

## DEALING WITH THE PAST—PART I

### THE CONCEPT OF THE CHURCH'S CORPORATE HEART

(With quotes from *Healing the Heart of Your Church* by Dr. Kenneth Quick, used by permission)

#### Introduction

In recent decades, the church has rejoiced to rediscover “body-life”—the importance of believers operating with their spiritual gifts and contributing their unique ministries to the church. We need to realize that these same principles must be applied to past or present corporate *sin, sickness, and wounds*.

#### The Biblical Foundation

##### Christ's Teaching

In Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus evaluates the *corporate histories* of the seven churches to which He sent letters. (see attached) He spoke to these congregations about *present spiritual problems rooted in their historical choices*. Christ uses the *singular* pronoun “you” both to commend and admonish each church, and He also expected that each church would respond from its “singular corporate heart.”

In our Lord's view of a local church, individual members recede and He sees a single body—the collective actions and attitudes of church members as a *singular whole*. Christ defines each local church as a single entity with commendable works or failings that require a singular corporate repentance and obedience.

##### Paul's Teaching

The Apostle Paul addressed 9 of his 13 letters to churches with “corporate problems.” Only occasionally does he mention specific problem people. Like North Americans today, the Greeks embraced “individualism” and “democratic philosophies,” and wanted to dismiss the issues as “*Not my problem!*” Paul challenged that as an arrogant attitude to believe that we are not “part of the problem.” (1 Corinthians 5:2) The church at Corinth stepped on the spiritual equivalent of a “rusty nail”—hurtful to a small area, but potentially destructive to the whole. Paul even warned about what would happen if the “corporate body” does not respond—“*Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?*” (1 Corinthians 5:6,7)

Dr. Quick says—“*The spiritual poison kneaded into the corporate body [in the past] still spins out painful repercussions. No one ever led the church to deal with the issue. Whoever should have taken responsibility for these things before God—to confess them corporately and take steps to rectify the damage—never did so. . . Many churches operate by the principle ‘out of sight, out of mind.’ It's not our problem any more. Only that joint and ligament were a part of the local body. Can a church ignore such a problem without corporate effects?*”

## SCRIPTURE LESSONS

Revelation 2

"Write this letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus. This is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lampstands: [2] "I know all the things **you** do. I have seen **your** hard work and **your** patient endurance. I know **you** don't tolerate evil people. **You** have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. **You** have discovered they are liars. [3] **You** have patiently suffered for me without quitting. [4] But I have this complaint against **you**. **You** don't love me or each other as you did at first! [5] Look how far **you** have fallen from your first love! Turn back to me again [**corporately**] and work as you did at first. If you don't, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches. [6] But there is this about you that is good: **You** hate the deeds of the immoral Nicolaitans, just as I do. [7] "Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Everyone who is victorious will eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God. [8] "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Smyrna. This is the message from the one who is the First and the Last, who died and is alive: [9] "I know about your suffering and your poverty—but you are rich! I know the slander of those opposing you. They say they are Jews, but they really aren't because theirs is a synagogue of Satan. [10] Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The Devil will throw some of you into prison and put you to the test. You will be persecuted for 'ten days.' Remain faithful even when facing death, and I will give you the crown of life. [11] "Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Whoever is victorious will not be hurt by the second death. [12] "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Pergamum. This is the message from the one who has a sharp two-edged sword: [13] "I know that you live in the city where that great throne of Satan is located, and yet you have remained loyal to me. And you refused to deny me even when Antipas, my faithful witness, was martyred among you by Satan's followers. [14] And yet I have a few complaints against you. You tolerate some among you who are like Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel. He taught them to worship idols by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual sin. [15] In the same way, you have some Nicolaitans among you—people who follow the same teaching and commit the same sins. [16] Repent, or I will come to you suddenly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth. [17] "Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Everyone who is victorious will eat of the manna that has been hidden away in heaven. And I will give to each one a white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it. [18] "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Thyatira. This is the message from the Son of God, whose eyes are bright like flames of fire, whose feet are like polished bronze: [19] "I know all the things you do—your love, your faith, your service, and your patient endurance. And I can see your constant improvement in all these things. [20] But I have this complaint against you. You

