

# Why Do Churches Die?

**Introduction.** As shocking as it may seem, I believe this church will die. In fact, there will come a day when every faithful church in this city will die. I say that because when we examine the churches of the New Testament (Rome, Ephesus, Colossae, Philippi, Corinth, Galatia, Smyrna, Philadelphia, etc.), there is not a one of them which remains to this day. This is pretty convincing evidence that this church will one day be dead.

In Revelation 3:1, the church at Sardis was literally like a dead man. The "name" indicates the church's reputation, the esteem in which it is held. Sardis had the reputation of being alive, but the Lord saw it as dead. Apparently this church, like the one at Ephesus, had begun with enthusiasm and a burning zeal for Christ and truth, but now it was dying of "dry rot," an internal deterioration. This congregation had sunk into spiritual inactivity, possibly to the level of the world, while yet maintaining an outward impression of faithfulness (cf. 1 Timothy 5:6).

It is sad but this describes many churches today that have a reputation of soundness and activity, but inwardly are decaying and dying. We need to examine why churches die but also examine what can be done.

## I. **Why Do Churches Die?**

A. They do not have a desire to live.

1. It is amazing to me, but some churches do not want to grow. They feel perfectly fine with their size. They never realize that when they refuse to want to grow in numbers, they are refusing to save souls.
2. In Acts, churches like Jerusalem (Acts 2:41-42, 46-47) and Antioch (Acts 13:1-3) were aggressive in saving souls and sending people out to preach the gospel.
3. It is a simple fact that if the congregation does not want to grow, it will not. The difference is made by brethren who want to band together with unity and zealously work toward a common goal of saving themselves and others (Philippians 2:2, 12).

B. They do not have any convictions.

1. Too many churches have traded a historic, objective, faithful gospel based on God's graciousness toward us for a modern, subjective, pragmatic gospel based upon achieving our goals by following life strategies.
  - a) If the preaching and teaching of the Bible is not enough to motivate a heart to search deeply and honestly about the condition of their soul, nothing will. We want people to make peace with God through the word (John 15:3), not a fabricated experience or man's philosophy (1 Corinthians 1:17, 21).

- b) The message is intentionally simple, and abhorrent to most people. God selected it for that purpose. The idea that we need to dress it up and make it cater to a younger generation is absurd. Jesus let people walk away because the message is a dignified and worthy one.
- 2. Indistinct preaching and teaching (2 Timothy 4:2-4) and accepting anyone into fellowship (cf. Romans 16:17-18; 1 Corinthians 5:4-5) will cause a church to die. So few churches feel an urgency to take a stand against false doctrine, improper use of church treasury, divorce and remarriage, or immorality.
- C. They do not have a loving atmosphere.
  - 1. If you have ever been in a church with a cold and unaffectionate atmosphere, you will know immediately why that church will die. People do not want to be at a place where they do not feel welcome or where there are undercurrents of strife or division.
  - 2. Congregations must be fitted and held together by love (Ephesians 5:15-16; 1 John 3:16) and godliness (Ephesians 4:31-32). It really does not matter how many individuals in an unloving congregation work because it is destined to die.
- D. They do not have good Bible classes.
  - 1. One of the great distinctive features about the Lord's church is its strong emphasis on the Bible. People visit our assemblies because they want to know more about God.
  - 2. The church needs Bible classes which truly explain and teach the scriptures (Acts 8:29-30), not provide time for playing or meaningless controversies and ignorant speculations (2 Timothy 2:23).
  - 3. Some churches have dumbed down what they teach their children so much that they are embarrassingly ignorant of the faith.
    - a) With nothing solid to hang their faith upon, their faith is in their subjective feelings, and when faced with other ways to "feel" uplifted, the church loses out to much stronger, baser appeals.
    - b) If you are afraid that children will be disinterested and will need "fun time" to keep them attending, do not worry. The agnostics and atheists will treat your children as intelligent and challenge their intellect with "deep thoughts" of question and doubt.
- E. They do not have meaningful worship.
  - 1. Christians are flirting with the idea of taking a historic, 2,000-year-old faith, dressing "pastors" in plaid and skinny jeans and trying to sell it as "cool" to our children. Furthermore, the depth of some sermons essentially only encourage people to "be nice" and "love Jesus". When this happens, people eventually realize that they can be "spiritually fulfilled" and get the same subjective self-

- improvement principles and “warm, fuzzy feeling” from the latest life coach or from spending time with friends or volunteering at a shelter. If this is all worship is to some, they quickly figure out that they do not need a crucified Christ.
2. On the other hand, some worship assemblies resemble more of a sad and mournful funeral than joyous and enthusiastic worship. Everything should be proper and orderly (1 Corinthians 14:40), but that does not rule out being enthusiastic and glad to be where we are (Psalm 122:1).
    - a) Worship assemblies are not to be a whooping and hollering type of rally. In worship, God must be respected and revered.
    - b) That means preparation and thoughtfulness in the Lord’s supper and sermons. That means enthusiasm in our song selection and singing, humble respect for God in our prayers, and contemplative sacrifice in our giving. People will return where they see that the time spent by the members means something to them.

## II. ***What Can Be Done?***

- A. They must wake up.
  1. Revelation 3:2 gives three remedies for churches in trouble. The admonition to “wake up” is the first sign of life (1 Thessalonians 5:6). Churches must be willing to realize they are in trouble. They must take care to be thriving and growing.
  2. Our admonitions against morality (1 Corinthians 5:1-2) and indifference (Revelation 3:17-19), and encouragements for zealous service and righteous behavior are for everyone’s edification (Romans 14:19).
- B. They must strengthen what remains.
  1. Churches can become discouraged with what they do not have instead of resolving to build upon what they do have. Churches need to work on what is good within themselves and not fret over what cannot easily be changed.
  2. Congregations have many members who have great faith and confidence in the word of God that can be passed on to others (2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 2:2-5).
- C. They must complete their deeds.
  1. Individually, members can consistently live out simple directives such as Matthew 5:16 every day.
  2. Collectively, brethren must finish the job and complete the task it was given to do. We should excel in the simple tasks of evangelism, edification, and benevolence.

**Conclusion.** As I said in the beginning, this church will eventually die. Our job is to postpone death as long as we can. If congregations will wake up, strengthen what is good, and complete their deeds, they will postpone death for a long time. This is all God expects of us. He wishes for us to work as hard as we can wherever we are (1 Corinthians 15:58).