour Jesus as the Lord of our lives. Instead, we relegate him to a lesser role as we accommodate to society's shifting moral priorities. Yet, there are also potential spiritual dangers for us on the other side of this divide. If we withdraw from others and become known as hateful and judgmental people who despise those around them, we completely miss reflecting the love of God for all people.



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The challenge we face is to avoid falling into either ditch. We need to stay true to the values God's Spirit and his word teach us, while at the same time showing love to all people, who are made in the image of God. We must never forget that we are all a "flawed" image of Christ, and none of us reflect perfectly his pure and holy nature. Others may have different flaws than we do, but God loves them just as much as he does you and me. His plan is to save us by his grace and mercy, and with the indwelling of Jesus in us through the Spirit, gradually mold us into the image of Christ.

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It is important we reflect a genuine tolerance of others. Tolerance doesn't mean we agree with everything someone else does, and compromise our beliefs to please them, but rather that we can love and respect them as made in God's image while holding to biblical standards of right and wrong. We come to love all people (Matthew 22:39) without engaging in or condoning that which we believe to be wrong.

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How can this be done? Only through the presence in us of the very love of God, expressed by and through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). After all, though he is pure and morally perfect (which none of us are), God (Father, Son and Spirit) loves us to the extent that Jesus the Son laid down his life to enable our reconciliation with God and salvation. Following this example, we can come to love, protect and care for others with whom we may have very real differences in belief and practice.

Given the nature of our society, it is incumbent we live out our lives as people who are in living union with Christ. This will involve his work of sanctifying us and changing us from the inside out. This will be evidenced by both integrity in behavior (Christian morals) and by an evident love for all people.

May God strengthen us as we walk what can seem to be a "tightrope" —being faithful to God, as we reflect his love to all around us. This is our calling, to live as lights in a darkened world!

Gary Moore

What Do We Do? Facing The Reality Of Living In A Post- Christian World

A few months ago I read a pretty sobering editorial about the state of Christianity in Britain entitled, "The Guardian view on disappearing Christianity: suppose it's gone forever?"

Is the end of western Christianity in sight? The most recent British Social Attitudes data shows that "No religion" is now by far the largest single identification in England and Wales.

It is very nearly half the adult population, and more than twice the proportion who self-identify as Anglican; it is four times the Catholic population, and more than five times the total identifying with non-Christian faiths.

The same pattern is seen all across Europe and increasingly in the US too, where the first chair for the study of atheism has just been endowed in Florida....

Speaking about the decline of Christianity in the West and its influence the editorial continues:

Such an enormous change is bound to have implications for the rest of us.

A post-Christian Europe will of course have a morality but it won't be Christian morality....The idea that people have some rights just because they are human, and entirely irrespective of merit, certainly isn't derived from observation of the world.

It arose out of Christianity, no matter how much Christians have in practice resisted it.

Although human rights have become embedded in our institutions at the same time as religious observance has been in decline, they could become vulnerable in an entirely post-Christian environment where the collective memory slips from the old moorings inherited from Christian ethics....

This century will be one in which humanity faces gigantic challenges, brought about by our own success in colonising the planet.

Global warming and the still present threat of nuclear destruction both need a sense of global solidarity to overcome, and a vision of humanity that transcends narrow self-interest.

If Christianity no longer can supply that, what will?"
(www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/may/27/the-guardian-view-on-disappearing-christianity-suppose-its-gone-for-ever)



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Reading that editorial article got me thinking. What if I was the only Christian left, how would I live?

A similar question was asked of Neil Earle, one of Northern Light Digest's prolific contributors. He recently told me, "I shocked my ministerial group last month when they asked me what I planned to do in retirement. I blurted out: 'Mere Christianity.' He explained to me—as you probably are aware—the phrase itself of course comes from the prolific thinker, C.S. Lewis (1898-1963)."

Whether or not Christian faith is either in ascension or in decline, for believers, the answer to the question, "How should I live?" remains the same.

Even as we face the possibility of being a minority belief system or faith, it would be fair to say that we have been here before. That ancient pastor and evangelist of the early Church, Paul of Tarsus, shared some admonitions to the small group of Christians living in the city of Rome—the center of a great pluralistic empire:

"So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you" (Romans 12:1-2, *The Message*).

Living Sacrifice

In verse 1, The Revised Standard Version uses the term being a "living sacrifice" instead of offering. The Christians in Rome were urged to live out their God ordained, Kingdom life, in total service

to him. But doing so isn't based on what performance that we bring to God, but service in response to his grace and the prompting of the Holy Spirit (see June 2016, *Northern Light Digest*).

"I'm speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him" (Romans 12:3, *The Message*).

Conducting Our Lives

Paul then gives his fellow Christians some practical advice on living as a minority situation:

If you preach, just preach God's Message, nothing else; if you help, just help, don't take over; if you teach, stick to your teaching; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don't get bossy; if you're put in charge, don't manipulate; if you're called

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Being God's Presence

A number of years ago, I was at a meeting with some of the leaders of this denomination from across Canada. We were discussing our future as we transitioned from a media (radio, television, print) ministry to a denomination which focused on the local congregation. One person in exasperation asked the question, "How do we preach the Gospel without using media?"

During those days, it would be like me asking today, "How is God's presence going to be made known in our world?" There was silence for a few minutes as the group pondered the "elephant in the room" that had just been revealed. Then someone spoke up with the answer, "Us!"

What if I was the only Christian left, how would I live? How would the world be aware of God's presence? Paul gives some pretty good advice.

Bill Hall

If you preach, just preach God's Message, nothing else; if you help, just help, don't take over; if you teach, stick to your teaching; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don't get bossy; if you're put in charge, don't manipulate; if you're called to give aid to people in distress, keep your eyes open and be quick to respond; if you work with the disadvantaged, don't let yourself get irritated with them or depressed by them.

Keep a smile on your face. Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle....Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody.

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Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it."

Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good" (Romans 12:6-21 *The Message*).
