

Church Attendance Drops as Marriage Declines

summarized and posted by Bob Young
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According to a recent study by Robert Wuthnow, sociology professor at Princeton University, one of the factors contributing to a decline in church attendance over the last three decades is the dramatic decline in marriage—particularly among young adults.

Consider these statistics:

- men are 57 percent less likely to regularly attend church if they are not married
- single women are 41 percent less likely to attend church than their married counterparts

"It exaggerates only a little to say that Americans in their 20s and early 30s divide into two groups of about equal size: those who are married, the majority of whom participate in religion; and those who are not married, the majority of whom do not participate," Wuthnow said.

Wuthnow estimates in his book, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty- Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion*, that American churches would have 6.3 million more young adults today if young people married and started families at the same rate they did 30 years ago.

Brad Wilcox, associate professor of sociology at the University of Virginia, makes a similar claim. The biggest factor driving the decline in church attendance is delayed marriage. "Marriage is a gateway into family life, and family life, in turn, is often a gateway into church attendance," he said. "The longer people postpone marriage, the less likely they are to attend church at a given age, and also the less likely they are to attend church down the road."

More information on the study and results is available at
<http://www.citizenlink.org/content/A000007940.cfm>