

CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

Before we open God's holy word, please join me as we pray for the Holy Spirit to guide our minds this morning as we study a very important topic.

I'd like to begin this morning by asking you a very simple and yet very serious question. Can membership in any denomination or religious organization of any kind save you? And the answer is? NO! And yet many of those same people who would answer no, would argue that if you leave their church, you have apostatized and will be lost if you don't repent and come back. This is a papal teaching by the way, and has no basis in Scripture whatever, and yet Satan has tricked many people today into thinking that this false idea is true, and therefore salvational. And so, people tremble at their leadership who would convey the thought that their eternal life is in jeopardy if they dare to question this false notion.

Allow me to read a couple inspired statements regarding these things. The first is in ***Review and Herald, February 10, 1891***, "We are not saved as a sect; no denominational name has any virtue to bring us into favor with God. We are saved individually as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ." Amen? This is a truth that many church members either purposely ignore or are totally ignorant of, but either way, they do so at the peril of their own souls.

Here's another one from ***Review and Herald, February 14, 1899***, "Accepting new theories, and uniting with a church, do not bring new life to anyone. Connection with a church does not take the place of conversion. To subscribe the name to a church creed is not of the least value to anyone."

And one more from ***Gospel Workers, page 446***, "Church membership will not guarantee us heaven. We must abide in Christ, and His love must abide in us. We must every day make advancement in the formation of symmetrical character. It should be the earnest desire of every heart to keep the church pure, and individually we are to keep our hearts in the love of God, and practice the truth daily, that this may be accomplished." That what may be accomplished? To form the right kind of character that will keep the church pure, and we'll find out why this is an important point as we go along.

Now, let me ask you another question. If being connected to a denomination or a religious organization of any kind cannot save you, can remaining connected to the wrong one cause you to be lost? The answer is yes! This is one of the paradoxes of inspiration. This is one of those subjects that are seemingly contradictory, or opposed to

common sense, and yet is absolutely true, and during the next hour I'm going to give you overwhelming evidence from inspiration that this is absolutely the case.

How often, when you think back on Biblical history, has the majority ever been right? I can't think of even one instance when this has ever been true. If there is one, no doubt it is a rare thing. In the past it has always been the few who have had the courage to speak and step out and follow an unpopular present truth message, and it's no different today.

In *Testimonies for the Church, volume 1, page 321* it says, "In this fearful time, just before Christ is to come the second time, God's faithful preachers will have to bear a still more pointed testimony than was borne by John the Baptist. A responsible, important work is before them; and those who speak smooth things, God will not acknowledge as His shepherds. A fearful woe is upon them."

According to this quote there are two kinds of messages being preached today, pointed and smooth. Which kind did you listen to the last time you went to church? If we go to church week after week and feel no conviction of sin and a desire to change, then there's something wrong. If we just get a warm fuzzy feeling and go away thinking we're just about right, then there's something terribly wrong, and we should be thinking about what can be done to correct this state of things or quit going and find a group that feel their lack and have a desire to become more like Jesus in character so we'll be prepared to go home with Him when He comes.

There are two definitions of the word "pointed" that I find very interesting. The first is "pertinent" and "relevant", sounds to me like that would be a present truth message that applies to today. And the second is "Aimed at a particular person or group." Wasn't that the work of the prophets? This was also Ellen White's work much of the time? As you read the Spirit of Prophecy you will find that her messages through vision were aimed at a particular person or group, and she did this a lot, and it wasn't easy for her to do, and I think this is the reason why a lot of Adventists today have a hard time with her writings, because she was always rebuking sin in the lives of various individuals and churches, and when we apply these rebukes personally where needed, as we should, because that's why they were written, they're not very pleasant, are they?

The definition of the word "smooth" is "nothing disagreeable; nothing that would cause resistance." Many denominations push their ministers to gain as large of an attendance as possible, because the more people, the more money, and a pointed message that causes resistance won't accomplish this goal. There's good reason why we need a pointed, rather than a smooth message today, and I'll read to you why that's true from

Spiritual Gifts, volume 2, page 300, “It is the pointed testimony that will bring the people to decide. A peaceful testimony will not do this. The people have the privilege of listening to this kind of teaching from the pulpits of the day. But God has servants to whom He has entrusted a solemn, fearful message, to bring out and fit up a people for the coming of Christ.”

