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Why I Haven't Left the Church

BY RICHARD A. PARKE

I hear a lot of people saying these days, “Why are our young people leaving the church?” We form committees to discuss the *why* for days, weeks and sometimes longer. At the conclusion, we often end up with some kind of “revival” event targeted at retaining the youth in our congregations, but I don’t see a lot of results.

What we fail to realize is something noted by John R.W. Stott in his book, *Basic Christianity*. John says young people have “rejected the contemporary church, not Jesus Christ himself.” John’s belief is that young people “see a contradiction between the founder of Christianity and the current state of the church he founded.”

We’re specifically talking about those who may have grown up in the church, or at least believe the teachings of Christ, but are rejecting the church as an organization for one reason or another. Paul writes in I Corinthians 12 that the church represents the “body of Christ,” so we can’t really have one without the other. If we believe we are members of that body and Christ is love, then shouldn’t Christ be our primary focus and love be the rule? It is Christ’s love that constrains us and His kindness that leads us to repentance.

If young people are attracted by the love of Christ but don’t see it represented in our churches, it’s no wonder we question the relevance of the church. I hear time and time again of people who don’t go to church anymore not because of the style of worship service or the songs sung, but because of some situation they experienced that left a bad taste in their mouth.

So, why haven’t I left the church yet? Yes, I, too, have been through situations that others may have considered



Bradley Austin

reason enough to completely reject the church. I realize though, the church is made up of sinners just like me but created in the image of our Father, which gives me hope. Though we make mistakes as the body of Christ, I know there’s no place better than where I am now and I am actively engaged in the church’s mission.

I am suggesting, however, that we take another look at the guidance of Galatians 6:1–10 where we are encouraged to bear one another’s burdens in an atmosphere of transparency and accountability with a passion for doing good—to encourage one another. Remember, we are all fighting a common enemy here, and the enemy is not flesh and blood. I think sometimes we forget we win this war when we love—myself included.

So may I suggest that the question should not be, “Why are our young people leaving the church?” but rather, “How can I better show the love of Jesus Christ in my daily life to those I meet?” (1 John 3:11–24; 4:7–21 is a good place to start; it has helped me.)

So let our “revivals” be daily, personal revivals as we strive to show those around us, young or old, the love of Jesus Christ! They will know we are Christians by our love!

Richard A. Parke has provided leadership for a number of religious activities on the campus of Andrews University, including the annual Easter Passion Play. He currently serves as the radio station manager for Campus Ministries.