

7 Crises That Threatened the Church's Existence

As we read the first historical account of the early church found in the book of Acts, we are able to see a pattern of seven essential threats that could have wiped the church off the map!

Interesting enough, these seven threats are still hazards to the contemporary church. The following are seven crises the church faced and how they overcame.

1. Outside Persecution

As we read in Chapters 3 and 4 in the book of Acts, the religious leaders warned the apostles not to preach any more in the name of Jesus. This threat had huge implications since it ostracized them both institutionally and socially from their friends and family in Jerusalem.

Instead of quitting or fleeing, they prayed for boldness to be His witness in spite of the persecution (Acts 4:29). This serves as a lesson to the contemporary church. Instead of merely praying for persecution to stop—we should believe God to fill us with the Spirit of boldness to proclaim the truth in the midst of our adversaries.

2. Internal Compromise

When Satan saw that he could not stop the growing Jesus movement with outside persecution, he attempted to infiltrate and compromise the church from within.

In Acts 5 (5:1-12) we read the account of how a married couple named Ananias and Sapphira lied to the apostles regarding the percentage of a property sale they were donating to the church. It seems they were attempting to leverage their

resources for honor and prestige in the new Jesus movement. If successful, they would have set an erroneous standard of using pretense for church influence and power—which could have corrupted the foundation of the church and led to its early demise,

Thank God, Peter moved in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and was able to prophetically discern their falsehood, call them out and allow for divine judgment to purge His congregation before this evil spread. The contemporary church also needs to operate in spiritual discernment as well as be aware of those who attempt to gain influence through lies and pretense.

3. Cultural Prejudice

In Acts 6, we read how Greek-speaking widows were neglected by the church's benevolence ministry. The Scripture emphasizes the fact that they were Greek-speaking, which means that they were Hellenized Jews who did not speak Hebrew. Unfortunately, this seemed to be the tip of the iceberg and revealed the fact that there was an evil underbelly of cultural prejudice permeating the congregation.

Thank God, the apostles immediately remedied this cultural divide by appointing more leaders to meet the need—resulting in the multiplication of disciples and kingdom expansion (see Acts 6:1-12). If the apostles allowed the congregation to neglect widows merely because they were Greek speaking (or Hellenized) they would have become a mono-cultural, Hebrew-centric church and failed in regard to the Great Commission (see Matt. 28:18-20). It's also possible that the church would have been severely judged by God for this great transgression.

Contemporary churches will also experience great failure if they refuse to acknowledge the transcendence of Christ over all and for all cultures and people groups.

4. Purchasing God's Gifts With Money

In Acts 8, we see the story of a man named Simon who attempted to purchase the gift of the Holy Spirit baptism with money. The apostle Peter immediately rebuked him and told him that his money can perish with him if he thought he could purchase God's gifts with money. The practice of attempting to purchase divine gifts with money is still known as "simony." Through the years both the historic church (through the use of indulgences) and the contemporary church have had to deal with ministers who attempt to peddle the sacred things of God primarily for profit.

If Peter didn't act swiftly and decisively, the early church would have been controlled by those who were wealthy and or destroyed by Simon. Also, the contemporary church must always teach that only the efficacious blood of Jesus can purchase for us what we need regarding our salvation and walk with Christ.

5. An Ethnocentric Gospel

In Acts 10 and 11, we see how God convinced the apostle Peter that the Gospel of Jesus was not only for the Jewish nation but also for the Gentile nations. Up to that point, the church was making the mistake of being mono ethnic—hence limiting the work of the cross to Jewish people.

Eventually, this form of racism would have either destroyed the church or greatly limited her influence in the world. The modern church must also go from being ethnically homogeneous to heterogeneous if we are going to advance His Kingdom purposes.

Modern churches that only cater to one ethnic group to the exclusion of other ethnic groups in their community (unless there is a language barrier) are also greatly limiting the power of the cross to reach humankind.

6. Mixing the Gospel of Grace and Works

In Acts 15, we also see how Jewish believers who were of the sect of the Pharisees started teaching that men needed to be circumcised in order to be saved. This mixture of law and grace for salvation would have destroyed the church if men like the apostles Paul, Peter and James did not back them down and stand up for the truth.

The modern church must also protect itself from destructive heresies that either take away from the divinity of Christ or attempt to add works to the cross of Christ for salvation. We must continue to earnestly contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

7. The Generational Loss of Passion for Christ

In Acts 20, Paul warned the Ephesian church elders that after he left, grievous wolves would follow him and draw disciples after themselves (20:30). Unfortunately, only one generation later, Jesus threatened to remove this once great church from the scene because they lost their passion for Him (Rev. 2:4,5).

As great as Paul the apostle was, the elders who followed did not take heed to his warning and failed to perpetuate his life, passion and doctrine (2 Tim. 3:10). Every church, in every nation and culture, is always one generation from extinction if we fail to pass on our faith and passion to those who follow in our footsteps.