I would much rather chance the displeasure of men this morning than the displeasure of God, wouldn't you? I would rather have people upset at me now rather than later, if you know what I mean. I don't want someone coming up to me sometime in the near future and say, “You knew these things, why didn't you tell me?” My goal is to be free from all sin, and free from the blood of all men, and I hope that's your goal as well, because anything less than this will cause us to be unprepared for the coming of the Lord.

The title to the message today is “Corporate Accountability,” or we could call it Collaborative Culpability, or guilt by association. This is an area of Bible teaching that many people are totally ignorant of today, and I think for the most part innocently so, but ignorance dear friends, is no excuse when we have all the information available at our fingertips to have an enlightened mind when it comes to these things. I presented this subject several years ago, because I thought it was important for people to know at that time, but today, because of what's happening in the church and in the world at large, I think it's even more important, so I decided it was time to dust off this old sermon and remind you of it once again so you can make sure that you are a part of the remnant spoken of in **Revelation 12:17**.

Corporate accountability centers around an individual being held responsible for the sins of others because of their union or association with them. In other words, any individual who is a member of a group, or a church, or even an employee of an organization, can be held responsible for the sins, or the wrongdoing, committed within that body on a corporate level. Even our civil court system recognizes this truth. You can be prosecuted as an accomplice just by being a part of the wrong crowd, or by withholding information you knew, or should have known as an employee or a member of a particular organization.

So, even if an individual did not personally or physically take part in the wrong committed, depending on the circumstances, they can still be considered an accomplice by virtue of their connection with that organization, and this principle of truth is clearly taught in God's word, whether it involves the sins of the membership or the sins of the leadership. In either case the entire body becomes guilty before God.

This morning we're going to take a look at several illustrations beginning with **Joshua 7:1**. Most of us are familiar with story of Achan. God told the children of Israel not to take any of the spoils of Jericho when God would give them the victory, because these things were to be consecrated to the Lord according to **Joshua 6:18, 19**. But do you remember what Achan did? He disobeyed God's express command and took some of the spoils for himself. He took some clothing, some silver, and some gold, back to his tent, dug a hole and buried it. And as he was wiping the dirt off his hands, I'm sure he must have thought to himself, "There, no one will ever know!" But as it turned out, everyone found out, didn't they?

In **Mark 4:22** Jesus said, "There is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither is anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad." It would be much better for us to confess and forsake our sins now so they can go beforehand to judgment and be blotted out, rather than try to cover them up only to be exposed to the whole universe after it is too late for genuine repentance, wouldn't it?

But here's the question, was Achan the only one held responsible for his sin? One might think so, but notice what **Joshua 7:1** says, "But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against **(who?)** the children of Israel." Notice, this verse says, "the children of Israel committed a trespass" and "the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel" and not just Achan. And not knowing this sin had taken place, Joshua sent 3,000 men to destroy the little city of Ai. And because there was sin in the camp, God was not with them and they were defeated.

Notice what it says in **verses 4, 5**, "So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water."

This was supposed to be an easy conquest, so what happened? Here's what happened: because Israel had gained a victory at the fall of Jericho not long before, the Israelites became self-confident. Even Joshua failed to seek counsel from God before sending out the army. Had they in humility sought counsel from God first, the Lord would have revealed to them that there was sin in camp. Then they could have taken care of this situation with Achan, and God would have been with them to give them the victory with zero casualties.

Now think this through with me for a minute. Why was God's presence not with them when they went up against Ai? Was it because there was a lack of humility on the part Joshua and the military leaders? Or was it because there was sin in the camp? ***Testimonies for the Church, volume 4, page 492*** says, "Shame, defeat, and death were brought upon Israel by one man's sin." You see; it wasn't the self-confidence of the leaders that caused God to withdraw His protection from Israel, His protection was already withdrawn because of what Achan did. It's true, the army self-confidently rushed to the attack without first asking God, but it was Achan's sin; the sin of one man that forfeited God's protection.

Testimonies for the Church, volume 3, page 239 says, "A concealed golden wedge and a Babylonish garment troubled the entire camp of Israel. The frown of God was brought upon the people because of the sin of one man. . . . God would not bless and prosper a people among whom there was even one sinner, one who had transgressed His word. This sinner was not in holy office, yet a jealous God could not go forth to battle with the armies of Israel while these concealed sins were in the camp."

