



Leaving the Faith - Really?

by

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Leaving

What's up with so many people 'leaving the faith'? Why are they doing it?

First, we need to define two terms:

- What does it mean to 'leave' something or someone?
- What does it mean to leave 'the faith'?

I understand walking away from a weak belief in something, but 'leaving the faith?' That's hard to fathom for several reasons.

Primary definitions for the word 'leave' include: 'go away from; to go out of or away from, as a place; to quit, depart from permanently.'

In each of these primary definitions we see the idea of leaving a place *where we had been*. If someone told you that they had 'left' Philadelphia this morning, you would understand them to mean that they had been *in* Philadelphia for some period of time before leaving the city to travel to another place. By definition, a person who 'leaves' something or somewhere has to have physically had something or been present somewhere before they would be able 'leave' that something or somewhere.

What people are claiming to be leaving in our context is both a *something* and a *Someone*. By definition they would be claiming to leave something they had been present in for some time and Someone they had known personally.

The Faith

Primary definitions for ‘the faith’ include: ‘complete trust or confidence in someone or something; belief in God or in a set of religious doctrines.’

The ‘faith’ that many people are claiming to ‘leave’ is known as the ‘Christian faith.’ That’s the complete trust or confidence in Jesus Christ and the claims He has made about Himself.

People who follow the ‘Christian faith’ are known as ‘disciples’ or ‘followers’ of Jesus Christ. Claiming to have been a member of the Christian ‘faith’ would imply they had joined according to membership guidelines determined by the Founder.

First, let’s learn something about the Founder of the Christian ‘faith.’

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:1-3, 14

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and

became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:5-11

“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.” Colossians 1:13-20

Based on who the Founder is, let's hear what He said about people becoming His followers:

“When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, ‘Whoever desires to come after Me, let

him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

Mark 8:34-38

The Founder of the Christian 'faith' personally called more than a dozen men to become leaders of 'the faith' and to teach people how to follow the Founder and what guidelines would be necessary to following Him. Here are a few of the guidelines for becoming a 'follower' of Jesus Christ.

1. Agreeing with God about who we are without Christ.

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” Ephesians 2:1-3

2. Understanding that our spiritual salvation is totally dependent on God's love, grace, mercy and kindness.

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with

which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”
Ephesians 2:4-9

3. Repenting before God judges the world.

“Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” Acts 17:29-31

4. Trusting in Christ alone knowing your life depends on it.

“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his

sword and was about to kill himself. 28 But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, ‘Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.’ Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.” Acts 16:25-34

Being a ‘follower’ of Jesus Christ brings about a radical change in the life of a human being.

“And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity

of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Acts 2:40-47

“Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.” Acts 26:19-20

“But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” Ephesians 4:20-24

Really?

Given all that the New Testament teaches about what it means to be a true ‘follower’ of Jesus Christ, I need to ask a question: REALLY?

True followers of Jesus Christ are ‘leaving the faith?’ People who have bowed their knee to the Lord Jesus Christ in true humility and repentance are ‘leaving the faith?’ People who have known the depth of God’s love and mercy for their soul and had full confidence in the truth of God’s Word are ‘leaving the faith?’ People who have seen the life-changing power of the Gospel in their own lives are ‘leaving the faith?’ People who have been involved in sharing the love of Jesus Christ with others and have seen the Holy Spirit change lives through the power of the Gospel of Christ are ‘leaving the faith?’ **Really?**

A Personal Story

I was once accused of ‘leaving the faith.’ I went forward during a church service at the age of ten and said I wanted to ‘join the church.’ That meant attending several classes, praying a prayer and being baptized. I did those things and become a young member of our church. I was allowed to attend ‘church meetings’ at the age of 12. That’s where I started learning about the underbelly of the church and I didn’t like what I saw.

Something else I did at the age of 12 was begin studying yoga and martial arts. In addition to learning about stretching and self defense, I also learned about world views other than Christianity. I went on to study Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism. I especially liked Buddhism

and Taoism because they were related to my martial arts training. I also loved to read and spent a lot of time at the library. I came upon the writings of David Hume and Bertrand Russell and read everything by them that I could find. I identified with what they wrote about religion.

Interestingly, at the same time I was finding great agreement with ancient Eastern mysticism and with agnosticism and atheism, I was still very involved at my church. I often won contests about Bible knowledge, sang in the choir and was a leader in the youth group. You might imagine what people thought and some said when I became an atheist in my late teens. Some accused me of 'leaving the faith.'

Question: was I ever 'in' the faith so that I could 'leave' the faith? I know I wasn't because of what I learned it meant to be a Christ follower. (See above) I became a Christian after investigating the claims of the Bible and determining that the evidence for the existence of God and the resurrection of Jesus Christ outweighed the arguments against it – arguments that I had strongly presented as an atheist radio talk show host. I learned what it means to have a 'personal relationship' with God after I repented of my sins and asked His forgiveness and His Holy Spirit cleansed me from all unrighteousness. Everything changed on the day I was 'saved' and 'sealed' for God's service.

"In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the

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guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Conclusion

I seriously question how many of the people claiming to 'leave the faith' today were actually 'in the faith.' Most of the 'former Christians' I've talked to and those whose stories I've read, talk about Christianity in an 'experiential' way. I've heard stories about how they began attending churches or youth groups or campus groups because of friendships with people in those groups or because they were attracted to someone in a group. When relationships changed or when they were challenged about what they believed, they 'left.' Even more young people 'leaving' the faith grew up in churches and, like me, stop attending church during or after high school. Many, like me, were never really 'in' the faith, so their leaving the church doesn't seem to apply to the meaning atheists and other non-Christians are giving to people leaving churches. Leaving a church or youth group is NOT the same thing as 'leaving the faith.'

So, what do we do about this? I suggest we do everything we can to help people who claim to have 'left' the faith. Love them and offer to discuss their reasons for leaving with 'truth and reason' (Acts 26:25) and "always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15).

We also need to do a better job of preparing children and teens in our churches to face the challenges from unbelievers they will meet during their lifetime. If a child trained in a martial arts class for 18 years, I would expect them to have a Black Belt and be able to

defend themselves and others against personal attack. If they couldn't, I would seriously question the teaching abilities of the instructors in that class. If a child trained in a church for 18 years, I would expect them to be a strong follower of Jesus Christ and be able to defend themselves and others against spiritual attack. If they couldn't, I would seriously question the teaching abilities of the instructors in that church. Does that sound reasonable?

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