

Changing Within Protestantism

Eight-in-ten adults who were raised Protestant are still Protestant, and about two-thirds of this group (or 52% of all those raised Protestant) are still members of the same family of denominations (e.g. Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, etc.) in which they were raised. The other third (28% of all those raised Protestant) are now members of a new family of Protestant denominations. However, one-fifth of those raised Protestant have left Protestantism altogether; most of them are now unaffiliated (13%), with smaller numbers having become Catholic (3%) or members of other faiths (4%). This section of the report takes a closer look at the large group of people (15% of the overall population) who have changed faiths within Protestantism (e.g., those who were raised Presbyterian and are now Episcopalian, or those who were raised Methodist and are now Baptist).

Current Religion of Those Raised Protestant	
	%
Still Protestant	80
<i>Childhood faith</i>	52
<i>New Protestant faith</i>	28
Now unaffiliated	13
Now Catholic	3
Now other faith	4
	100
N	19,935

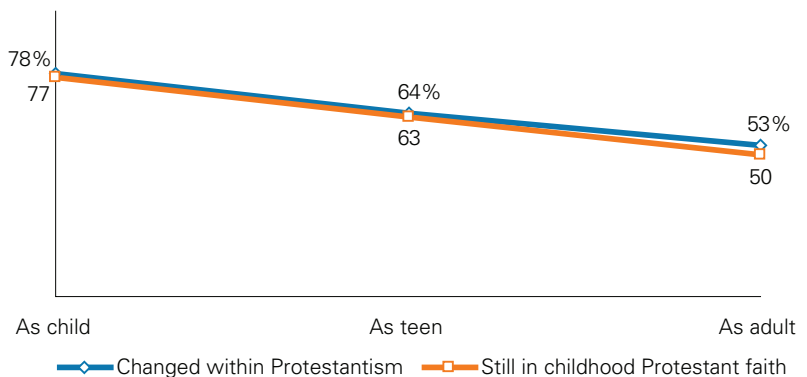
Source: 2007 "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey"

Most people who have changed faiths within Protestantism say they left their childhood faith before turning age 24 (56%). And relatively few report having changed religion as older adults. Only 22% of those changing within Protestantism say they joined their current religion after age 35.

When it comes to church attendance and strength of faith from childhood to adulthood, those who have changed faiths within Protestantism tend to closely resemble Protestants who still belong to their childhood faith. Members of both groups report a decline in church attendance over their lifetime. Roughly three-quarters say they attended church at least once a week as a child. Among those who have changed faiths within Protestantism, this figure drops to 64% in the

Religious Attendance Among Those Raised Protestant

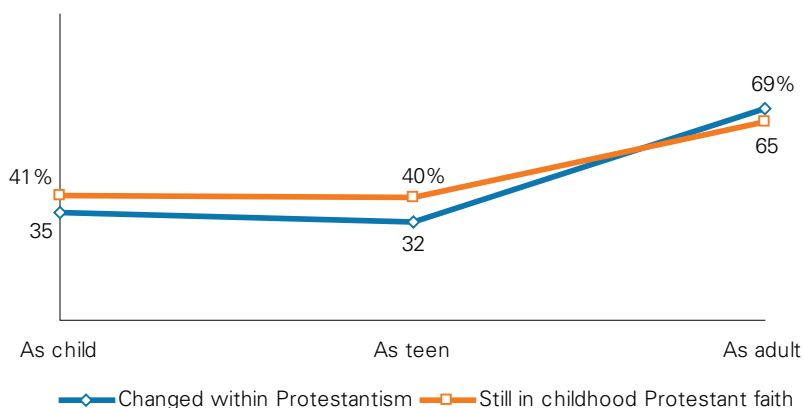
% who attend worship services at least weekly



teenage years and to 53% in adulthood. Among Protestants who still belong to their childhood faith, 63% attended religious services regularly as teenagers and 50% do so as adults.

In contrast to this drop in reported levels of church attendance over the life cycle, those changing within Protestantism say their level of faith has increased with time. More than two-thirds (69%) say their faith is very strong as an adult, while roughly one-third (35%) say their faith was very strong as a child, similar to the proportion saying it was very strong as a teen (32%). Interestingly, a very similar proportion of Protestants who still belong to their childhood faith say their faith as an adult is very strong (65%), and the arc of their faith follows a very similar pattern.

