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4 Signs of a Spiritually Sick Church

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“Culture” has become a popular buzz word in the business world over the last few years. Successful organizations realize that they have to create a culture of productivity, accountability, and growth if they want to sustain their success. Basically, this means that those involved in the organization need to be on the same page. They all need to recognize that certain attributes will keep them from doing well with the company, and certain attributes will help entrench them as a part of the work.

As the church, we need to look at our culture and realize that we’ve been plagued with a sickness. This sickness must be eradicated if each of our congregations are going to grow strong in the Lord. We’ve created a culture where it’s far too easy to slide into a comfortable Christianity, where a member can have a minimal role in the work of the church and as long as that’s fulfilled, we’re doing fine. But that’s not the kind of discipleship Christ established. How do you know when this disease is affecting your congregation? Here are 4 symptoms of a spiritually sick church.

1. Attendance isn’t important

A congregation can’t be healthy if it’s considered no big deal when its members skip worship. When sports, school, hobbies, or any other activities are considered perfectly normal and acceptable reasons for not being present with the body on Sundays, it’s a sign of a church that is a convenience in the lives of its members rather than a priority. It says that we think worship is exactly where we need to be... as long as we don’t have something better to do. Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:18-19 aren’t just about singing – they remind us how important it is for Christians to be together and encourage each other. Additionally, what the New Testament teaches us about the Lord’s Supper goes beyond just remembering Jesus’ death. It’s also about the fellowship we all have together in His blood. That’s not something a healthy church takes lightly or neglects when it’s inconvenient.

2. Prayers focus only on the physical

It’s important to pray for the sick, the injured, the traveling, and such, but if that’s all we focus on in our prayers and our requests, it shows just how earthly-focused we’ve become. Though Paul often mentioned the physical needs he and his fellow workers shared, his prayers showed his true priorities. He prayed that his brethren would be filled with the knowledge of God (Ephesians 1), that they would know the love of Christ and that He would live in their hearts through faith (Ephesians 3), and that they would walk in a manner worthy of the Lord (Colossians 1). While we don’t have the gift of Paul’s eloquence, we do need to make sure our prayers aren’t lacking in focus on our spiritual growth, opportunities to reach the lost, and our relationships with God.

3. Conversations don't include spiritual matters

It's no wonder why evangelism is so difficult sometimes. If we can't bring up Scriptural, spiritual matters of discussion with our Christian family, what makes us think we'll be able to do the same with the lost? Just imagine having a discussion with Paul or Peter that didn't include the work of the church or some point about Jesus. That seems incredibly unlikely, and we need to make it our goal to make it just as unlikely that we won't discuss such important matters with our brethren. Take note of the kind of conversations that happen before and after worship at your congregation. Are they all focused on the weather, sports, and other current events, or is there continued discussion on the topics brought up by the sermon or Bible class? What about your own interactions? Do you think to bring up the Bible, prayer requests, or words of encouragement, or do you remain on a shallow level in most of your interactions? If we want our congregations to grow spiritually, we need to make the Word a bigger part of our lives as individuals.

4. Fellowship ends when the doors close

If the lights being turned off and the doors being locked on every Sunday night signals the last time members are going to see each other before Wednesday night (or the next Sunday morning), we can hardly claim a commonality with the church of Acts 2. Yes, life is busy and hectic and crazy sometimes, but a church that isn't involved in each other's lives won't ever be able to connect with each other beyond shallow, superficial interests (like the conversation topics mentioned above). It's that genuine love and care for each other that is supposed to distinguish us from the world (John 13:35).

Hopefully we can all truthfully claim that we want to be active workers in thriving congregations. While there is always work to do, the good news is that it's not all that difficult. We just need to commit ourselves to God and to each other. Consider your prayers and the things you're saying. Pay attention to how much you bring God into your conversations. Spend more time around your Christian family.

Most will react in one of two ways: they'll grow along with you and start being accustomed to greater fellowship and increased focus on the Word, or they'll become uncomfortable and avoid Christian activity. Truthfully, that's what we need. We need to start having congregations where it's awkward and uncomfortable to be inactive and lukewarm. Too many times it's the other way around, where the passionate members are the ones that stand out as being different. Let's all purpose to start changing that culture.