

A HEALTHY CHURCH IN A SICK WORLD

Jer. 30: 10, 12-13, 15-17 "...I will restore health to you..."

See Hosea 14:4, "I will heal their faithlessness; I will love them (Israel) freely."

Isa. 1:5-7, "The whole head is sick...; your country lies desolate."

INTRODUCTION: In many ways we live in a beautiful world and a beautiful land. The purple mountain majesties and the golden fruitful plains are very real and indeed beautiful. We can see some of the most glorious sunsets right here in Pinellas county Florida as we look out over Boca Ciega Bay and the Gulf of Mexico many days of the year. We have it all here in the United States, between the two great oceans, and between Canada and Mexico -- *towering* trees, Redwood Forests, mighty rivers, lovely lakes, and the flower-decked meadows. ~~Sometimes we think we have it all.~~

But this is also a spoiled and a sick land, like the rest of the world. It is sick with sin, injustice, hatred, intolerance, crime, selfishness and a hundred other sicknesses.

This world system is not merely sick; it is sick unto death. Have you ever been sick unto death, so sick you almost died? When I was about eight years old I had double pneumonia, measles, and what they used to call "whooping cough" all at the same time, and I almost died. For over three days and nights I was unconscious, and my flesh turned an ashen purple color, but my dear Aunt (Penny), a skilled and tireless nurse, and some country doctors, stood beside me, and many good Christians prayer for me that I might be spared to serve the Lord, and their prayers were answered. I remember how I had to struggle and work to learn how to walk again after the worst was over. You can't really appreciate the gift of life until you nearly lose it, or you see someone very dear to you lose it.

There are some sick churches in the land, but to them God says, "I will restore health to you."

I. The Marks of a Sick Church

A. A Church without a Vision

B. A Church without a Mission, without goals, or objectives.

C. A Church without Structure or Organization

D. A Church without leadership

E. A Church without spiritual and material resources.

F. A Church that is living in the past.

G. A Church that is divided and polarized

H. A church that cannot attract, reach, win, challenge, keep new converts and members, and nurture and disciple them to become themselves new soul winners, teachers, and workers in the church.

A church that can not do this, and the other things I have mentioned, is not a healthy church; it needs a good dose of medicine from the Great Physician and a shot of spiritual vitamins from the Holy Spirit!

II. The Marks of a Healthy Church

A. A Church with a Vision and a Dream

B. A Church with clearly specified, locally owned, and clearly communicated goals and objectives. It must know who it is, what it believes and stands for, where it is going, and how it is going to get there.

C. A church that is ready for the imminent return but is also prepared for an extended duration. It has a ministry to its own members and a mission to its times, rather than a church which simply waits for its Lord to return.

D. A church which carefully and patiently develops the organizational structure and resources to carry out its own goals and objectives.

E. A church which attaches the highest priority to securing the right leadership needed to carry out its ministry goals and objectives, from the right pastor, with the right qualifications, training, and experience, to the best qualified and most competent deacons and other officers, to the very last Sunday School teacher, and Church Training, WMU, Brotherhood, Youth workers, leaders, and Musicians and singers. If the church doesn't have the leaders, they will have to be trained and developed. If they are simply not available to be trained, they must be reached, won, and enlisted, then trained.

F. A Church which develops and generates the necessary spiritual and material resources to do this kind of a job for the Lord.

Of course, faith and prayer are necessary.

Of course, the power of God must do the work.

Of course, faithfulness and obedience to God are necessary.

But these things will come with commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. These things will come if Christians put Jesus Christ first in their lives, if they will repent of their sins, and really live in their lives what they profess in their faith.

And God does not withhold his blessings until the last member of the church makes such a dedication.

If He did, we never would have revival!

But He does sometimes wait until a substantial number of people in the congregation make a real commitment and show the Lord that He will have a faithful nucleus of spiritually-minded believers to use as He sees fit.

