

2163 - REVITALISING the CHURCH - Acts 15.41

Regarding **existing** churches which were **dying** - what was Paul's policy? There seems to be no thought of **closing down churches** in God's Word anywhere! Of course the only historical Book in the NT is about the **growth** of the Church. In Rev we have clues re some problems of 7 churches in Asia. But even when a church was **dead**, they were 'written-off' but to ***Wake up and strengthen what remains*** [Rev 3:2] ie, they were to **strengthen** the church that was ***about to die!*** The direction from Jesus was to **revitalise** such a church, not to close it down! Where there is life (spiritual as well as physical) there is always hope! The Bible does **not** support **spiritual euthanasia!**

But of course, there is much in Scripture about churches which have become **unfaithful** and refuse to **repent!** X said that He will come to that church and if it does **not repent** *I will come...and remove your lampstand from its place* [Rev 2:5] **God** Himself will destroy a church that does not remain faithful. He will **remove His Spirit!**

What God wants from every church, dying or very much alive, is to **repent** of known sin! No church is perfect. Christ told **five** of the seven churches in Asia **to repent!** If Christ is still in the church, then we cannot think of closing it but of **revitalising** it! Big problem there of course is that many churches do not think **they need** to **repent!!**

How many missionary journeys did Paul have? Most folk say three! But it was only one really! After Paul's **first** missionary journey, his **second** and **third** journeys were **visiting** journeys in order ***to see how they are*** and ***strengthening the churches*** and ***strengthening all the disciples*** [Acts 15:36,41,+18:23] All his letters were **correcting** letters **re-vitalising** them in the faith. **Reviving** them! **Our text!**

Look: *they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders*

for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord [Acts 14:21-23]

WHAT ARE the SIGNS of a DYING CHURCH?

The signs are **not because** they had **small numbers!** One of the most influential churches in Scripture was the Church at Ephesus! The number? *There were about **twelve men in all*** [Acts 19:7] But what a great influence they had in the community!! The **social**, the **economic**, the **political** landscape changed radically because of the way **believers started living!** Their lifestyles changed. They gave up their **idolatrous worship** of idols and their **practices** in the **occult!**

The signs are **not because** they had no **suitable building!** The Early Church has **no buildings** - they met in **houses!** Four times in Acts it mentions *the church in your house!* And yet, they **changed the Roman Empire** within 30 years by their sacrifice/commitment!

The signs are **not having** no **programmes**, and no **musicians**, and no **youth group!** You never hear or read of that! Silas never said to Paul 'We can't go to Achaia we have no **musician**' (I am not saying these things are wrong - but they are **not the reason** for decline ! They **taught** their adult/children/young people the Holy Scriptures! That was their focus and central to their mission. *reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years so that **all the residents of Asia** heard the **Word of the Lord**...Jews/Greeks[A19]*

1. A church **will die** if it is **dependent** on **one personality leader!** If it is looking to that one leader to make all the decisions and follow him because they think he always has it right, **or whatever**, if you are dependent on one man, that church will die. Looking to **one person** is a sure way for a church to die. If the pastor dies, so does the church - that is **bad**. There **ought** to be elders and deacons to **bring the church on!** Paul never stayed long! He provided the **grounding** and commanded Timothy, Titus, etc to **make elders in every city!** There is only **One Master** - even Christ! He appointed discip**LES!**

2. A church will die if it **gives too much place to tradition!** A church **must** have tradition! Now, there **are** traditions that we must keep! *brothers, **stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter*** [2Thes 2:15] + we **command** you, brothers...*that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and **not in accord with the tradition that you received from us*** [2Thes 3:6] Every church **has traditions!!!**

*But there are also traditions that we must **get rid of** - because the **reason** why they were introduced have gone. Jesus was accused of breaking traditions - why? - because He **did** break them! *Why do your disciples **break the tradition of the elders?*** [Mat 15:2] If a church enjoys living in the past glories of a denomination or congregation - it has **failed** in its **object**. A church has a **message to spread** - and almost everything must **make way** for that message to reach as many people as possible! It is an exceedingly **serious** charge which Jesus made ***rejecting the commandment of God*** (to make known the gospel) *in order to establish **YOUR tradition*** [Mar 7:9]

3. A church will die if it has **no vision** for the **future!** The Israelites were to make **progress into** the Promised Land. They were to have their **eye on Canaan!** That was where they were heading. They were never meant to **stay** in the wilderness. Content with the **status quo!** A Church must have a **plan/strategy** for **challenging** the world in their community! One writer said some churches 'are on a life-**support** system, rather than a life-**saving** mission...their hopes and dreams are to keep the doors open, rather than to bring a harvest of souls through those doors'!! No vision for the **lost!**

HOW do we REVITALISE a CHURCH?

We must **realise WHO** we are, and **WHAT** we have in **Jesus Christ!** Do we really know *the **riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints*** - and what is the ***immeasurable greatness of His power toward us*** who believe? [Eph 1] The Ephs did **not know** - thus Paul prayed that way for them. **That Church grew from 12 in number to**

a community which **changed the whole culture!** The believers **sacrificed** their occult books 50,000skls = 200 men wages for a year! There was such a **change** in the lifestyle of the Xns, the **trade unions** had to meet to discuss the crisis of the loss of trade!

We must **recognise** our **calling** as Xns! We are to be **salt/light!** We are the ones God has appointed to change the world! Yes! You/I must make an impact on the world around us, by our godly living - no cheating, no lying, no deceit. We must have the **fruit of the Spirit** *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control* [Gal 5] God's word, not mine!

Are we ourselves **excited** about our faith? Are we **longing** to **share** our faith? The early disciples were accused of being **drunk** - because they were so **enthusiastic** about the gospel!! Do the world around you, see you/I as someone possessing something **special!** Something good? Something they want? If not, then we need to **pray seriously** that we would be willing to become like the Apostle Paul. In what way? *I have become all things to all people* - and wait for it - **THAT** *by all means I might save some* [1Cor 9:22]

Paul did the changing in order to **win** some people! He was prepared to become a **spectacle** and to become a **fool** for Christ's sake! He was even prepared to become *weak* in order to save those who were 'nothings'!! [9:22] He was prepared to be legalistic to win Jews and to eat things offered to idols to win Greeks! Do you/I **withdraw too much** from **society** instead of **getting more involved** in national life? Do we bring the **gospel** into the world around us? (Not just the law - we can criticise, but the **mercy/love/forgiveness** of God!)

What we should be seeking is **not church growth** - rather it is **church HEALTH!** And if we are healthy, as every child will tell you, we **will grow naturally!** We must **strengthen each other** in the same way that Jesus strengthened His disciples. Be **understanding** and **merciful** of those who have it wrong. Jude: *Have mercy on those who doubt...show mercy with fear...*[Jude 22cf].