



Old Testament Reading: Joel 2:12-17, 28-32

New Testament Reading: Ephesians 3:1-21

“The State of the Church”

Revelation 3:14-22

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While reports show a slight uptick in church attendance, especially among the Gen Z group, according to the three major reporting agencies, Barna, Lifeway, and the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, the long-term trends indicate that overall church attendance will continue to decline as it has for the last 80 years.

- Regular weekly attendance in the U.S. dropped from 42% in the early 2000s to around 30% by 2024, and now 22%.
- For the first time in 80 years, the number of U.S. adults claiming formal membership in a local church fell below 50%.
- According to the National Council of Churches, 15,000 churches will close in 2026, and, unless there is a genuine revival, over 100,000 will close within the next five years.

According to those who were surveyed, the primary reasons for this drop in attendance and membership include:

- **A lack of spiritual conviction** – the importance of having faith in God has diminished over the last 25 years, with even many believers admitting that they compromised their core convictions to remain in fellowship with unbelievers.
- **A perceived irrelevance** – when the programming of the church is adapted to attract the unchurched, believers find the “dumbed down” events to be irrelevant to their needs.
 - According to every survey, college-age young adults said their parents and churches had woefully failed to prepare them for the moral and ethical challenges they faced after they left home.
- **A lack of community** – while the vast crowds, loud music, and high-tech events produced an emotional high for the moment, they did nothing to meet the people’s need for authentic relationships with other believers, and their sense of belonging to that church.

While the heavenly, invisible Church, i.e., that Universal Body of Christ that Jesus has been building for 2000 years, is alive and well, the visible church, especially in America, is in serious trouble, not only in the decline in membership, but more importantly, in the church’s influence on the culture.

- Some say this is the **“age of Apostasy”** that the Apostle Paul referred to in 2 Thessalonians 2:2, when the church will defect from the Word of God and embrace spiritualism.
- However, the Christian Church is still growing, especially in those areas where Christians are being persecuted.
- So, if the Church in America is to experience genuine revival, God will have to bypass the apostate institutional church and purify the faithful remnant of true Church.
- In other words, if revival is to come, the prideful and boastful image of the large “successful” churches of today will be changed into small, but humble prayer groups in homes, where the worship of God is upon the beauty of His holiness and not the haughtiness of man.

In describing the spiritual characteristics of the church in Laodicea, Jesus also described the last of the seven church ages, which began in 96 A.D., and will end with the Rapture of the Church. Therefore, the Church is now in the Laodicean Church Age, characterized by the **“spirit of the age,”** rather than the **“Age of the Holy Spirit.”**

- The **“Spirit of the Philadelphia Church Age”** is still alive; it is in the heart of the faithful remnant who are standing against the spirit of the age.
- The Lord continues to knock on the door of those churches that have succumbed to the spirit of the age, and if they will repent, open the door and let Him in, they can still be preserved from the tribulation which is soon to come.

Jesus characterized the spirit of the age as:

1. Lukewarmness toward spiritual things – Revelation 3:15 – *“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.”*

- Jesus used the lukewarmness of the city of Laodicea’s water supply to describe the spiritual characteristics of the Church – they were neither hot nor cold about the essential things of the Christian faith.
- While the spirit of the Laodicean Church Age began in the early 1900’s, it was catapulted in 1975 when Bill Hybels

founded Willow Creek Community Church in Oak Brook, Illinois, and a few years later by Rick Warren, who started a similar type of church in southern California.

- These two men launched a massive shift in ecclesiology, (*the nature and structure of the Christian Church, as defined in the New Testament*) that changed the focus of the Church from worshipping God and edifying and training believers in discipleship to the needs of carnal man, and adapting the ministries of the Church to attract their worldly minds.
- However, in lowering the biblical standards of the Church, i.e., mixing the message of the gospel with the methods of the world, the Church became neither hot nor cold about spiritual things, and entered the Laodicean Church Age.

2. Self-Sufficiency and Deception – Revelation 3:17 – “*Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked*”

- By using worldly methods to attract the unsaved, the modern church was telling the lost that the gospel wasn't enough; that Christ crucified, Christ risen, Christ obeyed, and Christ returning wasn't enough to lead the lost to be saved.
- When Christianity has to be repackaged for the comfort of those who want just enough Jesus to keep them out of hell, that is the **“Spirit of the Age.”** It is evidence of the lack of seriousness today about the serious things of God.

3. Spiritual Poverty and Blindness – Vs. 18 – “*I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes.*”

- Jesus told the church at Laodicea that they needed three things to cure their spiritual weaknesses.
 - **“Pure gold,”** – not the fool's gold the world offers that perishes over time, but the “Law of the Lord” which converts the soul and produces a genuine faith.
 - **“White garments,”** – not the fleshly fashions that draw the attention of others, but the white robes of the pure righteousness of Jesus Christ, which are given to us when we put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - **“Eye Ointment”** – not the creams and cosmetics that make our eyes look better, but the anointing of the Holy Spirit to see this world through the eyes of Christ.
- Jesus is still knocking at the door of the Laodicean churches, but they can't hear Him over the deafening entertainment.
- Even now, if they will let Him in, He can still put things right, and they can dwell with Him in glory.
- However, if they continue to turn a deaf ear until after the Rapture, millions of Lukewarm Christians will be left behind to endure the Tribulation.