

22. Destiny

250. We believe that the Scriptures clearly teach that there is a conscious personal existence after death. The final destiny of each person is determined by God's grace and that person's response, evidenced inevitably by a moral character which results from that individual's personal and volitional choices and not from any arbitrary decree of God. Heaven with its eternal glory and the blessedness of Christ's presence is the final abode of those who choose the salvation which God provides through Jesus Christ, but hell with its everlasting misery and separation from God is the final abode of those who neglect this great salvation.

Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:34–46; Mark 9:43–48; Luke 13:3; John 8:21–23; 14:2–3; 2 Cor. 5:6, 8, 10; Heb. 2:1–3; 9:27–28; 10:26–31; Rev. 20:14–15; 21:1–22:5, 14–15.

Article 3. Membership Commitments

260. To be identified with an organized church is the blessed privilege and sacred duty of all who are saved from their sins and are seeking completeness in Christ Jesus. From the Church's beginnings in the New Testament age, it has been understood that such identification involves putting off the old patterns of conduct and putting on the mind of Christ. In maintaining this Christian concept of a transformed life, The Wesleyan Church intends to relate timeless biblical principles to the conditions of contemporary society in such a way as to respect the integrity of the individual believer, yet maintain the purity of the Church and the effectiveness of its witness. This is done in the conviction that there is validity in the concept of the collective Christian conscience as illuminated and guided by the Holy Spirit. The following items (265) represent historic, ethical and practical standards of The Wesleyan Church. While it is hoped that our people will earnestly seek the aid of the Spirit in cultivating a sensitivity to evil which transcends the mere letter of the law, those entering into membership are encouraged to follow carefully and conscientiously these guides and helps to holy living. Disregard of the principles embraced in these Membership Commitments subjects all credentialed ministers and any member serving in an elected leadership capacity to Church discipline (268; see also 550–610).

265. Those admitted to membership in our churches commit themselves to demonstrate their life in Christ in such ways as:

Toward God

(1) To reverence the name of God and to honor the Lord's Day by divine worship and spiritual edification, participating in those activities which contribute to the moral and spiritual purposes of this day.

Gen. 2:3; Ex. 20:3, 7–11; Deut. 5:11–15; Isa. 58:13–14; Mark 2:27; Acts 20:7; Heb. 4:9.

(2) To seek only the leading of the Holy Spirit and to abstain from all forms of spiritism, such as the occult, witchcraft, astrology and other similar practices.

Lev. 19:31; 20:6; Deut. 18:10–14; Acts 19:18–19; Gal. 5:19–20.

Toward Self

(3) To exercise faithful stewardship through the wise use of their time and material resources, practicing careful self-discipline in order to further the mission of Christ's church (remembering the principle of tithing which is basic to the New Testament standard of stewardship) and to demonstrate compassion to those in need.

Prov. 3:9; Mal. 3:10; Matt. 25:34–40; Acts 20:35; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:7; Eph. 5:16; Col. 3:17; James 2:15–16; 1 John 3:17.

(4) To demonstrate a positive social witness by abstaining from all forms of gambling and by abstaining from using or trafficking (production, sale or purchase) in any substances destructive to their physical, mental and spiritual health, such as alcoholic beverages, tobacco and drugs (other than proper medical purposes of drugs); and by refraining from membership in secret societies and lodges which are oath bound, believing that the quasi-religious nature of such organizations divides the Christian's loyalty, their secret nature contravenes the Christian's open witness and the secret nature of their oaths is repugnant to the Christian conscience.

Ex. 20:17; Rom. 14:21; 1 Cor. 6:12. Gambling violates the principle of Christian stewardship and the tenth commandment, is harmful to the individual in that it is emotionally addictive, is a poor example to others, and pollutes the moral climate of society.

Prov. 20:1; Rom. 6:12; 14:21; 1 Cor. 6:12–20; 10:23; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 5:18; 1 Thess. 5:22. Christians are to regard their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. While no “thing” of itself is sinful, the Christian should avoid the use of anything which would not help build the fellowship of the church, would not help the believers to realize their full potential in Christ, or which would enslave them. In the light of the scientific knowledge of our day concerning the actual and potential harm of these substances, total abstinence is more in keeping with these biblical principles than is moderation.

