

CHURCH FAILURES

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"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" Acts 2:47.

The word church appears 118 times in the New Testament. Seven times it makes reference to all believers wherever they are who belong to the family of God. One hundred and eleven times it refers to local churches on earth who met or are meeting in service for the Master. All the forces of hell cannot destroy the body of believers that belong to Him (Matt. 16:18). Christ gave himself for His church and He is its Head (Eph. 5:23). Satan cannot destroy it, (I Pet. 5:8) but he will never stop trying throughout the church age. The hope of the true church is that Jesus has promised to come for His own (I Thess. 4:17). In these latter days it is the local churches that are slipping in their stand and service for the Lord. I will try to point out some of the reasons local churches fail.

It is often the result of **WRONG DOCTRINE**. In I Timothy 4:16 we are told to "take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine: continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." The slide into modernism, ecumenism, false and misleading translations and modern psychological theories have been devastating to the church. God's wisdom from above is to be "first pure" James 3:17. Any church begins to slip when it "muddies the waters" by departing from proven Bible doctrines. The use of polluted Bible versions also leads to confusion and loss of original truths. This causes the unsaved to question the authority of the church. Shallow evangelistic preaching along with no doctrine, leads to an undeveloped and weak congregation that will splinter under the test of time. Doctrinal extremes are also deadly and a careful reading of II Peter 2:18-22 warns against private interpretations. The association of the church must also be carefully guarded as to other churches, schools, fellowships and persons. A church that walks in the cold winds of those who compromise will

slowly be robbed of its spiritual temperature and finally fail.

Many churches have failed through **FLAWED LEADERSHIP**. A church cannot go further than the one who heads its programs. The preacher must first meet Biblical qualifications. He must be "blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;...not a novice,... must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" I Tim. 3:2-7. Not just anyone can be a successful preacher. God's qualifications are very high and must result in a lifetime dedication to the call of God. One pastor of dubious ability argued he had seen the letters P C in the sky and knew it meant to preach Christ. Those who heard him felt it meant to plow corn. The pastor must not be guilty of weak preaching but must strive "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" Eph 4:12. He must live a strong pastoral life of example so as not to be a trumpet of uncertain sound I (Cor. 14:8). The man of God must develop loving, firm compassion and major in charity (I Cor. 13:1). He must not be afraid to discipline and rule well for he must give account to God (Heb. 13:17). The preacher must "preach the word; be instant in season; out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine" II Tim. 4:2. Above all things the man of God must be faithful (I Cor. 4:2). Such a lifetime of faithfulness will result in a lasting church and much eternal reward.

Often a Church falls into a path of **CONFUSED MOTIVES**. The church is to be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" I Cor. 15:58. The main purpose of the church is not social entertainment, sports or even environmental concerns. It reminds me of the Indian who when visiting the seashore ridiculed the lighthouse. He said, "horn blows, light flashes, bell rings, fog still comes." He certainly did not understand the value of the lighthouse. Soup

suppers are no substitute for the bread of life. Winning ball games does not compare to winning the game of life. A gambling Bingo game ignores the bigger need as men gamble away their souls. Social warmth has its place but spiritual fulfillment is best. The church must deal with day to day problems but spiritual needs must be first. The pastor has been chosen to win souls, (John 15:16) preach the Word, (II Tim. 4:2) the growth of the saints and the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12). The light of the Gospel must be bright and bring warning and guidance to the safety of the harbor. When the light of the church goes out the community is doomed to darkness. The light of the world is Jesus.

A dying church will be further evidenced by **MEMBER STAGNATION**. Sometimes members become lazy forgetting the command "be not slothful" Rom. 12:11. The value of church priorities gets eclipsed by things, possessions, home activities, family involvement, school functions, sports, clubs and work. The Word warns us not to "lay up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal" Matt. 6: 19. The furious pursuit of earthly things always results in indifference to Holy things. It leads to "Sunday morning rut" a term I give to those who occasionally visit for one hour Sunday morning but seldom Sunday School or evening service. They cannot manage prayer meeting and certainly revival meetings are not on their list of desired activity. A pastor can labor years trying to pry members from such an indifferent rut. The sins of omission often become stronger than those of commission. Without dedicated spiritual exercise, church members become a dead weight to the church.