“Very Strong” Faith Among Those Raised Protestant



When asked whether a series of specific reasons were among those motivating them to leave their childhood religion, the most common reason cited by those changing within Protestantism is having found another religion that is preferable (58%). A majority of Protestants who changed denominational families within Protestantism (51%) also cite a lack of spiritual fulfillment as a reason for leaving their childhood faith.

Four-in-ten of those who changed faith within Protestantism say they just gradually drifted away from their childhood religion, and a similar number say they left their childhood faith because they were not satisfied with the atmosphere at worship services. Many who change religion within Protestantism also cite life changes as at least partly responsible for their decision to leave their childhood faith; more than a third (37%) left their former faith because they moved to a new community and a similar number left because they married someone from a different religious background (33%). By comparison, relatively few who changed within Protestantism say they left their former religion because they stopped believing in its teachings (15%).

Reasons for Leaving Childhood Religion Among Those Who Changed Affiliation Within Protestantism

Reason	%
Found a religion they liked more	58
Spiritual needs not being met	51
Just gradually drifted away from the religion	40
Dissatisfied with atmosphere at worship services	39
Moved to a new community	37
Dissatisfied with clergy at congregation	36
Married someone from a different faith	33
Unhappy with teachings about the Bible	23
Uncomfortable with feeling of community at congregation	22
Stopped believing in the religion's teachings	15
Unhappy with way religion treated women	14
Unhappy with teachings on abortion/homosexuality	14
Unhappy with teachings on poverty/war/death penalty	12
Unhappy with teachings on divorce/remarriage	8
Someone they were close to passed away	6
Became separated or divorced	4
N	265

Respondents were asked whether or not each item was an important reason for leaving their former religion and could answer "yes" to more than one reason. See Q.4a-Q.4s in survey topline for exact question wording.

The survey finds a similar pattern in the reasons converts within Protestantism give for joining their current faith. The vast majority (85%) say they joined their current denominational family because they enjoy the services and style of worship. Roughly a third (36%) say they joined because they were attracted by a particular minister or pastor and a similar number (30%) say a member's invitation to join was an important factor in their decision. Half of those changing faiths within Protestantism (50%) say they felt called by God to join their new faith.

About three-in-ten (28%) of those who changed within Protestantism say they made the transition to their current faith because of marriage, and 38% say moving was an important reason for their religious switch. Divorce, separation and death of a loved one are rarely cited as reasons for joining a new faith among this group, with less than 10% naming each.

Reasons for Joining Current Religion Among Those Changing Within Protestantism

Reason	%
Enjoy the religious services and style of worship	85
Felt called by God	50
Asked to join by a member of the religion	30
Attracted by a particular minister or pastor	36
Moved to a new community	38
Married someone from the religion	28
Someone they were close to passed away	9
Became separated or divorced	4
N	285

Respondents were asked whether or not each item was an important reason for joining their current religion and could answer "yes" to more than one reason. See Q.17a-Q.17j in survey topline for exact question wording.

When asked to state in their own words the *main* reason for having switched religions, those changing within Protestantism tend most often to cite likes and dislikes about religious institutions, practices and people. Life cycle changes also figure prominently for this group, with more than one-in-five mentioning marriage or other family reasons as motivations behind their religious change. Fewer say they were motivated to switch religions because of their religious beliefs.

In Their Own Words – Main Reasons for Leaving and Joining Faiths Among Those Changing Religions Within Protestantism

	Leaving childhood religion	Joining current religion
	%	%
Religious and moral beliefs	17	16
Agreement/Disagreement with religious teachings	16	15
<i>Do not believe in former religion/any religion</i>	6	*
<i>Like current religion's beliefs</i>	4	10
<i>Biblical/Scriptural reason</i>	3	5
Agreement/Disagreement with moral/social teachings	2	1
Religious institutions, practices and people	32	37
Likes/Dislikes about organized religion	1	0
Likes/Dislikes about religion's rules, rigidity, etc.	4	4
Likes/Dislikes of particular churches/members/leaders	14	20
Lack/Presence of spiritual/social connectedness	13	17
Personal spirituality	6	13
Looking for something/Searching for answers	1	5
Saved/Accepted Jesus/Born again	2	1
Life cycle changes	28	32
Family reasons	21	26
<i>Marriage/Because of a spouse</i>	17	17
New circumstances	8	6
Other reasons	16	7
Don't know/Refused	5	3
N	265	285

Respondents were asked to describe in their own words the main reason for leaving their former religion and the main reason for joining their current religion, and could provide more than one reason for each question. See Q.3 and Q.16 in survey topline for exact question wording.