

SERIES: PRESCRIPTIONS FOR A HEALTHY & HOLY CHURCH:

A Study in 1 Corinthians Applied To The Church Today

II. DEALING WITH OBVIOUS DISEASES

B. “STDs” (1 Cor. 5:1-13)

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Disclaimer: *As may be surmised from the title, this morning's text, and thus message, deals with a mature and perhaps sensitive subject. While my intention is to address this subject as responsibly as possible, parents need to make their own choice about whether or not to keep their child(ren) for the message this morning.*

INTRODUCTION:

It is no secret that one of the biggest diseases running rampant through and destroying our society today are those which are sexually transmitted (STDs). It is not a subject we talk about very much and, largely as a result, continue to ignore and treat as if it doesn't exist even as it continues to devastate all around us.

As ugly and uncomfortable as it may be, problems like these can only be effectively addressed 'head-on.' To help frame our important lesson this morning, I would like to use the example of one of the most common and historically devastating STDs: Syphilis. Listen to this overview from healthscout.com:

Definition of Syphilis

This sexually transmitted disease (STD), which in its late stages can cause mental disorders, blindness, and death . . .

Description of Syphilis

Syphilis, which is known as the great imitator because it mimics so many other diseases, is making its strongest comeback in 40 years in the U.S.. The surging number of cases reflects social and economic factors like changing sexual habits. . .

Health officials are also deeply concerned about the links between syphilis and AIDS. The open sores of syphilis are believed to make it easier for the AIDS virus to enter the body.

The infection is acquired by direct contact with the sores of someone who has an active infection. . .

Because the early symptoms of syphilis can be very mild, many people do not seek treatment when they first become infected. However, untreated infected people can infect others . . .

Causes and Risk Factors of Syphilis

Unsafe sex is the primary causal factor in contracting primary [syphilis](#).

Symptoms of Syphilis

The first symptom of primary [syphilis](#) is a usually painless open sore called a chancre (pronounced "shanker"). The chancre can appear within 10 days to 3 months (usually 2 to 6 weeks) after

exposure.

Because the chancre is ordinarily painless and sometimes occurs inside the body, it may go unnoticed. . . . If not treated during the primary stage, the disease may progress through three other stages.

Secondary syphilis is marked by a skin rash Because active bacteria are present in these sores, any physical contact - sexual or nonsexual - with the broken skin of an infected person may spread the infection at this stage.

The rash may be accompanied by flu-like symptoms such as mild fever, fatigue, [headache](#), sore throat, as well as patchy [hair loss](#), swollen lymph glands throughout the body, and other problems The signs of secondary syphilis occasionally come and go over the next 1 to 2 years. Like the symptoms of the primary stage, those of secondary syphilis can be very mild and go unnoticed.

If untreated, syphilis then lapses into a latent stage from 15 to 40 percent of those infected go on to develop the complications of late, or tertiary, syphilis, in which the bacteria damage the heart, eyes, brain, nervous system, bones, joints, or almost any other part of the body. This stage can last for years, or even for decades.

Late syphilis, the final stage, can lead to mental illness, blindness, [heart disease](#), and death.

Treatment of Syphilis

In all stages of syphilis, proper treatment will cure the disease, but in late syphilis, damage already done to body organs cannot be reversed.

Prevention of Syphilis

Patients with infectious syphilis should abstain from sexual activity

(<http://www.healthscout.com/ency/68/720/main.html>)

No doubt there are at least a few of us here wondering: “I came to church today to hear the Word of God, not sex ed!” Folks, we may not all be very comfortable with it, but God and His Word ARE very concerned with our understanding and practice in this most intimate of subjects!

As we continue our study through 1 Corinthians and it's application to us today, we come upon a powerful warning that not only does sexually immorality lead to disease in our individual bodies, but in the Body of Christ (His church) as well! And it's causes, nature, effects, and treatment are very much the same as syphilis in the body.

SCRIPTURE: 1 CORINTHIANS 5:1A

PRAYER

1.) THE NATURE OF INFECTION: IMMORALITY (v. 1)

- There is a “*porneia*” problem in the church of Christ at Corinth!
- “*porneia*” is a Greek work that is used to refer to any or all acts of sexual immorality.
- In this specific case, Paul refers to the existence of a member of the church who is known to be living in a sexual relationship with his step-mother.
- Even in a perverse, pagan, sex-saturated society as Corinth, this was considered unacceptable.

- **Leviticus 18:8** clearly forbids this. Even Roman law banned it.
- And, yet, Paul points out how the city's Body of Christ is widely known to be guilty of a perversion that even the unregenerate, God-less pagans consider 'untouchable'!