You wonder why the church today is so weak and feckless and unsuccessful when it comes to taking the three angels' messages to the world? It's because there's sin in the camp! Plain and simple. That's why we're still here! A jealous God cannot go forth to battle with the powers of darkness on behalf of the church when sin is not being dealt with; when it's not being dealt with individually, and when it's not being dealt with in the leadership.

At first when the men of Ai chased off Israel and killed those 36 men, notice what it says in **verses 6-11**, "And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads. And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ **(or encircle)** us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name? And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned, **(Joshua should have figured that out)** and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled **(concealed)** also, and they have put it even among their own stuff."

These verses make it clear that 36 men died because of Achan's sin, even though these men did not disobey God themselves. Why then did they have to die? Because Achan, along with themselves, were part of the same corporate body. They were all members of Israel.

Someone who just couldn't accept this idea of corporate accountability once said to me, "those 36 men must have died because they saw Achan take those things from Jericho and said nothing about it." Do you think that might have been true? It sounds plausible. But what does inspiration say?

Signs of the Times, April 21, 1881, "The things which God had cursed, Achan eagerly gathered as a precious treasure, and secreted them in his tent. No human eye saw the act, but the eye of God was upon the sinner, and marked his transgression."

Also, ***Patriarchs and Prophets, pages 494, 497*** says, "God's command had been disregarded by one of those appointed to execute His judgments. And the nation was held accountable for the guilt of the transgressor. . . Achan's sin brought disaster upon the whole nation. **(Now listen carefully to this next sentence)** For one man's sin the displeasure of God will rest upon His church till the transgression is searched out and put away."

Membership in a church, friends, is a serious thing, and we better count the cost before we join one, especially when it looks like things may not be right there. Now let me be clear, there's nothing wrong with holding membership in a church, in fact it's God's plan. The Bible says we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Christian fellowship is God's desire for His people, but before that membership and fellowship takes place, there ought to be a time of probation where the church and the person joining have the opportunity to see if it's a good fit.

This is done all the time when a person applies for a job. There's a period during which a person's behavior or performance on the job is observed to see whether the person does well enough to stay, and if the person himself wants to stay. Doesn't something like this make sense before a person officially joins a church? Jesus said, "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." But too often, checking things out beforehand is not done, and many times either the whole church suffers because the individual is not living the truth, or the righteous person joining becomes accountable because there's sin in the camp.

Jesus is coming back for what kind of church? **Ephesians 5:27** says a church "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." And

so, how important is it to be a member of that kind of church and not one that is full of spots, wrinkles, blemishes and such things?

We're given an example in the second chapter of Acts of a church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing when the New Testament church "were all with one accord in one place," that is, they had put away all sin by repentance and confession and there was a close unity that had never existed among them before, and as a result, what happened? The early rain of the Holy Spirit was poured out and about three thousand souls were added to the church that very day. Not long afterward the devil said, "we can't have any more of this," and in chapter five we have the story of Ananias and Sapphira, two members of the church who had secret sin in their lives, much like Achan, and so this unity wouldn't be spoiled, God removed them because the church was one with God and one with one another. And dear friends, God is going to have a people like that just before Jesus comes that will be pure and holy, and He will pour upon them the latter rain and the last message of mercy will go very quickly like fire through the stubble.

And so, if we're going to be a part of that kind of church, we must be careful and do a little investigation before we join. It would be far better to worship alone, as many people have to do today, and as many have had to do all through history, rather than be joined to a harlot church, because when that happens, **1 Corinthians 6:16** says they become one flesh.

So once a church has done all they can do to make sure they're not accepting or retaining sinners in their fellowship, then God can bless that church. Now we're not talking about thought sins here, because we can't know what's in someone's heart and mind, that's beyond our ability to judge, but we can be fruit inspectors like Jesus said and be filled with the Spirit who will give us discernment to rid the church of those who would cause God's blessing and protection to be removed.

There may have been those in Israel, especially those in his own family, who were aware that Achan had some serious character flaws, we're not told, but dealing with sin in the church is a delicate work and there are certain divine rules and principles that must be followed when dealing with it, which we're not going to go into today, but we should be aware that church membership is something to be seriously contemplated before that step is taken, even if membership is just being transferred from one church to another as is done today without careful inquiry to find out what might be unknown.

