

Things To Consider Before You Quit Your Church

There are many things that can cause a person to consider leaving a church — some good and some not so good. Many times the Lord may reassign a person to another church so they can bring ministry or encouragement to another congregation — that’s the best reason to leave a church. In other situations, people may discover that their church actually impedes their spiritual well-being, and may find the necessity to withdraw. Frequently, people leave a church simply because they are disinterested, dissatisfied, or feel they can find something better.

Before doing anything, it’s a good idea to pray about your situation and seek the Lord’s leading (*Prov. 3:6*). If you feel the Lord genuinely wants you to leave and go elsewhere for good reason, go to the pastor and discuss it with him. Don’t just stop showing up for church. That is inconsiderate and immature. Keep in mind, leaving one church always means finding another — the Lord does not lead anyone to simply stop going to church (*Heb. 10:25*).

My advice to you is, if you are presently in a church that (1) is scripturally sound, (2) is reasonably stable and loving, (3) has godly, moral leadership, (4) is doing their best to exalt Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and (5) if they’re making a reasonable effort to minister to you and your family, then hang in there and remain faithful! You don’t know how blessed you are to have a healthy church like that. Many Christians would give anything to just find a church that is merely at peace!

If you’re unhappy with a church which fits this fivefold description, it’s very likely that the problem isn’t the church, but yours. Either you’re hung up on some trivial issue, your feelings have been hurt, or you struggle with discontent from other personal problems.

Seven things to consider before leaving a church:

1. Don’t leave a church out of your personal discontent. If discontent is rooted within you, it will follow you wherever you go, regardless of what church you attend. Many years ago, a certain lady who had attended our church for a few weeks came to speak with me. “Your church is so refreshing from all the other churches around here,” she complemented. Curious, I asked, “Just how many other churches have you attended?” “Oh, about thirteen,” was her reply. Privately, I realized that we were going to have problems with this new lady, because when it comes down to the basics, most Christian churches aren’t that much different from each other. Whenever a person finds dissatisfaction with several congregations, you can be assured that the problem is their own, not the churches. And sure enough, the woman eventually became discontent and left our church too, the same as the previous thirteen.

2. Don’t leave a church because you transferred your own personal frustrations there. Avoid pushing off your feelings of disappointment from other areas of our life onto the church. Sometimes unhappiness toward the church is a derivative from other personal problems such as: Family or marital difficulties, job dissatisfaction, personal offenses, memories of childhood abuse, mental stress, emotional illness, and so forth. People who struggle with deep internal problems sometimes develop a distorted estimation of the people or situations around them, and may blame them, including the church, for their anguish. Generally speaking, the church is not your problem. Remember that it and its ministers are there because they love you and want to help you — not hurt you.

3. Don’t leave a church because your feelings got hurt. Hurt feelings are a “violation of self interests” and are usually a result of being too self-sensitive. In any church or gather-

ing of people there may be many offensive things said or done, mostly unintended, but you don’t have to let yourself become offended. Those who are easily offended may simply be immature, too self-centered, or may retain self-sensitivities due to past, festering wounds. Hurt feelings are probably the greatest reason why people leave churches, but deepening your roots in Christ and His word can immunize you against such tenderness. “*Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them*” (*Psalms 119:165 KJV*).

4. Don’t leave a church over trivial criticisms. People sometimes have a remarkable ability of making a mountain out of molehill. I’ve known people to change churches merely because they didn’t like the way the pastor combed his hair, the length of the services, how the bulletin was typed, or other silly reasons. Of the many excuses that persons use to leave a church, this is among the most shallow. If all you seem to do is criticize and find fault with the church, you have an attitude problem. Regardless of where you go to church, you’ll find similar faults again, because the problem isn’t with the church — the problem is with you.

5. Avoid leaving a church over its style or individuality. One of the most common explanations people give for switching churches is their “disagreement with certain beliefs.” However, I can recall many instances where people used this reason even though both churches believed and taught the same things. In reality, it was a dislike of the personality of the church — its teaching methods, the style of worship, the structure of the services, or the pastor’s preaching style, etc. Many churches actually believe and teach the same things, but each might have a slightly different method, structure, or style which makes up its unique personality. No two churches are alike in their personality or methods, any more than two people are alike, but it’s not really very mature to abandon a church over such, shallow, external things. Our estimation of a church should be based

on more spiritual, substantive issues, such as their beliefs, their love for one another, or their commitment to reach the lost, etc.

6. Don't leave a church when faced with self conflict. Many people do not understand that spiritual growth requires confronting and overcoming conflict with our self-willed nature (*James 1:3-4*). The environment of the church provides two important features of growth producing conflict: (1) Authority who will challenge you with truth and correct you when you are wrong. And (2) an environment of believers, many of whom are imperfect and whose rough edges will serve as sandpaper to smooth out your wrinkles. *"As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend"* (*Prov. 27:17*).

If anyone thinks he is spiritual, just get close to your brethren, and you'll find out what's really inside you. People are like "mirrors" in which we can see ourselves as we really are. If there's bitterness or a lack of love, it will become exposed. It doesn't matter how agitating, rude or unspiritual your brethren might be. This does not justify your intolerance or impatience with them. These attitudes are characteristics of your own immaturity — a weakness in YOU that needs perfected. This is why some people run from church to church — because it exposes their bad side. They see their own sins and blemishes revealed in their relationship with the brethren, or they become outraged when their self-willed desires or sins are challenged through convicting preaching or correction.

If a person remains a "island" to themselves they will never have to face up to the spiritual immaturity within them. But exposing themselves to the environment of the church will cause them to face conflicts that must overcome in order to grow up. A sign of a spiritually mature person is that they can be loving and patient with anyone (*1 John 2:10, Gal. 5:22-23*), and they can humbly submit themselves to truth and the correction of authority (*Heb. 13:17*).

7. Don't leave a church until you have contributed in some way to try help make it better. I have always noticed that the most critical people in the church are usually the ones who do the least. Have you prayed for the leaders? Have you made yourself available to serve or help in areas of ministry? Have you expressed helpful suggestions or brought your concerns to the leadership (in a non-judgmental fashion). Go to the leadership and share your heart without harsh criticism, verbal assaults, or nagging complaints, which only cause a leader to become defensive.

Never spread your "unhappiness," criticism or dissatisfaction to members of the body — this doesn't do anything to help, and stirs up discord in the church, a sin God hates (*Prov. 6:19*). If you can't keep from spreading your discontent to others, sadly, it may be in your best interest and for the peace of the congregation, for you to move on to another church. Compassionate leaders who are unable to reason with such persons would be wise, and justified by scripture, as a last resort, to encourage their departure from the fellowship. *"Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave; yes, strife and reproach will cease"* (*Prov. 22:10*).

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