

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

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 in 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’ decisions, others find the preaching boring, and there is the complaint that the deacons don’t minister to their needs.

There also is the common grope 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 4:4; 17:17). 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 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 assis-

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

THE MOTHER WHO GAVE HIM UP

Text: _____

I. She Gave Him Up For _____

Notes:

II. She Gave Him Up For _____

Notes:

III. She Gave Him Up For _____

Notes:

RESPECT FOR MOM

While the soldiers stood at attention during a parade, a private waved to someone in the audience. "Jones, never do that again!" the drill instructor whispered. But a few minutes later, the soldier waved a second time. Back in the barracks after the parade, the DI stormed in and barked for Jones to come front and center. "Son, you knew I was going to see you," he screamed. "You knew it was wrong. Aren't you afraid of me?"

"Yes, sir!" replied Jones. "But you don't know my mother!"

BALANCE

"Imagine life as a game in which you are juggling five balls in the air. You name them—work, family, health, friends, and spirit—and you're keeping all of them in the air. You will soon understand that work is a rubber ball. If you drop it, it will bounce back. But the other four balls—family, health, friends, and spirit—are made of glass. If you drop any of these, they will be irrevocably scuffed, marked, nicked, damaged—or even shattered. They will never be the same. You must understand that and strive for balance in your life."

-Brian G. Dyson, President and CEO, Coca-Cola

tance.

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

WHENEVER IT BREAKS...

There is a monastery in Greece perched high on a cliff, several hundred feet in the air. The only way to reach the monastery is to be suspended in a basket which is pulled to the top by several monks who tug with all their strength. Obviously, the ride up the steep cliff in that basket is terrifying.

One tourist got exceptionally nervous about half-way up as he noticed that the rope by which he was suspended was old and frayed. With a trembling voice, he asked a monk riding with him how often they changed the rope. The monk thought for a moment and answered seriously, "Whenever it breaks..."

Some things should never be put off. When I recognize the need for change and correction, I need to do it NOW...before it's too late...before the rope breaks.

Would you believe me if I told you I had discovered a new diet where we could eat only fattening foods and yet lose weight? The diet would consist of banana splits, pizza, coconut cream pies, doughnuts, fudge—you name it. What if I told you that I had found a new alcohol recovery program where we were advised to drink a quart of Scotch every hour? Or what if I told you about a new way to get in shape by sitting in front of the television set, clicking away on your remote control? What if I told you that I had found a new way to get ahead in school by goofing off and playing video games?

We know none of these ridiculous suggestions will work. Why? Because we reap what we sow...

Isn't it time to start reading the Bible...before the rope breaks?

-Alan Smith

DUMBER THAN A DRUNK MONKEY—4

The Bible's conclusion of alcohol consumption. There are numerous examples of characters in Bible history who fell under the influence of the Devil's fiery liquid. And how do the scriptures portray those individuals? Does anything positive ever come out of those instances of iniquity? Let's call a few witnesses to the stand and gather some evidence to determine the Bible's conclusion regarding the consumption of alcohol.

The first instance in scripture at which we read of one under alcohol's influence is Noah, post-flood. In Genesis 9, shortly after their departure from the ark, it is learned that Noah went into the vineyard business and produced wine, wine that was obviously alcoholic. Verse twenty-one says "he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent." The influences of the wine had an obvious effect on him, both physically and mentally. He forfeited his ability to function and act rationally, and the result was despicable. "And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness" (vs. 22-23). What exactly happened is unsure, though some have speculated, but whatever it was, it was terrible and should have been avoided. However it was not, foremost, because Noah made it possible by his drunkenness. Was the alcohol commended or condemned? Obviously it was condemned!

Another instance in scripture where we read of someone else who succumbed to the Devil's drink is Genesis 19. On that occasion, Lot and his family had just fled Sodom and his wife was lost in the process. Lot, though, was without a son, and so his daughters devised a plan by which they would both eventually bear him sons. The plan was "let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father" (Genesis 19:32). Were the daughters innocent bystanders in this disgusting display? No! They were guilty as guilty could be. However, had Lot not allowed himself to come under the influence of alcohol as he did, he would have maintained his ability to react appropriately and he never would have yielded to the wiles of his daughters. And as bad as the first occasion was, Lot allowed this to happen to him twice! Such utter idiocy could only be attributed to the incapacitation caused by alcohol's effects. Was alcohol commended or condemned? Again, it was condemned!

A final mention regarding this point is the numerous times in scripture where God likens the spiritually ignorant people around the world, both of the heathen nations and even those of His own people, to those drunks who staggered, fell, and wallowed in their own vomit. Is it not significant that of all the illustrations God could provide in His infinite storehouse of wisdom to describe their degradation that He used the picture of those drunk under the influence of alcohol? How could anyone read verses like these and not get the picture?

- Psalm 107:27 – "They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end."
- Isaiah 19:14 – "The Lord hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof: and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit."
- Jeremiah 23:9 – "Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of the Lord, and because of the words of his holiness."
- Jeremiah 25:27 – "Therefore thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Drink ye, and be drunken, and spew, and fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you."

These verses and so many more portray the drunk man as a staggering sad sack of human waste. Does such a picture speak fondly and encouragingly of alcoholic consumption? It is certainly not here commended, but rather condemned!

The Bible's conclusion of the drinking of alcohol in any form and in any amount is that it is sickening, sorry, and sinful. It makes no sense whatsoever, and yet millions, if not billions around the world seek opportunities to fall prey to this predator of both the day and night. Why not spend our time, talents, and treasures in pursuits more constructive rather than destructive? To do otherwise, yielding to the pressures of society and Satan, truly makes us dumber than a drunk monkey!