are permitting that woman—that Jezebel who calls herself a prophet—to lead my servants astray. She is encouraging them to worship idols, eat food offered to idols, and commit sexual sin. [21] I gave her time to repent, but she would not turn away from her immorality. [22] Therefore, I will throw her upon a sickbed, and she will suffer greatly with all who commit adultery with her, unless they turn away from all their evil deeds. [23] I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches out the thoughts and intentions of every person. And I will give to each of you whatever you deserve. [24] But I also have a message for the rest of you in Thyatira who have not followed this false teaching ('deeper truths,' as they call them—depths of Satan, really). I will ask nothing more of you [25] except that you hold tightly to what you have until I come. [26] "To all who are victorious, who obey me to the very end, I will give authority over all the nations. [27] They will rule the nations with an iron rod and smash them like clay pots. [28] They will have the same authority I received from my Father, and I will also give them the morning star! [29] Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

### Revelation 3

"Write this letter to the angel of the church in Sardis. This is the message from the one who has the sevenfold Spirit of God and the seven stars: "I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive—but you are dead. [2] Now wake up! Strengthen what little remains, for even what is left is at the point of death. Your deeds are far from right in the sight of God. [3] Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly and turn to me again. Unless you do, I will come upon you suddenly, as unexpected as a thief. [4] "Yet even in Sardis there are some who have not soiled their garments with evil deeds. They will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. [5] All who are victorious will be clothed in white. I will never erase their names from the Book of Life, but I will announce before my Father and his angels that they are mine. [6] Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches. [7] "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Philadelphia. This is the message from the one who is holy and true. He is the one who has the key of David. He opens doors, and no one can shut them; he shuts doors, and no one can open them. [8] "I know all the things you do, and I have opened a door for you that no one can shut. You have little strength, yet you obeyed my word and did not deny me. [9] Look! I will force those who belong to Satan—those liars who say they are Jews but are not—to come and bow down at your feet. They will acknowledge that you are the ones I love. [10] "Because you have obeyed my command to persevere, I will protect you from the great time of testing that will come upon the whole world to test those who belong to this world. [11] Look, I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take away your crown. [12] All who are victorious will become pillars in the Temple of my God, and they will never have to leave it. And I will write my God's name on them, and they will be citizens in the city of my God—the new Jerusalem that comes down from heaven from my God. And they will have my

new name inscribed upon them. [13] Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

[14] "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Laodicea. This is the message from the one who is the Amen—the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation: [15] "I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish you were one or the other! [16] But since you are like lukewarm water, I will spit you out of my mouth! [17] You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. [18] I advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. And also buy white garments so you will not be shamed by your nakedness. And buy ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see. [19] I am the one who corrects and disciplines everyone I love. Be diligent and turn from your indifference. [20] "Look! Here I stand at the door and knock. If you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal as friends. [21] I will invite everyone who is victorious to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne. [22] Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

