

Though None Go With Me **by Dr. John Koessler**

A few days ago I had a painful conversation with a young man about the loss of his faith. Of college age, he grew up in a Christian home where his parents tried to raise him in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord.” His mother prayed for him every morning and whispered these words in his ear when she tucked him into bed at night:

*“May the Lord bless you and keep you,
May the Lord make His face shine upon you
And be gracious unto you
May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you
And give you a good night’s sleep.”*

The son of a pastor, he practically grew up in church. He prayed a sinner’s prayer when he was four years old, went to Sunday school on Sunday mornings, Vacation Bible School during the first week of August and memorized enough Bible verses on Wednesday nights to win the Timothy award in Awana.

But somewhere along the way he began to question the beliefs his parents taught him. Now he wonders about the historical accuracy of the Bible and why a loving God could condemn anyone to hell. He doesn’t see why Christians feel that they have to make such a big deal about homosexuality or why they make such a big deal about most of the things that upset them. In fact, Christians seemed to be at the root of his problems with the faith. “If God was really who Christians say He is,” he told me, “Church people would be different.”

I don’t think this young man is the only one who feels this way. If the church is the gospel’s greatest proponent, the church is also the gospel’s greatest stumbling block. Bertrand Russell in his essay entitled “Why I am Not a Christian” pointed to the church as one of the reasons for his unbelief. “There are a great many ways in which, at the present moment, the church, by its insistence upon what it chooses to call morality, inflicts upon all sorts of people undeserved and unnecessary suffering” Russell declared. “And of course, as we know, it is in its major part an opponent still of progress and improvement in all the ways that diminish suffering in the world, because it has chosen to label as morality a certain narrow set of rules of conduct which have nothing to do with human happiness....”

Russell was a philosopher and was arguing on philosophic grounds. I suppose that the young man I spoke with was doing the same, in his own way. But for him, I think, the reasoning was a little different. Beyond his questions about the reliability of the Bible or the reasonableness of the standards by which God will judge humanity was a simpler and more profound question. He was asking, in essence, “If the gospel has the power you Christians claim it does, why don’t you behave better?”

I am not sure I know how to answer him on this score. After all, Jesus did say, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Love, as Francis Schaeffer observed, is the mark of a Christian.” Love is not the only apologetic argument for the truth of the gospel but it is its most compelling. But I am also well aware of how often and how far we fall short. I suppose I could have accused this young man of exaggerating or whining, except I know that what he says is true because he is my

son. I have attended the same churches that he has attended and in many cases the experience has been as painful for me as it has been for him.

So why don't I feel the same degree of bitterness? Why haven't I turned my back on Christ? It's not as if the thought hasn't crossed my mind. But whenever I am tempted to throw in the towel-to turn my back on Jesus and everyone who is associated with him-the same question always stops me in my tracks. It is the question asked by Simon Peter in reply to Jesus, when many disciples turned their back on the Lord. According to John 6:67-68, Jesus asked the Twelve "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Like the old chorus I used to sing back when I was a Jesus freak says, "Though none go with me, still I will follow."

For Prime Time America, this is John Koessler.