

Something Learned From Mules

A mule can't pull while he's kicking, and when he is pulling he won't be kicking. It is the same in the church. When saints have their feet in the sand pulling hard to do the will of God, there is no time for kicking, nit-picking and complaining. To the contrary, when we are given to kicking, gossip, and idleness we never move the gospel chariot forward. Also, when one has two or more mules hitched together they have to pull at the same time to move the load. This is also true in the Lord's church. Pulling 'together' accomplishes great things.

- by ***W.R. Jones***

Why Churches Die

Drive across the countryside and you will find long-ago abandoned church buildings, now dilapidated and boarded-up. What happened to those churches meeting in those places? The skeleton buildings serve as testimony that life left the body. But how does that happen?

Churches close for any number of reasons.

- Some died socially. The population moves away from the meeting place and the younger people now attend another church.
- Some churches died of complacency. Leaders and members just no longer cared whether the church survived. Some members prided themselves on their "smallness" as the numbers dwindled year by year. "We like our church to be small," they bragged. But it was the kiss of death. "They know we are here, they will come if they want to," was used as an excuse for not reaching out, not advertising, not extending themselves into their community. We have never known of a thriving congregation with that sort of attitude.
- Some died from negativity. The church became known more for what it was "against," than what it was "for." Thriving churches rally around leaders who are moving forward, finding new enthusiasm for the same Gospel as always. Declining churches are composed of complainers who constantly second-guess their leaders over silly, incidental matters. They allow the future of the church to be minimized by critics who throw fits to get their way.
- Some churches decline due to personal agendas. Whenever someone promotes any idea not according to the Gospel of Christ, he is seeking his own agenda. Agendas can come from the right or the left. An agenda is someone's personal mission, pitting one side of a congregation against another. Disunity is the aim of such agendas (I Cor. 1:10-17).

Are there preventatives for church deaths? Certainly so!

- There is love. A lack of it will kill a church. Love for the Lord and one another is an essential (Matt. 22:37-40). An increase in love usually results in an increase in membership.
- Then, there is prayer. A growing church is a praying church. A church not praying together will soon wonder where all the members went (Phil. 4:6). Every congregation should emphasize prayer together. Prayer should be made for the weak and for the strong. Prayer should invoke the will of the Lord being done (I Jn. 5:14). Never cease in expressing love and thanksgiving to God (I Thess. 5:17).
- Beyond this, there is Bible study. Congregations slide toward extinction when they drift away from serious Scripture study. Stale, man-made philosophy substituted for the bread of life being broken, results in a church starving to death. Never underestimate the life-giving, power of the Word (Heb. 4:12).

These three preventatives, taken together, will keep churches from dying.

- by ***Mark W. White***

Take It Home

If you stroll through most church buildings after the assembled crowd has dispersed, you are likely to find all manner of things left in the pews. Kids' toys, writing pads, coats and sweaters, and not a little trash. A general appeal to cleanliness and neatness is always in order.

Among the things left behind are a couple of more troubling items:

Bibles -- We wonder how Christians can make it through the week without their 'swords' (Eph. 6:17). If you leave your Bible behind, you are 'unarmed' in the spiritual battle that surrounds us. Frequent and consistent Bible study are absolute necessities for those who want to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord" (2 Pet. 3:18). By all means, when it comes to your Bible, TAKE IT HOME! And, of course, use it on a daily basis.

Class papers -- Very often we see the class materials of kids and adults left in the pews. This is troubling in a least two ways. First (especially for the younger students) it displays a lack of appreciation for the hard work that teachers have invested in the preparation of these teaching aids. These could be used at home by parents who hope to re-enforce the lessons that the children learned in class (Eph. 6:4). But, obviously, that can't happen when they are left in the pew. Second (and here we have in mind the older students and adults) when the study materials are left behind it is a guarantee that preparation for the next upcoming class will NOT happen. This is a serious hinderance for the cause of learning and edification. PLEASE take these home and use them for deeper and effective study.

Things left in the pews tell a tale. What do they say about you? Think!

- by Greg Gwin