#### 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

I can hardly believe the report about the sexual immorality going on among you, something so evil that even the pagans don't do it. I am told that you have a man in your church who is living in sin with his father's wife. [2] And you are so proud of yourselves! Why aren't you mourning in sorrow and shame? And why haven't you removed this man from your fellowship? [3] Even though I am not there with you in person, I am with you in the Spirit. Concerning the one who has done this, I have already passed judgment [4] in the name of the Lord Jesus. You are to call a meeting of the church, and I will be there in spirit, and the power of the Lord Jesus will be with you as you meet. [5] Then you must cast this man out of the church and into Satan's hands, so that his sinful nature will be destroyed and he himself will be saved when the Lord returns. [6] How terrible that you should boast about your spirituality, and yet you let this sort of thing go on. Don't you realize that if even one person is allowed to go on sinning, soon all will be affected? [7] Remove this wicked person from among you so that you can stay pure. Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us. [8] So let us celebrate the festival, not by eating the old bread of wickedness and evil, but by eating the new bread of purity and truth. [9] When I wrote to you before, I told you not to associate with people who indulge in sexual sin. [10] But I wasn't talking about unbelievers who indulge in sexual sin, or who are greedy or are swindlers or idol worshipers. You would have to leave this world to avoid people like that. [11] What I meant was that you are not to associate with anyone who claims to be a Christian yet indulges in sexual sin, or is greedy, or worships idols, or is abusive, or a drunkard, or a swindler. Don't even eat with such people. [12] It isn't my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your job to judge those inside the church who are sinning in these ways. [13] God will judge those on the outside; but as the Scriptures say, "You must remove the evil person from among you."

## DEALING WITH THE PAST—PART II THE PRINCIPLE OF MEDIATORIAL AUTHORITY

(With quotes from *Healing the Heart of Your Church* by Dr. Kenneth Quick, used by permission)

### Introduction

*Care for the flock of God entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your good example. —I Peter 5:2-3*

Exercising spiritual authority over a flock of God's children is one of the least understood dynamics of the church today. This ignorance has led to a growing trust in the world's definitions and patterns of leadership. Certainly, there have been abuses, and Peter (in the above passage) warns us of three temptations for those who are "in charge" of the church—

- First, they must lead willingly rather than being forced into leadership.
- Second, they must never seek to profit on the backs of those they lead but rather serve from the heart.
- Third, they must never *enjoy* the power and control they have over lives, but must model the servant heart of our Chief Shepherd.

The "shepherding" function of elders tends to focus on the care of individuals. Although this is one important aspect of leadership, it must never be emphasized to the point of neglecting a "flock-focus." Only when Godly leaders step up and shepherd "the flock" in meaningful ways can we set the church free from the limits of its history.

### Biblical Foundations for Mediatorial Authority

God's blueprint for authority is found in Romans 13:1-7 (see attached). Clearly, there is a "*mediatorial*" or "*representative*" dimension to properly exercised authority in the church. The Kings and Priests in the Old Testament stood *for their people* before God. It's interesting to note that, for the most part, "as the heart of the King went, so went the hearts of the people." The "high priests" of the Old Testament stood "mediatorially" on behalf of the congregation before God in religious matters. In the New Testament, we are told that Christ is the ultimate "mediator" between God and man. (I Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 10:1-18)

Pastors and spiritual leaders today combine both *governmental* and *religious* functions within the church. Although all believers are called "royal priests" (I Peter 2,9,10), there are orders, levels, and degrees that distinguish shepherds from the flock. These divisions are not based on "spiritual superiority," but rather on God-appointed *role* and *function*.

Paul illustrated this when he sarcastically rebuked Christians for dragging other believers into court (I Corinthians 6:1-6-8, see attached). His target audience for this diatribe is church leaders! The *elders* are to be the ones who are “wise enough to decide these arguments,” because they have been called by God into this mediatorial role.

The main point is this—*those of us in spiritual leadership can represent the corporate body and speak for them before God and other people*. This privilege carries great responsibility and accountability (Hebrews 13:17). This mediatorial authority must never be abused to create an “us vs. them” mentality, but rather it should be used to bring unity to Christ’s body. Just as it is our Lord’s oneness with us that provides a basis for His mediatorial authority over us, it is our oneness with the congregation as their shepherds that becomes our basis of standing on their behalf before God.

The great news is that when the leadership team discovers the things that the Lord is saying to the church, *we are in the role and position to do something about it*. We are free to act on behalf of the congregation in dealing with any and all corporate issues from the past—historical patterns of sin, issues related to former pastors, boards, splits, power plays, moral failures, doctrinal error—and some of these may go back to “generations” before.

