

**SERIES: PRESCRIPTIONS FOR A HEALTHY & HOLY CHURCH:
A Study in 1 Corinthians Applied To The Church Today
I. A CHURCH'S MEDICAL HISTORY
(Intro., 1:1-9)**

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INTRODUCTION:

It's 2009 and what a world we have made for ourselves! Given the vast networks of information now available to us, it is rather easy to recognize that we live in a sick, diseased world that is breaking down all around us. We are an ailing people struggling amidst an ailing world. Nothing seems to function the way it was designed to or even used to anymore. Pain has become commonplace. Conflict is the norm and peace is the rare exception. Rather than healthy growth, there seems to be regression and even decay. Frequently, people use poison as medicine and shun medicine as if it were poison.

We, as a society, will pay obscene amounts of money, time and discomfort for cosmetic surgery to make us look better on the outside and yet continue to embrace that which destroys us on the inside. We sacrifice our children's future to numb our symptoms, but refuse to acknowledge the actual disease or consent to the surgery necessary to achieve true health. It's 2009 and what a world we have made for ourselves!

Therefore, as we join together in this new year, I want to challenge us as God's church in Perth to truly be set apart for Him as a light and example to the world around us of what it really means to be healthy and holy!

Our community desperately needs Perth Bible Church to provide it with a genuine, faithful and consistent example and source of health and holiness. But, for that to happen, our families need to be healthy and holy. And, for that to happen, each of us must individually commit ourselves to all that is necessary to attain and maintain healthy and holy lives to the honor and glory of Jesus Christ!

But HOW? What does this really look like? How can we live in this world and yet avoid it's rampant diseases?

Not only is this the situation and struggle that we face today, but it also describes the situation and struggle that the earliest Christian churches had to face. Nowhere was this more true than in the ancient city of Corinth, nor was the issue greater addressed than through the God-directed letters sent by the Apostle Paul to the church at Corinth. In these letters, the LORD God guided Paul to doctor the sick patient that was the church at Corinth. Why was it sick? Because *there was more of the DNA of the city in the church then there was the DNA of Jesus in the church or of the church in the community.*

May I implore us to dedicate 2009 as a year in which Perth Bible Church commits to the full process of diagnosis, treatment, diet and lifestyle that is necessary to be a healthy and holy church?!

To this end, I ask each and every one of us to study the wisdom and truth of God's words to the Corinthians and then apply these lessons to our own selves, families and church. To help us maintain this focus, I have chosen a "PBC Theme Verse" for 2009:

KEY VERSE: 1 CO. 15:58

"... Be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

THE PRINCIPLES (1:1-3)

The Medical Care Team: God the Director,
Jesus the Great Physician, and
Paul, the assistant.

- ✓ From the very beginning, Paul seeks to clarify that while the letter is coming from his 'hand' it's words and authority are that of Jesus the Messiah according to the will of God the Father (as perfectly given to Paul through the Holy Spirit).
- ✓ Paul communicates to the church with great authority, not because of who he is, his intelligence, training, title or earthly achievements, but because he has been sent in this role by Jesus Christ and exercises it according to God's will!

The Patient: The Church at Corinth & all Christians

- ✓ Notice Paul's emphasis on this being **God's** church. They are not their own, they are His. They are not to live according to their own experiences and feelings, but by and in fulfillment of His will!
- ✓ As Dr. Gordon Fee writes: *“Thus, just as Paul is an apostle by divine calling, so the Corinthian believers are God's new people by divine calling, who as such are to reflect God's character. One might note in passing that this is not their strong suit; in too many ways they look far more like Corinth than they do God's holy people in Corinth”* (NICNT., pg. 33).
- ✓ But, as Paul here reminds, it is not just the Corinthians but ALL Christians in all places (and time) that need to understand and apply these God-given principles!

Basis of Their Relationship Together: Grace & Peace

- ✓ This was Paul's desire and prayer for the church at Corinth, but it was not yet the reality.
- ✓ As we will see, the principle enemy of such grace and peace was the Corinthian Church's unbiblical understanding of what it means to be 'spiritual.'
- ✓ Further the Corinthians Christians considered themselves to have already attained the fullest measure of spiritual maturity and completion. When Paul questions this through others, they responded by questioning Paul's own spiritual maturity for not agreeing with or sharing in their own practices and experiences.
- ✓ In their minds, they are super-spiritual and their gifts & ecstatic practices prove it!

