

Sick and Dying Churches Causes and Cures

(Revelation 3:1-3) “And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.”

No church or pastor would like to think of their church or ministries as being sick or dying. But the reality is that today in America 95% of all churches (this includes IBC's also) are in decline. Thirty percent of these churches are so sick and dying that they will close their doors. Sixty five percent are somewhere between just feeling a little ill to being very sick but don't have the leadership or the training to recover as they should. Only five percent of churches are growing and most of these are at a very slow rate.

What are the causes and cures for these churches and how can a pastor or church tell if their church is healthy or sick? Though there are a lot of things to consider for why churches are in decline or their current stage of sickness we can only cover a few of the basics. Even though every church is different they all have some similar traits that are comparable in relationship to the causes of a healthy or unhealthy church.

We are not dealing with what we would call “dead churches” per say but those that have some indicators of becoming sick to being very sick or even dying. Much of this information will be drawn from (Autopsy of a Deceased Church, by Thom S. Rainer – B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, Tenn.) and personal experience from dealing with sick and dying churches. I'm assuming that most pastors are mature enough to read and be helped by other good books and materials that are not of our “kind”. Do we all go to Independent Baptist hospitals or doctors to get help when we feel sick?

There is always a progression with any sickness; some sicknesses are faster than others. But left unchecked and undiagnosed many can lead to severe and critical sickness or even death. Many churches that are dying will become dead unless they come to realize they are seriously sick, but can go on functioning for many years even a decade or more before burial. This is not an easy subject to read or address but a needful one to help us understand where we are as churches in America today.

Is there hope for our churches? I believe that there is, but only when we are brutally honest with ourselves and our churches. We know that Jesus will build His church, but our local churches as we see them today do not always stay open and that's a fact. There is hope and help from the Lord if we are willing to repent and do the first works in our local churches to be and keep a healthy body of believers in a certain location.
Have a great and blessed Lord's Day!

Bro. Mickey - SCM

Sick and Dying Churches

Causes and Cures

(Revelation 3:1-3) “And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.”

The Denial of the Diagnosis

Millions of people die simply because they are not willing to except or get a true diagnosis of their illness. They would rather go on as if there is nothing wrong and live in denial of all the symptoms no matter how evident they may be in their lives. The same is true in many churches that are sick but resist or deny that there is anything wrong. There are all kinds of symptoms that can help a church see that a certain sickness is starting to affect them. But if they don't except the symptoms or if they just deny those things which are telling them to pay attention about their condition then they will progressively get worse.

Here are some symptoms from a church that is starting to get sick from (Autopsy of a Deceased Church, by Thom S. Rainer);

- Probably over 150,000 churches fit this category out of 350,000 churches in America.
- A pervasive attitude that the best days of the church are in the past.
- Likely to have some decline in worship attendance over the past five years.
- Leaders stop looking at the numbers when they began to decline and when numbers are ignored, they tend to get even worse. (numbers represent people coming or going)
- Ministries and programs tend to shift more for members of the congregation rather than those outside the church. (it's more about keeping the aquarium happy and content)
- The church is moving from an outward focus to an inward focus. (loss of vision)
- Few new members are added each year but there is no sense of true disciple-making taking place. Most don't have a clear plan for making disciples. (and many don't know how)
- The church has a lot of programs and ministry clutter – much business and activity, but a great deal of it has no meaningful purpose. (so busy people don't have time to grow)

He offers four categorical responses for these symptoms but they are not quick-fix solutions.

1. Pray that God will open the eyes of the leadership and members for opportunities to reach the community where the church is located. (Some are trying to reach the world but not their own backyard. Are we really intense about reaching our town or city for Christ?)
2. Take an honest audit of how church members spend their time being involved. (Most members are involved in internal ministries forming holy huddles and not reaching the lost)
3. Take an audit of how the church spends its money. (Is there a balance with spending keeping the building and members up along with using money to reach the lost in the community?)
4. Make specific plans to minister and to evangelize your community. (Take inventory of the leadership and member's time, energy and money and see if it is truly balanced with helping those on outside as well as inside the church.)

We can deny the sick symptoms but that doesn't dismiss them, they are still there even if we don't want to face them. Lord open our eyes to see that You can cure any sickness! God bless!
Bro. Mickey - SCM

Sick and Dying Churches Causes and Cures

(Revelation 3:1-3) “And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.”

The Dread of the Disease

When someone starts feeling the effects of any sickness there is a sense of dreading what will become of them and for how long or how serious the sickness will be. Then the symptoms turn into a full blown serious debilitating disease that could cripple or could even cause death. Many times these sicknesses may have been prevented if they only sought out help and started taking corrective measures early when they just seen a few symptoms. The same holds true with churches also who are not willing to take care of the symptoms before they turn into a very serious sickness. Many churches are seriously sick but still refuse to admit that anything is wrong. Then they become aware of their sickness but it's too late and the sickness is taking a toll on the church in most of its ministries and members, affecting all those who are left.

Here are indicators from a church that is very sick from (Autopsy of a Deceased Church, by Thom S. Rainer);

- Again probably over 150,000 churches fit this category out of 350,000 churches in America.
- Significant numerical decline over the past ten to twenty years. (Denial is not an option)
- Prolonged times of apathy and occasional times of intense conflict. (Indifference / fighting)
- The church is not known in the community. (Not involved with their own mission field)
- New members are rare; the exodus clearly exceeds the inflow. (More leaving than coming)
- Revolving door of pastors. (Most of the time it's not the pastor that needs to leave but he has to be willing to change and help the church to get back to a place of healthiness)
- The “good old days” are typically twenty or more years in the past. (No vision or outlook)

He offers four categorical responses for these symptoms but they are not quick-fix solutions.