The reason why this is so important to understand and practice is this—often the perpetrators of past sins in the church are *dead, long gone, or unwilling to own their iniquity*. So we have the right and the duty to embrace the evil of the past on behalf of the present congregation so these things can be cleansed by the blood of Jesus once-and-for-all. This is why the “Solemn Assembly” becomes a major event in any church that wants to move forward in power to fulfill the Great Commandment and Commission of Jesus Christ. The shepherds of the flock can literally stand together on behalf of the people—past and present congregants—before God as mediators to bring healing to the church. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to act on behalf of the congregation to “fix” things at a corporate level! How exciting and challenging! Let’s humble ourselves before the Lord to become those kinds of shepherds for His people!

## SCRIPTURE LESSONS

Romans 13:1-7

*Obey the government, for God is the one who put it there. All governments have been placed in power by God. So those who refuse to obey the laws of the land are refusing to obey God, and punishment will follow. For the authorities do not frighten people who are doing right, but they frighten those who do wrong. So do what they say, and you will get along well. The authorities are sent by God to help you. But if you are doing something wrong, of course you should be afraid, for you will be punished. The authorities are established by God for that very purpose, to punish those who do wrong. So you must obey the government for two reasons: to keep from being punished and to keep a clear conscience. Pay your taxes, too, for these same reasons. For government workers need to be paid so they can keep on doing the work God intended them to do. Give to everyone what you owe them: Pay your taxes and import duties, and give respect and honor to all to whom it is due.*

I Cor. 6:1-8

*When you have something against another Christian, why do you file a lawsuit and ask a secular court to decide the matter, instead of taking it to other Christians to decide who is right? Don't you know that someday we Christians are going to judge the world? And since you are going to judge the world, can't you decide these little things among yourselves? Don't you realize that we Christians will judge angels? So you should surely be able to resolve ordinary disagreements here on earth. If you have legal disputes about such matters, why do you go to outside judges who are not respected by the church? I am saying this to shame you. Isn't there anyone in all the church who is wise enough to decide these arguments? But instead, one Christian sues another—right in front of unbelievers! To have such lawsuits at all is a real defeat for you. Why not just accept the injustice and leave it at that? Why not let yourselves be cheated? But instead, you yourselves are the ones who do wrong and cheat even your own Christian brothers and sisters.*

**DEALING WITH THE PAST—PART III**  
**HOW A CHURCH'S PAST CAN BECOME THE**  
**BEST FRIEND OF IT'S PRESENT AND FUTURE**

(With quotes from *Healing the Heart of Your Church* by Dr. Kenneth Quick, used by permission)

Introduction

Whenever an Intentional Interim Pastor begins to focus on some of the painful times in the church's history, reactions associated with denial begin to pour forth. I've heard people say, "*Why are we talking about all this negative stuff? Christ has led us on from those days, and we do not want to revisit those things!*"

The admonition to "forget those things that are behind and reach forward to what lies ahead" (Philippians 3:13) is more often misapplied and out-of-context than it is applied in context. It should be noted that Paul was speaking of his own personal walk with God in that passage. Clearly, the Apostle did not mean that we are to ignore corporate sin that has never been owned by a church.

The Biblical Path to Learning

A key question for all of us is this—"Did we learn the important lessons in our spiritual pilgrimage as individuals or as a congregation in good times or bad?" I think we would all agree that "pain" has been a better teacher than "pleasure." This does not imply that we should "wallow" in those painful things, but we should seek to understand what God is trying to say through the difficult times in our personal lives as well as the corporate life of the church.

James reminds us to—"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." (James 1:2-4) Stressful times in the church can be seen as a gift from God to prove our faith and produce the endurance that will lead to maturity. The text is clear—the Lord wants to give us something we "lack" as we learn endurance through trials. So the question becomes—"What did God want to give our church through this difficult season?"

