

# WHAT ARE THE INDICATORS OF SPIRITUAL WEAKNESS IN A CONGREGATION?

## INTRODUCTION

An indicator is a thing that indicates the state or level of something. For example, most teenagers see car ownership as an **indicator of affluence** and life fulfillment.

Spiritual weakness means lack of spiritual strength in God; lack of spiritual growth; instability or immaturity [*Ephesians 4:14* <sup>14</sup>*that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro.... 2 Timothy 3:7* <sup>7</sup>*always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. James 1:8* <sup>8</sup>*he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways*]; lack of zeal for God and so on.

Indicators of spiritual weakness in a congregation are those things which show that there are weaknesses in the congregation.

The church of God, in all ages, has had its times of weakness as well as its times of power. When division threatened the church, *factions were created*; when issues of justice and mercy were neglected (like the neglected widows), *it caused neglect of the word of God (Acts 6:2)*; when worldliness crept into the church, *it caused the loss of the power of godliness (II Tim. 3:5)*. We can see that there have always been periods of weaknesses in the church.

What are the signs (indicators) of spiritual weakness in a congregation?

## INDICATORS OF SPIRITUAL WEAKNESSES

### ❖ Loss of zeal or enthusiasm for God

The author of the book of Hebrews also had his own observations on the issue of the indicators of spiritual weaknesses in a congregation.

In *Hebrews 12:12*, the author pointed out that the congregation were experiencing weaknesses. He advised them to renew their spiritual strength or energy - <sup>12</sup>*Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.*

The author said this because he saw signs that they were no longer taking seriously the word of God; they were losing their faith in God and they were beginning to doubt why they should be living a disciplined and godly life because of God's word. *Hebrews 2:1* <sup>1</sup>*Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. Hebrews 3:6,14* <sup>6</sup>*but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.* <sup>14</sup>*For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end. Hebrews 2:3* <sup>3</sup>*how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him*

The Hebrew author observed that the brethren were first converted at a time when everyone expected the Lord to return soon. *2 Peter 3:4* <sup>4</sup>*and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."* The burning zeal to be faithful since the Lord will soon come was there. They had been able to keep up the high level of commitment for a while, but they could not maintain their enthusiasm year after year.

The author's direct references to their situation leave us with the impression that the readers were tired after a generation of commitment to the cause of Christ. *Perhaps there were Christians who had made their initial commitment in a moment of great congregational excitement* and were simply caught up in the prevailing mood. It is possible that they had expected these peak experiences to be a daily affair and that they were totally unprepared for a return to the routine affairs of church life.

There is this possibility that they lived in a town where there was considerable competition from new and exotic groups and cults. *Perhaps the worship services of the church seemed very ordinary when compared to other places where "things were happening."* Perhaps some, wanting to be where the action was, were inclined to follow the newest behaviors (clothing, hairstyles, and practices) that achieve short-lived popularity but fade away.

Their loss of zeal or enthusiasm for God was an indicator that spiritual weakness was taking over the church, they became impatient (*lack of endurance - Hebrews 10:36 - For you have need of endurance....*), unwilling to be committed to things of God and they were in danger of committing apostasy.

Their hearts became hardened and they began to learn the habit of dropping out of the assembly (**Hebrews 10:25**) either to be in solitary isolation or to find a *look-alike-gathering* that appeals to their soul and desires.

Some who do not wish to be seen as dropping out of the assembly, took on the pattern of refusing to mature in the faith. The Hebrew author says such brethren want to be taught over and over the first principles of the oracles of God, such brethren would have wished God speaks directly to them to explain certain things that may not be relevant to their salvation.

Their loss of zeal or enthusiasm for God was an indicator that spiritual weakness was taking over the church, thus Christians who should have developed spiritual depth and insight, were "dull of hearing." **Hebrews 5:12-14** <sup>12</sup> *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.* <sup>13</sup> *For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.* <sup>14</sup> *But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

**Hebrews 6:1** <sup>1</sup>*Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.*

Hence, the Hebrews author warned that if such brethren who ...*were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit.* <sup>5</sup> *and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,* <sup>6</sup> *if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame - Hebrews 6:4-6.*

Jesus repeated that loss of zeal or enthusiasm for God was an indicator that spiritual weakness was in the church at Ephesus - **Revelation 2:4,5** <sup>4</sup> *Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.* <sup>5</sup> *Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.* **Matthew 24:12** <sup>12</sup> *And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.*

## ❖ Ineffective Ministry

Ministry is both the activity [evangelism, converts' class, youths' class, singing class, Bible classes, Fasting and prayers, All-night prayers....] carried by the church for growth and salvation and the resource persons coordinating the activity. Ministry is an arm of power for the church strength. Let it be noted that no church ministry can please all men, but every church ministry

must build and maintain a proper working relationship with the brethren in a given congregation and the society at large. An ineffective ministry is an indicator of spiritual weakness in any congregation.

