

Dr. Stan's Perspective

“Why Are So Many Churches Dwindling And Dying?”

Introduction

The subject that I am going to address in this article is a very controversial one. It is one that a lot of believers don't want to discuss while many Christians can't accept the truthful reality of this subject matter. The fact is that we have major problems in our evangelical churches in America. According to statisticians like George Barna and Tom Rainer, most of our evangelical churches in America are either already dead waiting for the autopsy or the internment, or they are surely breathing their last death rattles just before their demise. We are told that over 70% of evangelical churches here in America are either declining, stagnant or plateaued in their growth. Some statisticians say that we are losing over 4,000 churches every year, while others say that it might even be as high at 10,000 closing their doors annually. Also, I read recently where between the years of 2010 and 2012, 50% of all evangelical churches in America added not one new member to their church rolls. I don't know how you feel about this, but to me this scares me tremendously. And, if I didn't remember the promise of our Lord in Matthew 16:18, where Jesus said the following words, I would be unable to bear the heavy burden for the church. This is what Jesus said, “And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Pay much attention to the promise Jesus made. He told Peter that He would build His church upon the rock (Himself), and the gates of hell would not be able to withstand the offensive of this powerful bride of Christ. In other words, the Real Church will never decline, die or be destroyed. If this promise is true, and we know it is, then why are the churches in the terrible mess that they are in today? I will attempt to answer this in this article, but let me just interject something right here. When Jesus said that the “gates of hell shall not prevail against the church”, He was revealing to His disciples and to us that the Church is not to be on the defensive, but instead, is to be moving forward offensively crashing down the gates of hell. In other words, Satan and his gates cannot withstand the assault of a God- called group of people called the ekklesia (called out ones) who are moving forward under the anointing and power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, there is much hope for us even during this age of church decay and decline. For sure, we have the promise of God being with us and empowering us so that we can live and work in an age of difficulty and

despair. May we always remember that we must never give up or quit until Jesus comes to rapture His bride.

Before I give you some reasons why our churches are dwindling and dying, let me say quite candidly that a lot of the churches that are dying are not real churches any way. The reason is that scores of church members are not really saved. They have religion and not a true relationship with Jesus. Thus, we are seeing 25% of the people doing all of the work, giving all of the money, and remaining committed to Jesus and His body. Therefore, it is quite appropriate for me to say that probably three fourths of church members are lost. This seems to be indicated by the parable of the sower which presents four kinds of soil, but only one of them was genuine.

Page 8. So, what we have are lost religious people trying to do church their own way. Now, let's look at some of the reasons why I believe churches are truly dwindling and or dying.

I. I believe the first problem is a lack of fervent prayer by the church members.

If you have ever listened to the prayer requests in one of our church services, you know that most of these prayer times are taken up with an organ recital, as someone has said. People ask prayers for their livers, their kidneys, their hearts, their gall bladders, etc. instead of asking prayers for the salvation of lost family members or their friends, and rarely do you hear some request prayers for genuine revival in our churches and in our land.

In addition, have you ever noticed how when a church plans for a time of fellowship and eating, scores of people sign up and attend? But if the pastor calls for a prayer meeting, only a few people show up. And yet the Bible tell us in James 5:16 ".....The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." This means that without the effective intense prayers of God's people, very little is accomplished. So, if we are to stop the bleeding of our churches figuratively speaking, we must get our people back on their knees, turn off their cell and smart phones, and stay there long enough to get some response from a righteous and powerful God so that we can save our churches and our nation from total despair and destruction. There is no way to stop the evil direction of our land and the death of our churches except through repentance and fervent prayer! We need to stop so much of this wasted time on wild music and preliminary performance and get on our

faces and beg Jesus to return to His house and save us from ourselves before it is too late.

II. I believe the second problem is that we have so compromised our churches with the world that there is no power of God within our bodies collectively or our individual lives personally.

And truthfully, we don't have to look very hard today to see how the wicked world has been allowed to take over our church events and ministries. Take a look at the music in most churches today! In a lot of these churches that JoAnne and I go into, the music is more like the rock festivals of the sixties and early seventies than a genuine worship experience. And yet, I hear pastors and church members trying to justify their man-centered performance mentalities which is doing nothing but stirring emotions and getting people excited about going home and living comfortably in their sins.

The other day I was reading in the Book of Proverbs, and God showed me a tremendous verse. The verse is found in chapter 17, verse 15, where the Bible says, "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord." No matter how much we try to defend what is happening in our church services today, it is completely wrong if our behavior honors men and belittles the sinless and holy God of creation. Recently I was asked by a pastor friend of mine to review and proof read his doctorate thesis which was written on worship. This book is an absolute read for every pastor in America and the world when it comes out in print. On page 39 of this thesis, Pastor Allen Wheeler quoted A.W... Tozer and then went on to give his own input into the matter of worship in a church service. "Tozer said he believed that if the Christian Church has not crossed the line already, that it is perilously close to slipping into the heathen oriented worship, rendering to the creature what rightfully belongs to the Creator." Pastor Wheeler says that "Tozer's focus was on the celebrity worship we see so prevalent in our churches today. Many worship services today in America are similar to experiencing "Saturday Night Live" all over again come Sunday morning where the primary focus is on man more than God." In other words folks, we have brought the world into the church and tried to excuse it by saying that this wild music with the strobe lights and dynamic atmosphere is for the purpose of drawing lost people to the worship service. Pastor Wheeler has addressed this by saying on page 75 of his thesis that "Music is never used in the Scripture as a means to reaching the lost. Church

music is not to be used for the purpose of appealing to the lost but to glorify God!” And, I think it bears mentioning here that in the Bible praise and worship always followed the preaching and explanation of the Word. Then, when the people were brought under deep conviction and they repented of their sins, then from their broken spirits and contrite hearts, they praised and worshiped God. This should be our pattern if we are going to bring God’s presence and life back to our churches.

