

# 10 Terrible Reasons to Be Done With Church

[By Brandon Cox](#) July 2015

The “Dones.” It’s a term sociologists and researchers use to describe [those who are done with church](#). The Dones were once part of a church, but have become disillusioned for a variety of reasons and have decided to be spiritual without the help of a local congregation. And [the Dones are growing in number](#).

I’m a pastor, and I’ve seen the church from every angle. I’ve been a church kid, a kid whose family left the church, and a young adult who found my way back to the church. I’ve been the pastor of smaller, more traditional churches, on staff at a megachurch, and a planter of a new church unlike any other I’ve ever been part of. And there have been, in my 20 years of ministry, quite a few Sunday nights when I’ve felt the desire to be Done again.

But I’m here. And I’m committed. And I’ll share why, but first, I want to address some of the most common reasons you might think you’re Done with the church.

## “The Church Is So Judgmental”

Guilty. The church in America has had a history of perpetuating an us-versus-them mentality toward people who don’t seem to fit in. We’ve been legalistic. We’ve focused on external appearances when God cares about the heart. We’ve rejected people over some sins and not others. And we’ve given the impression that God is displeased with people who can’t keep their lives in near-perfect order.

And we’ve been terribly wrong. The church needs to own this. We need to change this. And to turn the ship around and become a grace-based, love-filled, purpose-driven body once again, we need you.

You see, the church is often judgmental not because it's made up of Christians, but because it's made up of humans, and humans are all judgmental. We all tend to assess the people around us to see how we measure up, and if we can somehow outrank others, we feel better and safer. This isn't just a church thing. It's a work thing. It's a class thing. It's a race thing. And it's pretty much always wrong.

### **"The Church Is Full of Hypocrites"**

Guilty again. You see one person at church and another in the cubicle and they both go by the same name. We hear preachers and politicians proclaim moral virtues while secretly living very differently. We are actors. But again, we are ALL actors. It's human nature to wear a mask to avoid the pain of scrutiny and judgment by others. So nobody walks into church cussing the way they did during the game Friday night. After all, we have an image to uphold.

Granted, the church ought to be the one place where this pattern is broken, but can we acknowledge that if we understand human nature correctly, this is really a terrible reason to be done with the church. After all, if you spot this problem, you obviously have a desire to be authentic and transparent yourself, so we NEED you to help make the church different.

### **"The Church Is Too Institutional"**

This is often the case, especially in America. Rather than being [a loosely organized organic community of friends](#), we're a business and a bureaucracy. We erect ginormous denominational structures with boards, committees, parliamentary procedures and elected officers. Within the church, we have budgets and buildings and sometimes resemble the corporate world a little too much.

Here's the flipside, though. Just as it's possible to be too institutional, it's dangerous to be too anti-institutional. Some level of institutionalism is necessary to maintain financial records ethically, organize people to accomplish the mission, and provide at least a simple structure through which people can be equipped to grow spiritually and serve others.

Somewhere, there is a happy medium, and you might just be the person to help us discover it.

### **"The Church Is Too Political"**

Sadly, this is true, in multiple directions. On the one hand, we have the "religious right" or "moral majority" who completely confuse what it means for the church to be light and salt in the middle of a secular culture. We wrongly promote a kind of theocracy that seeks to "put God back into America" and legislate from our selected set of Scriptures. And on the other hand, there is a rather leftist, "progressive" branch of the church that seems to fight for an opposite set of values often with similar tactics.

I'm as done with this as you are. I'm convinced that Republicans, Democrats, Independents, Libertarians and those who wish to rebel against Palpatine's new Empire to restore the Old Republic and the Jedi should all feel welcome on Sunday. But here's the good news—there's a whole generation of church leaders who are tired of trying to bully the "other side" (whichever side that might be) into submission. We're interested in meaningful conversations in search of truth. And if you are too, come back to the church. We need your voice.

### **"The Church Complicates My Life"**

As a kid, my family attended Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night and Sunday School. There were programs, events, activities, and business and committee meetings. And we were part of a church with less

than two hundred people. Somewhere along the way, we thought the cool thing to do would be to come up with as many “ministries” as possible for as many people as possible and stay as busy as possible.

But does all the busyness produce actual, spiritual growth? Not often. It just wears us out, keeps us busy “at church” instead of living on mission, and prevents us from developing meaningful relationships outside the life of the church in the real mission field. And we can attend 10 Bible studies per week and not practice anything we’re learning.

