

# Wayward Children

**Introduction.** When God created us in His image, that image included freewill. And the Bible appeals to man's capability of freewill dozens of times in scripture, but one of the starkest examples is in Ezekiel 18. This chapter definitely proves that someone will be responsible for their own sins.

Ezekiel 18:10-13 discusses the sad case where righteous parents had a wayward child. There is, of course, another classic example in the New Testament with the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-16). This son left home, wasted his inheritance "with riotous living" — and ended up in pig pen.

This gloomy subject touches all of us, either directly or indirectly. Some face it now and some will face it in the future. Fortunately, because the Bible teaches a lot on this, it will prepare us for this test. So we will study wayward children in the Bible and the church, and then investigate what we can do with this heart-wrenching situation.

## ***I. In Old Testament History***

- A. Adam and Eve were God's wayward children (Genesis 3:6, 8).
  - 1. All of us are wayward in the same way (Romans 3:23).
  - 2. The seed of woman to be wounded by Satan was the Son of God (v. 15). It cost God His Son to restore this broken fellowship.
- B. Cain was angry with Abel and alienated from God (Genesis 4:3-10).
- C. Ham brought shame to Noah (Genesis 9:22).
  - 1. The phrasing indicates disrespect and possible sexual temptation.
  - 2. Noah contributed to his son's sin through his drunkenness.
- D. Esau hated Jacob (Genesis 27:41-43).
  - 1. Their mother was caught in the middle.
  - 2. The brothers finally reconciled around 20 years later.
- E. Joseph's brothers envied and hated Joseph, and lied to their father (Genesis 37:31-35).
  - 1. The lie stood for years (Genesis 45:25-28).
  - 2. Changing circumstances in life sometimes contribute to children coming to their senses. It could be happy circumstances like a wedding or the birth of a child, or it could be adverse circumstances like an accident, misfortune, sickness, disease, or death.
- F. Hopelessly hardened cases (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).
  - 1. Parents are not to blame in this case.
  - 2. The community must be protected.
- G. David's children were part of a troubled family (2 Samuel 13; 18:33).
  - 1. Amnon raped Tamar; Absalom then killed Amnon and hid for three years.
  - 2. Absalom rebelled and was killed by Joab.
- H. The grief of parents is proverbial (Proverbs 10:1; 15:20).

## ***II. In The Teaching Of Jesus***

- A. Some wayward children repent and some do not (Matthew 21:28-32).
- B. Some of God's own people became hardened beyond hope (Matthew 23:37-38).
  - 1. It was not God's fault. He did everything possible to save them.

2. Christ rebuked, admonished, and pled with all His heart.
3. Nothing else could be done for them in heaven or on earth. God left them desolate and alone to be destroyed by their own hardness (Proverbs 10:14).

### **III. In The Church**

- A. God teaches us to admonish, rebuke, warn, and plead in every way possible. Then, we withdraw.
  1. God gave a procedure when one brother sins against another (Matthew 18:15-17).
  2. We admonish and withdraw, not to destroy but to save (1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15).
  3. The problem is not ignorance but self-willed persistence and stubbornness (Titus 3:10-11).
  4. How long we plead with the wayward is a matter of judgment (consider the nature of the sin, the attitude of the brother or sister, etc.). We should not withdraw too quickly, nor wait too long. Elders and other mature brethren take the lead.
- B. Sometimes the wayward are bitter against the faithful (1 John 3:11-12).
  1. They may justify themselves with false charges (“You don’t have love” and “The church is full of hypocrites.”), misrepresentations (“You’re a bigot, Pharisee, legalist, etc.”), imputing wrong motives (“You love condemning people.”), emotional pleas (“I can’t believe you’d do this to your own son/daughter.”), and twisting the scriptures (Matthew 7:1; cp. 1 Corinthians 6:1-5).
  2. We answer with the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), always realizing that true love means obeying God’s word (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3).

### **IV. What Can We Do?**

- A. Pray.
  1. Pray for wisdom (James 1:5). We all realize that wisdom is needed to discuss close, emotional issues with our children.
  2. Pray not that God will save them in their sins, but that they will repent of their sins (1 John 5:16).
- B. Put God first.
  1. Don’t let your anxiety obscure your faith in God (Matthew 6:33). Determine to obey God no matter what your children do.
  2. Don’t let your children lead you to sin against God or to compromise any truth in an effort to please them (Matthew 10:37; Ephesians 5:11). Let them know you love them, but show you love God more by being steadfast.
- C. Put your trust in God.
  1. Trust that He can help you through any trial or temptation, no matter how severe (1 Peter 5:6-7).
  2. Trust that He will bring spiritual good out of your trials as He has promised (James 1:2-4).
  3. Trust that He will not allow you to be tempted beyond your power to resist (1 Corinthians 10:13).

- D. Present the truth always in word and deed.
  - 1. Let them see your faith by upholding the truth in a kind, firm, and consistent way (1 Peter 3:1, 15).
  - 2. Answer carefully and cautiously when wayward children complain against brethren and the church in general (Colossians 4:6). If we coddle and sympathize with them, they feel justified and we help Satan make them comfortable in sin.
    - a) Treat petty complaints as petty: “I don’t like the time or length of the service, sermon topics, preacher, Bible class teacher, elders, song leader, etc. Someone did not shake my hand, etc.”
    - b) If true problems are identified, address them with scripture, not emotion or overreaction. Point out that we can be part of the problem or the solution — we can seek to help, not merely complain.
  - 3. Our example has to match our teaching of the word — they are always watching both!
- E. Remove stumbling blocks and correct sin.
  - 1. If you have committed sins which are a stumbling block to the wayward child, correct them.
    - a) Confess and correct your wrongs with your child (Matthew 5:23-24).
    - b) Remove the stumbling block lest it destroy both your child and you (Matthew 18:6; Romans 14:13; 1 Corinthians 8:9; Revelation 2:14).
  - 2. Open confession opens a door for healing to begin (James 5:16).
- F. Press on in serving God.
  - 1. Focus on the future reward of heaven, not the past mistakes of self or others (Philippians 3:13-14).
  - 2. Do not let yourself be embittered, demoralized, or paralyzed by their sinful attitudes and actions.
  - 3. Help others reach heaven too. Every person lost is wayward from God. If you cannot help your own wayward children, remember that everyone is equally precious to God and you can help someone.

**Conclusion.** We cannot save your children or anyone else until we save ourselves. We cannot share God’s grace until we accept God’s grace (Acts 22:16). If we have obeyed the gospel in the past but become wayward, God is ready to receive us back if we will repent, confess, and pray (1 John 1:9).

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