2.) THE BODY'S RESPONSE: PRIDE OR GRIEF? (v. 2)

- As heinous as the nature of this infection in the Body, Paul saves his greatest concern and rebuke not for this individual's gravely sinful behavior, but the even more troubling reaction of the Church to his behavior.
- **Not only** has this thing happened, not only is it widely known throughout the community, not only has this made the community of believers and their testimony a tarnished laughingstock, **but the church takes pride in all of this!**
- Huh? Why? How?
- The Scripture does not specify here, but human nature itself – I believe – provides some likely answers.
- Perhaps the offender, like so many people today, bragged about it as a badge of conquest and proven manhood.
- Perhaps the congregation took great false pride in how they “are so loving and full of grace and mercy” they can accept, love and fellowship with even a sinner such as this one. Perhaps they saw this as a sign of their own spiritual superiority.
- Oh, friends, we may mock and be astounded by these foolish 1st Century Christians but how much different or better are we? How often do Christ's churches and preachers today take great pride in de-clawing, ignoring and even condoning sin in the false name of love and mercy?
- “*We're all sinners.*” “*But for the grace of God, I . . .*” “*All sins are the same, this one is just more socially taboo.*” “*Who are we to judge another?*” “*It's just a mistake; poor judgment*”
- Don't get me wrong, there is great truth in these statements. However, the problem is in properly and fully understanding and applying these truths as they are presented by God.
- **RATHER than boast (even in love, mercy or forgiveness), Paul – inspired by the Holy Spirit – reminds God's people that the ONLY proper response to sin is deep grief!** A grief such as one experiences at the death of a loved one.
- **The problem is NOT that God's people demonstrate love, mercy or forgiveness. The problem IS that they are skipping too many other mandatory steps to get there. As a result, they exercise a prideful love of the flesh rather than a holy love of the LORD.**
- **As Paul will bluntly remind us in the following verses, godly love and mercy toward a sinner can ONLY be righteously extended when it follows grief, repentance and cleansing!**

3.) THE NECESSARY TREATMENT: CUT IT OUT (vv. 3-5)

- There is only one way to deal with such disease – **isolation and eradication!** *Please recognize, I said eradicate the disease, not the patient!*
- “**when you are assembled**” These instructions are given to and expected to be carried out by the church *as a community* – not any individual who takes it upon themselves.
- “**in the name of our Lord Jesus . . . with the power of our Lord Jesus**” *Both the final diagnosis (judgment) and treatment (discipline) are to be carried out in and by Jesus, our Lord.* That is, *not* according to the judgments, feelings, or standards of our own opinions or preferences. But, as Christ's representatives acting in His divested authority, we are commissioned, expected and even ordered to maintain His (not our own) standards and exercise

the appropriate judgment and discipline necessary to do so. Implementing this as a community united in Christ and under the authority of the Word is our 'checks and balances.'

- “**turn that one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh**” This is a phrase that is widely open to misunderstanding if not properly interpreted in the context of Scripture. First, we need to understand that the underlying principle to all of this is that of the individual's spiritual orientation. To “turn over to Satan” is NOT a reference to any kind of imposed enslavement. It's a shortened phrase telling the believers to accept that this individual has clearly made the choice to live under the influence of Satan rather than of God. Similarly, “the destruction of the flesh” does not refer to some kind of physical torture or destruction. Rather, it is a reference toward the sinful nature – an orientation away from God.
- This phrase is Paul's spiritual equivalent to our saying: “*The only way you can help him/her now is to let him/her hit bottom and pray that results in him/her finally seeing reality for what it really is.*” Think of the A&E show, “Intervention.” Acceptance and enablement only makes the addiction worse. If a person refuses to seek or accept help, the only thing left that one can do is let them go and pray the pain of consequences brings them out of it before it's too late.
- “**so that his spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord.**” The purpose of this treatment is not punishment, but salvation and healing!

4.) PREVENTION: MAINTAINING CLEANLINESS (vv. 6-13)

- In vv. 6-13 Paul re-summarizes the principles that need to be learned, remembered and applied from this specific example to any number of others now or in the future.
- He begins by using the analogy of the leaven (yeast) to explain the theological principle that must be understood and maintained: Even a little bit of sin will eventually spread and decay the whole community. Because Christ has already been sacrificed as our Passover Lamb, we no longer have to or should live lives of constantly having to deal with new infestations of yeast. In Christ, we have been freed from sin and should therefore live that way.
- “**not with old yeast, or with the yeast of malice and evil**” Paul adds this to make clear that this principle is not just to be applied to sexual immorality, but to all sins – especially gossip and vindictiveness.
- **vv.9-11** Separation is the only sure way to preserve holiness. If one follows God's standards for sexual behavior, they will never have to worry about getting an STD. Similarly, if we follow all of God's standards of morality, we will never contract a spiritually transmitted disease!
- **vv. 12-13** Paul ends this Scripture with a final clarification. Concerning individual sin, we have no right or authority to judge those outside of the Body of Christ. However, it IS our responsibility to appropriately maintain the integrity and holiness of the Body and those who are part of it – as a community and according to the Word of God!

FINAL ANALYSIS: THE BODY OF CHRIST & STDs

I realize how foreign or strict this may appear to many of us here and today. It is essential that we keep in mind above ALL else, that we do not live in a vacuum. We are a called out (holy, sanctified, ecclesia) people, set apart by the LORD God Almighty in order that we may reflect His holiness amidst the rubbish of this world. We can't do that if we water-down God's holiness or if we live, speak, think, and act the same as everybody else. **Yes, we are saved by grace but, having been saved, we are now called to walk in holiness!**