

“Quitters”  
by Rom A. Pegram (7/15/18)

Some of you may be familiar with the name ... Anne Rice. If you read novels, I'm sure you've heard the name. Anne Rice has written about 30-some books, with 90 million published. She's one of the most successful authors in modern-day history. In her earlier years, she wrote mostly what is called 'metaphysical gothic fiction'—in other words, vampire novels. *Interview with the Vampire* was one of her hit books that was made into a movie—one of her earliest books from the 70s. *The Vampire Chronicles* is also hers that some of you might have read. Today, I want to tell you the story of this famous, incredibly successful author...

Anne was actually raised in the church. When she was 18 years old, in her own terms, she left the church violently—violently and completely, I would say. She left the church and went on to pursue her literary career. Needless to say, she was very, very successful! Anne, through her literary contacts, has been everywhere in the world and seems to know many influential people. Suffice it to say, she's met people you and I will never meet, and been places you and I will probably never have the opportunity to visit. Much of this is due to the fact that she's sold over 90 million books...

Her life wasn't all smooth sailing though; like many of us, she's had some bumps along the way. She married young to a self-proclaimed atheist, married for 40-some years, then lost him much too early to an illness. And then, in her late 50s (1998-99), she came back to her faith—back to the church after being away as an atheist all those years...

When she came back, Anne decided to commit her writing skills to the Lord. And she began to write a fictional trilogy on the life of Jesus, her first book about when Jesus was a child. It's a work of fiction about all the things we wonder about Jesus' childhood and what it might've been like. What was Jesus like as a teenager? Did he do miracles just for fun? Did he have siblings, etc.? So far, *Out Of Egypt* is a good read. But at the end of the book there's an author's note, and in this author's note, Anne Rice—who's been everywhere, met lots of important people, has become very wealthy, and has had several movies made of her books—explains how she came back to the faith—how she re-embraced Jesus. Here's how it happened:

Anne, to some extent, is a historian. She's an author who researches like crazy before she writes a book. As a matter of fact, she's known for her in-depth research prior to writing her novels. Well, she's always been fascinated with the history of Judaism—from which our faith came. Her interests are primarily in Judaism as an ancient culture and religion ... and how they have survived all of these years (as there have been many cultures and/or religions that never survived antiquity). So: *Why the Jews?*

Anne studied Jewish history and discovered there was a part that she knew nothing about—what historians called *The Jewish War*. In 64-65 A.D., she discovered, the Jews rebelled against Rome ... and the war lasted 4-5 years. It ended with Rome (10<sup>th</sup> Legion) surrounding the city of Jerusalem and laying siege to the city, destroying

everything including the ancient Temple. And this is all laid out for us by the Jewish historian, Josephus. It was just a horrific time for Jews there in Palestine...

Anne was fascinated by this. So she looked for other sources that could teach her about the Jewish Wars. She thought to herself: 'I know. I'll turn to the New Testament.' She'd always been taught that the NT was written many, many, many years after the actual events ... which is why the stories had time to grow and turn into miracles, etc. So she assumed that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John would certainly have recorded the events of the siege of Jerusalem that took place in 70 A.D. So, she read them ... and what did she find? Much to her surprise, she found there wasn't anything in there about these events! And she thought: 'Well, maybe these events hadn't happened yet. Because if the Temple had been sacked, surely these guys would have written about that!'

Folks, what Anne discovered in her research was this: The Gospels (unlike what she'd been taught previously) were actually written by eyewitnesses—most of whom had still been alive at the time of the Jewish Wars. So, unlike what she'd been told previously, the Gospels weren't far-fetched books that were written at a later date, so the stories could grow over time and become stories of miracles. Oh my goodness! Her eyes opened to this whole level of scholarship that she previously didn't know anything about! Because most of the people she'd spent so much time with all her life simply disdained Christianity, she'd never given the historical movement a second thought. But now, knowing for herself those who wrote the Gospels were eye-witnesses and wrote down what they'd experienced early in the 1st century ... that made all the difference in the world!