Now let me read you something so you don't think I'm just making this up. Notice what it says in ***Review and Herald, January 10, 1893***, "There is one thing that we have no right to do, and that is to judge another man's heart or impugn his motives. But when a person

presents himself as a candidate for church membership, we are to examine the fruit of his life, and leave the responsibility of his motive with himself. But great care should be exercised in accepting members into the church; for Satan has his specious devices through which he purposes to crowd false brethren into the church, through whom he can work more successfully to weaken the cause of God.”

Now back to **Joshua 7:12**, “Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they (**plural**) were accursed: (**and then God says**) neither will I be with you any more (**Joshua**), except ye destroy the accursed from among you.”

Testimonies for the Church, volume 3, page 269 says, “The plain, straight testimony must live in the church, or the curse of God will rest upon His people as surely as it did upon ancient Israel because of their sins. (**Now listen carefully to the following sentence**) God holds His people, as a body, responsible for the sins existing in individuals among them.” Pretty clear, isn’t it? There’s no way to twist that statement around to try to prove that the opposite is true.

Let me give you a few phrases the Spirit of Prophecy uses that are synonymous with the phrase “straight testimony.” It is the “pure unvarnished truth.” It is “plain utterances.” It is “solemn warnings.” It is “to pour forth the straight truth.” It is “to exalt the standard of righteousness.” It is “plain dealing with sin.” It is the “plain sharp truth.” And it is “to call sin by its right name.” In other words, the “Straight Testimony” is to tell it like it is; but we must remember to do it with tears in our voice like it says Jesus did in **The Desire of Ages, page 353** when He uttered His scathing rebukes. That’s something I need to learn to do better, we probably all do.

In **Joshua 7:24-26** it says, “And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. (**Achor means “troubled,” troubled valley, and there’s a good reason for that name as we read what follows**) And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor, unto this day.”

Evidently the character of the father had become stamped upon the character of his children and all that he had. That’s the warning in the second commandment if you

recall, and as a result the whole family was wiped out as an object lesson to the rest of the members of Israel. Sounds pretty harsh when you think about it, but evidently it was necessary to stop this kind of thing from repeating itself. Sometimes God has to destroy the few to save the many, to destroy those who have gone too far in transgression, and that's what He had to do in this instance.

Patriarchs and Prophets, page 495 says, "As the people had been held responsible for Achan's sin, and had suffered from its consequences, they were, through their representatives, to take part in its punishment. 'All Israel stoned him with stones.'"

Let's look at another example in **Jeremiah 32**. In the days of Jeremiah, Israel had apostatized; they committed spiritual adultery by serving other gods. And because they had become like all the other nations around them, and even worse, God commanded Jeremiah to give them the "straight testimony." But the church leaders didn't like the message, can you imagine that? Especially the part about their church falling from God's grace and protection and were about to go into captivity to Babylon.

Notice what it says in **Jeremiah 32:1-3**, "The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar. For then the king of Babylon's army besieged Jerusalem: and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the prison, which was in the king of Judah's house. For Zedekiah king of Judah had shut him up, saying, Wherefore dost thou prophesy, and say, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it."

If we go back a few pages to **Jeremiah 26**, God told Jeremiah to stand at the entrance of the temple and tell all the people who were coming to worship in the Lord's house, probably on Sabbath, something very interesting. In **Verses 4-6** God said to Jeremiah, "And thou shalt say unto them, thus saith the LORD; if ye will not hearken to me, to walk in my law, which I have set before you, to hearken to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I sent unto you, both rising up early, and sending them, but ye have not hearkened; then will I make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth."

Shiloh you'll remember, was the place of worship before Jerusalem. It was destroyed and the Ark taken because Eli's sons, the church leaders, had committed some very grievous sins. Can you imagine God's last day prophet standing at the entrance of the church on Sabbath morning delivering such a message today? "God says if you will not listen to me, his messenger, and walk in My law, I'm done with you people, and your

church will be an example of what I did at Shiloh.” Has this already happened to modern Israel, to spiritual Israel? Since we have to answer for ourselves, I’ll let you be the judge.

Now listen to what the apostate church leaders had to say about Jeremiah’s message in **verse 11**, “Then spake the priests and the prophets (**that would be the false prophets**) unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears.” And you know, this same kind of response comes to anyone who would dare to deliver a similar message to God’s professed church today. “This man is worthy to die!” And if they had the authority, no doubt they would carry it out.

