

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

WHY PEOPLE QUIT THE CHURCH

Church leaders have long been interested in why so many drift away from faithful service to the Lord. Jesus summarized the matter of his parable of the sower. The causes he listed are: the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of wealth, distracted desires for worldly things, and carnal pleasure (Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:18; Luke 8:14).

This list could be expanded from numerous other texts (e.g., the ingestion of false teaching [cf. Romans 16:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:6; Titus 3:10]), but for the moment this will suffice.

Several months ago, Lifeway Christian Resources, a Baptist-based group, did a survey of 469 adults who formerly were "church" people but had left their respective groups. The results of this study are interesting.

1. Many of them "quit church" because they "simply got too busy." Too busy to honor their Creator; too busy to serve Him who died for them; too busy to go to heaven.
2. Others faded away, they said, because "family and home responsibilities prevented" their continued connection with church. Is not serving God the most important family and home responsibility? Is putting food in a child's mouth and clothes on his back more crucial than nurturing his soul toward heaven? The failure to sort out one's prime obligations is one of the most significant gauges of spiritual foolishness.
3. A considerable number complained that they had become disenchanted with church leaders or members. This is what one might call the PTB syndrome ("passing the buck"). Some do not like the elders' decision, others find the preaching boring, and there is the complaint that the deacons don't minister to their needs.

There also is the common gripe that they are not being included in the church's activities. Of course, they never volunteer for service and usually complain when asked to do something.

4. Not a few charge that church members are judgmental and hypocritical, etc. Never mind that these are judging those whom they contend are judgmental. And they never boycott any place on the basis of hypocrisy except the church!

In more than a half century of service to Christ, I cannot recall having seen a reprobate leave the fellowship of the church and take personal responsibility for his apostasy. He always plays the blame game: "It's not my fault; they did it to me!" Such rationalizations are hypocritical subterfuge on the part of dishonest people who refuse to acknowledge their own problems.

5. A small number claim they left the church because they lost faith in organized religion. One supposes they prefer disorganized religion. God does not condone confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), and one is not allowed to improvise his own worship and service system (John 4:24; 117:17). Such autocratic, self-focused individuals have not the slightest understanding of what genuine Christianity is. Of course, there are cases where people genuinely lose faith. Perhaps they were never grounded or they were disappointed when their expectations of God were more idealistic than informed.

I am familiar with a man who matriculated through two Christian schools and then preached the gospel for a number of years on a foreign mission field. Eventually he "soured," and now he works vociferously to oppose Christianity in every conceivable way he can, denying even that Jesus Christ ever lived. It most likely is the reality that he failed personally and now seeks to rationalize his apostasy by directing his wrath toward the Son of God.

Such loss of faith is never justified. Let the patriarch Job be your teacher! One should join the man who exclaimed, "Help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24), and seek assistance.

6. Some fall away because of changing circumstances in their lives. A divorce, for

COMMON SENSE CHRISTIANITY:
THE RUST IS A WITNESS

Text: _____

1. That _____ is _____

Notes:

2. That the _____ is a _____

Notes:

3. That _____ is a _____

Notes:

WHAT A SAVIOR!

Text: _____

1. Pictured is His _____

Notes:

2. Pictured is His _____

Notes:

3. Pictured is His _____

Notes:

example, can devastate a person. He or she may feel an unjustified guilt because the marriage did not hold together. One may be immersed in shame because other families in the church seem stable.

7. Others may experience a job move that sends them into an isolated area where there are no Christians. If one does not have the stability to survive in a community where there is no church, or if they cannot summon the courage to faithfully serve God alone, attempting to teach others, he or she would be far better off finding a new job that would facilitate Christian faithfulness. No job is worth the loss of one's soul (Matthew 16:26).

The ultimate truth of the matter is this: there are **no valid reasons for forsaking Christ**—only lame excuses! And Jesus made it very plain: excuses will carry no weight in the day of reckoning (see Luke 14:18ff).