I also want to mention that the world has come into the church today because pastors are not crying out against sin. But, how could they when numbers of them have compromised with every kind of perversion, lifestyle, and evil that has ever been committed? Not long ago I was talking to a dear man who said to me, “ we are losing our denomination because the people are divided right down the middle on homosexuality.” And, I know for a fact that down through the years, that denomination became more and more liberal and as they did, they began to tolerate every kind of sin that is imaginable. May I say that whatever sin God has condemned is not up for debate in our churches. This is man-controlled churchianity and not genuine Christianity. So, when the church has become so worldly and the world has become so churchy that you can’t tell the difference, then God will be nowhere around this church. It will just dwindle and then die.

III. I believe the third problem which is contributing to the death of our churches is that there is no world vision for souls.

Instead, our churches have become self-centered churches with a maintenance mentality that is producing nothing but care-taking of what they already have. These churches don’t care about the masses of people that die and go to hell each day without Christ, but they are more interested in what will be served for dinner on Wednesday night. They also have disregarded weekly outreach visitation as a church ministry because they have convinced themselves that door to door visitation will no longer work. Yet, the Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses are proselytizing millions of people with their false and damnable doctrines by going from door to door.

The Bible clearly tells us in Proverbs 29:18, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.....” This is so true today in multitudes of our churches where pastors and people have no vision for a lost world. And yet, everyone of these dear servants of God know fully well that we have the Great

Commission, and if we have no vision for the lost world, then we are living in willful disobedience to the commission of our Lord that is given five times in the New Testament. There is no vision for a lost world outside the walls of the church unless there is compassion experienced by a daily intimacy with Christ. If we have this intimacy, then we will have compassion just like Jesus does, and this compassion will propel us into passionate activity in winning people to Jesus. Then, we will follow the planned strategy found in the Book of Acts to carry out our mission to realize the vision God has given to us. Churches will always die if they fail to maintain a vision outside the walls of the church.

IV. The last problem that I believe is contributing to the death of our churches is that the churches have no active mission program.

And when I say program, I am not talking about a man-made or man-conceived program. I am talking about having a mission ministry in our local churches that is patterned after the pattern given to us in the Book of Acts. Oh, there are many people involved in denominational or associational mission programs, but only to the extent of sending money, offering up a few prayers, or just mentally giving assent to the validity of these programs, but never getting around to actually and sacrificially participating in the front lines in order to win people to Christ. Many of these well-meaning supporters of missions have been brainwashed just to send their money and let the big wig bureaucrats who know how to do “real missions”, handle this mission work. And by the way, they are taught to never question how the money is spent, but just trust the bureaucrats’ wisdom and keep sending their funds if they want to be a good Baptist. Yet, personal involvement is not a part of the church’s mission efforts.

Also, I want to mention that most churches don’t have missions as a priority in their church ministry. Missions are stuck way down the line in the budget and if things get tight financially in the church, the missionaries are the first to lose their support or to be dropped because there are more important items like cleaning fluids, paper plates for socials, coffee in the kitchen, etc. It is like missions are only made a priority if finances are good and there is no other line item that needs the funds. No wonder, God takes His hands off this kind of church.

Conclusion

I sincerely wish that I had more time to discuss several more reasons or problems that are causing churches to decline and die but space will not allow me to do so at the moment. However, I do pray that our brief discussion of this tragic situation in our American churches, and even in other countries as well, will cause us to really get under the burden to get on our knees and repent of our complacency and return to the Book of Acts for our guidelines on how to build great churches, yes, even in this generation. The spiritual welfare of our children, grandchildren, and even future generations is very much at stake if Jesus doesn't return soon. I absolutely can not and I will not stand by and see the destruction of some former really great churches that have gone the way of contemporary wickedness by mixing the world with the church. Yet, I hear people say that we ought to get away from rules and regulations, but years ago when people in Germany were telling Dietrich Bonhoeffer to shut up and not take Hitler seriously, Bonhoeffer said, "When we live our lives only by grace without rules, grace becomes a law unto itself." And I believe, grace may become a license to commit blatant sin and produce excuses for not living righteously within the church as well as outside the church building. So, I hope everyone of you individual blood-washed believers will get under the burden for our churches in this country, and also for the declining and dying churches. We can't afford to capitulate this country to the Muslims even if we have some leaders in Washington that would like to see Christianity put on the back burner or in the closet like homosexuals used to be. Isn't it a great land, when the homosexuals come out of the closets and parade their perversion and cram it down our throats while we put the Christians behind close doors. Folks, the only thing that can stop this mess in our land is spiritual revival and reawakened churches. Let's get serious and pray for this immediately and fervently!