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SERMON TOPIC: A HEALTHY CHURCH

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COLOSSIANS 1: 15-20
COLOSSIANS 2: 16-23
COLOSSIANS 3: 11
COLOSSIANS 2: 20-23
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A HEALTHY CHURCH

PRAYER

Gracious and eternal **God** we have come now to hear a word from you. And we ask as always oh, **God** that you would speak to us and speak through us. Teach us to love you more that we may learn to love each other and **Lord** help us to serve you better that we may be willing to serve each other. For it is in thy son's name that we pray, amen.

SERMON

I want to read from Colossians, chapter 2 and I'm going to read just verses 18 and 19. Colossians, chapter 2, verses 18 and 19 and there we simply find these words:

“Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle motions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as **God** causes it to grow.”

Someone once asked the question what makes a church grow. Well according to church growth specialists there are at least 10 factors that must be present in a church before it will grow. You might ask yourself as I go through these how do you think our church measures up in the following areas.

First, we must create a climate of happiness in the church. People must enjoy coming to a church before it will grow. 2, there must be a loving climate. **God** has given the world the right to judge the church by how we love one another. Number 3, the church that would grow must have a bible-centered atmosphere.

Number 4, the members of the church must be enthusiastic. Number 5, there should be freedom rather than formality in the operation of the church. A relaxed atmosphere is essential for meaningful worship, bible study and fellowship. Number 6, the growing church is evangelistic. It must be zealous to win lost people to **Christ**.

Number 7, a growing church is an authoritarian church. Its authority comes from **God**. Number 8, in order to grow a church must be daring. It must be willing to attempt daring and different programs and methods of reaching people. Number 9, a growing church has a great faith. Its members have vision and the faith to make that mission into reality.

Number 10, a growing church is a praying church. We would be better at talking to people about *God* if we were more faithful at talking to *God* about people.

I want to lift up this morning as a subject a healthy church. For you see it's not just enough to grow, you can be growing but you might be growing something malignant. You might be growing something that is unhealthy in the body. So what we want to look at or to consider is what is it that makes a church healthy.

You see Paul here is writing to the church at Colosse and here was a church that had problems with what was known as the Colossian heresy. Paul answered the various tenants of that heresy that threatened the church because there was something in the teaching that was going on, a kind of syncretism had set in.

Now that simply means that the folk there had simply begun to adopt a little of this and a little of that and a little of something else and put it all in the pot and mixed it up together with Christian teaching and say that's what the *Lord* expected.

Paul wanted them to be able to identify false teaching from the truth. And the church, if it is to be healthy, must be able to understand what the word of *God* has to say.

My brothers and sisters, I would argue that the first tenant or the first requirement for having a healthy church is that that church must eat a balanced diet. Just like the health of the body is determined by what we put in it. Many of us are subject to hypertension and strokes, migraine headaches, ulcers and all kinds of other things that are out there because of what we have been taking in over the years. We have not been eating properly.

There's now a big movement on to get back to nutritional value and teaching nutrition. How do you feed the body in order to be healthy? Well just as that applies in the physical realm, I would argue it applies in the spiritual. That a good balanced diet for the church is key to being healthy.

What should we be eating then? We eat the word of *God*. What do you mean? Well *Jesus* said it best man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of *God*. If we want to be a healthy church we must get a steady diet, we must be nurtured on the word of *God*. Babies who start out in the word are given milk. See the word not in its full totality because they can't digest it all but as they grow older.

In other words, you ought to be a little further long in your dietary needs now than you were when you first joined the church. Therefore, if you have come along and been feeding yourself a good steady diet of the word, then your understanding ought to be there.

My brothers and sisters, some of us don't eat a balanced diet. In fact some of us fast when it comes to the word. We might read it on Sunday or look at the passage that the pastor pointed out then we close our bibles when we leave here and that's it. We fast all week long.

Well see if you do that you starve the body from what it needs the most. And I'm not just talking about individual Christians. See too often we individualize everything in the text, it's just a matter of me and my relationship with *God*.

Now we're talking about the relationship of the whole body. Paul was addressing heresy in the church. What were some of the heresy? Well there was a teaching going around that the spirit was good and matter is evil, Colossians 1, 15 through 20. Paul's answer to that was that *God* created heaven and earth for His glory.

Then there was another heresy that said one must follow ceremonies, rituals and restrictions in order to be saved or perfected, Colossians 2, 16 to 23 and 3, verse 11. Paul again responds these were only shadows that ended when *Christ* came.

