

Answering Excuses for Leaving the Church

By Paul R. Blake

1. "They told me what to believe!" If "they" are parroting the theological mongering of men who have written another gospel, we certainly need to leave. "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:6-10).

If they are faithfully teaching what is written in the word of God, then we need to believe it whether we like it or not. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2Cor. 5:20). "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27).

2. "They told me I was sinning!" Personally, I am grateful to the evangelist who told me I was sinning. Before I obeyed the Gospel, I was bound for perdition. God bless the man who had the courage to stand before me and, by truth and love, warn me of the danger ahead of me. He risked my prideful displeasure and distain because he cared about my soul. On the other hand, I have heard of men who verbally abuse people from the pulpit. If I put aside my pride, I can learn to distinguish between the two, and love the first and pity the second.

3. "They didn't meet my needs!" I am not sure what is meant by this statement. If you mean that the church is not helping you to learn of salvation and how to maintain a godly life, then I agree; they certainly aren't meeting your needs. On the other hand, if someone is looking for a spiritual equivalent of the Disney channel at church, he needs to re-examine his faith. Worship is not a spectator sport, nor is it to be viewed as cable tv (change the channel if bored with the program). Christ came to serve, not to be waited on; and, His professed disciples must adopt the same spirit. Shame on me if my choice of churches is based, not on which one follows God's word and loves one another, but on which one has the biggest social program, best family life center, and best dinners. I must learn that my "needs" are to be saved, to be guided throughout life by the will of God, and to be of service where I live.

4. "They're too stuffy!" That is often the truth in some churches. I have been in places where I felt like I should have apologized for coming. I look at this as a temporary problem, though. I don't read in the Bible about heaven being populated by the self-righteous, the arrogant rich, or the social elite. I reckon I can put up with it for my three score and ten. At the same time, I have heard some make this statement meaning that because worshippers weren't dancing in the aisles shaking tambourines in ecstasy, they were being stuffy. I think more often than not that when this statement is made, it is because the speaker does not fully understand reverence. "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him" (Psalm 89:7).

5. "They're wasting God's money!" Indeed when we allow the contribution to be misused, we are in effect accessory to embezzlement. Devout souls need to speak up and ask for a scriptural reason for it's use. One certainly cannot have fellowship with error. At the same time, you must understand that your objection to the spending of the money must be based on scripture and not opinion. If a local church is teaching the lost, preaching to the saved, and practicing limited benevolence, they are practicing sound doctrine. Occasionally differences over the budget are based on judgment and opinion and not doctrine.

6. "I just wanted to leave!" This is possibly the answer that lies closest to the truth. Often folks leave for personal reasons, or boredom, or personality conflicts, or many other unworthy motives. It is an honest man who will acknowledge that he had no good reason for leaving. This is the Lord's church. We provide book, chapter and verse for all that we do. We strive heartily to do all things through love for God, for truth, for brethren, for all humankind. In a setting like that, if one choses to leave, more often than not the problem lies with himself. A humble self examination will reveal this and provide an honorable answer to one's difficulty.

If a local congregation is preaching and practicing the truth in love, there then exists no good reason to leave. Perhaps one may have to move to find work, or to care for family members, or some

other worthy external reason. But to flit from congregation to congregation like a disgruntled sparrow speaks more to the weakness of the Christian than it does of the church.

The Power of Collective Prayer By Kent Heaton

“Then Daniel went to his house, and made the decision known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret, so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. So Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him. I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; You have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of You, for You have made known to us the king's demand." (Daniel 2:17-23)

It was the worst of times. Daniel and his friends had been taken captive by a heathen nation and forced to serve in the courts of the king. Their names were changed; education forced upon them from the oppressors and challenged to eat delicacies they had to refuse. Through faith they were able to overcome being forced to eat food that would defile them but more battles remained. Their lives were danger as the king had a dream and because no wise man could tell the dream and its meaning a command was given to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. Word came to Daniel his fellow wise men were being slaughtered. Imploring Nebuchadnezzar to give him time Daniel knew the answer could only come from the Lord.

Normally a king would have a dream and ask his wise men to explain the dream. A good charlatan could easily give the king an interpretation that would soothe his troubled mind. However Nebuchadnezzar demanded the wise men tell him his dream and the interpretation. No one could do it. The faith of Daniel was exemplified when he tells the king to give him time to discover the dream and its meaning. How could this be done? Whom did Daniel think would give him that power? He knew this could only be the work of Jehovah God.

What Daniel did is a powerful testimony to the purpose of collective prayer. He did not pray alone. The need was great. This was something that needed the power of communal prayer. Returning to his home he found his three companions and the four of them prayed earnestly for their deliverance. The dream and its meaning is revealed through their faith and trust in God. They understood how great the Lord was ruling in the affairs of men. Their dependence was not on man's wisdom but from the word of God. They also understood they needed each other. Prayer is a powerful testimony to the faith of the individual but when prayer is combined in a collective action of faith it can move mountains in a massive way.

The days of the prophets were days of turmoil. There were many needs on an individual level and especially on a national level. Daniel shows a pattern of prayer that is often untapped in the church today. This is something beyond the individual prayer and beyond the scope of the "normal prayers" during an assembly. The need of the hour is specific and urgent. They gathered together as four men to pray fervently for an answer that seemed impossible. Because of their faith deliverance was granted. The power of collective prayer by individuals may have lost its popularity but it has not lost its influence on the Lord. There is a need of restoration within the body of God's people to realize the power of joining hearts together in prayer for a common cause. Daniel went home to pray with his friends. This Babylonian prayer meeting changed the course of history.

Prayer pleads the promises of God and from those promises rise the need to share our faith with others in asking His favor. There is strength in praying people and increasing their number in a union of prayer exalts the power of God. When specific needs arise our heartfelt concern should also include the action of collective prayer. It can change the world.