

# On Leaving Your Local Church



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***Guest post by Dwayne Milioni pastor of Open Door Church in Raleigh, NC***

“We must never jump to conclusions and take our leave of a church in a willy-nilly way, for joining and leaving churches are very serious matters. Most churches receive their members with sacred vows; if you joined your church this way, you should resolve to keep your vows even through difficult times. However, if the church of which you are a member seems to be on the edges of apostasy and you are not being nurtured spiritually, you may leave. And if the church has clearly crossed into apostasy, you must leave. But be very careful, and let the Bible and the marks of the church (1) The faithful preaching of the gospel; (2) The proper administration of the ordinances; and (3) The right practice of church discipline) guide your decision” (R. C. Sproul, *Tabletalk*, May, 2000, p. 48).

There are some good (right), some neutral (neither wrong nor right) and some bad (wrong) reasons why a person or family should leave the local church.

Good reasons to leave a local church include:

- The local church has moved away from teaching biblical truth on the fundamental doctrines and is misrepresenting the gospel; if heresy on some fundamental truth is being taught from the pulpit (Gal. 1:7-9; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Pet. 2:1).
- If the leaders of the church tolerate seriously errant doctrine from any who are given teaching authority in the fellowship (Rom. 16:17).
- If the church is marked by gross hypocrisy, giving lip service to biblical Christianity but refusing to acknowledge its true power (2 Tim. 3:5).
- There is sinful division within the local church that is not being addressed (1 Cor. 1: 10).
- If the church is characterized by a wanton disregard for Scripture, such as a refusal to discipline members who are sinning blatantly (1 Cor. 5:1-7).
- There is unrepentant sin amongst the church membership that is not being properly addressed and/or unbelievers are allowed to remain as members (1 Cor. 5:9-11; 2 Cor. 6:14-18).
- If the church is seriously out of step with the biblical pattern for the church (2 Thess. 3:6, 14).
- There is unrepentant sin amongst the elders because of which they are no longer qualified (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9).
- The elders/pastors are not loving shepherds, but rather arrogantly lording their authority over the congregation (1 Pet. 5:3).
- Members are not being taught the Bible or equipped in a manner that will allow them to mature as a believer, nor are they being allowed to serve and use their spiritual gifts (Eph. 4: 11-16).
- The local church has made a radical shift in its mission and ministry direction so that your conscience will no longer allow you to remain as a member (Acts 20:28-30; Rom. 16:17-18).
- Your local church sends you out to begin another work (2 Tim. 4: 12; 2 Cor. 12: 18)

Neutral reasons to leave a church include:

- You have moved and your local church is too far away to remain active.
- Your local church has disbanded.
- You have physical limitations that no longer allow you to attend.
- You and your elders have prayerfully agreed that another local church would be better for you.

Bad reasons to leave your local church include:

- You are feeling like you need a change or a fresh perspective.
- You have an un-resolved conflict with another member at your current local church.
- You have been hurt by something that has happened at your church or by a member.
- You don't feel significant as a member anymore.
- You don't want to be as committed as you once were and leaving would be easier.
- Your children want to attend somewhere else or you want them to attend another church's children's programs.
- You don't prefer the music style or certain programs.
- You are questioning biblical truth and are moving away from orthodox doctrine.
- You want to pursue an unbiblical relationship with another person and you know your pastors would disagree with you.
- You are in unrepentant sin and don't want to change.

Questions you should ask yourself and answer honestly before leaving a local church:

1. Do I have good, biblical reason to leave my church?
2. Have I made this a serious matter of prayer and believe this is God's direction for me/my family?
3. Have I been given the approval and blessing of my elders to leave? [Your elders are God's gift to you to shepherd you. They have been giving authority to oversee your spiritual life, like a husband has loving leadership and authority over his wife in marriage.]
4. Is this the first church you have left or is leaving the local church becoming a pattern for you?
5. What impact will this have on your local church? Would others members affirm you decision?
6. What lessons are you teaching your children about loyalty and commitment to one of God's ordained institutions? The same type of loyal devotion that God expects in marriage, he also expects from members serving together in the local church.

**Scripture to reflect on before making your decision to leave your local church:**

But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. (1 Cor. 12:18)

And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. (1 Cor. 12:26)

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. (Heb. 13:17,18)

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. (Rom. 12:10-13)