

HOW TO DESTROY A SOUND CHURCH

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Do you want to know how to destroy a faithful, sound church of the Lord? Many people are doing it, but I doubt any of them would admit that they are working toward this goal. You will understand, of course, that I am NOT writing this article with the hope of finding someone to do such a despicable deed. I am approaching the subject with the hope of making the guilty realize what they are doing, perhaps ignorantly, to weaken the congregation of which they are members. If I do not reach the guilty, hopefully I will help all who are trying to make the church strong with an active faith to identify and rebuke those who are destroying the congregation of which they are members.

The common formula for destroying the effectiveness of a strong and growing congregation is a rather simple and easy one. Of course, no one wants to admit that he wishes to be a party to any such work, but somehow many religious people today seem to find and follow the formula to the letter.

There are many characteristics of a sound, strong and faithful church that distinguish it from others, and these are the points to attack first in destroying such a church. This is well known to the devil and he will put into the hearts of as many as will submit to him (John 13:2) to do his work. We shall examine the methods of the weak and ungodly in their words and deeds that destroy a sound church.

1. Every strong, effective congregation has a good teaching program. It must be acknowledged that a "teaching program" is not, within itself, an asset, but a good teaching program to teach the TRUTH is one of the greatest assets any church can have. Consequently, to contribute something to the downfall or deterioration of the teaching arrangement and the effective implanting divine truth in the minds of children and adults alike will result in the destruction of a strong church.

There are a number of ways such destruction is accomplished. Instead of regular and faithful attendance, an occasional attendance to Bible classes demoralizes the teacher, discourages the class, hinders the plan of teaching by the elders, and keeps the guilty one from learning. The offender could also roam from class to class in an effort to become lost and yet claim his fulfillment of the responsibility for being present. That is a sure way NOT to learn and it will keep others from learning.

I must also say that one of the most effective ways to destroy Bible study is to never prepare the lesson or participate during the class period. If possible leave the work material and Bible at home. Murmuring and complaining about the subject matter, the teacher, and other students in the class contributes to the destruction of an otherwise effective Bible study.

2. Every strong, effective congregation has a zeal for truth and righteousness. An effective attack will be to destroy that zeal and love for the truth and righteousness. Just develop an attitude of apathy: the "I don't care" attitude and encourage as many others as possible to do the same. Forget about the importance of expressing your love to God in obeying His commandments (John 14:15; 1 John 5:2,3). Just be sure to come to the period of worship on Lord's day morning

and Lord's day evening (if you are involved enough to come) with both the attitude and expression of doing as little as possible and expecting to receive as little as possible.

Find as many faults with the elders, deacons, teachers, preachers, and saints as one can think up. It makes little difference whether they are true or not. It will help distract attention from the purpose in praying and singing the praises of God. Never bring your Bible to worship. Never listen to a lesson with self in view, and never make an application of any principle of truth to your own life. In substance, be as indifferent toward all that is done or said as is possible. Indifference on the part of a large number (and apathy is contagious) will completely demoralize and destroy the work of a strong congregation.

3. Every strong, effective congregation holds unity of doctrine and practice among the members (Eph. 4:1-4). One of the most effective tactics in destroying a sound church is to introduce false and divisive doctrines. Develop the role of a professional critic, and attack under the guise of "deeper study" about every principle of truth that is presented both privately or publicly. Try to present yourself a one man authority on every issue and an expert umpire in resolving every controversial issue. It does not require a great amount of knowledge of the Bible, but it does require a lot of brass and skill in perverting the truth and in ignoring other plain statements that are made in the Bible. It helps to enlist any others who might seem to think as you do to add to the false and contentious doctrines. The offender finds it important to undermine the oversight of scriptural elders and the sound doctrine from the word of God both privately and publicly. To make his opinionated doctrines even more effective, he begins a campaign of setting one brother against another or one family against another within the congregation.

False doctrine is an effective method in destroying a sound church. But there is another very effective element to add to this false doctrine approach: adopt the practice of shifting responsibility to someone else, anyone else. Encourage the elders to give their responsibilities to others--to the preacher. This can be done almost without notice. The claim to oversight would be retained while literally assigning every decision and function of the elders to another person to the point that the elders do not really know what is going on. The quickest way for elders to lose their oversight and leadership is to lose the personal communication with the congregation to which they are responsible. This has produced more corrupt and unauthorized functions and organizations within the church than any other one single practice.

4. Every strong, effective congregation is spiritually minded and dead to the world. One other method in accomplishing the demise of a strong, faithful church is for a large number of the members individually to love the world and turn back to those things from which they were delivered when they obeyed the gospel. The word teaches us not to love the world, and then defines what the world is (I John 2:15, 16). To love the world makes us enemies of God (James 4:4).

The slow drift both on the part of the ones who practice immoral conduct of the world and those in the church who tolerate it will in time lead to the ineffective influence of the church

to preach the gospel of Christ to anyone. The Spirit said that they who are after the flesh will die, but those after the things of the Spirit will live. (Rom. 8:5-8).

The works of the flesh are listed in Galatians 5:19-21. The weakening of the church through immorality is made greater by the fact that immorality is tolerated and even excused by others in the congregation who do not practice it, but will not take scriptural action to "purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump" (I Cor. 5:7). One or two members practicing the works of the flesh, without rebuke and discipline, will soon destroy all the influence of any congregation and render it totally defenseless against the powers of this world. Such a church will lose its relationship to the Lord, and the candlestick will be removed out of its place.

This is a sordid and sickening picture of the downfall of a good congregation and how it is accomplished. It is not just a theory; it is in fact a cycle in which the history of many congregations is repeated many, many times. The purpose of this article is to impress upon everyone the need to avoid any part of this course that would lead to the destruction of any congregation.

It is so easy to allow oneself to drift from the truth, or to close our eyes to the drifting of another. The changes are slow and gradual, but the inevitable consequences are the same. This is the reason the word of God repeatedly exhorts each of us to watch and "examine" ourselves, whether we are in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5).

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