

Why Are So Many Christians Turning Into Atheists?

Pastor Ryan Bell made a strange New Year's resolution in 2014—he aimed to live a godless year.

Bell, no relation to universalist Rob Bell, kept a blog to chronicle his yearlong journey without God and even had a documentary crew on hand to film what turned out to be his transformation from a Seventh-Day Adventist pastor to a full-blown atheist.

"I've looked at the majority of the arguments that I've been able to find for the existence of God, and on the question of God's existence or not, I have to say I don't find there to be a convincing case, in my view," Bell told NPR's Arun Rath.

"I don't think that God exists. I think that makes the most sense of the evidence that I have and my experience. But I don't think that's necessarily the most interesting thing about me."

What? How do you move from accepting a call of God into full-time ministry only to turn your back on him and decide to exchange a close relationship with God to a "closer relationship with reality"?

From Christian to Murderer?

Maybe we should ask heavy metal Christian rock star Tim Lambesis, the former front man for As I Lay Dying. Of course, that may be somewhat difficult considering he was sentenced to six years in prison for hiring a hit man to kill his wife. In the midst of that drama, Lambesis admitted he's an atheist.

In another instance, a Methodist worship and teaching pastor who served God in ministry for 20 years took up a new post, at

least for a season, as public relations director for the American Atheists. She said her move to atheism was “very, very gradual.”

“Actually there’s not really one single moment where I can look back and say, “Ah, that was the moment,” Teresa McBain told *The Christian Post*. “It was kind of a slow progression.”

There’s a long list of Christians who turned to atheism on Wikipedia. And the Clergy Project, a secret initiative that’s willing to foot the bill to get you out of your pulpit and into a new career, claims to offer a “safe haven for active and former professional clergy/religious leaders who do not hold supernatural beliefs.”

What is going on? Is the church doing something wrong? Or is the culture wooing once-saved Christians to the godless side? Or both?

A WikiHow article actually spells out “How to Persuade a Christian to Become Atheist” and atheists are certainly campaigning hard for their godless view. At the same time, a Barna Group study conducted among 16- to 29-year-olds shows that a new generation is more skeptical of and resistant to Christianity than were people of the same age in 1997. Just 16 percent of non-Christians in their late teens and 20s said they have a “good impression” of Christianity. Common negative perceptions include that present-day Christianity is judgmental (87 percent), hypocritical (85 percent), old-fashioned (78 percent) and too involved in politics (75 percent).

“We are far from becoming an atheist nation,” says Barna researcher David Kinnaman. “There are tens of millions of active believers in America today. But the wall between the church and the churchless is growing higher and more impenetrable as more people have no muscle memory of what it means to be a regular attender at a house of worship.”

The Great Falling Away

What, then, is the root of Christians turning their back on God? I believe it's a sign of the times and may be part of the Great Falling Away. About two years ago, I asked the question: "Is the Great Falling Away Already Underway?". Jesus said that in the last days, the love of many would grow cold because iniquity will abound (see Matt. 24:12). When a God-fearing pastor becomes a godless champion for faithlessness, love has grown cold.

But there is hope. Mike McHargue is a Christian turned atheist turned follower of Christ. He says his time as an atheist actually made him a better Christian.

"Atheism doesn't pretend to have answers to every question. Losing God changed me. I no longer feel like I have to have answers to all the questions we face in life. I'm happy to look for an answer without finding one, and I'm comfortable with uncertainty. My faith is an act of simple trust now," McHargue wrote in *Relevant* magazine.

"What I know is less important than what I do. Knowing Jesus is not an abstract set of information or a construct of dogma. Being a Christian comes down to the simple of act of dropping my nets when I hear the words, 'Come, follow me.'"

I pray that every Christian-turned-atheist—and every atheist for that matter—would come to this same revelation. God is waiting to embrace you.

Jennifer LeClaire is senior editor of *Charisma*. She is also director of *Awakening House of Prayer* in Fort Lauderdale and author of several books, including *Satan's Deadly Trio: Defeating the Deceptions of Jezebel, Religion and Witchcraft*, and *The Spiritual Warrior's Guide to Defeating Jezebel*. You can visit her website [here](#). You can also join Jennifer on Facebook or follow her on Twitter.