

An Unexpected Killer in a Suicide Case
by Dan 2009

The church is dying. Not the physical and marketable church, of course. That is doing quite fine. When I say “The church is dying”, I mean the spiritual church, the “real” church, the church that remains even if a brick building with a steeple is demolished. There was a time when this church was alive and thriving, spurred on by the praise and glory of God, but now the spiritual church is crippled and broken, a battered shell of falsehoods and lies engulfing its mangled corpse. It took time, and planning, as it does with any successful heist of life. But it is finally coming into perspective, as the latter days approach and we find ourselves near the end of time. The church is dying, and we, as Christians, are partly responsible for murdering it.

Imagine, if you will, that you have a beautiful new baby daughter. She becomes the sunshine of your life, and you cuddle and squeeze and adore her petite body, loving her every second of every day. And now imagine she’s at the stage where she learns words, and she looks at you with her large, deep, dark eyes and says your moniker, and you freak out and jump in the air so violently you nearly hit your head on the ceiling, for you’re so delighted in her. Now imagine she’s eight years old, and her favorite pastime is to snuggle up next to you while you read her a story or fable, and you imitate each character’s voice to her exuberant joy. And now, if you will, imagine that she’s sixteen, and she doesn’t talk to you, look at you, or heed your words. She still calls you her parent, but she feels no remorse at living life in the fast lane, throwing caution to the wind and disobeying the morals you taught her. Grouchily she dons a dress every Sunday, flaunting a smile after entering the building and leaving it lie on her beautiful face just long enough to last through an hour long service, immediately casting off her mask and taking your keys after the minister ends his prayer. Please (if you will), imagine that and allow it to sink into your mind. How would it make you feel?

Many Christians play the role of a teenage daughter in church society today. When they first came into the fellowship they acted as Christians, though they were as “baby” Christians, not having enough knowledge about their new way of life to carry it out to the letter. As they matured, they learned more about the faith, though quite little, for they only attended a service now and again, and procrastinated the reading of the bible or fellowship with comrade Christians, saying “I’m too busy at the moment, maybe at a later time”. Now years of a lukewarm Christian agenda have passed them by and their actions mimic those of the world rather than God’s guidelines. They still call themselves Christians, but it is only a saving grace, a loose thread to grasp for even while they dangle over the pit of hell. They have placed too much value on materialistic objects of the earth and worldly pleasures, petty things that will have no value at all in the life to follow. And yet they still name their faith to be that of the Christians, subliminally burning holes in the church’s credibility.

Historically the church has sold itself as an organization, drawing in curious non-believers who wish to find the inner peace they are lacking. Advertising was not required. However, many pastors and spiritual leaders of today have taken a more marketable approach, creating more diverse reasons for attending church than that of hearing a message. A prime example is a story that was printed in the Northampton Chronicle a little under two years ago. It told the plight of 190 churches across the Peterborough Diocese who decided to raise awareness that the church still existed by filling 190 balloons with helium and releasing them, letting them drift away in a giant publicity stunt. Not only did the leaders release balloons (which, in most cases, don’t cause great excitement in people over age five), but they also arranged for three thousand “goody” bags to be created and given to returning worshipers. The greatest shame a leader can have, in my honest opinion, is when he finds himself in need of a shtick to please those that follow him. Even more so, it is a shame in the church, for these leaders, pastors, and teachers aren’t truly the leaders of the congregation. God is. To hand out “goody” bags in an attempt to draw back an unshapely heathen who cares little for the Good News but enjoys Snickers bars seems ethically and morally incorrect.

Another example, far more disturbing, is the recent escapade that occurred in Lakeland, Florida, a few months ago. It involved a “pastor”, a Mr. Todd Bentley, who prior to his conversion was a convict, charged with multiple counts of sexual assault. Many people have crawled out from under burdens far greater and still had a positive impact in the church, so to discredit his commitment to Christ based on his colorful past isn’t proper. However, his present seems to eerily mirror parts of his former life. For example, he claims that the Holy Spirit “manifests” itself in him and gives him the ability to generate gold dust from his pores. The gold dust itself is real; the myth is the claim of a miracle. There is no suggestion in the Bible of gold dust having significance to Christians, and the entire demonstration leaves a bit to be desired. Every miracle in the Bible happened for a reason, and it was more than a magic show of bizarre intrigue, for it was used to show the power of God. Yet people gawked at this incredible “revival”, and the whole world rushed down to Lakeland to get “On Fire for God”. In the process they donated millions of dollars to the revival leaders, convinced by a sly, snake-tongued imbecile. Today Todd Bentley is

suspected of adultery with a secretary and is out of the ministry, living off the donated money misled Christians gave freely. He remains a large, splotchy pimple on the church's forehead, and the uncovering of his farce seems like a long time in coming. Why couldn't people in the church simply read the Bible and discover the truth about the "revival" themselves? Couldn't even one Christian unveil the truth and explain to the rest of his Brothers in the Lord what he had learned? Why is the church so weak against these false prophets? The answer is rather simple; we are lazy. We would rather follow a magic leprechaun who performs acts of wonder and tells us pretty stories about God than delve into the Bible and unearth truth for ourselves. We must, if we plan to survive, right the ship and steer in whatever direction God points us, foregoing any of our personal qualms and totally surrendering to him.

Some people will disagree with my lament of the church's death, saying my examples are rarities in the church and there is no pattern in the majority of believers. Yet I see this trend to some degree in every church I have ever attended. Some of my friends are part-time Christians, and I know full well they would loathe reading the Bible and trying to understand God's plan for themselves. Their current feelings are the result of deformities in their spiritual growth, starting when they were just "baby" Christians. Maybe they were the children that were misled by their parents into odd doctrines, or perhaps they only heard about Jesus on Sunday morning, or perhaps they were the children who decided to attend in order to procure a "goody" bag. Whatever the reason, they find church dull and boring and make an effort to skip as often as possible. They are not alone. Many people in my congregation find it necessary to take "breaks" from church, sometimes prolonging over months of uninterrupted solace from other Christians. When a known stranger does attend, it often alienates other people in the church, as the prodigal family shares no common ground with regular attendees due to their long absence. This creates cracks in the Body's mental walls, breaking the fragile psyche of the congregation and making what used to be a joyful gathering for fellowship into a solemn, uncomfortable meeting.

C.S. Lewis profoundly explained, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen; not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." Many Christians today seem to enjoy hiding in a dark closet of worldly passions throughout the week, forsaking the Bible and only wandering into a few stray rays of sunlight every seventh day. This is the reason why the church is crumbling to dust, for the church is the people and the people are the church. If the people neglect building themselves and each other up, give up reading and attempting to understand the Bible, and lack the drive to gather in fellowship, the building with a steeple will be the only thing left. Eventually that, too, will become dormant, and eventually abandoned entirely, for people will continue taking vacations from the gathering together of the saints until they relinquish their Sunday obligation altogether. They will allow their Bibles to sit on a shelf, collecting dust, and will continue to put off and deny the conviction to open it and read in order to save themselves precious time. However, all time will be wasted, as they build up their earthly possessions and fall from grace, consumed by the influence of the world. A matter to be taken lightly, this is not. The church really is dying, and it's a slow agonizing death of spiritual decay.