Now, notice Jeremiah’s response in **verses 14, 15 of chapter 7**, “As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves (**and is that all? No!**) ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the LORD hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears.”

So, it wasn’t just the church leaders who would be accountable for his death, but the whole city and all the individuals in the surrounding area. This is another example of corporate accountability. Even though the people in the city and the surrounding area wouldn’t be the ones to put him to death, they would still suffer the consequences of what their leaders wanted to do. I bet there were those in the church that day who knew what their leaders were like and who heard what they were threatening to do, and because no one had the courage to speak up in Jeremiah’s defense, the whole city and those in the surrounding area would be complicit if they went ahead with their plans to kill Jeremiah.

What about the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in **Numbers 16**? Korah, Dathan, and Abiram along with 250 other church leaders decided to rebel against God by disregarding the counsel of His chosen messenger, and as you think about it, it sounds kind of like the history of Adventism, doesn’t it? Anyway, these three rebels tried to get the whole membership to follow them instead of the prophet, and they were doing a pretty good job of it. And in **Number 16:20, 21** it tells us what God told Moses and Aaron to do. “And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.” Here we see that God was going to do away with the whole congregation because of what these three men were doing.

And what did Moses and Aaron do? **Verse 22**, “And they fell upon their faces, and said,

O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation?"

According to what God already said, what would be the answer to this question? The answer is yes, it's called corporate accountability! God doesn't just spout idle words and not follow through, unless, and this is an important point, unless someone pleads with Him to change His mind, and isn't that what Jesus does for us? The wages of sin is death, eternal death, but Jesus paid the penalty on the cross and says, "My blood Father, My blood, My blood," and because of His intercession we can be forgiven and allowed to live, and that's what Moses and Aaron were doing. That's why it's important to intercede on behalf of our loved ones and friends who we know aren't following the Lord, because it can cause God to do for them that which He otherwise could not do. God is a gentleman. He will not force Himself on anyone, but if others are praying and asking for Him to intervene, then He can work.

Let me give you an example. Cindy and I pray for our children and other family members every day, and that gives God permission to work for their salvation in a way that He could not do did we not pray. Why? Because those who are living in sin are Satan's lawful prey, and because of prayer when the Lord comes to the aid of an individual, Satan says, "what are you doing here, God? they didn't ask for your help." Then God can say, "no, they didn't ask, but their parents did, and that's all the permission I need, get thee behind Me Satan." We need to remember this as the reason for intercessory prayer, it's to give God permission to intervene in the life of the one who perhaps doesn't see the necessity of praying for themselves.

In **Numbers 16:24-26** it says, "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the congregation, saying, Get you up from about the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. And Moses rose up and went unto Dathan and Abiram; and the elders of Israel followed him. And he spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins." **In all who's sins?** "In all their sins."

You see, in the congregation there were many who were deceived by these church leaders and would be destroyed right along with them if they refused to separate, isn't that right? At first God was ready to destroy the whole congregation, and then, because of the intercession of Moses and Aaron He gave an object lesson of His mercy for those who would do what He says. Again, this is the same thing Jesus does for us, and this is the reason for this whole scenario, to show us how the plan of salvation works. Evidently

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram had gone too far in their rebellion to turn back, but it wasn't too late for the congregation as a whole.

Notice what it says in *Testimonies for the Church, volume 3, page 354*, "They (**the congregation**) also were in alarming danger of being destroyed in their sins (**the sins of Korah, Dathan and Abiram**) by the wrath of God, for they (**again the congregation**) were sharers in the crime of the men to whom they had given their sympathy and with whom they had associated."

So now we get a clearer picture of what was going on. Because the congregation had lent their support to the rebels by giving them sympathy, and in some cases just by their association, they were guilty. But the congregation finally came to their senses as it says in **Verse 27**, "So they gat up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side: and Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children." They stood there stubborn and defiant, even though the whole congregation decided to separate from them.

Did you notice it only mentions Dathan and Abiram as having their families with them? Why doesn't it mention Korah's wife, and sons, and little children? Were they destroyed along with the rest? **Numbers 26:9-11** gives the answer if you'd like to turn there. "And the sons of Eliab; Nemuel, and Dathan, and Abiram. This is that Dathan and Abiram, which were famous in the congregation, who strove against Moses and against Aaron in the company of Korah, when they strove against the LORD: And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up together with Korah, when that company died, what time the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men: and they became a sign. Notwithstanding the children of Korah died not."

