

13 Signs of a Dying Church

The Word of God teaches us that there are times God's presence can leave the corporate expression of His people. We see this in 1 Samuel 4:21-22 when the name Ichabod was given to the grandson of Eli, the high priest, after the ark of the covenant was captured by the Philistines. Also, in the book of Revelation 3:1 Jesus told the church of Sardis that it had a reputation of being alive but was dead. Hence, it is possible for communities of faith to be dead or dying.

Furthermore, in Revelation 2:5, Jesus warned the church of Ephesus that if they did not repent He would remove their lampstand. Since the lampstand represents the true church, according to Revelation 1:20, then Jesus was either threatening to shut down the church and or remove Himself from it—which would mean it was dead spiritually. Since Jesus said that the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church (Matt. 16), then it is impossible for Satan to close down a church; whenever a church ceases to exist, it is the Lord Himself who shut it down. This is the reason many denominations will cease to exist in the next few decades as well as why many congregations close their doors every year. To blame Satan for this is not biblical since Jesus said He is the one who removes them.

Having established the biblical precedent for dead or dying churches, the following are 13 signs of a dead or dying church:

1. There are no functional prayer gatherings.

Within dying churches, few people show up to pray and seek God together since they have no sense of His presence or that He is present in the midst of them, just as you would not be motivated to speak to your friend if you didn't think they were listening.

2. There is no expectation of answered prayers.

Few if any pray together since there is no anticipation that God will actually answer prayer. When you are in a church without faith to believe God, it is either dead or dying.

3. The presence of God is missing in the assembly of the saints.

Metaphorically, the heavens are like brass over the skies of dead or dying churches (Deut. 28:23). There is no sense of God's presence during worship even though Jesus promised that where two or three gather in His name, He is in the midst of them ().

4. The power of God is not manifest.

Jesus said that when demons were cast out it was a sign the kingdom of God was among them (Luke 11:20). The apostle Paul expected the miraculous to be the norm in the life of the church, as we read in Galatians 3:5.

Jesus expects believers to use their faith to receive answers to prayer and move mountains (Mark 11:23-24).

When there are no instances of God's divine intervention in a church, it can be a sign that the church is dead or dying.

5. The Word of God is presented without authority or anointing.

The religious leaders, who practiced a dead faith during Jesus's time, were shocked when they heard Jesus speak because He taught with authority (Mark 1:22).

In dead or dying churches, the preacher has no unction to instill faith, motivate action or convict of sin.

6. Few if any people are saved or get baptized.

In the early church, the Lord regularly added people to the

church (Acts 2:47). When there are no people being saved or baptized, it is a sign the Lord is no longer working in their midst.

7. Every church service is predictable by the minute.

Whether it be high church services or a non-denominational charismatic church, when every aspect of the worship, liturgy and preaching is predictable as if choreographed to the minute, then it may reveal there is no room for the Holy Spirit to operate. Like Samson of old, the Spirit may have departed without the people knowing it (Judges 16:20).

Truly, any aspect of our church that can function without dependence on the Holy Spirit shows that it is a machination of men and not God.

8. There is no pattern of disciple making

The bottom line in all churches is the making of committed Christ followers, better known as disciples. It doesn't matter how large a church is, what matters is how many mature sons are being developed that will positively affect the created order (Rom. 8:19-21).

9. The people jockey for position and titles.

When people are not seeking the glory of God they depend even more upon getting affirmation from men. Hence, a church without the presence of God will most likely have a hierarchical culture with people posturing for positions and titles. The less you know God intimately, the more your identity will be connected to credentials and titles.

10. There is no divine sense of mission and purpose.

When there is no vision, the people are perishing (Prov 29:18); when a congregation is dead or dying they have no compelling transcendent purpose that motivates them to fulfill their biblical calling.

11. Few people volunteer to serve.

Psalms 110:3 says that the people will volunteer or offer themselves willingly in the day of His power. Consequently, in dead or dying churches very few people volunteer to serve in the ministry.

12. Few people support the church with tithes and offerings.

Jesus said, "where your treasure is, there will your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21). When a church is dying or dead, few people will be motivated to invest their finances into it. Conversely, when people see God moving within the church, they will have more faith and be more motivated to give of their finances knowing that it is being sown in good soil.

13. The community isn't impacted.

God called believers to be the salt of the Earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16). When our lamp goes out, the surrounding community is no longer changed by the power of the gospel. Furthermore, any so-called church revival that doesn't bring positive change to their surrounding community is not real revival. Perhaps it is only a renewal, which is also a good thing but renewal is primarily for the church.

In conclusion, if you see any or all of these signs of a dying church in your congregation, ask the Lord what He wants you to do to help resuscitate it. Humbly present your concerns to the leaders of the church before making any decisions. Perhaps God is doing a lot behind the scenes that you do not know about.

Also, at times in American history, the turn of the 19th century in particular, the church in general was in a very low spiritual state. God raised up men like Charles Finney to usher in the Second Great Awakening, which revived thousands of congregations and awakened lost sinners. Like the prophet Habakkuk of old, let us seek the Lord to revive His work in the midst of the years and beseech Him that in wrath He would

remember mercy (Hab. 3:2).

The greatest challenge we have in this nation is not our political leaders but a lack of power and conviction in the pulpit and the pews that can produce world-changing Christ followers.