

Sabbath School Today **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

Health and Healing **Lesson 13: “Social Support: The Tie That Binds”**

On a flight to Israel a few years ago a conference president saw me reading the book *Corporate Repentance*. [1] He asked, What is corporate repentance? At the time the best response I could offer was: I don't know, that's why I'm reading the book. Little did I realize that the biblical concept of corporate repentance was the key to authentic interaction between such diversionary peoples within the church.

There is a yearning in Evangelical circles for such authenticity in church life. God meant for Seventh-day Adventists to lead the way. Now it seems that scholars such as Mark J. Boda are writing about the biblical doctrine of repentance in order to lay a foundation for such an experience within the Christian church. [2]

Jesus intends for the Laodicean church to be the leader demonstrating genuine social interaction in the world. It is the consequence of heeding His appeal to “be zealous therefore, and repent” (Rev. 3:19).

Righteousness that is motivated by self-centered fear of hell and hope of heavenly reward produces division in the church. Its fruit is a critical spirit, judgmentalism, and elitism. For example, a worldly adorned woman went to church on Sabbath morning and the “greeters” immediately tagged her with a “visitor” sticker so that everyone would know she wasn't one of them.

A. T. Jones, one of the Lord's “messengers,” sensed the self-inspired mainspring of the work when he said: “Why should we not honor Him instead of ourselves? Shall I not honor Him instead of myself? It is not individual confession that is wanted so much as a General Conference confession. It is a General Conference clearing of ourselves that is needed.” [3]

An individual concern for our own salvation is good. If one is preparing to die, by all means, make confession of personal sin; but it will never produce a body of believers who stand united and face their final examination before translation at Christ's second coming. Jesus says what is needed is for “the angel [the leadership] of the church of Laodiceans” to “be zealous therefore, and repent.” Jones captured the idea with his expression, “a General Conference confession.”

We are all born into this world with an innate, natural self-love. It is this sinful nature which has the potential of producing all the sin that exists in the world from A to Z. If it were not for the restraining powers of God's grace, any individual saint or sinner, would, given the right circumstances and opportunity, commit the crimes of another. [4] In the

cosmic Day of Atonement, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring this to our attention so that we may intelligently confess such unknown sin by appreciating how much it cost the Son of God to die for that sin on His cross.

No one is made of any better material than another. When this recognition sweeps across the world church, the “caring church” will be a reality. Relationships will be genuine. Friends will be open and vulnerable to one another. Acceptance of the outsider will be spontaneous. There will be a sudden in-rush of newcomers that the Lord Jesus can entrust to His people. [5] Such repentance of the body will be the greatest incentive for evangelism that the world has seen.

It was Jesus Himself, who originated this kind of social interaction and evangelism. His repentance was no sham act on the banks of the Jordan when He requested of John the Baptist the baptism of repentance. Jesus’ incarnation necessitated Him taking a “self” like we all have (John 5:30). This meant that He was truly “tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). He could have sinned. For this reason, He humbled Himself in prayer, fasting, and repentance in order to keep “self” under the principle of the cross—self-denial.

Jesus knew what was in man, because He was one with us (John 2:25). He didn’t need anyone to tell Him what potential existed in the self-motivations of mankind because He took a “self” like we have and continually repented on behalf of sinners. He felt the need for personal repentance in order to keep from sin that He might say, “not as I will [ego desires], but as Thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39). This made Him sympathetic with individuals so that He might impart aid to them in time of need. People were drawn to Jesus because He was “real.”

It was at Pentecost that eleven disciples fully appreciated the cross. They saw what in their ignorance they had not perceived beforehand. The love of Christ revealed in the cross produced a spontaneous repentance for sin that resulted in church unity. An authentic body healed of its disease became the agency through which the Holy Spirit was manifested in the early rain. A socially united body was a fit vessel to receive the evangelistic fruitage of diverse converts.

The Apostle Paul’s divinely inspired metaphor of the church as a body in 1 Corinthians 12 fully expresses the harmonious interaction of its members under one Head who is Christ. There is (1) corporate unity of the “one body” (vs. 13); (2) corporate diversity of various “members” (vss. 15-18); (3) corporate need (vss. 21, 22); (4) corporate balance (vss. 23, 24); (5) corporate care (vs. 25); (6) corporate suffering and rejoicing (vs. 26).

The Lord Jesus comes to His people in the 1888 message as a Lover and not a Lawgiver, in order to present the claims of the cross. The message to the Laodiceans is a heart-warming, heart-reconciling appeal to return to their first love. The ultimate meaning of the cross is the cleansing of the sanctuary. Jesus shows the cross as the way to being at-one-in-heart with God. When once alienated hearts are turned to God, there is harmonious and united interaction within the body. In other words, faith that is

motivated by God's self-giving love is true righteousness. The righteousness is 100% His.

The healing and health of the church can only come about by the restorative power of the cross. The integrity of the church lies in the pathway of Christ's gift of corporate repentance.

—Paul E. Penno.

Endnotes:

[1] Robert J. Wieland, *Corporate Repentance* (Glad Tidings Publishers: Berrien Springs, MI, 2002).

[2] *Repentance in Christian Theology* (Liturgical Press: Collegeville, MN, 2006). Mark Boda is a professor at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

[3] A. T. Jones, "General Conference Proceedings," *The Daily Bulletin of the General Conference* (Worcester, MA: Feb. 24, 1899, p. 3).

[4] "God's law reaches the feelings and motives, as well as the outward acts. It reveals the secrets of the heart, flashing light upon things before buried in darkness. God knows every thought, every purpose, every plan, every motive. The books of heaven record the sins that would have been committed had there been opportunity. God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing. ... He reveals to man the defects that mar his life, and calls upon him to repent and turn from sin (*Signs of the Times*, July 31, 1901; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1085).

[5] "If the churches expect strength, they must live the truth which God has given them. If the members of our churches disregard the light on this subject, they will reap the sure result in both spiritual and physical degeneracy. And the influence of these older church members will leaven those newly come to the faith. The Lord does not now work to bring many souls into the truth, because of the church members who have never been converted and those who were once converted but who have backslidden. What influence would these unconsecrated members have on new converts? Would they not make of no effect the God-given message which His people are to bear?" (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 370, 371).