

The Church Died

by Joe Fitch

Impressive churches dot the pages of Bible history — Antioch, Ephesus, Jerusalem, Philippi, 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Did the churches become outdated?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.

— via The Beacon
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