

How to Keep From Getting Hurt in a Church

It has been shown that a great percentage of persons who quit going to church, do so because of some type of offense or injury to their feelings. It is unfortunate that such experiences occur. You may not be able to stop offensive things from happening, but by applying God's principles you can stop them from hurting you. The Bible says, "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (Psa. 119:165 KJV). The following are several things that people can do to protect themselves:

1. Avoid developing unreasonable expectations (Psa. 62:5) - The definition of disappointment is "the failure to attain one's expectations." Don't expect things from the church or the minister that they can't deliver, or that the Bible doesn't teach for them to do. Many expectations have to do with preconceived "traditions" which we have come to associate with a church, perhaps from another fellowship we once attended or grew up in, etc. It's a good idea to meet with the pastor and ask what you can expect of his ministry and the church.

2. Don't place an absolute trust in people (Jer. 17:5) — Come to terms with the fact that everyone is human and will fail you at some time or another. Even the pastor will make mistakes. The only one you can trust entirely without fail is God. Love and forgiveness is granted unconditionally, but trust must be "earned." Trust is the acquired confidence in a person's actions. We certainly can, and should trust persons who show trustworthy behavior, but because all men have the potential for failure, we should never put an infallible sense of trust in anyone but God.

3. Focus on common ground (1 Cor. 1:10) — Avoid becoming highly opinionated. Opinions are the interpretations and ideas of men, which if constantly pressed on other people, can cause division or promote sinful debates and quarrels (Rom. 1:29). Opinionated people are prone to get hurt when others disagree with them. Avoid controversy over scriptures which are vague and foster many interpretations — stand fast upon those common, basic truths — Jesus, His life, death and resurrection — and don't add to what God's Word says (Prov. 30:5-6).

4. Don't expect any church to be perfect (Rom. 7:18-19) — As long as churches are made up of people like you and me who have imperfections, there will never be such a thing as a perfect church. Unless people understand this, they'll have an unrealistic view of the church, and will eventually become disillusioned and hurt.

5. Don't seek to promote yourself or your own agenda (Psa. 75:5-7) — Have a humble and meek attitude like Christ (Mat. 11:29, Rom. 12:3). Pride and arrogance will set you up for a fall (Prov. 16:18). Don't promote yourself, campaign or strive to attain an appointed or elected position. God is the one who puts persons in such positions, and unless He does it, stay away from it. Lift up the Lord in all you say and all you do. Don't boast or talk about yourself (John 7:18). Avoid an attitude of competition which creates conflict in unity. The philosophy of Christianity is not to try to outdo one another, but to submit to and lift up one another (Eph. 5:21).

Avoid the trap of presuming that your opinions are always divinely inspired or are indisputable. Share your suggestions and ideas with church leaders, but don't press your opinions or personal agenda. Don't expect to receive preferential treatment or to get your way about everything. The Bible teaches the church to make decisions

in the best interest of the whole congregation, not just a certain few (Jas. 2:9). If you do things for the church or give generous offerings, do it to bring glory to God, not to bring attention to yourself or to gain influence (Col. 3:17).

6. Avoid blaming the church for personal problems (Isa. 26:3) — When you go to church, you should try to dissociate the church from the other personal problems you deal with. This kind of emotional distress can create "distorted perception" which may prevent you from seeing reality the same way others do. When facing personal struggles, don't jump to conclusions over anything, because situations are probably not as severe as they seem.

7. Treat others as you wish to be treated (Matt. 7:12) — Human beings tend to reflect the way they are treated. This is why Jesus gave us the Golden rule: "Do unto others as you would have them to do unto you." The way that most people interact with you is as a direct result of how you interact with them. Many hurt feelings can be avoided if we will realize that people usually react to how we deal with them. Take a close examination at the way you say things, or even how much you talk.

8. Have a teachable cooperative attitude (Heb. 13:17) — The Bible teaches believers to be cooperative and submissive to their spiritual leaders — something that's not possible unless the believer is committed to a church and accountable to a local pastor. As long as you are a part of any church, accept that the pastor and leaders are in charge there. Consequently, God holds you accountable to respect their authority, to pray for them, and to cooperate. Always be willing to humble yourself before others. If you have a rigid, inflexible attitude in the church you will probably get hurt.

9. Don't oppose or hinder the church (Prov. 6:16-19) — One of the things that God dislikes most are those who sow discord — who create division and strife in the body of Christ. Don't be a gossip, a complainer, or stir up turmoil. If you're displeased with the church in some way, either try to offer your help and pray for it — or as a last resort, leave and find a church you're happy with — but never become a source of agitation or hindrance. When things are not as they should be in the church or with its leadership, there are honorable ways to help promote improvements or resolve inequities. However, it's unethical to oppose the church or attack its leadership, and persons who do will likely end up hurt, bitter or possibly worse.

10. Be committed to forthrightness and truth (Matt. 18:15-17) — When someone has wronged you, Jesus says that you are to first go to them and confront them privately between yourselves. Most offenses in the church result from misunderstandings, and many could be quickly resolved if offended parties would just go to the source. There are always two sides to a story. The scriptures address this very problem, that before we believe a rumor, we are to investigate thoroughly, to verify all the facts (Deut. 13:14).

11. Be devoted to love and forgiveness (1 John 2:10) — The practice of loving the brethren — all the brethren, not just the lovable ones — keeps us from stumbling. Jesus takes personally how we entreat our Christian brothers and sisters. When we love even the “least” of our brethren, Jesus accepts that love toward Himself (Matt. 25:40). You cannot love the Lord any more than you love the least in the body of Christ (1 John 4:20). Be quick to forgive and don't hold grudges. Unforgiveness and bitterness is one of the greatest reasons why people get hurt in the church and probably the greatest cause of apostasy — falling away (Matt. 6:14-15).

12. Don't get caught up in the offenses of others (Psa. 15:1-3) — Sometimes offended persons will seek sympathy from naive, listening ears. They go about pleading their case, pouring out their bleeding-heart of injustice to those sincere, tenderhearted persons who will listen. Their goal is to seek out persons who will coddle them, support their opinions and take up their offense against the offending party. You should love and encourage a friend with hurt feelings, but reserve your opinion and avoid taking sides, lest you find yourself a partaker in other men's sins, or you also become offended and hurt with the church.

13. Don't personalize everything that's preached — Obviously, every pastor preaches with the hope that each person will take the message personally and apply it to their own life: “If the shoe fits, wear it.” However, there are always a few who think the minister is pointing his sermon specifically at them. This is a common misunderstanding which causes persons to get hurt. If there's something specific that the pastor needs to say only to you, he will deliver it to you personally, in private — not in subtle hints from his sermon.

This is a summary of the book, How to Keep From Getting Hurt in the Church, by Dale A. Robbins, available from www.victorious.org or through www.amazon.com.

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