

Trends

The number of those who are skeptical or agnostic toward the Bible—who believe that the Bible is “just another book of teachings written by men that contains stories and advice”—has nearly doubled from 10% to 19% in just three years. This is now equal to the number of people who are Bible engaged—who read the Bible at least four times a week and believe it is the actual or inspired Word of God.

—via Barna Group

1 Peter 1:23: “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.”

Sentence Sermons

“A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education.” —Theodore Roosevelt

Psalms 119:105-106: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. 106 I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.”

News & Notes

- Please pray for those mentioned in the announcements after services and others listed on the bulletin board in the foyer of the church building.
- Please pray for my son and his wife as they seek to start a new congregation in northern Michigan. Please pray Ryan can raise enough support to do this important work.
- Please pray for all the faithful gospel preachers who labor in foreign fields under very difficult physical and spiritual circumstances.
- Please pray for Alan Jones. Alan's deep brain stimulation treatment to relieve severe facial pain was unsuccessful. He continues to suffer; please pray for him and his family.
- Please keep sisters Virginia Brown and Wilma Cardwell in your prayers. Their faithfulness sets such a good example and gives encouragement to all! Ditto for Al (our Barnabas!).
- Pray for Hatti and her “new life” in Texas!. We wish her only the very best and will miss her “something fierce”!
- Pray for the all of our students: elementary, secondary and college. Our young people are now back to school. Pray for Zach as he goes away to basic training in the U.S. Army.

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Words of Life

Westside church of Christ

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

John 6:68



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Ancient Landmarks

Heath Rogers

There are a handful of passages in the Old Testament that refer to landmarks which the children of Israel were to respect. The first of these passages is found in Deuteronomy 19:14. “You shall not remove your neighbor’s landmark, which the men of old have set, in your inheritance which you will inherit in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess.”

When Canaan was conquered, the land was distributed to tribes and families by allotment. This was the will of God. Each person was to respect the property belonging to everyone else. These landmarks Moses spoke of were stones or posts which marked these original property boundaries. Today, property lines are filed with the county auditor’s office, and any dispute over property lines can usually be settled by looking at these records. There were no such records in ancient times, only landmarks. These landmarks could be moved, which would result in the theft of property.

Proverbs 22:28 warns, “Do not remove the ancient landmark which your fathers have set.” Respect was to be given, both to the property of one’s neighbor, and to the action taken by their fathers in distributing this land.

Moses pronounced a curse on one who would move his neighbor’s landmark (Deut. 27:17). Proverbs 23:10-11 warns, “Do not remove the ancient landmark, nor enter the fields of the fatherless; for their Redeemer is mighty; He will plead their cause against you.” Instead of a penalty, there is a warning and a curse pronounced against the one who would dare to take such action against his neighbor. The idea is that such a crime would sometimes go unnoticed because the landmarks would be moved slowly over time, or that land would be snatched away by force from those who were powerless to defend themselves. One may “get away with it” here and now, but would eventually pay the price for such action when they faced the Lord in judgment.

These warnings against removing ancient landmarks provide an important lesson for us today. The word of God establishes boundaries. When we surpass or go beyond these boundaries we sin. “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9). Some are not content to abide within God’s word.

They want to move these boundaries to accommodate their own desires.

The Lord has long ago established His law regarding marriage. According to Jesus, marriage is to be between one man and one woman for life (Matt. 19:4-6). Today, same-sex unions are being recognized by many states in our country. It appears the next “landmark” to be moved will be the legal recognition of polygamy.

Multitudes of people have moved God’s law regarding what one must do in order to be saved. The Lord and His apostles taught one must believe (John 8:24), repent of his sins (Luke 13:3), confess his faith (Rom. 10:9-10), be baptized (Mark 16:16) and remain faithful in order to be saved in Heaven (Rev. 2:10).

Many brethren are not content with the blueprint the Lord has established for the work, worship and organization of the church. The “landmarks” have been moved ever so slightly over time so that today we fellowship halls, gymnasiums, daycare centers, food pantries, instrumental music and women preachers in some churches of Christ.