Why didn't they die? Because they separated from the rebellion. Do you think it was difficult for Korah's children to separate from their father? and what does this teach us? It teaches us that we dare not sympathize with sin, even if it involves our own family members. This should be a lesson to us. "These things were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come."

Jesus had some hard sayings in this vein while He was here, and one of them is found in **Matthew 10:37** where He said, "He that loves father and mother more than me is (**what**) not worthy of me: and he that loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Korah's children were spared only because they chose to separate from rebellion and apostasy. They refused to be corporately accountable for the sins of Korah.

Now let's go back to **Numbers 16** and finish the story in **verses 31-33**. "And it came to

pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto **(or were connected to)** Korah, and all their goods. **(Evidently there were those, other than his children in his household that stuck with him)** They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation.”

This is an example of what happens to those who continue to sympathize and associate with apostasy and rebellion after God has said separate from it. The ground may not open up and swallow us today, but in the end our fate will be the same if we make the wrong choice, and we will also perish from among the congregation of the Lord.

Let’s turn now to **Genesis 19** and look at yet another example. Angels revealed to Lot that God was going to destroy the wicked city in which he lived. And they gave him the opportunity to warn everyone who would listen. In **Genesis 19:12** it says, “And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place.”

Let me ask, how successful was Lot? He wasn’t, was he? And herein lies a principle; you can’t pull people out of Sodom if you live in Sodom. It does no good to throw a life preserver to someone when you’re standing on a ship that’s going down. And this principle holds true today regarding churches in apostasy. If you stay you will only add to the confusion that already exists and jeopardize your own salvation. Lot had no business being there in the first place, and he knew it, and he paid the price, didn’t he?

Verse 15 says, “And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.” Question: was Lot a righteous man? Yes! **2 Peter 2:8** says that Lot was a righteous man. But what would have happened had Lot decided to stay? He would have been destroyed, even though he was a righteous man. He would have been eternally lost, even though he was not guilty of personal sin. All his righteousness could not save him if he refused to obey the command to separate, and that brings us to another conclusion: you can have victory over personal sin, but if you fail to separate from corporate sin, you will be destroyed right along with it in the end.

Yet Lot didn’t leave until the very last minute, did he? And because he delayed, he lost his wife. If Lot would not have hesitated, his wife would not have been lost, that’s what it says in ***Patriarchs and Prophets, page 161***, and not only that, but the world would be a better place today. Because of Lot’s decision to delay and the sin of his two daughters and the offspring that was produced by incest, it has contributed to the unrest in the

Middle East till this day. The question is, will anyone be lost because of our hesitancy; because we fail to separate from both personal and corporate sin? I hope not.

Then in **Genesis 19:20-22** Lot begins to plead with the angels by saying, “Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live. And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken. Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.”

Notice, the angel couldn't do the work that the Lord sent him to do until Lot was at a safe distance. And so, who are the ones holding things up today? Isn't it those who are slow to separate from sin and apostasy, both on a personal and on the corporate level? Lot sincerely believed that the small city of Zoar couldn't possibly be as corrupt as Sodom. But notice what it says in ***Patriarchs and Prophets, pages 166, 167***, “Before the destruction of Sodom, God sent a message to Lot, 'Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain (**Notice, “in all the plain.” Zoar was in the plain**); escape to the mountain (**you see, it was God's plan for Lot to go straight to the mountain and not stop over in Zoar, and for good reason**) escape to the mountain lest thou be consumed. There was a coming out, a decided separation from the wicked, an escape for life. So it was in the days of Noah; so with Lot; so with the disciples prior to the destruction of Jerusalem; and so it will be in the last days. (**Or our day**) Again the voice of God is heard in a message of warning, bidding His people separate themselves from the prevailing iniquity. As in the days of Noah and Lot, there must be a marked separation from sin and sinners.” From both personal and corporate sin.

In ***Patriarchs and Prophets, page 459*** it says, “The followers of Christ are to separate themselves from sinners, choosing their society only when there is opportunity to do them good. We cannot be too decided in shunning the company of those who exert an influence to draw us away from God.”

