

Preacher's Pen points

Dealing with Wayward Members



Almost every church has “members” who have abandoned the duties of church membership. Such members have allowed personal problems or grievances against others to hinder them from continuing their fellowship with other Christians. They may be on the “church roll” but they do not participate in the church’s activities. In this article I hope to address some of the questions that are often raised about such people that we might call “wayward members”.

What is the spiritual condition of the wayward member?

Christians who do not act upon their commitment to the Lord to join with other Christians in spiritual work are rebelling against God’s purposes. From the NT we can show that membership in the body of Christ resulted in one joining oneself to a local church. As a member one should assemble with the church, participate in the church’s work, and maintain an accountability to the congregation to live a godly life (Ac. 2:42-47). When one refuses to do these things he is in disobedience to the Lord and in great spiritual peril (Jas. 5:19-20).

What is the wayward member’s relationship to the church?

Occasionally I’ve known of people who died and who had not shaded the church building doors for years being described in their obituaries as “members of the _____ church of Christ”. To these I kindly submit that membership in a local church in name only is no membership at all; and one who imagines that having his name on a church roll will secure his eternal salvation is sadly mistaken. However, more often, people who quit participating in the activities of the local church intend to indicate that they no longer want

to be members of the church. In such cases, they will avoid contact with any church members and will refuse any discussions of their behavior. They say by their actions, if not by their words, “I don’t want to be recognized as a member there”. In either case, it is important to understand that membership in a congregation is meaningless if the duties of membership are not performed!

How should the church handle wayward members?

The church should, at the first sign of waywardness, begin meaningful communication with the negligent member, seeking to resolve problems that might have caused withdrawal of participation (Lk. 17:4). Sometimes sincere loving interest and helpfulness wins back those who are in the process of departing.

The church should respect a person’s right to disassociate himself from a local church. Just as one voluntarily agrees to submit to others in joining a congregation, he may also voluntarily disassociate himself from a local church. In such cases, the church should acknowledge the obvious and sadly inform the general membership of the person’s decision.

The church should continue to seek the future restoration of the wayward by prayer, by admonition when the opportunity arises, by withdrawal of any social association that might suggest approval of the person’s sin (2 Thes. 3:6-15).

The church should do some serious soul searching, asking how they might have failed the person who left the faith and learning from the answers valuable lessons to prevent such casualties from arising in the future.

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