

MARANATHA BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

13 January 2019

"Present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:28)

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Sunday School: 10 am

Sunday English / Chinese Worship Service: 10.45 am Sunday Chinese Worship Service: 7.30 pm

Wednesday Prayer Meeting: 8.00 pm

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WHAT IS A SICK CHURCH?

Christendom has an epidemic! Unhealthy churches exist in large numbers today. Unfortunately, not too many church leaders would admit it. Why? Can you tell the state of a person's health by looking at him? Can a doctor diagnose a person's sickness accurately without putting him through a whole battery of tests? You will agree with me that some abnormal conditions are harder to diagnose than others.

What does a sick church look like? How can we recognize one when we spot one? A church that has a fundamental, well-thought-out constitution and by-laws is no indication to its spiritual health. The barometers of the health of the congregation do not depend on the beliefs of conservatism, size of the congregation, organization of the church or the busyness of the church.

How would you define a healthy church? (Take a moment to think about it). To me, a healthy church is a growing, practicing church. It is a church that not only teaches and preaches the Gospel truth but it also practices it. Gospel truth is never taught in the Bible simply that it may be known; it is taught in order that it may be translated into practice. Sadly, the church has many professors of the faith, not many possessors of the faith. Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21; Luke 6:46). These words were spoken by Jesus 2000 years ago are still applicable today. Paul exhorted the Corinthian Christians to examine themselves and see whether they are in the Christian faith lest they be reprobates (2 Corinthians 13:5). Elsewhere he urged them not to take the grace of God in vain (2 Corinthians 6:1). Salvation is more than a reformation of unwanted habits; it's a transformation of character (2 Corinthians 5:17). Jesus said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16). Indeed, by their fruits, you shall know them (Matthew 7:20).

Let me share with you briefly what I think an unhealthy church is. If you agree with me, then you should take a moment to pray with me that God, by His Holy Spirit may revive, refresh and rejuvenate His church worldwide for His name's sake.

Church Leadership

Leaders are appointed by God (Exodus 3:10; Jeremiah 1:5). Leaders are voted in by you, members of the church (Acts 6:3, 5, 6; 14:23; Titus 1:5). How prayerful are you when you cast your vote for a certain candidate? We do not vote for a deacon or an elder without giving much consideration and prayer. I hope all of us will bear this in mind for the next church election.

Having a godly leadership is vitally important. A church that is controlled by unhealthy leaders is a sick church. The church may have a glorious history and a solid reputation from years past, but if its leadership is unsound, domineering, political, worldly and spiritually unqualified, it is a goner. Beware of such leadership which often quietly introduces radical new ideas or changes that are not based on biblical principles or good traditions.

Church Members

A church comprises good and bad members. A church that undermines its leadership at every opportunity is a sick church. I thought this only happens in the political world, but unfortunately, it also happens in the church. "I looked for the world and I found it in the church, I looked for the church and I found it in the world" (Horatius Bonar). James said, "My brethren, these things ought not so to be" (James 3:10).

Church members are taught to obey and support their leadership in fervent prayer. They are to help them to serve with gladness and not with sadness which is unprofitable to them (Hebrews 13:7, 17). Do not undermine your leaders!

A church that comprises lazy members is a sick church. Members of the church ought to be energetic in the Lord's work. Paul said, "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord" (Romans 12:11). The mission of the church is a high calling. The church is to make a difference in society. Therefore, every member of the church is called to be a part of the Gospel work. No one is left out.

But alas! Where are the members when the church calls for help? Usually the same people would respond to the call. But where are the rest of them? Are you like the invited guests who paid no attention to the King's invitation to the wedding and went about doing their own business? (Matthew 22:5) We cannot always give excuses for not serving in the Lord's vineyard. Moreover, we are told to occupy ourselves in the Lord's work till Jesus comes (Luke 19:13).

Church Position

An unbalanced church is a sick church. A church that claims to preach the truth and that no other church does this is a sick church. Such a church may not be dying in the sense of declining membership (members can always be found who like their religion that way), but as far as effectiveness for the ministry of the Gospel is concerned, it might as well be dead.

A church that causes its members to shun other believers because of minor, non-essential

issues is a sick church. In the matter of secondary teaching of the Bible, no church agrees with you 100 per cent. While taking a firm stand on the fundamentals, every church needs to learn to agree to disagree on issues that do not affect the core of the Christian faith.

A “holier than thou” church is a sick church (Isaiah 65:5a). Its members are full of pride and behave in a superior, condescending and arrogant way. A good example was the sect of the Pharisees. Their very name meant “separatists.” They separated themselves from those they thought to be sinners and looked on them with disdain. The Pharisees liked to compare themselves and their righteousness with the lowly publican. They even thanked God that they were not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers or even as this publican. Such was the attitude of the Pharisees. However, Jesus pointed out that it was the publican in his total humility in admitting his sins who went away justified (Luke 18:9-14).

Church Vitality

A church that looks great on its facade but lacks spiritual vitality is a sick church. This kind of church usually has a well-planned programme. Everything is in order. Its programmes are excellent. Its organization is superb. Its publicity is first class. Members are happy with its set up. However, there is something missing. There is very little life in the church. Members may hear a great sermon. They may agree with the preacher on every fine point of the sermon preached and even shout “Praise the Lord!” but there is practically no change or effort made to conform to the preaching of the Word. Consequently, it leads to spiritual deadness or a comatose state.

I would liken this kind of church to the church in Ephesus and Sardis. To the church in Ephesus, Jesus said, “I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love” (Revelation 2:2-4). These verses tell us that it doesn’t matter how great the church is or what it has done for the Lord. A church that has left its first love for the Lord is a sick church. Something must be done before judgment comes (Revelation 2:5). To the church in Sardis, Jesus said, “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead” (Revelation 3:1). The church in Sardis might have a good reputation and be well-known among other churches but God who searches the heart knew its members’ spiritual condition – dead spiritually!

Is Maranatha B-P Church like the church in Ephesus or Sardis, or both?

Church Problems

A church that bickers, argues and quarrels one with another is a sick church. Such a church finds it hard to solve problems harmoniously. Nothing can be done in this church because whenever its leaders or members meet to resolve their problems, they cannot see eye to eye or agree on what to do. Its consequences are detrimental to the church. People either leave the church or care nothing about it

Whenever there is a church problem, emotions always run high. Many words are said and feelings are hurt. If the problem persists unaddressed and the misfits remain in place, the church will become sicker and weaker. Needless to say, this will eventually lead to a church split.

To avoid a church split, its leaders and members are to take heed to Paul's exhortation to the Corinthian Christians – *"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"* (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Do not split the church by asserting your rights or teaching unbalanced truths but with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:2, 3).

What is a sick church? Do you have any further thoughts?

Pastor Colin Wong

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Theme for the Quarter :

THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Combined Worship Service :

Rev Colin Wong
speaks on

Who is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity

(Scripture Text : John 14:16,17; 15:26; Responsive Text : Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-21).

Interpreter : Dn Royce Yeo.

[End of MM]