Remember, the removal of an ancient landmark was an act of theft against one’s neighbor and an expression of disrespect against God. It is no different today. When we fail to abide within the boundaries set forth by God’s word, we are attempting to steal His authority (His right to establish and enforce the boundaries set forth in His word). Cursed be the man who disrespects God’s authority.

Fortune Cookie Religion

Larry Hafley

Some folks are amazing. They will accept the word from within a fortune cookie, but they doubt the living word of the living God.

Others want a “fortune cookie religion.” They want it to be short and sweet. Give them pious sounding expressions that, in reality, say nothing of substance, and they are happy. Give them nothing but glorified wishes in a well stated phrase and they will smile with delight. They want a religion that is cute and clever. It must not ring with the clear and certain sound of authority. It must not sound “dogmatic.” Fortune cookie revelations never condemn. “Fortune cookie preachers” never alarm nor warn with fear. (Contrast that with, “*Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men,*” and, “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (2 Cor. 5:11; Heb. 10:31).

Fortune cookie religion, with its light, generalized phrases, appeals and applies to all. It extends the right hand of fellowship to everyone. It demands no repentance and never identifies any act as sinful, nor any specific person as a sinner. Fortune cookie religion amuses. It never disturbs. (By comparison, when the apostles preached, sinners, cut to the heart, “*trembled,*” Acts 24:25)

Fortune cookie religion satisfies the curious, appeases the skeptical, and entertains the idle. It provides no strength to the soul, no path for the seeker, no hope for the faint and forlorn. It tolerates and encourages mediocre spirits by failing to summon them to stand for what is right and oppose that which is evil.

Does the description of “fortune cookie religion” sound like your idea of what religion ought to be? Does it sound like a definition of this church’s nature and character? If so, may God help us all!

Answering the "My God is Bigger Than That!" Argument

James Luedecke

I recently noticed the following Facebook post from a young lady in my area: “What is a good church? I need God back in my life.”

Many well-intentioned people immediately commented on this post with a brief description of their church, how much they enjoyed it, and how warmly she would be welcomed should she decide to visit. In response to this, a local Baptist pastor posted the following: “I’m amazed by this outpouring from so many people who love their churches so much. I’m also glad that God is big enough to be in all these churches.”

This is a classic example of a line of reasoning that I’m encountering more and more these days—the “my God is bigger than that” line of reasoning. Let’s stop for a moment and think about this Baptist pastor’s statement. Is God obligated to approve of every group that calls itself a “church” simply because if He chooses not to approve of this church or that church, it would render Him a littler or lesser kind of God?

“Let the righteous strike me; it shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; it shall be as excellent oil; let my head not refuse it.”

Psalm 141:5

Here’s another example of the same type of reasoning: An evangelist for a church of Christ was having a religious discussion with a Baptist preacher. The evangelist presented several lines of Scriptural evidence supporting the belief that water baptism, when scripturally administered, is for remission of sins and, therefore, essential to salvation. The Baptist preacher simply replied, “Your God only saves those who get wet in a church of Christ baptistery, but my God is big enough to save everybody who puts their faith in Him.”

The implication here is this: “Only a very small God would insist that baptism is essential for salvation.” “Only a very small God would insist that baptism be administered in a Scriptural manner.” “Only a very small God would build one church and save people through that one church.” “Only a very small God would reject people who join man-made churches which preach man-made gospels and teach man-made doctrines.” “Only a very small God would disagree with me and my unscriptural religious beliefs.”

Is this the best that false teachers can come up with in defense of their false religious practices—“If God doesn’t do things my way, that makes Him a littler or lesser God.” Shouldn’t it be just the opposite? Shouldn’t it be more like this—“If I don’t do things God’s way, that makes me a littler or lesser Christian?” Are we really so irrational to think that our religious beliefs, whether right or wrong, can make God any bigger than what He already is? Do you think God appreciates being pulled into religious discussions in this manner? The debate lies not in how big or small God really is. The debate is, as it always should be, what is the truth of the Bible and will we accept that truth?