

Four People Who Will Destroy Your Church

Introduction. Some have, in speaking about problem members, said, “The thing that some churches need is a few good funerals.” How could anyone suggest such a radical solution? After all, these are people you are talking about! You can’t just give up on them.

But over time, as I have watched congregations develop, I have begun to see the wisdom in these words. Sadly, there are people that are so toxic and so destructive, that they will literally destroy your church from the inside out.

I do not want these people to die and I do not want them to go away, but there is a very good reason that Paul advocated disfellowshipping in 1 Corinthians 5:4-7, as well as marking erring brethren in Romans 16:17-18: some people, if left unchecked, will eat your congregation up.

And when we are talking about people’s souls — souls that could be lost by keeping someone like that inside the congregation — it becomes a matter of spiritual necessity that they are removed.

One of the hardest parts of this process can be in identifying who these people are in the first place. Outside of a blatant sin, how can we know whether someone has the ability to destroy a congregation? And even if their actions are not worthy of disfellowship, it is still important to discern who these individuals are so we, or the elders, can correct them. Here’s a list of the most common types of church-destroyers:

I. The Heretic

- A. The person who stands up and spouts false doctrine needs to be handled immediately, without hesitation and without compromise, lest they persuade others to leave the faith entirely (Titus 3:10-11; 2 Peter 2:1-2).
- B. Paul identified this spirit in Peter in Galatians 2, when he noticed that Peter only wanted to fellowship with the Gentiles when the Jews were gone — a hypocrisy that Acts 15 sought to correct. They were his brothers, and the misguided religious judgment of a few Jews should not have convinced him otherwise.
- C. Paul pointed out the error of his way with one simple verse (Galatians 2:14). The text is careful to point out the fact that Paul did this publicly. Why? Because such a public sin, which had the ability to lead people astray, needed to be handled in a way that let that same audience know that it was wrong.
- D. Other, possibly more private sins, are governed by Jesus’ words in Matthew 18:15-17, with the escalation of witnesses and judgment dependent on how stubborn the offender is, but there is no getting around it: if there is sin in the camp or in the church in the form of moral sin or doctrinal sin, it needs to be dealt with immediately, lest it spread to others and affect the entire body (Joshua 7:10-13).

II. The Egotist

- A. This is the one who loves to have all the attention. This one is not hard to spot considering they are usually front and center. But keep in mind that the problem is not that they serve. The problem is not that they teach or talk in class. The

problem is that their sole motivation for speaking and serving is to draw attention to themselves.

- B. Never mind the fact that other people might want to contribute in some way, the egotist is too busy reminding everyone that he's the smartest person in the room, which means that everyone else is not (Romans 1:30; 2 Timothy 3:4).
- C. They're the ones who "love the chief seats in the synagogue," and they "love for other people to call them Rabbi" (Matthew 23:5-7), because, after all, isn't the praise of men the same as the praise from God? Hardly (Matthew 6:2, 5, 16).
- D. How does this person destroy a church? By treating the church as if it is a one-man show, they communicate to everyone else that they are the only ones capable of righteousness. Pretty soon, people will start believing that about themselves, and they will simply fade into the distance.
- E. These people are always up for a good fight, because their word matters most, sometimes even more than God's (3 John 9-11). They want everyone in the church to know who is in charge, which is them (Mark 10:35-37). Ironic, considering they didn't pay for it with their own blood (Acts 20:28).

III. The Complainer

- A. Have you ever known someone that hated everything every other person did? They do not care about finding solutions and they do not care about other people's issues. All they care about is that the entire world notices how miserable they are. It is their identity, and it almost seems like the more they complain, the more they will continue to complain.
- B. Even worse, they feel like everything in the world is meant to serve them: the carpets need to match their tastes, the thermostat should be tailored to their comfort level, and if a sermon does not seem applicable for whatever reason, they are going to find someone who will preach what they like (Micah 2:11).
- C. But no matter how much of a complainer one person is, they have nothing on the multitudes in the wilderness during the Exodus.
- D. Imagine over two million people wandering around in the desert, complaining about everything. Never mind the fact that God had just delivered them from slavery in Egypt using a series of supernatural plagues, parted a major water source for them to pass through, and annihilated the greatest army in the world to secure safe passage.
- E. As humans, they had to eat, so God dropped food out of the sky for them (Exodus 16:4). Not good enough. They also had to drink, so God made water come out of a rock (Exodus 17:6). Still not good enough.
- F. How do you please someone like that? You can't, and you can't please the complainer either. The preaching will never be good enough, the building will never be as beautiful as it needs to be, the worship will always be mediocre, the elders will always be too slow, and the complainer will always be persecuted.
- G. The one characteristic that every complainer I have ever met has in common is a fundamental lack of interest/ability/foresight to do anything for his or herself. It is a trademark of the complainers that they are always, without fail, the ones doing the least amount of work and expecting the most in return.

- H. It does not matter that they have never once had people in their home, everyone else is not hospitable. It does not matter that they have never talked to others, everyone else is unfriendly. It does not matter that they have never led singing, brother So-and-So should never set foot in a pulpit again.
- I. And on it goes. Murmuring destroyed the Israelites in the wilderness, and it will destroy your church if you let it (1 Corinthians 10:10; cp. Philippians 2:14).

IV. The Matador

- A. A matador is the person who never speaks up, never argues, never contributes, and worst of all, never engages with the congregation that they are a part of. They stand to the side and shout a silent “Ole!” as the work passes on by.
- B. To be fair, some of this is innocent as much as it is destructive. Maybe the person does not feel like they can help or have the resources to contribute much, but regardless, their presence (or lack thereof) is hardly noticed by the ones that they do not speak to. It does not mean they do not love them, or are loved in return, but there is just not much of a relationship to speak of.
- C. A congregation of matadors will watch as the heretic’s teaching runs amok or as the egotist dominates every situation, and will quietly slip out the side door so as not to “interfere.” They will not necessarily do anything else to hurt the church, but they also will not typically do anything to grow it as well. They are just kind of there.
- D. It sounds harmless, but remember what Jesus said to the ones who were “lukewarm” in the church at Laodicea? He saw their bland state and vowed to “spue” them out of His mouth because they were so distasteful to His palate (Revelation 3:16). Their state was one of complacency: they believed they were fine the way they were, when in reality, they could not have been more wretched, miserable, blind, and naked if they had tried.
- E. Many brethren are like this. They do not actively try to hurt the church, but they do not try to improve it either. Instinctively, they think that the best they can do is sit on autopilot.
- F. Jesus has a different viewpoint. He lambasted the one-talent man in Matthew 25:26-30, not because he had so little, but because he refused to use what he had. By not engaging, he was working against his master (Matthew 12:30).
- G. Christians are not supposed to live on the sidelines. We are not supposed to sit by and watch as the events of the congregation, both good and bad, pass us by. We are called to fight the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12), and to help others do so as well. We have to get in the game. Sometimes, the only way we produce repentance in unrighteous lives is through the pressure of multiple like-minded brethren.
- H. We are called to be combatants, not spectators. A church full of the latter will almost certainly dwindle away, achieving nothing and losing everything. It is a sad way for a church to die.

Conclusion. Don’t be a destroyer. Use your talents for wise purposes which will be talked about tonight. Those who destroy the Lord’s work will be judged for it, so don’t fall into the trap of doing only what you want to do.

I am deeply indebted to Brady Cook for the use of his material.