

## SERIES: PRESCRIPTIONS FOR A HEALTHY & HOLY CHURCH:

A Study in 1 Corinthians Applied To The Church Today

### II. DEALING WITH OBVIOUS DISEASES

#### A. CANCER

## “STUNTED GROWTH” (1 Cor. 3:1-23)

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### INTRODUCTION:

**Ever try arguing with a baby? Toddler? Teenager? Did you have much success? Why not?**

Then, I think we should all be able to understand at least somewhat how Paul is feeling in dealing with the Corinthian Christians. He tries to teach them what is absolutely right, but *they are don't understand him, are too busy babbling to hear his words, or think that they already know it all.*

The problem is that they accepted only the most basic and rudimentary things of Christ as taught them by Paul, but then sought to add to that from other outside sources – the 'wisdom of the world.' In short time, they began to see themselves as the spiritual giants and Paul as the little guy – the fool who only knows one thing. You see, in their minds, they had Paul's message of Christ's salvation plus all kinds of other wisdom. Paul, however, just kept saying the same things over and over again and didn't 'expand' his wisdom like they had.

Of course, as we will greater see this morning, we will terribly and pridefully deceived! The sad result was that their Christian growth was stunted, and years after they got saved and were first taught by Paul, they continued to be spiritual babies.

**You know what the real 'kicker' is, though?** *That far too often we're no different and we don't even know it!*

### PRAYER

### THEIR GROWTH WAS STUNTED BY:

#### I.) **POOR DIGESTION (3:1-4)**

- Paul directly points out that the Christians in Corinth have a faulty spiritual digestion system. It is faulty because they have the digestion of a baby.
- He diagnoses this as being the result of **2 significant problems.**
- **First, they continue to have immature systems that can't handle spiritual food of genuine substance.**
- The spiritual 'milk' Paul refers to is the basic gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. The spiritual 'meat' is understanding and applying the **full** implications of the reality of our salvation in Christ.
- Like 'milk' the basic facts of salvation in Christ are essential for life and growth and yet is easily swallowed and digested. Similarly, only infants can survive on this alone. As any mother can verify, it does not take long at all before a baby figures out that milk is not very filling. If, however, a mother were to continue to feed a growing child only milk as a newborn infant, that child will experience stunted growth and malnutrition.
- Similarly, Paul is here saying, that Christians cannot continue to feed their spirits on nothing but the basics of salvation without also suffering from stunted growth, malnutrition, and even starvation.
- Instead, it's not long before that spiritual milk needs to be complemented with some spiritual 'meat.'

That is, understanding and applying the **full** implications of the reality of our salvation in Christ. *Not just the fact that we are saved, why we are saved, or our eternal security in Christ, but also how are we to be changed as a result, what are we supposed to grow up to be, how do we keep ourselves fit and healthy, and how should our relationship to Christ and others change as we grow and mature ourselves!*

- So why would someone continue with a staple of milk-only?
- Simple. Milk is easily and quickly swallowed. Meat, on the other hand, is much more substantial. It needs to be chewed, savored and broken down before it can be swallowed. Usually, we have to wait for it to cook. Sometimes, we even have to gnaw it off the bone or cut out some of the fat and gristle that is too much for us. Even when we have learned and are willing to invest the extra effort this takes, we need to gradually allow our digestive systems to get used to this different and more complex diet. It might not all digest completely or as well as we like at first. And, then, there are a varieties of meat to get used to eating and digesting.
- **Second, their spiritual growth is stunted because they keep insisting on eating the wrong things and believing they are the right things.**
- Even as the Corinthian Christians (like so many people today), began to realize they needed more than just milk to fill them up and energize, they sought it with their taste buds rather than follow the instructions of good nutrition. That is, they gorged on the sweet, tasty, good-looking candy instead of the real food they needed. It tasted great, was a lot of fun and for a while provided a great rush of energy, excitement and the perception of being full. As a bonus, it was also very popular – everyone likes it and everyone was eating it!
- Spiritual 'candy' is the so-called 'wisdom of the world.'
- You see, the Corinthian Christians thought that they were the best and had the best because they had what appeared to be the most shiny, attractive, energizing, good-tasting and instantly edible food– candy. Paul, he just had raw meat.
- Paul could not even try to feed them nourishing spiritual food, because all they were willing or capable of eating was worldly (carnal) food. *Anything else they either refused to eat or spit back out.*
- **They continue to avariciously feed their flesh, but starve their spirit! What comes out is what came in!!!**

### ANTIDOTE:

#### **GROW UP!**

- **Grow A Thick Spiritual Lining & Change Your Diet**
- Start feeding your spirit and starving the sinful flesh instead!
- If you still find spiritual 'food' difficult to digest, start building up your system.

## II.) **BAD MECHANICS (3:5-17)**

- In these verses, Paul ties this principle of their diet back to their strife and division.
- All the gunk they have put in has confused it's mechanics. After having lived with this for some time, they've reached the point where they don't even understand how the mechanics of their spiritual Body are supposed to work!

