



DON'T COUNT THE CHURCH OUT

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Unless a person has been in a Rip Van Winkle coma; or living on another planet, he has heard many snide and negative remarks about the church. Remarks such as:

“The church is a corpse waiting for the last rites.”

“The church is not relevant for today’s real needs.”

“The church has outlived its purpose in the world.”

“The church is full of hypocrites and losers.”

“The church has lost its influence in the world.”

Critics of the church have been throwing rocks at the body of Christ since the first century. Most of them, however, were from the outside. Many of today’s critics and funeral directors for the so-called “the dead church” are within the church.

The Bible doesn’t try to hide the fact that the church has had problems since the beginning when Ananias and Sapphira lied about their stewardship, and Peter preached one thing about the acceptance of “all people” but practices something else (cf. Acts 2:39; 10:1-48). Most of the epistles were written to correct problems in local churches. Five of the seven churches of Asia had major problems (cf. Revelation 2 and 3). Therefore, why should we be surprised that we have problems in churches today?



Many contemporary congregations may be weak, struggling, waffling relative to doctrinal challenges and in doubt of their future. This doesn't mean, however, that the church which Jesus promised to build (Matthew 16:13-20) is on her last legs. She has sailed some rough seas in her history but always found safe harbors. She has been bruised, bloodied and crippled but bounced back strong. She has been chased out of town but returned stronger than ever. She has been knocked down but always gotten back up. No! Don't count the church out. Why? For several reasons:

First, the church is the centerpiece of God's eternal vision to save all men. Isaiah saw her as a house into which people from all nations would flow (Isaiah 2:2-4). Paul affirmed that the "church is the house of God" (1 Timothy 3:15). God's eternal vision will not be destroyed by men or Satan.

Second, God doesn't sponsor failures. When Jesus announced that He would build His church, He also affirmed that the "gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Yes, the church may struggle and have issues but termination is not one of them. Jesus purchased His church with His blood and the purchase contained an eternal covenant (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 13:20). You can't get rid of an eternal covenant.

Third, God has ordained that He be given glory in the church (Ephesians 3:21). This affirms that He will sustain the church in order to maintain His glory, which must not be given to another or any other thing in heaven or on earth.



Fourth, the church is the body of Christ; the body which He is the head (Ephesians 1:22, 23; Colossians 1:18). Jesus is alive and well and ruling from heaven over His church to which He adds saved members (Acts 2:47; 1 Corinthians 12:18).

Fifth, the church will exist unto the end. Paul wrote: "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to god, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power" (1 Corinthians 15:24). Read the end of Revelation: The church wins!

Sixth, the church is going to be aided by Christ until the end. She will not be left alone to drift without her Savior, "...and, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20).

Seventh, the church is the glorious bride of Christ. He is not going to abandon His bride or commit adultery against her. He is going to help her remain pure and holy until the end (Ephesians 5:21-33).

Eighth, the church will always exist because she must preach the Gospel, which is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:14-16), to every creature (Mark 16:15, 16), and when a person obeys they are added to the church (Acts 2:47; 1 Corinthians 12:18). As long as the "seed of the kingdom" (Luke 8:11) is sown into hearts and they obey, the church will exist.



While the close observer of these points relative to the church knows that most of them are emphasizing the universal nature of the church, it is also important to note that the universal nature of the church, along with the power of the word of God to convert sinners, gives assurance of the future of local congregations that follow God's word. Don't count the local church out.

A congregation that places itself under the authority of God's word, seeking to fulfill the three-fold task of evangelism, equipping and edification, will honor God and reach the lost with the Gospel. While it is true that numerous congregations have ceased to exist for various reasons, it doesn't mean that it has to happen. It's high time for soldiers of Christ to man their battle stations with a new zeal and determination to help Christ grow and maintain a healthy church. We must bloom where we are planted; grow fruit as branches of the Vine (John 15:1-14).

The church has never faced more exciting and challenging times. We have never had more resources, manpower and money. The world is waiting for the church to come speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 3:15), showing the solutions to man's sin, life, grave and eternity problems are solved in Christ; and in Christ is in the church. You can't have one without the other. We must revitalize the emphasis the word of God gives to the church, both locally and universally. Therefore, we must not count the church out.



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5

“O breath of Life, come sweeping through us;

Revive Thy church with life and power.

O Breath of Life, cleanse, renew us;

And fit Thy Church to meet this hour”

-- Bessie Porter Head