

Corporate Repentance

Lloyd Knecht

5. The impression should not be given that Ellen White ever called for corporate repentance in respect to the events in 1888 or 1893, or that the general conference administration of O.A. Olsen took the same position in regard to Jones and Waggoner as the Butler/Smith administration. The 1888 conflict witnessed a turnover in the leadership of the church because of problems relating to the Minneapolis meeting. The new administration gave preeminence to Jones and Waggoner throughout the 1890's. After 1888 it was Smith and Butler who were on the "outs" with the General Conference administration. Ellen White continued to call individuals to repentance, but did not call the denomination to repentance.

In 1901 Ellen White called for the corporate body of the Seventh-day Adventist to repent for its attitudes, actions, and inaction in regard to the message proclaimed to the General Conference session and pre-session in 1888.

What has been the history of this people and this work since that time. Where do we stand now in reference to this message? How far has that truth been received – not simply assented to but actually received – not far, I tell you...For the past thirteen years this light has been rejected and turned against by many, and they are rejecting it and turning from it today; and I say to every such one, "Beware lest that come upon you which was spoken of the prophets, Behold ye despisers and wonder and perish."

What is the remedy? - The very same as of old, and no other, repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. When John the Baptist came to prepare the way of the Lord under those circumstances that I have set forth, what was his message? 'Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. When Christ Himself appeared, and began His work, what did He say? – 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel'...What are the messages to the churches? – 'Repent, repent, repent'. What is the message to the Laodicean church? – 'Be zealous therefore and repent.'" (1901 General Conference Bulletin, p. 321; compare 8T097, 98, '104-106)

In "Presidential Perspectives – Corporate Identity and God's Blessing", August 8, 2011, Ted Wilson makes a compelling case of how leadership interacts with membership in corporate action to either reject truth or corporately repent. He cites biblical examples of corporate repentance of leadership or of laymen. "God deals with His church today as a corporate body. If we are to receive the latter rain of the Holy Spirit today the body and leadership must be on the same page."

He quoted from Desire of Ages, pp. 737-738, "Thus by choosing a heathen ruler (Caesar), the Jewish nation had withdrawn from the theocracy. They had rejected God as their king. Henceforth, they had no deliverer. They had no king but Caesar. To this, the priests and teachers had led the people. For this with the fearful results that followed they were responsible." So we see that a call for leaders to repent is an urgent call for leaders to model and lead the entire church in corporate repentance. Private sins are privately acknowledged and public sins are publically acknowledged.

In a letter to O.A. Tait, August 27, 1896, Ellen White had this to say in regard to General Conference President O.A. Olsen, "I feel very sorry for brother Olsen. I have written him with regard to the situation. (letter May 31, 1896) He has written back to me, thanking me for the timely letters, but he has not acted on the light given. The case is a

mysterious one. While travelling from place to place he has linked with him men whose spirit and influence should not be sanctioned, and the people who repose confidence in them shall be misled...He has given unmistakable evidence that he does not regard the testimonies which the Lord has seen fit to give His people as worthy of respect or as of sufficient weight to influence his course of action.”

Ellen White appeals to the church, “At every advance step in Christian experience our repentance will deepen. It is those whom the Lord has forgiven, to those whom He acknowledges as His people, that He Says, ‘Then you shall remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loath yourselves in your own sight,’” (COL, pp. 160, 161)

Job, who God said was “blameless and upright”, had this experience when God revealed Himself in ways Job had not considered, “I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you. Therefore I repent in dust and ashes. (Job 1:8; 42:5)

Daniel experienced this repentance for NehJudah, “O Lord, according to your righteousness, I pray let your anger and your fury be turned away from Your city, Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because of our sins, and for the iniquity of our fathers.” (Daniel 9:16)

Further study: www.gospelstudygroup.org of March 2012; *Corporate Identity and God's Blessing* by Ted Wilson; *Return of the Latter Rain* by Ron Duffield; *Corporate Repentance and the Latter Rain* by Raymond Joseph; *Corporate Repentance* by Robert J. Wieland, Glad Tidings Publishers, Berrien Springs, MI 49103; Nehemiah 1 and 9; 1 Kings 18.