A church, like individual families can also be damaged by **FAMILY FRICTION**. Sometimes a family has been lodged for years in control of the church. When the preacher no longer pleases them they seek to run him off. They often cut pay and benefits and stir great confusion throwing the wounded church into another period of travail. Every day a church is without a pastor weakens its stamina for God. Disgruntled members often

become vampires sucking the lifeblood of the church. Cliques and divisions splinter the congregation into little groups which cannot get along. There are those who foolishly preserve grudges like treasure and those who resist change and progress. Jealousy often rears its ugly head and in a business meeting angry words fly like darts with fatal results. Often the accuser is guilty of worse things than the accused. The Holy Spirit becomes grieved, the church atmosphere becomes strained and the resulting struggle wounds the church. Scripture warns often the one complaining about the "speck" in another's life is guilty of a whole "saw log" in their own eye. Loving believers are to give none offense (I Cor. 10:32) and to avoid divisions (I Cor. 11:18). When coming to worship if we are angry toward our brother or he has the same feelings toward us we are told to "leave thy gift before the altar and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift" Matt. 5:24. Church fights result in people leaving their church for all the wrong reasons. Some people bounce around like ping pong balls developing an attitude that cannot get along anywhere. Such action is a sure way to destroy your children's respect, and importance of the church. Our world holds far too many embittered ex-church members who waste away like skulls on a barren desert.

WEAK DISCIPLINE can also be a tragic cause of the slippage of a church. The pastor and congregation must be firm and stand as one against all sin. Compromise leads to weakness and sin and if allowed to continue, will bring moral contamination. Open sin cannot be tolerated. Brethren must make things right with brethren (Matt. 18:15). If they will not hear, take two or more witnesses (Matt. 18:16). If they refuse, then bring them before the church and if that fails then put them out (Matt. 18:17). That may sound harsh, but the cancer must be severed from the body before it kills the whole. David's sin brought occasion for the enemies of God to blaspheme. Weak discipline destroys the growth of believers, causes the world's ridicule, encourages transgression in others, prevents one doing his best and hinders the power of God. A pastor must use the Bible as a rule book of authority to govern as

God has commanded. This is not legalism but shows obedience to the commands of God. Wayward and stubborn members must be counseled, face their sin and have an opportunity to repent and return to the path of usefulness. Gods followers must keep their body under, (I Cor. 9:27) run the race setting aside sin, (Heb. 12:1) and be true examples of the believer (I Tim. 4:12). A successful army takes lots of training, must obey commands and do battle against the enemy. The army of the Lord is the same. From the church armory we must march in battle for the King of Kings. Loyalty must be demanded, breeches of discipline punished and a common goal must lead to victory. We must stand together, uphold tradition, assist our wounded and be faithful in battle. Failure to give and take discipline will result in weak-kneed members and a church that will not stand. If the church won't stand for something it will fall for anything.

A church can also fail because of **MEAGER SUPPORT**. We live in an age where the demands for our money are many. There is much dishonesty among church goers today. Many drive stolen cars, watch stolen TV sets and live in stolen houses. Failure to tithe and give honest offerings is an act of robbing God. (Mal. 3:8). Your tithe belongs in your storehouse, the local church. (Mal.3:10) Believers are encouraged in I Corinthians 16:2 to go beyond as God has prospered them. In Acts chapter 5 we see Ananias and Sapphira struck dead because they cheated and lied as to their finances and what they had promised God. A church member who will not tithe to his church places a heavier load on the faithful ones. Put a number of such together and the church will suffer financially. The general funds will fall low, bills be unpaid and the testimony of the church lowered. The pastor will not be paid a decent wage and missionary funds will drop. The Biblical standard is to " give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" II Cor. 9:7. Your good church deserves your wholehearted support in a systematic way. Any failure in this will strangle its ability to serve the community and win souls to Christ.

There may be a few more reasons but let me lastly suggest **FAILED VISION**. Scriptures warn " where there is no vision, the people perish" Pr. 29:18. A business fails if not convinced its product is needed. Salesmen must invest hours presenting the product and devote years of work to the company. The church is very much the same and more. Ours is not a product of convenience but a matter of life and death. Failure to see and feel for a lost world negates the main purpose of the church. If all men without Christ are lost, then they need to be saved. God never commands a sinner to go to church but for us to go get them. His servants are to "go into the highways and byways and compel them to come in" Luke 14:23. To maintain a strong church the pastor and people must "be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" I Cor. 15:58. Christ always kept the spiritual needs of men uppermost. A lasting church must never lose sight of the need for winning souls. In Bob Jones University, where I got my training, the preacher boys always sang this song. "Souls for Jesus is our battle cry. Souls for Jesus we'll fight until we die. We never will give in while souls are lost in sin. Souls for Jesus is our battle cry." I've practiced that for fifty years and plan to keep at it until Jesus calls or comes for me. Those of us who remember parade day in the military can remember standing in the proud ranks with fluttering flags and marching band. One cannot forget the booming order, "pass in review". What a thrill to wheel with your own company and with eyes right salute the commander. Such a day awaits the army of the Lord as His church is called to pass in review. Christ will proudly present His troops to the father in the greatest assemblage yet seen. Until then, He wants His church to be a "glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" Eph. 5:27. Let's obey Revelation 2:25 which urges "that which ye have already, hold fast till I come". You need your church and your church needs you. Choose a good one and stick with it with total devotion and sacrificial service. He gave His life for the church and we must not do less.