### A.) **Role Confusion (vv. 5-9)**

- The Corinthian Church – the Body of Christ in Corinth – has become filled with unhealthy division because they don't even understand the roles of the different parts of the body.
- Rather than see all parts as equally important, even as they look different and have different functions, they want all of the parts to function like the one each personally believes to be the 'coolest,' or most important.
- They act as if it is a competition of bodily functions where the strongest or most popular should be the one whose team everyone joins.
- *Can you imagine if the organs and cells of our bodies acted like that?*
- In these verses, though, Paul uses the example of a collective farm. One plants the seed. Another waters the seeds. ALL are equally important to the process, yet no matter how they perform their function, ONLY God can create the growth.
- In Paul's analogy, the church is the field. Members are the plants. Paul is the one who planted the church. Apollos is now watering it. Both are equally necessary. If either carried out their responsibility poorly, the plant would sicken and eventually die. If they carry out their responsibility well, however, God will cause the plants to grow and the field to be bountiful.

### ANTIDOTE:

**Understand that all are equally servants, charged with the specific task the Master has given to each one. All have a responsibility to keep the church holy and healthy, but only God can make it grow!**

- **We need to realize that we are all servants, though we may have different roles and functions.**
- **Our focus needs to remain focusing on God and what He requires of us.**

### B.) **Wrong Materials (vv. 10-17)**

- In these verses, Paul changes analogies to make another crucial point about the development of the Church.
- *Note that the emphasis here is on the choice of materials used in the building, but NOT on the size of the building or the rate of its expansion!*
- Paul reminds them he has already laid the foundation, which is the rudimentary truth of the gospel. The task of building the church of God in Corinth upon that foundation since then, now, and in the indefinite future remains theirs.
- One day, the owner – the Lord God Almighty – will inspect His Church and judge those who have built it. Those who have built well, will receive a just reward. Those who have not, will receive a just reprimand and no reward.
- The question, then, is HOW will God, the owner of the Church, judge it's construction.
- *If the answer were left to us and/or the scenario was turned into a reality show, we'd most likely judge according to what building was built the fastest, biggest, and appeared to be the flashiest and fanciest at the moment it is finished – at the most efficient price. How effectively practical it really is, or how it still looks or functions in 5, 10, or 20 years – under this circumstance or the other, is irrelevant.*
- *The real answer, according to Scripture, is much different – and the opposite. God will judge His church base on how well it endures and survives – especially when challenged by fire.*
- What determines this is whether or not the original foundation is honored and what types of materials are used in the construction.

- Using wood, hay and straw will win the reality show. It costs the least, can be easily and quickly attained, can be easily manipulated just how you want it, can create a large structure with minimal material, and can be covered up and decorated to look like something more than it is. The problem, however, is that time, nature and the mistakes and occasional abuses of its inhabitants will quickly expose it for what it really is.
- By contrast, using gold, silver and costly stones will make for a building that not only looks valuable and attractive, but that will remain strong in spite of time, nature and the mistakes and the occasional abuses of its inhabitants. *But it's a much slower and more costly endeavor!*
- Wood, hay and straw represent the world's building materials. Gold, silver and costly stones those of the LORD.
- The questions Scripture here poses, therefore, are these:  
**(1) Will God's people build His church upon the foundation He has provided in the crucified Christ or look for another?**

**(2) Will they build upon that foundation with the materials (ideas, perspective, beliefs) of the unbelieving world or with the materials of Jesus the Christ?**

**ANTIDOTE: Only use the Master's materials, no matter the cost.**

- That cost, by the way, can come in many forms – money, popularity, speed, size, or initial appearance.

### **III.) DENYING OWNERSHIP (3:18-23)**

- In vv. 18-23 Paul summarizes what he has been explaining throughout the letter so far, summarizing it as an issue of ownership.
- First, Paul pointedly declares: “If you want to build something truly great and lasting – read the Owner's Manual and trust Him! Only a fool would consider it wise to follow someone else's instructions.”
- At the end of the day, it's all about understanding and respecting ownership.
- We get in trouble when we begin to forget that. *“That part of the church building is so-and-so's, because he paid for most of it.” “This is my department, I'm the one who is most responsible.” “She has been here the longest and invested the most of her time, so she should get a more significant voice than anyone else.”* etc.
- It all makes sense IF this is truly 'our' church alone and IF we accept the wisdom of the world.
- BUT, it is NOT 'our' church alone and the wisdom of the world is foolishness to God!
- Everything, including all that we consider a part of Perth Bible Church is ours to take responsibility for – but we must never forget or lose sight of the fact that all of it (including ourselves and those around us) ultimately belong to God!
- The bottom line, says a Holy Spirit-inspired Paul, is this: **There is no wisdom apart from God's wisdom and only His wisdom should be applied to what is His!**

**ANTIDOTE: Honor the Master & His plans first and last.**

## **CONCLUSION: COMMITMENT TO HEALTHY GROWTH**

The Corinthian error is an easy one to make or repeat. I pray we would never be so proud as to believe that we are above such error – for in even thinking so we are committing it! Can we, then, commit together and before the Lord that we will each:

### **1.) GROW UP!**

**- Grow A Thick Spiritual Lining & Change Your Diet**

**2.) Understand that all are equally servants, charged with the specific task the Master has given to each one. All have a responsibility to keep the church holy and healthy, but only God can make it grow!**

**3.) Only use the Master's materials, no matter the cost.**

**4.) Honor the Master & His plans first and last.**