God would have us go into the cities to give a Bible study, but not to live there, and that should have been Lot's attitude toward Sodom instead of moving his family there. But people today say, “Oh, but I'm spiritually strong! No one will ever be able to draw me away from God and the truth!” That's what many of the antediluvians thought a few days before it started raining. Notice what it says in ***Review and Herald, September 15, 1904***, “Those who believed, when Noah began to build the ark, lost their faith through association with unbelievers who aroused all the old passions for amusement and display.”

There could have been way more than eight souls saved in the Ark, but because of worldly associations they missed out. Friends, it is a law of the mind, that by beholding we become changed. Never forget it. If you do the world will creep in, and before you know it you will lose the peculiar character a Christian is supposed to have.

Let me continue on a little farther with ***Patriarchs and Prophets, pages 166, 167***, “There can be no compromise between God and the world. Lot dwelt but a short time in Zoar. Iniquity prevailed there as in Sodom, and he feared to remain, lest the city should be destroyed. Not long after, Zoar was consumed, as God had purposed. Lot made his way to the mountains, and abode in a cave, . . . But the curse of Sodom followed him even here. The sinful conduct of his daughters was the result of the evil associations of that vile place. Its moral corruption had become so interwoven with their character that they could not distinguish between good and evil. Lot’s only posterity, the Moabites and Ammonites, were vile, idolatrous tribes, rebels against God and bitter enemies of His people.”

Wouldn’t it have been better had Lot obeyed the angels’ instructions implicitly right from the start? If he had, his wife would have been saved, and his daughters would not have committed sin by lying with their father, and we would be reading a totally different story about his life today. Lot found out the hard way that one wicked city that was associated with the other made them both corrupt. They were in the same plain, they had close association, and that’s all it took.

And you know what? This same principle holds true today regarding every apostate church and religious organization and institution that are connected through the same corporate structure. Just because we may acknowledge that the big city Adventist churches have gone the way of the world doesn’t mean that the small churches in the country are a safe place to attend and support, because what are we doing when we do that? We’re supporting the whole corrupt system.

Did you know that the Seventh-day Adventist church is a legal corporation? I’m not bringing this up to try to show if it’s right or wrong, but to help you understand the possible consequences of belonging to it. If you are a member, then you are a part of that corporation. So what’s the significance of that? Let me give you the dictionary definition of a corporation. “A corporation is an organization—usually a group of people or a company—authorized by the state to act as a single entity and recognized as such in law for certain purposes.” Remember earlier when I quoted the apostle Paul who said to be joined to a harlot is to be one body with her? The same is true for a corporation.

When you are joined to it you and everyone else in it are a “single entity.” That’s why when one member sins, the whole body is held accountable.

In *Testimonies for the Church, volume 4, page 210* we see that this is absolutely true. It says, “The great heart of the work is at Battle Creek; and, as the human heart throws its living current of blood into all parts of the body, so does the management at this place, the headquarters of our church, affect the whole body of believers. If the physical heart is healthy, the blood that is sent from it through the system is also healthy; but if this fountain is impure, the whole organism becomes diseased by the poison of the vital fluid. So it is with us. If the heart of the work becomes corrupt, the whole church, in its various branches and interests, scattered abroad over the face of the earth, suffers in consequence.”

In the *1888 Materials, page 764* it says, “In our largest churches the greatest evils exist **(and that’s still true today)**, because these have had the greatest light. They have not a true knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent. The leaven of unbelief is working, and unless these evils which bring the displeasure of God are corrected in its members, the whole church stands accountable for them.” You see, it’s not only the local church you attend that you must be concerned about, but what the church as a whole is doing and allowing and teaching.

Now that was written in 1888! What would she say today about what’s going on in the largest churches? In fact, you don’t have to look at the largest churches anymore, because the largest have infected even the smallest because of “the poison of the vital fluid.” It’s the same as what happened to Zoar. Because it was in close proximity to Sodom, it was God’s purpose to destroy it when He destroyed Sodom. The only reason it wasn’t destroyed that same day is because Lot was there. Nevertheless, God’s purpose was fulfilled, even though it was delayed, and the same holds true today.