1. The church must admit and confess its dire need. (Not acknowledging their condition leads to being a “dying church”) (If the leaders can own up then there can be a move in a positive path)
2. The church must pray for wisdom and strength to do whatever is necessary. (Until the church is willing to do whatever it needs to do, it will continue to get sicker and start dying)
3. The church must be willing to change radically. (This is not saying worldly change but positive change from old problems and habits that caused the sickness in the first place)
4. The change must lead to action and an outward focus. (Very sick churches are more focused on themselves than those on the outside) (Time, energy and money spent for themselves)

Nothing is impossible with God but He expects churches to cooperate with Him and then align themselves with His word and be lead of the Holy Spirit. Can a very sick church recover? Yes but it will take tough decisions and a complete turnaround from what made them sick. Most people and churches are not willing to make that kind of change to regain their health. The Lord is always willing and waiting for us to come to Him for help and recovery. May God bless your Sunday and stay or work on being healthy this week.

Bro. Mickey - SCM

Sick and Dying Churches Causes and Cures

(Revelation 3:2-3) “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.”

The Distress of the Decisions

After a person has gone through the symptoms of getting sick and has become a very sick person then they come to the point of being distressed not making the right decisions to reverse their sickness. We are talking about people and churches that have the opportunity to make right choices about their health but instead are making wrong choices or really don't care about where their health is going. There are some sicknesses that are not of one's own lifestyle or choosing but have come about by some other reason other than their own. Sometimes churches are dying not because they want to but for reasons beyond their ability to change. These are rare for most of the time even these churches can make some type of hard decisions to get back to some kind of health.

In many cases the ones that don't do anything about their sickness will progress on to the stage of dying. This could take time and in some it could last up to years or even decades as they struggle along in their very sick condition. It's sad to see these folks or churches trying just to survive and going through so much pain. There will be internal as well as external conflict of soul and body and even with those who they love and are most intimate with. When a church begins to die they will need to make some preparation just like anyone else should do. Dead churches don't make wise decisions as a matter of fact they don't make any decisions at all. It will come down to one or a few that will have to make some tough and hard choices about what to do when the church is dead and ready to close. Some refuse to accept their condition.

Indicators from a church that is dying from (Autopsy of a Deceased Church, Thom S. Rainer);

- Slow erosion- decline is everywhere in the church, but many don't see it. (Denial)
- The past is the hero- when times were better years ago. (No vision for the future)
- The church refused to reach their community. (Everyone in the church looked alike)
- The budget moved inwardly- where the money of the church goes, so goes its heart. (??)
- The great commission becomes the great omission. (Focused inward instead of outward)
- The preference- driven church. (All about “me, myself and I” and our preferences)
- Pastoral tenures decreases-pastor becomes discouraged and leaves. (Not always the case)
- The church rarely prayed together. (More time spent on programs and activities than prayer)
- The church has no clear purpose. (Busy doing what they've always done and yet dying)
- The church obsessed over the facilities. (Buildings are more important than people attitude)

He offers four responses for these dying churches that will end in death. Death with Dignity

1. Sell the property and give the funds to another church or church plant. (Use wisdom)
2. Give the building to another church that's struggling to get back to being healthy.
3. Turn the church building over to those who actually live in the neighborhood. (Spanish etc)
4. Merge with another church but turn over leadership and ownership. (To a healthy church)

This is very condensed and I would recommend getting this book and read it for yourself. Have a great Lord's Day and start making choices to be a healthy church. Bro. Mickey – SCM

Sick and Dying Churches Dead Churches

(Revelation 3:1-3) “And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.”

Have you ever visited or preached in a dead church? It's like preaching at a cemetery, the people are in their places but no one's alive. When we think about a dead church verses a sick or dying church there is a vast difference, one has life the other does not! One still has some movement and breath in them while the other is completely breathless and motionless.

In a dead church there are people that are alive physically but function like a dead person spiritually. Though they may be saved and going to heaven they have no works that verify that they are alive, “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” They are going through the motions of having a church service without any life or the Holy Spirit moving them to live out their Christianity. In other words the Holy Spirit has been so quenched and grieved through the constant and continual disobedience and rejection of His urging and inspiration that He is departed. God doesn't get any glory or honor from a dead church!

Dr. Vance Havner said that occasionally he would preach in a church where the look on the faces of the people would curdle milk.

Dr. J. Gerald Harris said, “I think, however, I would rather preach in a place where there is defiance and resistance than in a place where there is death.”

Three things that is common amongst dead churches.

1. There is no purpose in a dead church. They have lost sight of why they are a church in the first place and that is to honor and glorify God and to reach the lost and build up the saints. There is no vision for the future because they are always looking to the past and what once was instead of what can be, through God's help. Their rationale and function is as old as their past “good old days” and the way things used to be before _____.

2. There is no passion in a dead church. I'm sure that there was a time that the church had enthusiasm and excitement and a zeal for the Lord and a commitment to win the lost. Going to church was a delight and the members an obsession for doing the will and service of God. Now it's hard to make it to the services because of what might happen next or not happen at all spiritually speaking. Most everything is done in a fleshly routine and no one really cares.

3. There is no productivity in a dead church. The natural course of living things is producing or having some type of real productivity. (J. G. Harris) “People, corporations and churches that are vibrantly alive are productive. But death is marked by sterility, stagnation and barrenness.” Dead churches for the most part look dead and act dead, the pews are mostly empty, the baptistery is dirty or broke, the altars are dusty and dry. The church house is still standing but no one is living inside and there is no output because there is no life left inside. Lord help us to live and be revived again! Please pray about helping sick and dying churches. God bless and have a great and lively Sunday in the Lord.

Bro. Mickey - SCM