Nor is the spiritual commitment all that is needed. It is also necessary to have the material resources, the funds, and the consecrated hours, and days, and weeks, and months, of time and service and work necessary to do the job.

Kingdom-building, and church-building, and soul-winning, and Christian service are not easy. No one ever said they were; they weren't meant to be easy or convenient; they bring great blessings and rewards, but not always in this life. You may have to do without some things you wanted to have, in order to be able to give more to the Lord's work. You may have to revise your will, if you really put the Lord first in your life and estate.

G. A Church which works on its responsibilities and ministries to the present generation, rather than looking with nostalgia to the past.

-- Some say, "But that's not the way we used to do it back home in Michigan, or West Virginia, or Oklahoma."

-- Some say, "If things were only more like they used to be way back when..."

-- Some say, "If we only had more preaching on Hell fire, prophecy, sanctification, the Blood, etc., etc., things would be different."

-- Others say, "If we could only have more good old fashioned fellowship, informality, gospel singing, evangelists, guest speakers, and conferences, and concerts, this would solve all our problems, like it did back in the good old days."

What such people don't realize is that they are ill with a bad case of nostalgia, and they are being unrealistic toward the big picture of the church in St. Petersburg, Florida, in our sophisticated, enlightened, urban community in the year 19 . This is not Calhoun County, Alabama, in 189 .

Think about Matthew chap. 25. All 10 of the maidens were ready for the early coming of the bridegroom. But five of them were not prepared for his delayed coming. This can illustrate how some Christians and churches are so ready for the imminent return of the Lord Jesus. If He comes soon they will be ready and waiting for Him, joyously singing their favorite hymns in their Bible Conferences. But if he delays his return, and doesn't come for several more years, they may not be so prepared, because they have no real goal or mission in their life for the Lord.

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They are good at waiting, but not so good at doing something constructive for the Lord as a part of the visible church ministering to its generation. Too bad! Too bad!

God had a plan when He sent Jesus into this sick world, and "Oh the grace that drew salvation's plan!" And the church needs a plan and a program to carry out its mission to its age. I believe such planning, and programing, are parts of God's divine purpose for the church today. Planning does not show lack of faith; just the contrary; it shows how we are going to implement our faith. Programming is not evil; just the opposite; it is our way of going about being obedient to out "heavenly vision."

H. A Church that is united in faith, love, and determination to move ahead in its Christian ministry, service, and witness. — *Regardless of the sinful spirit of our modern age. **

Such a church will let nothing or no one deter it from its appointed task under God as it sees it. It invites Christians of like mind who will support such a healthy community, but it will not change or compromise its beliefs, affiliations, policies, plans, goals, objectives, structure, ministries or programs just because some question them. Those who question and criticize will be invited to listen and learn with an open mind and heart, until, hopefully, they come to share the same dream with the rest of the church, but they will not be allowed to destroy that dream or to divide the church.

CONCLUSION: Would you like to be a part of a forward-moving church like this? If the church isn't all it should be, perhaps you can make it become more of what it should be by God's grace. If you can be happy in such a fellowship of God's people; if you can support the work this church is trying to do for the Lord in this community and city, and if you are a Baptist with your church letter somewhere else, but you live here now, perhaps you should come on promise of your letter and be a part of what God is doing here. If you are a born again Christian but have not been baptized by immersion, think and pray about it; perhaps you should come forward on profession of your faith and as a candidate for baptism, and so come into the membership of this church. If you have never before accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, you can do it right now where you are, and come forward making your first public profession of faith in Him, and accept believer's baptism by immersion as an outward sign of your new faith in Jesus. Do it now as we stand and sing.

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"Why should men love the Church?
Why should they love her laws?
She tells them of Life and Death,
and of all that they would forget.
She is tender where they would be hard,
and hard where they like to be soft.
She tells them of Evil and Sin,
and other unpleasant facts."

T.S. Eliot