

QUITTING YOUR CHURCH?

Sylvester Onyemalechi

It is becoming increasingly difficult to find Christians who are completely loyal to one church. Many people today move from church to church. Most of the church growth we have today is a movement of Christians from one church to another. It is becoming a normal thing to change church. A Pastor was quoted to have said that, "Christians behave like prostitutes." He said so because he discovered that they are never stable or satisfied with one church. This makes it difficult for churches to flourish and function well. It is not fun to invest time into someone and as soon as you think the person is ripe to become very useful in one area of the ministry or the other, he or she is gone sometimes for stupid and unthinkable reasons. This is the dilemma of many Pastors and church leaders today. Some ministers have already accepted it to be a norm and do not worry about it any more.

What exactly makes people to leave one church for another? What will one regard as a genuine reason for leaving or quitting a church? These and many more questions will be answered in this article.

People leave their church for another for many and different reasons. Some of them are genuine and understandable, while some are no reasons at all. There are many things that can cause a person to consider leaving a church, some are good and some are not so good. Many times the Lord may reassign a person to another church so they can bring ministry or encouragement to another congregation -- that's the best reason to leave a church. In other situations, people may discover that their church actually impedes their spiritual well-being, and may find the necessity to withdraw. Frequently, people leave a church simply because they are disinterested, dissatisfied, or feel they can find something better.

Some people quit their church for not getting a position of authority that they anticipated they will get. Some leave for not getting the breakthrough and miracle desired. Some quit for not getting special attention from the Pastor. Some quit for not getting financial help from the pastor or church even when the Pastor or church explained clearly that the money requested is not available. Some left because when food and drinks was served in the church program, they were left out for one reason or the other. Others leave for another church because they hear that many miracles are being witnessed there. Some leave because someone offended them and they couldn't and don't want to forgive the offender. Some leave because someone they once had a quarrel with somewhere surfaced in that same church as a new member. Some quit because they were rebuked or disciplined for a wrong doing by the church authorities instead of accepting rebuke and correction. Some have quit their church after being lifted from poverty to riches in a "small church", they felt their mates were no longer in

that church, so they have to go to a bigger church where they will meet people of their caliber.

Some came into a church with many problems; their pastors loved them and passionately prayed for them until their situation changed, a little later they left after they got what they wanted. Some leave their church after a little misunderstanding forgetting all the help they got from their church and especially their Pastors. This is disheartening and Christians need to have a rethink about the reasons why one should quit a church.

Before doing anything, it's a good idea to pray about your situation and seek the Lord's leading

Prov 3:6

6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

NIV

If you feel the Lord genuinely wants you to leave and go elsewhere for good reason, go to the pastor and discuss it with him. Don't just stop showing up for church. That is inconsiderate and immature. Keep in mind, leaving one church always means finding another -- the Lord does not lead anyone to simply stop going to church.

Heb 10:25

25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

NIV

My advice to you is, if you are presently in a church that **(1)** is scripturally sound, **(2)** is reasonably stable and loving, **(3)** has godly, moral leadership, **(4)** is doing their best to exalt Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and **(5)** if they're making a reasonable effort to minister to you and your family, then hang in there and remain faithful! You don't know how blessed you are to have a healthy church like that. Many Christians would give anything to just find a church that is merely at peace!

SEVEN THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE LEAVING A CHURCH

1. Don't leave a church out of your personal discontent. – If discontent is rooted within you, it will follow you wherever you go, regardless of what church you attend. A Pastor reported, "Many years ago, a certain lady who had attended our church for a few weeks came to speak with me. "Your church is so refreshing

from all the other churches around here,” she complemented. Curious, I asked, “Just how many other churches have you attended?” “Oh, about thirteen,” was her reply. Privately, I realized that we were going to have problems with this new lady, because when it comes down to the basics, most Christian churches aren’t that much different from each other. Whenever a person finds dissatisfaction with several congregations, you can be assured that the problem is their own, not the churches. And sure enough, the woman eventually became discontent and left our church too, the same as the previous thirteen.

2. Don’t leave a church because you transferred your own personal frustrations there. -- Avoid pushing off your feelings of disappointment from other areas of your life unto the church. Sometimes unhappiness toward the church is a derivative from other personal problems such as: Family or marital difficulties, job dissatisfaction, personal offenses, memories of childhood abuse, mental stress, emotional illness, and so forth. People who struggle with deep internal problems sometimes develop a distorted estimation of the people or situations around them, and may blame them, including the church, for their anguish. Generally speaking, the church is not your problem. Remember that, and that its ministers are there because they love you and want to help you -- not hurt you. The church is your friend and partner in your recovery. Failure or delay in getting healing should not be blamed on the church or the leadership of the church. Walking out on the church is not the best thing to do

3. Don’t leave a church because your feelings got hurt. -- Hurt feelings are a “violation of self interests” and are usually a result of being too self-sensitive. In any church or gathering of people there may be many offensive things said or done, mostly unintended, but you don’t have to let yourself become offended. Those who are easily offended may simply be immature, too self-centered, or may retain self-sensitivities due to past, festering wounds. Hurt feelings are probably the greatest reason why people leave churches, but deepening your roots in Christ and His word can immunize you against such tenderness. If our walk with Jesus has not changed our lives and strengthened our ability to forgive and accommodate people’s weaknesses, then we can’t claim to be changed by Jesus Christ.

