

## PATH TO CHRISTLIKE LOVE II

By Paul Penno Jr.

September 26, 2012

A fresh telegram from Heaven could not be more direct and arresting than Jesus' message to us: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent." (Rev. 3:14-21)

We have never properly responded. One reason: our sinful nature instinctively recoils against His kind of love—the chastening kind: Another reason may be that we have not grasped what His call to repent means.

Since He addresses "the *angel* of the church of the Laodiceans," it must be more than individual or personal repentance that He calls for. Yet there has been impressive resistance to the idea that "the *angel* of the church" needs to repent.

Like a massive blood transfusion, a new idea has now permeated the church: it is impossible to attain a truly Christlike character, even by His grace, so why repent of failure to reach an impossible goal? The bottom line, of course, is anti-repentance, but this involves conflict with Christ Himself. Could this mean that we have slipped on to the wrong side of the great controversy?

### **What is Bible repentance?**

The NT *metanoia*, implies a change of mind about sin. Once we loved it; when we repent, we hate it. And, of course, a true change of mind means a change of direction forthwith. Hence the common definition of repentance as turning around to go in the opposite direction.

This is fine, provided we also appreciate the NT definition of what the sin is of which we must repent. Sin is a state of being in disharmony with God, alienated from Him and at heart enmity with His righteousness. It runs deep. If we'd like to know our true state of harmony or disharmony with God, we can read Christ's sermons and parables in the four gospels. For example, "Love your enemies." "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth." "Sell what you have and give alms." "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Apparently He has meant business all along because He tells the loveless lost at last, "Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me." Repentance means to stop playing games and listen to Him seriously. (Mt. 5:44, 6:19; Lk. 12:33, 9:23; Mt. 25:45)

### **Does the Lord ask only for individual repentance?**

He speaks "unto the *angel* of the church of the Laodiceans." He explains, "The seven stars . . . in My right hand . . . are the angels of the seven churches," that is, the leadership of those churches. Individuals compose leadership but leadership is always a corporate entity. In the case of the seventh church, it is also a denominational entity, otherwise Seventh-day Adventists have been pathetically mistaken about who they are for over a century. As a corporate and denominational body, we are Laodicea; and we are called to "repent" as such. (Rev 1:20; GW 13, 14; AA 586; 9T 19)

### **What is corporate repentance?**

The word “corporate” has nothing to do with legal or committee organization. It is strictly a Biblical idea having its source in Paul’s brilliant chapter on the church and its members being united with Christ. The church is “the body of Christ,” “not one member but many.” “As the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.” (1 Cor. 12:12-14)

There is no English word to describe this; hence we must use a Latin derivative, corporate, which comes from *corpus*, “body.” It is impossible to appreciate what mature union with Christ or reconciliation with Him means (the “final atonement,” in other words) without grasping Paul’s idea. “All the members . . . being many, are one body” means they bear a corporate relationship to one another. “We were all baptized into one body” describes the *corporate unity* of the church.

But there is more than unity: “the foot, . . . the ear, . . . an eye, . . . God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.” Here is *corporate diversity*. “The eye cannot say to the hand. ‘I have no need of you.’” Here is *corporate need*. No one member can despise another.

God has built something else into the body: “God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body.” Here is *corporate balance*. The purpose? “That the members should have the same care for one another” as the parts of a human body have a *corporate concern*. “If one

member suffers, all the members suffer with it.” Here is *corporate pain*. “If one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.” Here is *corporate joy*. (1 Cor. 12:15-26)

The whole functions as “the body of Christ,” He being the head. A paralyzed body does not obey the impulses of the head, for it is sick. If the corporate body of Christ does not carry out the will of its Head, its sickness is what the Bible calls sin. It is both an individual and a corporate guilt. The remedy has to be both individual and corporate repentance. Christ’s call to Laodicea to repent is the last in the Bible; it is the focal point of Revelation. All the victories that follow assume an overcoming, repentant, reconciled remnant church at-one-with Him in a heart and life commitment that is complete. It is a growing up into Christ that is symbolized by the Bride making herself “ready,” no longer content to remain the self-centered child she was. (Rev. 19:6-9) It is no secret that Satan would like to sabotage such a vindication of Christ.

The human body illustrates this inspired corporate relationship. If you stub your toe on a sharp rock, your whole body feels the pain and sympathizes with the injured member. If it could speak, the leg would share the guilt of projecting the toe against the stone; the other leg wishes it had taken more of the weight so as to lessen the injury; the eye wishes it had been more observant; the hands cooperate by rubbing the wounded toe; the whole body halts to care for its injured member.

An infected anopheles mosquito in bites the finger and the resultant disease of malaria affects

more than the finger, because the blood stream carries the parasites throughout my body. One comes down with a *corporate disease*. The medicine taken provides a *corporate healing*.

Sin is a *corporate disease* of the human race which is represented in Scripture as “one man” infected by it, for “in Adam all die.” “By the one man’s offense death reigned.” Apart from Christ, no human being is intrinsically better than another for “all alike have sinned.” We need the imputed and imparted righteousness of Christ 100%. But we instinctively recoil against this, for we feel that surely we have *something* good in us. But Scripture is emphatic: “In me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells.” This means that the sin that another human has committed, I could commit if Christ had not saved me from it. The righteousness of Christ cannot be a mere adjunct to our own good works, a slight push to get us over the top. Our righteousness is all of Him, or it is nothing. This was the stumblingblock in 1888 and still scandalizes many today. Apart from the grace of a Saviour, the sins of the whole world could be mine if I had the “opportunity” to be in the shoes of other people, to be tempted as they in their circumstances.