He is all you need to be saved. So don't let folk go out here telling you you've got to eat certain stuff, you can't eat this, you can't eat that, you've got to act a certain way in terms of following certain rituals and ceremonies. No. You need *Jesus*. That's how you get saved. For salvation is in no other except the name of *Jesus Christ*. There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.

So my brothers and sisters, Paul dealt with heresy. They also taught that one must deny the body and live in strict asceticism, separate one self from everybody, Colossians 2, 20 to 23. Paul's response was that asceticism is no help in conquering evil thoughts and desires. Instead it leads to pride.

How many folk have you met in these other religions or cults who feel as though they are somehow morally or more spiritually superior to you because they adhere to certain dietary laws and because they don't do this or they don't do that? It leads to a king of spiritual arrogance and pride.

So again my brothers and sisters, it's not enough. As he was talking about here in the text another doctrine that was being taught, angles must be worshipped. That's why I'm very critical of the discussion coming out of Hollywood on TV shows about angels. I'm critical because I want to make sure that whatever is being taught conforms to the word of *God*.

Paul addressed this Colossians 2, 18 angels are not to be worshipped. *Christ* alone is worthy of worship. The bottom line is that a healthy church, a healthy church is one that eats a balanced diet and the most balanced thing that I know to nurture the church is the word of *God*.

My brothers and sisters, it's a sad commentary on the church when we can sit up for three hours during a concert but can't sit still for 20 minutes to hear the word of *God* being preached. It's a sad commentary on what we are eating and what we are digesting. The bible says faith comes by hearing, by hearing the word of *God*. It says how shall they hear without a preacher.

It tears my heart when Christians don't want to hear the word of *God* being preached. So again, preaching and teaching the word of *God* is what keeps us healthy when we digest the word of *God* and make it a part of us, we grow in wisdom and in stature and in favor with the *Lord*.

So again, a balanced diet is important for a healthy church. The bible is a balanced book. It presents the good and the bad of human nature. Folk wonder why did the *Lord* have to put that stuff in there about David, that thing about him and Bathsheba. Well the bible doesn't bite its tongue, it tells the truth. But it also lets us know that David prayed and asked for repentance. He said create in me a clean heart O *God* and renew a right spirit within me. David knew how to get on his knees and confess to *God* and admit when he was wrong.

So the bible is a balanced book. It presents the good and the bad. It doesn't promise us that life will be a rose garden when we accept *Christ* into our lives. But it does give us the assurance that whatever we've got to go through *God* will be right there with us, that He will guide us, He will comfort us, He will nurture us, He will strengthen us.

It's a balanced book and we need a balanced diet that consists of the word of **God**. Not only must a healthy church if it's going to be healthy have a balanced diet because some folk can eat all day. I know me, yall I'm talking to me too. Give me the right amount of potato salad and some ribs you know and some collard greens, I eat all day long just picking. But I've eaten. Maybe a little chocolate cake for dessert, glass of milk, I'm straight. Some can eat all day and still not be healthy because they don't have a good heart.

A church in order to be healthy must have a good heart. What do you mean? Well I was looking at Brother Stanley this morning and that's when it kind of connected in my mind. He was talking about prompting, the way the holy spirit can prompt us and it occurred to me that's it. A good heart is one that is compassionate, it is sensitive to the prompting, to the leading of the holy spirit.

See the bible says that we must be wise as serpents but harmless as doves. Our hearts have to be right. The bible says as we think in our hearts so are we. So in other words, what is in my heart is what eventually will work its way out in terms of my actions, how I conduct myself. Either I will whisper behind your back because see that's in my heart or when I love you, I will defend you and I will stand right there with you because it's in my heart.

A good heart is sensitive to the promptings of the holy spirit. I like the way Brother Stanley defined that prompting. He said it comes like a flash, just like that. It's that moment where you may be indecisive and you're not quite clear about which way the **Lord** is leading and then suddenly it hits you and then it's gone. But you know in that moment what you're supposed to do because **God** has now spoken and He says some of us tend to call it intuition. He said redo your vocabulary. I like that. See I was listening to him good this morning.

Because my brothers and sisters, a good heart it isn't about just being a good person, it's about trying to do the will of the father and allowing the holy spirit to lead me in what I am doing. It may mean that I'm doing something different or that I'm doing something we have not done before. But if it is consistent with biblical teaching, if it is consistent with what I know to be the heart of **God** then this is the direction I need to move in because I want to be sensitive to the needs of others.

