

[What the Southern Baptists Are Missing](#)



By [Nathan Jones](#)

"The nation's largest evangelical denomination reports it gave more to missions work, but lost members and baptized fewer people last year."

That statement made by [OneNewsNow.com](#) ("Giving to missions up, membership down among Southern Baptists" by Allie Martin, Apr.28, 2009) sums up the pain the Southern Baptist denomination is experiencing as they put more and more funding and manpower towards reaching out with the Gospel, yet are seeing fewer and fewer accepting salvation.

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in their 2008 [Annual Church Profile \(ACP\)](#), a yearly report looking at the work and ministries of each church within the denomination, contains the worrisome statistics. While total giving to missions reached \$1.36 billion in 2008, wonderfully supporting more than 10,500 missionaries who engage nearly 1,200 people groups throughout North America and around the world, baptisms fell for the fourth straight year to 342,198, a drop of 1.1 percent, the fewest number of people since 1987.

Thom S. Rainer is president and CEO of LifeWay, the ministry within the SBC that compiled the Annual Church Profile. While Dr. Rainer praised Southern Baptists as being "among the most generous and mission-minded people in the world" who will "give even when they're hurting so the spiritual and physical needs of others are met," he also noted that "the numbers simply tell us that Southern Baptists are not reaching as many people for Christ as they once did." As Dr. Rainer reports, "It still takes 47 Southern Baptists to baptize one person for Christ."

Why is that? Why are the Southern Baptists excelling so much in missions giving and implementation, but are seeing ever-declining results?

The answer, I believe, lies in the Profile's Sunday school enrollment statistics: "Sunday school enrollment dropped 123,817, or 1.6 percent, to 7,752,794." And, that these Sunday school statistics are affecting membership statistics: "Total SBC membership fell by 38,482, or 0.2 percent last year, to 16,228,438."

Before I explain why I believe the declining Sunday school statistics reveal the reason, understand that I am currently a member of the Southern Baptist denomination.

Throughout my life I've been a member or attendee of many denominations, and as long as they were solid on doctrine and strong in the expository teaching the Word of God, I was there. And, when seeking a seminary that stood on those essential teachings, I became a student of the doctrinally solid Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. In a time of growing apostasy in the Church, the Southern Baptists in the past almost fell off the precipice into apostasy until Dr. Albert Mohler, Jr., led the charge back to doctrinal soundness within the denomination. I respect the Southern Baptists and their stand, and so joined up.

Going to Southern Seminary and attending a Southern Baptist church can be two different things, though. While Dr. Mohler is writing important books like *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* that teach the essentiality of expository preaching, the churches' sermons teach very little except the importance of missions and social justice. While the Seminary instills the importance of strong corporate Sunday school study and even provides the full weight of LifeWay teaching resources, the churches starve out the Sunday school classes in favor of small home groups led by unqualified "facilitators" who are given materials that only teach... missions.

Missions is the key passion of many Southern Baptist churches, and as a former Missions minor myself, I applaud the denomination for its strong desire to reach people for Christ. But, missions without educating those who are going out into the field in what they believe lets loose an army of short-term missionaries that have no idea of what they believe or even how to share it. The "missionaries" all understand the importance of doing missions, but lack the basic Sunday school training to defend their own faith. They can't answer the tough questions of the faith that on the field the world will certainly be lobbing their way.

In essence, the churches are sending forth spiritual children to do a spiritual adult's job.

And so, what are the Southern Baptists missing when scratching their heads over the conflicting statistics?

We are missing that necessary step of equipping our own people in what they believe. And, an important component of what we believe is encapsulated in Bible prophecy.

Bible prophecy is an almost unheard of topic in many Southern Baptist churches. Preachers don't understand it so don't sermonize it. Pastors worry Bible prophecy could be divisive and result in numerical loss so avoid it. Missionaries have no idea how vital a topic it is when sharing the Gospel with the lost world and so are ignorant of it.

Bible prophecy is one-third of the Bible, so important to its author, the Holy Spirit. It contains the promises of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and only Savior, to mankind and to the whole world. Bible prophecy reveals that Jesus will return for those who have accepted His salvation. It provides hope in a world gone crazy. Bible prophecy teaches what happens to a person when they die, describing their eternal destiny in the grand scheme of God's plan for the ages. Bible prophecy reveals that each believer is part of something bigger than just the Church, but rather are a vital part of God's eternal kingdom. And most importantly, Bible prophecy teaches how just amazingly awesome God really is.

Southern Baptists, we are missing a vital part in the good work of bringing people to Christ — we are missing the power of the teaching of God through Bible prophecy. When we put study, especially the study of Bible prophecy, back into our churches and our missions, we will see God bring more souls to Him, changing those conversion statistics to His glory.