

The Church Died!

Impressive churches dot the pages of Bible history - Antioch, Ephesus, Jerusalem, Phillipi, Rome. From more recent restoration history, a host of names are recalled. But what finally happened to those churches? A few remain; most are gone. They died! Is this destined to be the final chapter of this church? Why did they die?

Did the churches become outdated? A new T-model Ford is as good as ever but not suited to the demands of our day. Man has not changed. Man's spiritual needs are the same. God's church is perfect in design and needs no improvement. That is not the problem.

Was it persecution that destroyed those grand churches? All churches felt the lash of persecution, but that is when they multiplied their numbers. They died later. Churches die from within - not from outside pressure.

Churches die at the tables of compromise. When the churches fought the world, sin, and false doctrine - asking no quarter nor giving any, they prospered. Brethren bore scars; they lost a battle now and then, but they did not lose the war. In their hand was a two edged sword, and on their side a divine defense none could penetrate. Compromise opened the gates and sheathed the sword. "Let's not dispute with people ... " That appeal is the cankerworm and caterpillar that devours a church - and it is at last dead, stripped of its courage and faith.

Churches die of indifference. All churches lose members - they die, quit, or move away. Laziness just revises the directory and waits for move-ins and births. No effort is made to restore the fallen as scripture demands. No seed is sown. No one has home Bible studies. There is no zealous pursuit of souls. That church naturally - gradually - eventually but ever so surely dies.

Churches die from misdirection. They adopt worldly religious ideals. They see the church as a social reform agency, a general benevolent society, and a recreational institution. Its spiritual mission is forgotten. The harder they work, the worse the church becomes. Finally it is but a grotesque caricature of the Lord's church. Somewhere along the way, the church died - the victim of apostasy. Other churches have no direction at all. They are content to open the doors three times a week, have a meeting once a year, and paint the building when it begins to peel. They go in circles constantly wearing the ruts deeper and deeper. They press without a real goal, running on the treadmill until the church dies.

Is such inevitable? Must our work be wasted? No! The Lord has a prescription: "Preach the word; ... in season, out of season" "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, ... " "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." May we have the zeal, faith and backbone to take the medicine.

- by Joe Fitch

Led By Whom?

Some claim that the Holy Spirit is still speaking to them in a direct, miraculous way IN ADDITION TO what He recorded in the Bible. However, the Holy Spirit Himself tells us that His revelation, the New Testament of Jesus Christ, is "perfect", "complete", and "final" (See Jas. 1:25; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Jude 3). The New Testament is the Word we must live by because it is the Word we will be judged by (Jas. 2:12; Jno. 12:48). It is the 'ONLY way God speaks to men today.

It would be interesting to know just what the Holy Spirit would say to these men that He has not already said in the Bible. If He said the same thing as the Bible, it would not be necessary, and if He said something different, one would be "accursed" if he taught it (Gal. 1:8-9).

Please consider these obvious facts: FIRST, the Holy Spirit would not teach a doctrine that denied what He already said in the Bible. Yet, all who claim direct guidance today teach doctrines which conflict with the Bible. SECOND, the Holy Spirit would not teach conflicting doctrines. Yet, such as claim direct guidance (Mormons, Catholics, Pentecostals, etc.) teach opposing and conflicting doctrines. Who can believe that the Holy Spirit is the author of such chaos?

CONCLUSION: Men who claim miraculous guidance today are frauds who teach THEIR OWN doctrines instead of God's. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall NOT pass away." Read your Bible and do what it says. It'll make your perfect and throughly furnished (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

- by **Boyd Sellers**

Church Discipline Works!

The scriptures plainly teach the concept of church discipline. "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed" (2 Thess. 3:14). ". . . with such an one no not to eat" (1 Cor. 5:11).

There are always those who complain that this discipline will not work. "It drives people away," they claim. And, because they do not believe the process will work, they often refuse to participate in it - continuing to open associate with the one who has been withdrawn from. Sometimes they will even openly oppose the disciplinary action and work against it.

Wait a minute! Who are these people arguing with anyway? Not with us! They are arguing with God! These folks need to be taught, and the teaching needs to begin with the very basic concept of faith in God's word and confidence in His plan.

The truth of the matter is that church discipline, when properly administered does work. In fact, when done correctly, it always works! 1 Corinthians 5 serves as an interesting study of the benefits of church discipline. Notice how it:

- a) demonstrates to all that sin can not be tolerated (vs. 2)
- b) proves our commitment to God and His will (vs. 4)
- c) shows the erring brother that we love him and are concerned for his soul (vs. 5)
- d) protects the rest of the congregation from a damaging influence (vs. 6-13)

If anyone still doubts the effectiveness of this approach, please note that the actions described in the text above had the desired effect - the erring brother was restored! (2 Cor. 2:4-8). This is God's plan, and it works. We must have enough faith to employ it.

- by **Greg Gwin**