

# 5 Signs of a Dying Church

Church is boring for most because the power of God has vanished from many congregations ... there is a lack of desire to pursue Him in the pulpit as well as in the pew. Like Samson, they “know not that the Spirit of the Lord has departed” (cf. Judge 16:20).

High attendance is not the gauge of success, faithfulness is. Granted, a healthy church should experience seasons of growth, but even cults generate large numbers of followers.

Here are 5 simple ways to gauge the health of a church as well as a believer:

**1. Is prayer an after-thought or a priority?** Nights of prayer and worship are often replaced with Bingo and are in a hurry to burn through a sermon, scurry through worship, and head to the nearest restaurant. This is a sure sign of a dying church. If churches are too busy to pray—we’re too busy. “When faith ceases to pray, it ceases to live” (E.M. Bounds). We should never allow our relationship with God to suffer because we’re too busy. “We must spend much time on our knees before God if we are to continue in the power of the Holy Spirit” (R.A. Torrey). Spiritual life and prayer go hand-in-hand. You can’t have one without the other.

**2. Is the church known for either emotionalism or dead formalism?** Unfortunately, Christians often embrace one of two extremes when it comes to the topic of the Holy Spirit. At one extreme are those who embrace pure emotionalism and hysteria—“if it’s odd it’s God” is often their motto. All weird behavior is excused. The other extreme resembles a cemetery. There’s no living, vibrant spiritual life taking place. The church is dead, cold, and lifeless; talk of revival is either dismissed or ridiculed. Both extremes are wrong and offer a false impression of genuine Christianity ... both are

characteristics of a dying church.

**3. Is sin excused and holiness minimized?** In short, has the fear of the Lord vanished? Some time ago, a pastor of a large church in my area made an unforgettable statement, "We should avoid mentioning the fear of the Lord. It makes people feel uncomfortable." Just writing that sentence makes me feel uncomfortable. The *fear of the Lord* is mentioned frequently throughout the Bible as the beginning of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. "The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him..." (Psalm 147:11).

Fear can also motivate a person to repent. Jesus said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). Jesus spoke more on the fear of hell than on the glory of heaven. "That makes me both love Him and fear Him! I love Him because He is my Savior, and I fear Him because He is my Judge" (A.W. Tozer).

The present condition of the church (and America) leads one to wonder if this lack of fearing the Lord is contributing to her spiritually dead condition: "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth..." (Revelation 3:15-17).

**4. Is love a concept or a reality?** True love is a "choice" and a commitment that we make to do good to others; it is not a "feeling." If love is the greatest commandment, it should be our first priority. Love hopes for and believes the best in others. It is demonstrated through our actions and our words. The Bible is clear: *If you have not love, it profits you nothing* (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:3). You can be well read in all sixty-six books of the Bible, preach as well as Whitefield, Moody, and Spurgeon, and have a Ph.D. in theology, but if you don't have love, you have nothing.

**5. Are difficult truths neglected, watered-down, or avoided in the hope of “not offending”?** Ironically, churches that are “all about love” forget the other side of the coin: judgment is never mentioned; repentance is never sought; and sin is often excused. They want to build a church rather than break a heart; be politically correct rather than biblically correct; coddle and comfort rather than stir and convict. This leaves people confused and deceived because they believe in a cross-less Christianity that bears no resemblance to Jesus’ sobering call to repentance. Christianity only makes sense in light of the consequences of sin. The good news about Christ can only be appreciated with the bad news as the backdrop. *There are times when the saints must be fed, and there are times when the sinners must be warned* (C.H. Spurgeon).

Pastors (including me) must find the balance—preach the difficult truths as well as the joyful ones; preach the cross and the new life; preach hell and preach heaven; preach damnation and preach salvation; preach sin and preach grace; preach wrath and preach love; preach judgment and preach mercy; preach obedience and preach forgiveness; preach that God “is love,” but don’t forget that God is just. Ironically, it’s the love of God that compels us to share all of His truth, including those things that are hard to hear.

Although disheartening, this trend away from God’s Word (absolute truth) is not surprising. The apostle Paul warned centuries ago: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine [God’s Word], but according to their own desires ... they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4). If this isn’t exactly what we see today, I don’t know what is.

*Pockets of true revival are breaking out across America. Want to know more about the next great move of God? Click here to see Jennifer LeClaire’s new book, featuring Dutch Sheets, Reinhard Bonnke, Jonathan Cahn, Billy Graham and others.*

Are you losing the battle against sin? The below video message will help.

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