Ex. 20:3; Matt. 5:34–36; John 18:20; Acts 4:12; James 5:12. These prohibitions do not restrict membership in labor, civic or other organizations which do not contradict loyalty to Christ and the Church. When in these relationships Christian principles are violated, members shall be dealt with because of such violations and not because of the membership itself.

(5) To follow the teachings of the Scriptures regarding gender identity and sexual conduct.

Gen. 1:27; 1 Cor. 6:12–20; 7:17–24.

Toward Family

(6) To follow the teachings of the Scriptures regarding marriage and divorce. We affirm that sexual relationships outside of marriage and sexual relationships between persons of the same sex are immoral and sinful. We further affirm that marriage between one man and one woman is God’s design, and we regard sexual sin of the spouse, such as adultery, homosexual behavior, bestiality or incest, as clear biblical grounds for considering divorce, and then only when appropriate counseling has failed to restore the relationship.

Ex. 20:14, 17; 22:19; Lev. 20:10–16; Matt. 5:32; 19:19; Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18.

(7) To preserve the sanctity of the home by honoring Christ in every phase of family life and by demonstrating Christlike love (always avoiding violence,

including physical, psychological, emotional, or sexual abuse toward one's spouse or family members, as well as sexual infidelity or desertion, any of which warrant church discipline for the offender and may justify separation or divorce if true repentance and appropriate counseling cannot bring about reconciliation), and by living peacefully with one another, thereby building up one's spouse and family members through word and deed, and encouraging the nurture and education of the children in the Christian faith so as to bring them early to the saving knowledge of Christ.

Prov. 22:6; Malachi 2:13–16; Mark 10:9; 1 Cor. 7:10–16, Eph. 5:28; 6:4.

Toward The Church

(8) To work together for the advancement of God's kingdom and for the mutual edification of fellow believers in holiness, knowledge and love; to walk together in Christian fellowship by giving and receiving counsel with gentleness and affection; by praying for each other; by helping each other in sickness and distress; and by demonstrating love, purity and courtesy to all.

Rom. 15:1–2; Eph. 4; 1 Thess. 5.

(9) To grow in the knowledge, love and grace of God by participating in public worship, the ministry of the Word of God, the Lord's Supper, family and personal devotions and fasting.

Mark 2:18–20; Acts 13:2–3; 14:23; Rom. 12:12; 1 Cor. 11:23–28; Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:1–2; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; Heb. 10:25; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18.

(10) To preserve the fellowship and witness of the Church with reference to the use of languages. The Wesleyan Church believes in the miraculous use of languages and the interpretation of languages in its biblical and historical setting. But it is contrary to the Word of God to teach that speaking in an unknown tongue or the gift of tongues is the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit or of that entire sanctification which the baptism accomplishes; therefore, only a language readily understood by the congregation is to be used in public worship. The Wesleyan Church believes that the use of an ecstatic prayer language has no clear scriptural sanction, or any pattern of

established historical usage in the Church; therefore, the use of such a prayer language shall not be promoted among us.

Acts 8:14–17; 1 Cor. 12:1–14:40; Gal. 5:22–24.

Toward Others

(11) To do good as much as is possible to all people as God gives opportunity, especially to those in the body of Christ; by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the destitute, by visiting or helping those who are sick or in prison; by instructing, correcting or encouraging them in love.

Matt. 25:31–46; Eph. 5:11; 1 Thess. 5:14; Heb. 3:13; 10:23–25.

(12) To respect the inherent individual rights of all persons, regardless of race, color or sex.

1 Cor. 8:13; 12:13; Gal. 3:28; 1 Tim. 5:21.

(13) To live honestly, be just in all dealings and faithful in all commitments.

Eccl. 5:4–5; Rom. 12:17; Phil. 4:8–9; 1 Peter 2:12.

268. These are the Membership Commitments of our Church. We believe all these to be consistent with the principles of Christ as taught in the Word of God, which is the only and sufficient rule both of our faith and practice. If any among us do not observe them, and/or habitually break any of them, we will admonish such persons in love with the hope of restoring them to lives of harmony with the above Membership Commitments. If such efforts of restoration continue to prove fruitless, official action may be taken toward termination of said persons' church membership. However, the church members are encouraged to continue efforts toward the spiritual restoration of these persons.

Matt. 18:15–17; 1 Cor. 5:6–7, 9–13; 2 Cor. 2:5–7; 5:18–20; 6:14–18; Gal. 6:1–10; Eph. 4:25–32; Titus 3:10–11.