Ps 119:165

165 Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.

NIV

Never forget that the church is like a hospital with sick patients looking for healing from their spiritual, mental, emotional and physical illnesses. You have yours, and others have theirs. This calls for patience with each other. If you want me to be patient with you when your illness manifests, then you have to be patient with

me when mine manifests. With this in place, we will cohabit and fellowship with one another without breaking up the church or running out on each other. Every church you go to, you will meet imperfect people and Pastors. Work on yourself and be patient with others.

4. Don't leave a church over trivial criticisms. -- People sometimes have a remarkable ability of making a mountain out of molehill. People have changed churches merely because they didn't like the way the pastor combed his hair or dressed, the length of the services, they were not thanked publicly for the service they rendered or the gift they gave the church, how the bulletin was typed, or other silly reasons. Of the many excuses that persons use to leave a church, this is among the shallowest. If all you seem to do is criticize and find fault with the church, you have an attitude problem. Regardless of where you go to church, you'll find similar faults again, because the problem isn't with the church -- the problem is with you.

5. Avoid leaving a church over its style or individuality. -- One of the most common explanations people give for switching churches is their "disagreement with certain beliefs." However, there are many instances where people used this reason to change to another church even though both churches believed and taught the same things. In reality, it was a dislike of the personality of the church -- its teaching methods, the style of worship, the structure of the services, or the pastor's preaching style, etc. Many churches actually believe and teach the same things, but each might have a slightly different method, structure, or style which makes up its unique personality. No two churches are alike in their personality or methods, any more than two people are alike, but its not really very mature to abandon a church over such, shallow, external things. Our estimation of a church should be based on more spiritual, substantive issues, such as their beliefs, their love for one another, or their commitment to reach the lost, etc.

6. Don't leave a church when faced with self conflict. -- Many people do not understand that spiritual growth requires confronting and overcoming conflict with our self-willed nature (James 1:3-4). The environment of the church provides two important features of growth producing conflict: (1) Authority who will challenge you with truth and correct you when you are wrong. And (2) an environment of believers, many of whom are imperfect and whose rough edges will serve as sandpaper to smooth out your wrinkles. "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend" (Prov. 27:17).

If anyone thinks he is spiritual, just get close to your brethren, and you'll find out what's really inside you. People are like "mirrors" in which we can see ourselves as we really are. If there's bitterness or a lack of love, it will become exposed. It doesn't matter how agitating, rude or unspiritual your brethren might be. This does not justify your intolerance or impatience with them. These attitudes are characteristics of your own immaturity -- a weakness in YOU that needs perfected. This is why some people run from church to church -- because it

exposes their bad side. They see their own sins and blemishes revealed in their relationship with the brethren, or they become outraged when their self-willed desires or sins are challenged through convicting preaching or correction.

If a person cuts himself off from others, they will never have to face up to the spiritual immaturity within them. But exposing themselves to the environment of the church will cause them to face conflicts that they must overcome in order to grow up. A sign of a spiritually mature person is that he can be loving and patient with anyone (1 John 2:10, Gal. 5:22-23), and he can humbly submit himself to truth and the correction of authority (Heb. 13:17).

7. Don't leave a church until you have contributed in some way to make it better. -- I have always noticed that the most critical people in the church are usually the ones who do the least. Have you prayed for the leaders? Have you made yourself available to serve or help in areas of ministry? Have you expressed helpful suggestions or brought your concerns to the leadership (in a non-judgmental fashion). Go to the leadership and share your heart without harsh criticism, verbal assaults, or nagging complaints, which only cause a leader to become defensive.

CONCLUSION

Never spread your "unhappiness," criticism or dissatisfaction to members of the body -- this doesn't do anything to help, and stirs up discord in the church, a sin God hates (Prov. 6:19). If you can't keep from spreading your discontent to others, sadly, it may be in your best interest and for the peace of the congregation, for you to move on to another church. Compassionate leaders who are unable to reason with such persons would be wise, and justified by scripture, to encourage their departure from the fellowship. *"Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave; yes, strife and reproach will cease"* (Prov. 22:10).

Never quit your church until you have prayed and you're truly sure that God wants you to leave. Don't let the flesh to lead you. Let the Holy Spirit lead you. Many times people leave their church claiming that God has asked them to leave, but deep within them, they know that they are lying. Never act like such. Make sure you are led by God and your reason is not selfish.