Some of us will say I love helping people, all they got to do is come and ask me for what they need. But you see sensitivity means I don't have to wait for you to come and ask. Sensitivity means that I'm so in touch with the **Lord** that I have radar out and my radar directs me. The **Lord** directs me to those who are in need and I go to them and say look let me try to help you with this or would you mind or how would you like to do this. In other words, I'm sensitive to the leading of the holy spirit.

Many of us shut it out and you know we can get so good at shutting out the leading or the prompting of the holy spirit that sooner or later we become desensitized to what **God** has to say. That was the problem that **Jesus** had with the Pharisees. You see the Pharisees knew the law, no question about it, they knew the law and they were right up there straight up and down. But **Jesus** said to them you swallow a camel but you strain at a gnat. In other words, you can't see the forest for the trees.

My brothers and sisters, we must learn to be sensitive to the needs of others and be willing to do what we can to help, whatever may be called for. If it means sacrifice, so

be it. For **God** so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that who so ever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

A healthy church is one that has a good, strong heart. That means that the holy spirit has to clear, the blockages in the arteries that keep the blood from flowing to the heart. Sometimes we get stuff in the way, our own agendas, our own perspectives, our own thoughts or the world's thinking, whatever it is we put that in the way and it blocks the flow of blood so that eventually the heart will constrict or it will stop pumping and the church can have a heart attack.

My brothers and sisters, we need to have a balance diet but a good heart. A good heart is one where the holy spirit is evident. It doesn't have to mean that we're shouting all over the place all the time, everybody is running all around, you know I grab the mike and run up and down the aisle a couple times and shout and do a couple of pirouettes and turn around, yall get up there and then we go home oh child we had church this morning. No. Sometimes **God** can come in a still, small voice and speak to your heart and give you little push, a little nudge, that prompting and you know that it's the **Lord** talking.

Sometimes we know it's the **Lord** but we want to challenge it because it goes against the grain of what we think ought to be done. But again the test is, is it consistent with the teaching of scripture. We've almost elevated that WWJD to the level of cliché now. Everybody is familiar with what would **Jesus** do. But that actually come out of a book by Charles Sheldon and it had to do with imitating **Christ**, it had to do with wanting to be more like him, it was called In His Steps.

It was a devotional that was designed to help us to see things more like **Christ**, let this mind be in us which was also in **Christ Jesus** so that you as my neighbor or you who may think you are my enemy or whoever it is that I come up against, I have to ask in dealing with the various situations that life throws at me what would **Jesus** do. That's the background context for that. How would **Jesus** respond in a situation like this? How would **Jesus** determine what is best for all in a situation like this? That ought be what governs how we do what we do.

Then somebody turned it around and said DJWW, the devil just won't win. I like that. I like that because I'm not going to give the devil an on tray into my life or into the church. You heard the text that was read earlier by Reverend Phillips that had to do with **Jesus** when He came into the coast, He was talking to the disciples, He asked them who do men say that I am. In other words, what are they saying about me out there, what are the census, the polltakers saying.

The republican convention is coming, everybody is talking about the polls and who's leading, we got an election in November. Well biblically here **Jesus** was taking a random sample and He was asking the question who do men say that I am. There's a whole lot of stuff floating around out there, some say that you're Elijah, some say you're John the Baptist or one of the prophets, you've come back.

Then finally **Jesus** said all right now let's get to the real deal, who do you say that I am. That's the question that we've got to answer today who do we say that **Jesus** is. Of course Simon Peter ever present, ever with an open mouth says to him you are the **Christ**, the son of the living **God**. And before He could get puffed up and proud for having given that answer see because yall know how we would get, **Jesus** could say okay, that's good, that's the right answer.

The first think we would say is see that I'm bad, I read my bible, I know the word, I'm up on this. No. See before he could even get to that *Jesus* simply said to him and let me say this flesh and blood did not reveal that to you, you could not have arrived at that on your own but by my father who is in heaven. And He said not only that, on this rock, He said you're Peter little rock. But on this rock, me big rock, I will build my church.

So the builder, the architect, the designer of the church is *Christ* and the church is founded on him. So we are members of His body. As Paul points out in Corinthians, chapter 11 that we are all members of the body. Some are fingers, some are hands, some are part of the neck, some are arms, some are a leg, but we are all still a part of the body and we all have a contribution that we can make in helping our church to grow and stay healthy. But we've got to make sure that the heart is right, that the heart is right, that the heart is right.