Thankfully, God is raising up a generation of church leaders who are driven by God’s eternal purposes for the church rather than by programs, events, buildings and schedules. It’s entirely possible to [streamline the church’s structure](#) in a much more simple way to stimulate real growth and real relationship-building. But we need your help.

### **“The Church Is Too Dogmatic”**

Maybe. But I don’t think being dogmatic is the problem. Once we discover that something is absolutely true, we should indeed hold onto it, right? I think the problem is often the way we present truth—like a bulleted list of precepts to be blindly affirmed. If we know Jesus is the only way to eternal life, we must be dogmatic about it. But we also must allow people the room, the space and the time to explore our message and come to a place of belief on their own time.

In other words, I don’t think the problem is that [we preach the Bible](#). I think it’s that we preach the Bible in a way that leaves no room for conversation about the Bible. But again, there is a generation of church leaders aspiring to set the table for real discussion. So come on back and grab a chair.

### **“The Church Just Wants My Money”**

Sometimes, the church has approached the subject of money in terrible ways. People have definitely been spiritually abused and taken advantage of for the benefit of some church leaders who live lavishly off of a gullible flock. But again, this doesn't represent the church as a whole. In fact, most church leaders today are calling upon the few who commit abuses in this area to repent.

What makes it hard for leaders is that generosity is part of discipleship, and giving is part of a commitment to Jesus and to the local church. Jesus talked a lot about money, and the Bible has a lot of teaching on the subject. So if you're done with church because of the subject of money, you have to evaluate whether your problem is with the church or with Jesus.

The matter of greatest importance is the motivation behind our giving. Financial contributions should be the responsibility of those who are called, saved and committed. The face of the matter is, when we give, we reflect God's nature, our faith grows and the world is ultimately impacted as a result.

### **"The Church Doesn't Care About Issues That Matter"**

And what are the issues that matter? I would say that this question is a little bit relative to our current historical and cultural moment. What matters to you may not have been a significant issue a generation ago, or at least not as prevalent. I personally believe the church is doing amazing things in arenas like human trafficking, poverty, education, the environment and civil rights.

Every church will have a different personality and its members will have a unique set of overlapping burdens such that one church might take on several signature issues, but not every issue. And since I assume I'm talking to people who generally agree about the truth of the gospel but disagree

about the usefulness of the church, we must understand that the eternal destinies of the souls of people is the single most crucial issue of all.

Don't leave the church over this. Bring the issue to the table and take personal responsibility for it.

### **“The Church Seems Irrelevant to My Life”**

The church has often been slow to adapt to its environment, culturally speaking. Our music, our terminology, and our means of communicating the gospel have been too slow to keep up. Walking into many churches is like walking out of the modern world through a time portal to the 1950s. And out of fear, many churches refuse to give up extra-biblical traditions. But the last few decades have presented a significant course correction in this area.

From the Jesus Movement of the 1960s to the admittedly awkward rise of contemporary Christian music, many segments of the church have endured the necessary and painful transition needed to bring an always relevant biblical message back to the attention of the surrounding culture. We have a long way to go and many preferences yet to lay on the altar, but the church has come a long way.

I think it would be difficult to find a mid-sized town or large city in America where there is not [a strong, biblical, culturally-relevant, gospel-oriented church](#) to join.

### **“The Church Let Me Down”**

Me too. When I was 12, the church I grew up in had a split over personality issues masked as doctrinal ones. My family quit. When I was a young, inexperienced pastor, I found myself in the middle of a couple of feuds that ultimately killed two churches. I was determined to never be a pastor again, but God had other plans. The church lets people down. Often.

Now let me share my pastoral heart with you. My deepest pain as a leader is knowing that we won't be able to meet everyone's needs, connect everyone in a group, discover everyone's gifts, solve everyone's problems or bring healing to every sickness. I know, Sunday after Sunday, that while we will do our very best, our best is never enough and some will always be let down.

So here's my question. What if nobody bailed? What if everyone decided to stay and work out their issues and be part of the solution? [I think it would be a game changer.](#)

If you think you're done with church for any of these reasons, let me challenge you to think differently. Instead of saying, "I'm done with the church, because ..." why not say, "I'm done with my part in the problems I see, but I'm going to be part of the solution."

Here's the biggest reason you CAN'T leave the church. Jesus died for her. The church, as imperfect as she is, is the love of Jesus' life. The church is God's choice institution for sharing the gospel, making disciples, counseling the broken, healing the sick, feeding the poor and making a difference in its surrounding community. God wired you for community. You need his people and you need to be humble enough to see the church as "us" and not "them."

As [Bill Hybels famously said](#), "The local church is God's Plan A, and there is no Plan B."

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