PATIENT'S BIRTH RECORD

- ✓ Paul 1st in Corinth A.D. 50 on his 2nd missionary journey (Acts 18)
- ✓ Stayed about 18 months
- ✓ Paul planted a church through gospel preaching and the help of Silas, Timothy, Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos.
- ✓ Members of the church were from both Jewish & predominantly pagan backgrounds.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- ✓ Corinth was a large and impressive Greco-Roman city of perhaps 500,000 people and was the chosen capital of the Roman province of Achaia.
- ✓ A very 'religious' city with many pagan temples and cults, as well as a Jewish community. It was praised as a city “favored by Aphrodite (goddess of lust),” and included the temple devoted to her sanctioned religious prostitution. In addition, Corinth was known to housed the cult to the Roman emperors, the cult of Poseidon, the Egyptian deity Isis, and many others.

- ✓ Also, a notably wealthy and equally immoral city. The city was primarily Italian in culture and was officially Latin-speaking. Any from within the province of Achaia who had dreams or ambitions of most any kind, moved to Corinth. It was a city, therefore, full of great ambitions and a tremendous emphasis on individual status. It was a society of people all trying to outdo, get especially noticed and be lifted up over the others.
- ✓ The city had such a prolonged reputation for immorality that around 400 years before even this time, the Greek playwright Aristophanes started using the term Corinthian as a new verb meaning “to commit sexual immorality.”
- ✓ Imagine putting together NYC, Las Vegas, Los Angeles & New Orleans and then declaring every day to be 'Carnival' (Mardi Gras). Then, throw in a multitude of hedonistic 'spiritual gurus' and you'd have 1st Century Corinth.

DIAGNOSTIC RESULTS

As the Apostle Paul carefully examined the various reports he received about the church in Corinth, he came to the obvious conclusion that the ills of the city had infected the church and it's people.

IDENTIFIED DISEASES:

1. **Cancer** (1:10-4:21)
2. **STDs** (5:1-13)
3. Complications from **Malpractice** (6:1-8)
4. **Self-Mutilation** (6:9-8)

IMPROPER DIET & EXERCISE:

DESIRED OUTCOME

A Healthy & Holy Church - 1 Co. 15:58

“... Be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”

PLAN OF CARE

THE KEY: LOVE

- Whatever the ailment and whatever the necessary cure (including major surgery), it is emphasized throughout this letter that ALL care in ALL situations is always to be administered in and with love.

1. **Re-unification** of the Whole Body (Chaps. 1-4)

2. **Lifestyle** Changes (Chaps. 5-6)

3. **Diet & Exercise** (Chaps. 7-16)

PRESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY:

This Body, which is the Church of Christ, will always be subject to dangers against its health both from its environment (the world) and from within itself (sin nature – a spiritual auto-immune deficiency). All of these dangers, however, are preventable and treatable through proper submission to the Great Physician and His care team, along with genuine grace, love and cooperation between the different parts of the Body.

PROGNOSIS (1:4-9)

The Corinthian Christians became so excited and enamored with their new freedoms in Christ and the many wonderful gifts He freely bestowed upon them that they began to become fixated on their own new selves, abilities and gifts to the point that they had taken their eyes off Jesus. Nevertheless, Paul delivers a prognosis of what they can become if their focus remains **on Christ**.

1. Patient's **Character**

- ✓ To a populace and church that is widely characterized by their regular boasting, the Holy Spirit here uses Paul to remind the redeemed of what is most important, who they are **in Christ**.

A character trait that . . .

a. **In Christ, strengthened by Grace (v. 4)**

- ✓ The greatest of what they have received and the true source of their strength, has been received from Christ by grace - undeserved, unearned, and without favoritism.
- ✓ Paul recognizes and here affirms that their problem is not in their gifts, but rather *in their attitude* toward their gifts. Therefore, he seeks to turn their focus from the gifts themselves to the giver of the gifts – Jesus Christ.

b. **In Christ, richly Equipped (vv. 5-7)**

- ✓ Speaking (*logos*) and knowledge (*gnosis*) were both characteristics greatly valued by the elite of Corinth and viewed as characteristics that would uniquely set them apart from and above others.
- ✓ Within the church, however, ALL have been richly equipped by Christ with these two gifts – regardless of status.
- ✓ That this was, in Christ, “confirmed” upon the redeemed is a legal metaphor Paul uses to emphasize that these gifts are evidence that God has completed a special contract with His people.

c. **In Christ, kept Clean and Free (v. 8)**

- ✓ To a people who have been and currently continue to be ravaged by spiritual disease, Paul refers to the certain day in which they will yet be blameless – not because of their own works, wisdom or spirituality, but because of the faithfulness and greatness of the One who is truly making them clean and free.

2. **Trust in Care Team (v. 9)**

- ✓ The Holy Spirit directs Paul to remind the Corinthian Christians that the proper and true object of their trust is NOT their societal status or the various perks that may come with it, BUT in Almighty God who alone is perfectly faithful to the end!

CHALLENGE:

WHAT IS OUR DIAGNOSIS?

WHAT IS OUR PROGNOSIS?

WHAT IS OUR COMMITMENT TO HEALTH & HOLINESS?