It's a bad, dangerous combination when you've got an educated head and unregenerate heart. That's a bad combination. It's also a bad combination when you've got a regenerate heart and an uneducated mind, you just don't know what you're doing so you're just following anything because it sounds good. Now you've got the spirit in you, you want to clap, shout and run. But you don't know what you're running for. The head and heart must work together.

That leads us to the final point, a healthy church must have a good head and the head of the church is *Jesus Christ*. My hope is built on nothing less than *Jesus'* blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame but I'll wholly lean on *Jesus'* name.

My brothers and sisters, how do you make a healthy church? What does it take to make a healthy church or a great church? It's not soft sets and subdued light, but courageous leadership. Not sweet tones on the organ, but sweet personalities. Not tall towers, but lofty vision. Not a big budget, but big hearts. Not the money received, but the service that is rendered. Not a large membership, but *God's* presence in the membership.

If you only got two or three *Jesus* said I will be there in the midst of them. It's not what we've done in the past but what are we doing right now for *Christ* and what will we do in the future that reflects His glory. That's what determines the greatness or the health of the church.

When we look at the book of Revelations letters were sent to seven different churches and the very first church, the church at Ephesus that at one time was a church on fire for the *Lord*, a church that dotted every I and crossed every T was found to be guilty of one thing. They had left their first love. They had forgotten about *Christ*. They had forgotten about that which they were founded upon and so again the challenge for them was to repent and to recover that which they had lost. The sad story is they never repented and they never recovered and the church went out of existence.

My brothers and sisters, what is required for a healthy church? A balanced diet consisting of the word. Now we might add with that prayer, prayer ought be a part of your diet. You need to let *God* talk to you through the word and you need to talk to *God* in prayer and *God* will talk to you. Get a dialogue going.

Then you might even add to that sing a song every now and then. When you're feeling a little down, it's all right, either turn to the scripture and recite the *Lord* is my shepherd, I shall not want or you can sing why should the shadows fall and why should

my heart feel lonely and long for heaven and home when **Jesus** is my portion, my constant friend is He. His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches me. You can sing a song.

So you've got word, you've got prayer, you've got song, that's a balanced diet. Then you might add to that testify. You might want to say a word on behalf of the **Lord**. If **God** has been good to you then you ought to want to tell somebody about it. I can't keep it to myself. I've got to let somebody know that **God** has been good to me.

So now my diet is getting a little more well rounded here, I've been digesting the word and I have been praying and talking to **God**, I've got a song in my heart and now I've got a testimony to give on His behalf. I'm willing to go where **God** wants me to go and do what **God** wants me to do.

A balanced diet, a good heart and a good head. **Jesus Christ** is the only foundation, the only head of the church. **Jesus Christ** is the alpha and the omega. He is the first and the last. He is the foundation upon which we stand. He's the one who died that the church might be born and rose again that the church would have hope that extends beyond the grave.

Oh, my brothers and sisters, **Christ** is the head of the church. There is no other head. Oh, we have titles and positions that **God** has given us. **Christ** is identified as the shepherd, pastor as under the shepherd. But **Christ** is the shepherd. So He is the head of the church and we must never ever forget this is His church. Not mine, not yours, but His. He's the only one who gave His blood that the church would be born. He's the only one who will come back to rapture the church to be with him. He's the one who will come to you in the midnight hour and comfort your heart, dry your tear stained eyes. He's the one. **Christ** is the head of the church.

My brothers and sisters, may we never forget that, that we must make our appeal to him. If there's anything we doubt, anything we have questions about, anything about which we are unsure, we must go to him in prayer. We must go to him in His word and let His word speak to us. This is what we must be founded upon.

As I said before my hope is built on nothing less than **Jesus'** blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame but I'll wholly lean on **Jesus'** name. It's on **Christ** the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. His oath, His covenant and blood support me in the whelming flood. When all around my soul gives way He then is all my hope and stay. It's on the solid rock I stand. When He shall come with trumpet sound oh may I then in him be found. Dressed in His righteousness alone faultless to stand before the throne. It's on **Christ** the solid rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand.

It doesn't matter how smart I think I am, it doesn't matter how many positions I have and where I serve and where I go, what's important is to remember that **Christ** is at the head. I must remember that not just in lip service but in deed and in the way that I live my life. I want to live so **God** can use me.

Paul said I am crucified with **Christ**, never the less I live. Yet not I but **Christ** lives in me and the life I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the son of **God** who loved me and gave himself for me.

The doors of the church are open. The invitation for Christian discipleship is now extended.