And then she wrote another book: *Called Out of Darkness*. And this book, folks, was her 'spiritual confession'. This is the story of how she came back to the faith. So, here's Anne Rice—probably smarter than most people, she's been everywhere in the world, she's richer than all of us put together, and she comes to faith—basically through her intellect. And in this 'spiritual confession', Anne deals with some issues that many of us have wrestled with for years. Let me share some of this with you:

*He (God) knew how or why everything happened; He knew the disposition of every single soul. He wasn't going to let anything happen by accident! Nobody was going to Hell by mistake. This was His world, all this! He had complete control of it; His justice, His mercy—were not **our** justice or **our** mercy. What folly to even imagine such a thing.*

So, here Anne's saying ... how in the world could you get hung up over the justice of God? It's God's justice, not yours—God's mercy, not yours. And then she continues:

*I didn't have to know how He was going to save the unlettered and the unbaptized, or how He would redeem the conscientious heathen who had never spoken his name. I didn't have to know how my gay friends would find their way to Redemption; or how my hardworking secular humanist friends could or would receive the power of His Saving Grace. I didn't have to know why good people*

*suffered agony or died in pain. He knew. ... And it was His knowing that overwhelmed me, His knowing that became completely real to me ... And why should I remain apart from Him just because I couldn't grasp all this? He could grasp it. – Anne Rice (Called Out of Darkness: A Spiritual Confession)*

Wow! Is that profound or what? So, folks, Anne Rice re-embraces her faith. And she kind of follows the whole Christian thing for about 10 years, and then something happens. *In July 2010, she quit.* She just quit Christianity. She posted it on her Facebook page and this is what she said: *Today I quit being a Christian.* To which I'm thinking, 'No, you can't quit! You're one of us!' But, here's more she had to say:

*Today I quit being a Christian. I'm out. I remain committed to Christ as always but not to being a 'Christian' or to being part of Christianity. [Can you do that?] It's simply impossible for me to 'belong' to this quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious, and deservedly infamous group.*

Whew! I love Jesus, I just don't like the quarreling, I don't like the hostility, I don't like the disputatious—*those inclined to dispute*. In other words, I'm going to follow Jesus, but I don't want to be a part of whatever *that* is. *Have some of you ever felt the same way?* Here's how she continues:

*For ten years, I've tried. I've failed. I'm an outsider. My conscience will allow nothing else.*

Okay. Wait. So your conscience, which is informed by your following Jesus, won't let you be a Christian? I felt terribly confused the first time I heard this! ('Anyone else?') But here's how she ends this section:

*My faith in Christ is central to my life. My conversion from a pessimistic atheist lost in a world that I didn't understand, to an optimistic believer in a universe created and sustained by a loving God is crucial to me. But following Jesus does not mean following his followers. Christ is infinitely more important than Christianity and always will be, no matter what Christianity is, has been, or might become. – Anne Rice, Facebook 2010*

Anyone else relate to her frustration? I've spoken to several young people who feel similar; they love Jesus ... but they don't love what Christianity has become over the years—the quarreling, the hostility, the disputatious people who call themselves *Christian!*

Folks, last week we learned that *the word Christian can mean anything you want it to mean*, because being mentioned only 3 times in the NT, it was never defined. It was, in fact, a derogatory term those who weren't followers of Jesus used to describe those who were ... and it stuck! Jesus, however, referred to his followers as something else. Do you remember what that was? *Disciples*—a terrifying word, because it is so well

defined in scripture. There's no mistaking what a disciple of Jesus is ... and that, folks, is what Anne was after! So, let me remind you of what John taught us last week...

**REMINDER: THE APOSTLE JOHN BELIEVED THAT LOVE WAS THE KEY TO BEING DISCIPLES!** And he shares what Jesus said about it in John 13:35 (NIV): "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

And, especially for the men here, this is NOT the Jesus who's saying this—the mambie-pambie Sunday School Jesus that's depicted in so many portraits. Those are rather feminine ... and that's not the real Jesus. Rather, THIS is the Jesus who's saying this—the carpenter or stonemason's son—one who worked in his father's workshop since he was young, was strong and masculine...

Remember, this is a 30-year-old guy who marched into a city, and knew he was going to be arrested and probably put to death. My guess is that ... neither you nor I would do that. This is a guy who grew up witnessing the cruelty of the Romans. He grew up seeing and smelling rotting corpses on Roman crosses. As a child, I'm sure his mother covered his eyes. But as a 30-year-old man, he chose to walk into this ... for us!

