

Why Churches Fail



Foreword What the Church Was Made For

God did not invent the church as a club, a brand, or a weekend service. He called it into being through Christ. Jesus said, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (**Matthew 16:18**). He loved the church and gave himself for her, so that she would be holy and without blemish (**Ephesians 5:25–27**). The church is his body, the place where his word is taught, his people are formed, and his mission goes forward.

Jesus also gave a picture that explains failure. “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (**John 15:5**). A branch that does not abide is cut off, withers, and is thrown into the fire (**John 15:6**). That can happen in two ways. Sometimes the doors close. Sometimes the doors stay open, the sign stays lit, and the church is already dead toward Christ.

Jesus warned a church that looked successful from the outside: “You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead” (**Revelation 3:1**). A worldly church can still meet, sing, and raise money, while Christ has become a product—something offered to consumers who want comfort, belonging, or a better life, rather than the

Lord who calls people to repent, believe, and follow. When that happens, the church may still be open. It is no longer abiding.

1. Why a Church Fails and Closes Its Doors

A closed church is not always a mystery. Often the branch was already cut from the vine long before the last service. These are common reasons the life drains out until the doors shut.

Lack of biblical teaching.

When the Bible is no longer opened, explained, and obeyed, the people lose the truth that keeps them alive. “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (**Hosea 4:6**). Paul told Timothy to preach the word in season and out of season, because a time would come when people would not endure sound teaching, but would gather teachers to suit their own desires (**2 Timothy 4:2–3**). A church that stops feeding on Scripture eventually has nothing left to stand on.

Prayer becomes an afterthought.

The early church devoted itself to the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (**Acts 2:42**). Jesus said the temple was to be a house of prayer (**Matthew 21:13**). When prayer is squeezed into a short slot, or saved for emergencies, the church is no longer depending on God. It is managing itself. “Pray without ceasing” is not a slogan for the especially devout. It is the normal breath of a living church (**1 Thessalonians 5:17**).

Lack of evangelism and discipleship.

Jesus’ last command was clear: make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey all that he commanded (**Matthew 28:19–20**). A church that stops telling the gospel and stops forming people who can tell it turns inward and ages out. Paul told Timothy to entrust what he had heard to faithful people who would teach others also (**2 Timothy 2:2**). Where that chain breaks, the next generation is not there when the doors need someone to open them.

Compromise with the world and the loss of a biblical worldview.

Friendship with the world is enmity with God (**James 4:4**). Paul wrote, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (**Romans 12:2**). When a church adopts the world’s definitions of truth, identity, success, and sin, it no longer has a distinct message. John warned, “Do not love the

world or the things in the world” (1 John 2:15). A church that blends in does not convert the culture. It is absorbed by it, and then it has no reason to exist.

Failure to raise up leaders—to train and equip.

Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11–12). A church that depends on one personality and never trains others collapses when that person leaves, fails, or dies. Healthy churches multiply shepherds. Dying churches protect a platform.

Conflict is not handled by biblical standards.

Unresolved conflict does not stay small. Jesus gave a clear path: go to the person, then take one or two others, then tell it to the church (Matthew 18:15–17). Paul said, “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil” (Ephesians 4:26–27). Churches that gossip, take sides, or ignore sin until it explodes often close not because they lack people, but because wounds were never brought into the light.

2. Why a Failed Church May Still Have Its Doors Open

Closing is not the only form of failure. Some churches remain open, funded, and busy, and are still cut from the vine. They have a name, but they are not alive. Christ is no longer the life. **He is the product on the sign.**

The Word of God is treated as something that only expresses or contains truth, rather than as God’s word.

Scripture does not merely hold religious opinions. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). When a church says the Bible “contains” the word of God, or only “expresses” human experiences of God, it has already placed itself above the text. It can then keep the parts it likes and set aside the parts that cost something. The doors stay open. The authority is gone.

Biblical morality and ethics are replaced with worldly ones.

Isaiah warned, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil” (Isaiah 5:20). A church can still use Christian language while blessing what Scripture calls sin, and shaming what Scripture calls obedience. Paul said people would turn away from the

truth and wander into myths (**2 Timothy 4:3–4**). When ethics come from the culture instead of from the word, the church is no longer salt. It is a religious version of the world around it.

Prayer is replaced by entertainment.

Amos pictured worship that God rejected: songs, instruments, and religious noise without justice or a true turning to him (**Amos 5:21–23**). A church can fill the hour with lights, humor, and production, and still never become a house of prayer. Entertainment can draw a crowd. It cannot abide in the vine. “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (**John 4:24**).

Apathy replaces the Great Commission.

Jesus did not suggest the mission. He commanded it (**Matthew 28:19–20**). A church that is content to maintain its members, protect its preferences, and avoid anything that might offend has traded commission for comfort. The church in Laodicea was neither cold nor hot, and Jesus said he would spit it out of his mouth (**Revelation 3:15–16**). **Apathy feels peaceful.** It is a sign the branch is already drying.

Conclusion: What Remains

A church fails when it stops abiding. The building can close, or the building can stay open while Christ is marketed instead of obeyed. The remedy is the same in both cases. Return to the word. Pray as if God must act. Make disciples. Refuse the world’s categories where they contradict Scripture. Train the next shepherds. Deal with sin and conflict in the open, as Jesus did. And remember why the church exists: not to offer Christ as a product, but to belong to him as Lord.

“Abide in me, and I in you” (**John 15:4**). A church that does that may be small. It will not be dead.