Let me give you one more illustration, and it’s probably the prime example of corporate accountability, and it’s when Jesus was scourged and crucified. Remember what the Jews said after Pilate washed his hands and tried to acquit himself of all responsibility for what was about to happen? They said, “His blood be upon us and our children.” You wonder why the Jews have had such a hard time all through history? It’s because of the principle of corporate accountability being worked out in their lives, and they have no one to blame but their own ancestors. But the good news is, they can break from that guilt if they so choose by surrendering to the Christ who offered Himself “as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.” **1 Peter 1:19**

It's really a sad situation we find ourselves in today, isn't it? in the world and in the church. Just as the radical liberal agenda has taken over our country, so it has taken over the church, and it's a true saying that says, "as goes the church, so goes the country." The things we see happening in the political arena today are the result of the rejection of the truths of God's word and of the religious leaders who have allowed it to happen, and according to Bible prophecy it's not going to get better. It's time now for the last message of mercy to swell to a loud cry, that the precious few who will listen might be hurried out of the doomed churches as Lot was hurried out of Sodom before it's destruction.

So, what's the point I've been trying to make for the past hour? #1, God is calling us to separate from personal sin by accepting Jesus as a personal Saviour. This is the essence of the third angel's message, the righteousness of Christ in us, better known as righteousness by faith. It's accomplished by allowing the Holy Spirit to work in us, "both to will and to do according to His good pleasure" as we cooperate with God through the exercise of the human will, or our power of choice.

Because listen friends, the devil can't force anyone to sin. All he can do is tempt; transgression is our own act. Want a quote for that? ***Patriarchs and Prophets, page 421***, "The strongest temptation cannot excuse sin. However great the pressure brought to bear upon the soul, transgression is our own act. It is not in the power of earth or hell to compel anyone to do evil. Satan attacks us at our weak points, but we need not be overcome. However severe or unexpected the assault, God has provided help for us, and in His strength we may conquer." Praise the Lord!

So #1, God is calling us to separate from personal sin, and #2, God is calling us to separate from corporate sin wherever it is found. And as we've already seen, this is not a new message, it's always been a Biblical principle. And it's the essence of the fourth angel's message of **Revelation 18:1-5**, which is yet another example of corporate accountability, because the call to come out of Babylon is not so you won't be punished for your own sins, but for her sins! Read it carefully! And when both of these messages of separation from personal and corporate sin are combined into one whole gospel, then you have the sounding of the Loud Cry of the third angel according to ***Early Writings, page 277***. Allow me to read it to you, and we'll close with this.

"I saw angels hurrying to and fro in heaven, descending to the earth, and again ascending to heaven, preparing for the fulfillment of some important event. Then I saw another mighty angel commissioned to descend to the earth, to unite his voice with the third angel, and give power and force to his message. Great power and glory were imparted

to the angel, and as he descended, the earth was lightened with his glory. The light which attended this angel penetrated everywhere, as he cried mightily, with a strong voice, 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.' The message of the fall of Babylon, as given by the second angel, is repeated, with the additional mention of the corruptions which have been entering the churches since 1844. The work of this angel comes in at the right time to join in the last great work of the third angel's message as it swells to a loud cry. And the people of God are thus prepared to stand in the hour of temptation, which they are soon to meet. I saw a great light resting upon them, and they united to fearlessly proclaim the third angel's message.

"Angels were sent to aid the mighty angel from heaven, and I heard voices which seemed to sound everywhere, 'Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.' This message seemed to be an addition to the third message, joining it as the midnight cry joined the second angel's message in 1844. The glory of God rested upon the patient, waiting saints, and they fearlessly gave the last solemn warning, proclaiming the fall of Babylon and calling upon God's people to come out of her that they might escape her fearful doom."

Brothers and Sisters, Adventism is in a crisis situation today, and most don't even know it, because they are not studying for themselves, and I have to ask, where do you stand with God today? Are you separating from the confusion, or are you adding to it by trying to ride the fence? Are you standing firm for Bible principles, or are you hostile against God through indifference and neutrality? Are you giving a "straight testimony," or is your life preaching "smooth things"? Are you giving the trumpet a certain sound, or are you giving a message that's confusing the troops? Is there a clear line of distinction between you and the world, or is the line of demarcation a little blurred?

Friends, the times in which we live demand that we take a clear and decided stand for truth, because not to step out and be counted as part of the Lord's army, is to step into the ranks of the enemy by default. Long ago Jesus said to the Pharisees, "he that is not with me is against me." And that is still a true statement that we would do well to consider this morning.

If you want to be one of those who will be prepared to stand in the hour of temptation, which we are soon to meet, and sooner than we might think, I would ask that you kneel with me as we ask God to help us to live and proclaim the last message of mercy this sinful and wicked world will ever hear.

