

Youngsters Leaving the Church?

Written by K B Napier
Monday, 26 March 2018 11:03

I admit to feeling some annoyance when I hear the claim: “*Youngsters are leaving the church*”. It is a claim found in many Christian publications and on websites. But, is it accurate and true? No, it is not!

The question is asked not by those who understand God’s sovereignty, but by those who do not. The claim is made by Arminian-style preachers and denominations, under several guises, and they are all wrong.

This paper is very short, because the answer to the supposed ‘dilemma’ is itself very short and easy to understand. Only those who have an inadequate biblical understanding can possibly make the claim that youngsters leave the church “because”. What, then, is the answer?

Election and Predestination!

Basically, that is the answer. In every age throughout history, the only ones who are saved have been elected and predestinated by our Lord in eternity. Thus, in every age, ONLY the ones so elected will be saved. The frantic efforts made by Arminianists are meaningless and will have nil-effect, because of election. Whether large numbers flock to hear the Gospel and are saved (rare), or only a trickle come to the Lord, the number thus saved will ALWAYS be precisely the number called by God in Heaven. No others will ever be saved.

Youngsters Are Not a Special Case

(Also read article by same title, [O-036](#))

The younger a person is, the less likely he or she is to be saved, simply because they are too young to understand the things of God in any real way. There are exceptions, but these are few, and are the effect of the Holy Spirit’s intervention for His own purposes. This is more-or-less verified by the fact that most who are saved are at least in their mid-later teenage years or older.

On 21st October, 1966, we heard of the terrible Aberfan disaster, when a coal tip suddenly slipped and enveloped part of Aberfan village (South Wales), including the school with children,

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killing 116 of them, plus 28 adults. I was saved in the previous summer in my mid-teens, and I was given my first preaching date, which fell a few days after this disaster, which I used in my 'sermon' to the rest of the young people in our church.

The fact was, I should never have been asked to preach at all. I had only just become a Christian and knew nothing. Though brought up in churches from birth, it was not until the summer of 1965 that I actually listened to God and to preaching. I started to listen ONLY because God has caused me to be born-again. Even then, I understood almost nothing. So, who was I to preach? All I really remember about that first 'date' was trying to make what I said 'entertaining' and those who heard me still remember some of the content! To put it bluntly, I was untaught.

However, I know that out of the roomful who listened, almost none understood the things of God. In that we were almost equal! I was just one out of many speakers. I knew from the way the other youngsters spoke and acted that their attitude towards church was that of bored kids who had nowhere else to go; it had almost nothing to do with 'faith'. The local church had quite a large number of youngsters, because, at that time, there were only youth clubs: 'disco' clubs had not yet been invented; youngsters could go to this or that church hall to hear local rock bands play badly, and to meet the opposite sex. But, when in their churches, they understood nothing and did not really want to know. Older Christians were partly to blame, for being ignorant themselves and not teaching the teenagers as responsible.

As one who grew up with them, I was (almost) the same. But, after that first awful preaching date I became more interested in knowing about scripture. And the more I learned the less I had in common with my fellow youngsters (then attending what was called the 'YPP' – the Young Peoples' Fellowship). Indeed, they moved away from knowing me and even on day trips, when we all went out together in buses, I was always on my own. They went off to 'have a laugh' and I went on my own, usually drawing, or looking at places of interest. On the buses, they wanted to sing inane choruses, while I asked to sing real hymns... a desire that led them to give me the nickname of "Old 'What's the Bible say'?" One other young man was just as serious, and he went into the local Bible College. The rest? Little spirituality.

Now, my point is this: youngsters are NOT 'leaving the church/the faith'! Those who are elect, predestinated, and genuinely saved, CANNOT 'leave the church/ekklesia'; it is simply not possible, because 'once saved, always saved'.

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They might be tempted away from true faith in college by things like evolution, etc., or by the temptations of clubs and pubs, or even by sex. But, they WILL return to truth and faith after repentance. All others, just like the large numbers who I knew in our YPF's, were never saved in the first place. They did not, then, 'leave the church/faith'; they just left the local church membership, which is very different.

So many churches think they must hatch fabulous plans and programmes to keep youngsters interested. They bring them together in groups of the same age instead of mixing ages naturally. They surround them with rock music and games. None of this is scriptural. Biblically, all people of all ages meet together – the young enthuse the older ones, and the elders temper enthusiasm that might otherwise go astray. Those youngsters who are truly saved will hunger after truth and scriptural knowledge. Those who are unsaved will remain ignorant and untaught, no matter how interesting older Christians think their programmes are. And it is these who leave.

If younger Christians are taught truth and shown how biblical truth applies to modern life, they will grow in faith, and not fall away, unless sin carries them off. If that happens, older Christians must pray for them and for their return to truth and a genuine witness. There is no need for special programmes or 'plans', because God has already got the youngsters in His sights! He knows who will be carried off by sin or false teachings. He knows when they were saved and knows when they will return.

The task of older believers is to show truth in their own lives and to counsel those of ANY age who fall away temporarily. Because only the Lord truly knows who is saved, we must pray for them and try to give sound counsel. We are not responsible for youngsters who fall away, temporarily or for life. *They* are responsible for their own sins and for their standing before the Lord. But, this standing will only be true if they have been elected to salvation. Most churches erroneously think **THEY** can save.

Christians should understand that in Judaism, children were deemed to be responsible adults at age 13. In Christian churches older members tend to wrap youngsters in cotton wool, thinking they are 'too young to be responsible'. What an error! Youngsters must come to know the awe of the Lord, and must be taught to obey His commands. Playing games and holding quiz nights and rock music concerts is not part of the remit!

Youngsters who leave do NOT leave because there are no rock music events, or flashing lights

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and games. They leave because they are unsaved. Those who are saved and leave do so because of sin. But, Arminianists do not understand nor accept this basic fact.

The above is sufficient to answer the silly arguments about 'youth leaving the church'! Few youngsters who attend churches today, and who leave, are saved. It is about time older Christians understand this truth and not fret over what cannot be changed. Yes, older Christians must understand what happens, but they must also be true to the Lord and live holy lives. They must not always hit youngsters over their heads with undue strictness and irrelevant rules. Like all people, youngsters must be taught the things of God and must be expected to obey God. The rest is up to their own consciences and spiritual understanding. Hard to accept maybe, but important.

We all want our children to be saved, but this loving desire often overtakes reality, and parents are then shocked when their children rebel and leave. Let them soak up the charismaticised atmosphere and ethos of many modern churches and they are MORE likely to leave. What everyone needs is God, not human plans and policies. Many folks sit up and listen to genuine teaching and real witness. But, nothing at all will convince youngsters if they are unsaved to begin with (which we all are). They will only stay and listen, and then grow in grace, if they are already elect. No amount of planning and youth programming will alter that! The Holy Spirit will open their eyes, hearts and minds through being born again. Then comes salvation. After that it is a matter of obedience to the Lord. Young or old, the same demands apply.

So, whether leavers are young or older, assuming their local church consists only of ekklesia who obey the Lord, they leave for a variety of reasons: most because they are unsaved and want something they think is 'more exciting'; but even the saved can leave. Ask them why if you can, but bear in mind they are not yet fully mature and might offer silly or wrong reasons. Even so, *they* are responsible to God for their actions. Not you, and certainly not plans and policies. We can say a lot more, but this paper deals with the basic answer.

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