-Wayne Jackson

MY RULES FOR LIFE

1. I try never to say anything behind a man's back that would give me the least embarrassment to say to his face.
2. I try never to speak back to personal critics—friends do not need to hear the defense and enemies would not believe it.
3. Every day I greet every person I see with a smile and make a special effort to do so if the person is poor or in unfortunate circumstances.
4. The first thing when I awake in the morning I plan what my duty for the day is and try to go beyond it.
5. Every day I read from the Bible and some other good books—feeding the mind and the soul is more important than feeding the body.
6. I try to pay every debt I owe on time and always save something from every pay check, however small.
7. I like people and never harbor any malice or hatred toward any person in the world; I like places and have yet to be anywhere that I do not like—I go there with the intention of liking the place.
8. I am a confirmed optimist, believing that ever in this life evil men will be punished by their own unhappiness and good men will be rewarded. "It's better further on."
9. I try to close each day as if it were the last day I'd be on earth, closing the books on all regrets, worries and annoyances.
10. The last thing I do at night is to count one by one the blessings of the day. This makes me so thankful and happy that I soon drift into pleasant sleep. In this spirit, I hope to close life's journey and drift into eternity.

-George W. Dehoff

REDEEM THE TIME

A reminder that can never be repeated too often is that life is short and the days of man are few. Each breath is fleeting and even if we are able to enjoy the luxury of seventy or eighty years (Psalm 90:10), that time is far less than it seems. Knowing, though, that life is as a vapor (James 4:14), it seems amazing the time that we will spend on some matters and restrict from others. Would the most important things not be obvious as we survey the span of our lives? Seeing as they would, why is it the case that so much is wasted on what amounts to be so little? Paul would encourage the Christians of Ephesus to “see then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16). What Paul is discussing in these two verses is the difference between wise and unwise living and encourages those recipients to walk with diligence. In verse sixteen, though, Paul uses a phrase that perhaps establishes his desire in the best way possible. He encourages us all to “redeem the time.” Gary Colley marvelously explains the wisdom of this concept:

“Redeeming the time’ points us to the way we are to use our swiftly-passing moments of life, especially in teaching the lost. We are to ‘buy up the opportunities’ as a wise purchaser who realizes the value of certain merchandise and purchases it at the first opportunity, lest the opportunity be lost. We are to use our time to the best advantage each hour and each day in serving our Lord (Romans 6:16-18). We are to use our mental and physical faculties in such a way that honor and glory will be gained from our lives for God’s glory (Matthew 5:16). We must strive to be the greatest possible blessing to our fellow man in teaching and living before him the Gospel of salvation (Romans 1:14-17). Tomorrow may be too late to begin living the wise life!”

Every day 86,400 seconds have been deposited into our lives? Are we being wise stewards with those blessings so as to provide our Master with the greatest return possible (see the parable of the talents—Luke 19:12-27)? With this profound reality facing us every day, what are some Divine suggestions as to how we can properly redeem our time as earnest servants of Jesus Christ?

We should spend time talking to God. Prayer is an invaluable blessing that often is ignored to such a point that some even forget how to pray. Many and varied, though, are the instances in scripture that allude to the need to make prayer a practice to which we are given multiple times daily. The Psalmist would say that “evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice” (Psalm 55:17). It seems safe to say that every day he was determined to spend time talking to God, knowing the good that it would ultimately accomplish in his life (James 5:16). If we are truly desirous to redeem the time we have, we will spend time with this admirable practice as well.

We should spend time allowing God to talk to us. “By what means is this accomplished?” you ask. By reading, studying, and meditating upon the inspired words He has provided through scripture. No, God is not going to speak directly to us through some small still voice as many claim, but His ability to communicate with man is not hampered in the least. The Bible contains any and all information that we could ever need from God in this life (2 Peter 1:3) and if we will commit our lives to searching it out, we will find the blessings too numerous to name. The New Testament bears out the fact that those who are diligent in their studies are noble, upright, complete, and growing (Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 2:15; 2 Peter 3:18). Truly our pursuit of Divine knowledge will never be in vain as we spend time each day allowing God to talk to us.

We should spend time talking to someone about God. The responsibility to evangelize the lost of the world is an expectation that is lost in the minds of many Christians. Some know it but ignore it. Others never fully recognize the need. A number simply do not know where to begin. Our accountability to the Great Commission, though, is as great today as it ever has been. Each day, in some way big or small, we should make strides in trying to get the saving gospel to someone who needs it. By committing ourselves to that effort, we will be aiding the church at large as together we “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Yes, everyday we should try to spend time talking to someone about God.

Are we redeeming the time or wasting our time? Surely our hope is to be as productive in service to God as we possibly can that He might be glorified, His kingdom might be built up, and the number of saved souls increases at a phenomenal rate. Redeem the time, because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:16).