This idea is impressively stated by Ellen White: “God knows every thought, purpose, every plan, every motive. The books of heaven record the sins that would have been committed had there been opportunity.” (5BC 1085) Do those computer records show sins that do not in fact exist deep down in our hearts? If so, God is terribly unfair, “imputing” unto the world “trespasses” of which they

are not guilty. That would be the opposite of what Paul says He does. There is indeed abundant forgiveness and heart-cleansing with Jesus, but He cannot “cleanse us from all unrighteousness” unless we “confess” it with understanding; and we cannot confess it unless we realize it. We have something yet to learn.

Those sins “that would have been committed had there been opportunity” which we have not repented of, represent our unrealized guilt. Other people have committed them and we have been thankful that we have not been pressured sufficiently by temptation to do them ourselves. But Luther wisely says that we are all made of the same dough, alike. It follows that corporate repentance is repenting of sins that we would have committed had we had the opportunity. This goes rather deep.

Wesley said of a drunk in the gutter, “There but for the grace of Christ am I.” When the church learns to appreciate such contrition, Christ’s love will course through its veins and transform it into a truly “caring church,” the most effective soul-winning “body” history has ever known. (Zech. 8:20-23; GC 611, 612)

This is because such repentance alone can enable one to love his neighbor as himself, not in the sense of excusing or palliating his sin in that we know we could be as guilty as he (this lowers Christian standards), but because such repentance includes an effective cleansing from the defilement of the sin itself. Such love goes far beyond a sentimental sympathy, for it becomes an effective cooperation with Christ in reaching the heart with

redemptive, cleansing power. The Head at last finds “members” prepared to be His effective agents in actually saving people. Never does corporate repentance encourage the slightest “holier-than-thou” spirit. In a time of widespread lowering of standards and tragic failures, “sighing and crying” for the “abominations” in the land becomes a negative and helpless hand-wringing unless it grows out of a corporate sense of the weakness and guilt that we all in truth share. Corporate repentance automatically eliminates the schism of the “us” versus “them” mentality. It is the true path to heart-unity.

### **How can we repent of sins that other people committed long ago?**

The “body of Christ” is vertical as well as horizontal. It embraces all who have been its members in the past and all who will be in future. Understanding the past is essential to understanding the present and preparing for the future. Those who do not know history are fated to repeat it. We cannot truly understand ourselves unless we understand our predecessors.

There is a sense in which “all the world” has become “guilty before God.” (Rom. 3:19) In a very real sense, each of us is guilty of the crucifixion of Christ because our “carnal mind is enmity against God” and “whoever hates his brother is a murderer” automatically.

None of us were born at the time the Romans and the Jews crucified Christ. Someone may say, “Thank God: I don’t know what I would have done.” Paul tells us what we would have done, apart from

repentance: “all the world” is “guilty.” All lions are by nature man-eaters; all they need is the right circumstances to kill humans if desperate hunger grows strong enough.

### **How can we be guilty of sin as a church or corporate body?**

“There is a terrible amount of guilt for which the church [Seventh-day Adventist, context] is responsible.” (5T 457) Not until “there was no remedy” for their continued apostasy did the wrath of the Lord at last arise against ancient Judah. (2 Chr. 36:16) Then began the tragic history of the cruel world empires, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. In a sense, the guilt of ancient Israel is responsible for the rise of those empires. (cf. 4BC 26-32)

Ellen White discerned truth. The great gospel commission could have been completed before the horrors of World Wars I and II were unleashed on the world. (GCB 1893, p. 419; EV 696) The reason is that the 1888 message was the “beginning” of the Latter Rain and the Loud Cry; she says it was “to a large degree” rejected by the leadership of the church. Thus those who fervently believed in the doctrine of the second advent actually delayed it for generations. The sorrow of “what might have been” filled Ellen White’s soul with anguish.

If we were to have another 1888 Session where the Holy Spirit manifested Himself as the Latter Rain, would we again insult Him? Unless there is repentance for doing it the first time, the answer has to be yes. We must repeat the mistakes of our brethren of the past so long as we do not

welcome a corporate repentance that cleanses us from every similar “purpose” or “motive,” however deep. The Pharisee prayed, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men.” The contrite soul will realize how *like* others he is!

### **What is denominational repentance?**

It is a “body” of believers individually experiencing corporate repentance. As surely as the Seventh-day Adventist denomination is the “remnant church” of prophecy, the Laodicea of Revelation, so surely will such repentance permeate that “body” in the time of the “final atonement.” The heavenly angel predicted an event that had never before taken place: Unto “two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.” (Dan. 8:14) The books of heaven can not be cleansed of the record of our sins until our hearts are cleansed. The righteousness by faith issue thus comes into focus: justification *by faith* is more than a mere legal declaration; it makes the at-enmity soul to be at-one-with-God. Daniel’s prophecy requires it.

Is such a repentance possible? Will God ever have a people who have so learned contrition that they feel that all the sins of the human race could be theirs but for the grace of a Saviour, and who thus stand before the Throne “cleansed”? Will He have a people who recognize their 100% need of the imputed righteousness of Christ, who fully realize what they would be without it?

Some sadly say no; ancient Israel failed, and so must modern Israel. But the bottom line of Bible prophecy says: “Then the sanctuary *shall be*

*cleansed.*” Zechariah foretells an experience of corporate denominational repentance, followed by a glorious experience of cleansing. (Zech. 12:7-14; 13:1) Such an experience permeating the church is denominational repentance. Christ calls for it in His message to Laodicea. Isn’t it time for us to respond?