**An ineffective ministry is one without clearly defined roles that have no mutual connection with one another.** There must be a mutual understanding of each role in the ministry.

One cannot be all things at all times to all men. Imagine a highly recommended magazine designed without an editorial team (Editor In Chief, Art director, designers, Picture editor, Copy editor and so on) or a magazine in which one person covers all these roles. Such creates a situation where there are too many roles to fulfill, too many papers to sort; the result can only be weariness, frustration and emptiness.

In **Acts 6: 1-5**, we saw a congregation in Jerusalem where *arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution*. In the midst of this congregation, we have the apostles, yet the congregation decided early on that it is not desirable for the apostles to preach the word (*ministry of evangelism*) and the same time to coordinate the daily distribution (*ministry of benevolence*) otherwise the ministry will be characterized by misdirected efforts; will not be in godly sympathy with the hearts of the brethren and the souls of perishing men; will become ineffective and will not have a proper working relationship with the brethren.

The decision of the congregation was for everyone to have a mutual understanding of the role of the apostles - *give themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word*. In addition, others were appointed to *coordinate the daily distribution*. The Scripture says that *the saying pleased the whole multitude*.

Some ministry leaders are overloaded with too many roles in their ministry; others want to be the hands and feet of the ministry, and they don't have suitable time for study, research, and prayer. They don't grow and the church will be starved. In an age of knowledge, with information exploding on every side, the preacher in his pulpit, the elder in his ministry, the deacon in his ministry...must be imminently and adequately prepared. Things change, and so do people. Today is different from yesterday and the temptation to relish in the glory of past victories and usage of *old outline and a tired frame* is always self-defeating and does not make the church to prosper. Ministries leaders must learn to adapt one's thinking in matters of judgment and expediency and make efforts to ensure the church is adequately fed. This enables them by *sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict* - ***Titus 1:9***.

**An ineffective ministry is one without constant recruitment of willing workers.** A ministry should always plan for succession. A ministry leader can recruit, train, and motivate co-workers, for his own ministry to succeed. David had his thirty-eight mighty men, Nehemiah had his busy helpers on the wall, and Saul had the valiant men whose hearts God had touched went with him -***1 Samuel 10:26***. The most far-reaching thing any church leader can do is secure other workers. He must never forget that it is better to train ten people to work than to do the work of ten people.

An ineffective ministry is an indicator of spiritual weakness in any congregation.

#### ❖ ***An Out-of-Control Schedule***

This is one indicator of spiritual weakness in a congregation. Everyone in life has a schedule. We created this schedule for our own comfort, review and control. Sometimes, it is our schedule that reviews us, controls us and gives comfort to itself. In such case, the schedule becomes out-of-control. This is quite different from *inevitable control schedules*. One of Satan's greatest weapons against our generation seems to be his ability to make Christians busier than ever before.

Out-of-control schedules do not allow God to have the better and greater part of our time and lives. Out-of-control schedules choke us with irrelevant activities that do not allow us to focus more time on our relationship with our Creator. Out-of-control schedules are the cause of late-coming, forsaking of the assemblies of the saints, gradual weakening of our faith, worldliness and cold love for God. Out-of-control schedules makes us instrument of weakness to the church. ***Ephesians 5:16*** <sup>16</sup>redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

If we desire to walk closely with God this year, we will absolutely, necessarily have to begin by taking a close look at our calendar/schedules.

### ❖ **Parasitic sins**

Parasitic sins are sins that are so easily attached to us. They easily ambush us. They have become our habits. Parasitic sins are the strongest indicators of spiritual weakness in a congregation. When the congregation is filled with brethren who *continue living in sin*, the Holy Spirit is grieved (***Ephesians 4:30***) and the strength of the church disappears.

***Hebrews 12:1*** <sup>1</sup>Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Sometimes, we begin to drift away from God, because we have sins in their lives that cause us to feel guilt when we show up at church services. And we feel reluctant to pray, listen to or read God's word when we know we have these issues in our lives. Such sins are damaging them just like parasites in one's body. And those sins will almost certainly affect our spiritual vision. The solution here is not to run/drift from God. The key is to confess our sin to God and repent from them so that God will restore us and make us whole again.

## CONCLUSION

We have seen some indicators of spiritual weaknesses in a congregation. Our challenge is to relate these indicators to ourselves (because we make up the church) and strive with God's power to overcome them for the church to alive and filled with God's power.

*God bless you all in Jesus Christ Name – Amen!*