Folks, *if you want to understand what Jesus meant by what Jesus said, you have to watch what Jesus did!* It was THIS Jesus who said (John 13:35, NIV), "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." So, it's not just going to church, huh? It's not just what I believe? It's actually how I treat those who are a part of the Body of Christ. It's actually how I treat those whom God's called me to be in ministry with. So, John believed Jesus—that LOVE was the key; that's how folks would know that we were his disciples. And here's something else:

**NEWS FLASH: THE APOSTLE JOHN (AT THE END OF HIS LIFE) *STILL* BELIEVED THAT LOVE WAS THE KEY TO BEING DISCIPLES!**

Approximately 55 years after Jesus said what he did in John 13, John—who gave us the Gospel of John—is an old man. He's seen a lot. He saw or heard about Jerusalem being sacked. He heard about thousands of Jews who were crucified or murdered, some by their own people. He knew the Temple had been destroyed. He's an old man who's witnessed the death of many of his colleagues, like Peter—crucified upside down, and Paul—beheaded outside of Rome. At this point, he's one of the only ones left, having lived through several Roman emperors, too. He's survived a lot. And then, when he's old, he sits down and writes to followers of Jesus... Now, he can write anything he wants, of course ... because he's an Apostle—one of Jesus' original twelve. He's John—THE John! Here's what he says:

1 John 4:7 (NIV) – "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God." In other words, the key characteristic, the way you know somebody is really a Christ-follower, John says, is how well s/he loves...

1 John 4:8 (NIV) – “Whoever does not love does not know God [a pretty bold statement], because [*tell us why, John*] God is love.” For some of us, we’d use words to describe God like ‘omniscient’, or ‘omnipresent’, or another ‘o’ word; but for John, after years of experience with Jesus, it was simple: LOVE is God’s essence! ... “So, John, did you see how many of my fellow Jews were killed in Jerusalem when the Romans sacked it? And did you see what happened to Peter?” *to which John redirects the conversation...*

1 John 4:9b (NIV) – “This is how God showed his love **among us**.” Do you see what’s happening here? This is John letting us know that he was an eye-witness to all he speaks of...

1 John 4:9c (NIV) – “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son...” ‘Yep, I wrote that,’ John would say. ‘That was a John original, now seen at all ball games—*John 3:16...*’

1 John 4:9-10 (NIV) – “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” *Us, our ... us, our ... us, our...* Do you know what that means? That means everyone we come eyeball-to-eyeball with in this world is included here—God loves ... our mother-in-laws, our ornery neighbors, our bosses, every check-out person we deal with, etc. John saw it happen, folks ... so *this is the real deal*. And then he ends with this:

1 John 4:11 (NIV) – “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” Every time someone acts unlovable and we’re tempted to respond in kind, we have to remember that we do not love others because we feel like it; we love them because God chose to love us first ... and he did—hugely! And we owe God—this being ‘good debt’... We love God so much we *want* to love others in his name...

Folks, I’m guessing this probably isn’t why Anne quit—because people loved her the way Jesus asked them to. People don’t quit because of that! They quit because we’re *not* doing what Jesus said to do...

Take just a moment with me and imagine—once again: What if everyone who names the name of Jesus decided ... this isn’t rocket science? All we have to do is to ... LOVE. It’s been available for 2,000 years. Our problem is ... we’ve settled for being Christians; our problem is we’ve settled for ‘the brand of Christianity’ and we’ve given up something good. So, what would it look like if we who claim Jesus would recommit to what he asked us to do: LOVE?

- What would it look like if you loved your wife or husband the way Jesus loved you—unconditionally?
- What would it look like if we loved our kids ... or our kids loved their parents ... the way Jesus loved us?
- What would it look like if we genuinely loved our co-workers ... and all those at church ... the way Jesus asked us to?

I don't think we'd have so many people quitting the church, do you? No one ever quit because they were being loved. Maybe that's what John had in mind. Maybe that's what Jesus had in mind. Folks, let's just decide to love one another the way Jesus loved us! As Gary Smalley wrote in his now famous book, LOVE is a decision! So, let's decide today, shall we?