In Romans 5:2-4, Paul indicates that—"We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love." That word "develop" describes a "digging process to remove something buried"—like mining for jewels. It is vital that a church does not "waste its sorrows" by not allowing the Lord to "dig out" what He intended to mine from the church during its time of difficulty.

If we are brave and willing, we could ask questions like—“*What did God seek to mine out of our congregation during that church split? What are those things Jesus wanted to teach us through the difficult departure of our last pastor? Have God’s purposes been fully accomplished?*”

### Talking About the Church’s Past—To Protect the Next Generation

One more passage that demonstrates how a church’s past can become the best friend of its present and future—Joel 1:2-4—“*Hear this, you leaders of the people. Listen, all who live in the land. In all your history, has anything like this happened before? Tell your children about it in the years to come, and let your children tell their children. Pass the story down from generation to generation. After the cutting locusts finished eating the crops, the swarming locusts took what was left! After them came the hopping locusts, and then the stripping locusts, too!*”

In other words, the prophet is saying that we do not want to embrace the old adage that says—“History teaches that we learn nothing from history.” Joel knew that the tragedies of Israel’s past and the lessons associated with their pain needed to be told and retold to future generations as a warning and protection for the next group of leaders. In the same way, we must learn from the trials of a congregation’s past so that the church will not *repeat* them. It’s not about digging up painful memories so that we can wallow in them—rather, we must tell the whole story of our history in order to learn how God wants to protect the church from repeating former patterns of failure.

In congregation after congregation, I am seeing the evidence of the fact that when sin and failure is not *dealt* with in the past, it is *duplicated* in the present and future—only with more *devastating* consequences. Churches that have had issues surrounding the abuse of finances—without dealing with that—will continue to repeat more intense versions of the same problem. A fellowship that has experienced traumatic pastoral transitions—without exploring the reasons for that—will actually to see an escalation of tension with each successive pastoral departure.

It is time to *embrace* the lessons of the past as the very best friend of the church’s present and future! As we allow the Holy Spirit to do the digging, lessons can be learned, former mistakes can be avoided, and the congregation can set a future course consistent with fulfilling the Great Commandment and Commission of Jesus Christ.

**DEALING WITH THE PAST—PART IV**  
**WHY GOD HOLDS PRESENT CHURCH LEADERS**  
**ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE CHURCH' S PAST**

(With quotes from *Healing the Heart of Your Church* by Dr. Kenneth Quick, used by permission)

Introduction

In Deuteronomy 8:2 we read—“*Remember how the Lord your God led you through the wilderness for forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would really obey his commands.*” The core teaching here for the church is that our sovereign God has been leading and teaching us—and His most significant corporate lessons have revolved around crises. These “corporate pass-fail exams” often go *unrecognized* because church leaders rarely think about the “corporate heart.” (see Part I)

In the Old Testament, God’s “corporate pass-fail exams” would include—

- The rebellion of Korah (Numbers 16—a corporate rebellion by those who felt they a better way to worship the Lord than the leadership)
- The bitter waters of Marah (Exodus 15—a corporate response to disappointed expectations)
- The food shortage en route to Sinai (Exodus 16—a corporate response to deprivation)

Some contemporary examples of how the Lord is “*testing [the church’s corporate heart] to prove [the church’s corporate] character*” would be things like—

- Worship-style wars
- Moving the church to a new location
- Sudden drop in the general fund
- Moral failure of a key leader
- Conflicted conclusion to a pastor’s tenure

Just as the Lord tested Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, He is testing church leaders today “*to see what is in their hearts.*” Paul made parallels with the Corinth church that occurred during Israel’s wilderness wanderings (I Corinthians 10:1-12). In a crisis, leaders get tested in their relationships—to God, to one another, and to the congregation.

According to the leader’s *response* to the various exams, Christ will have an accompanying *reply*. If the leaders *pass* the test—as with the Ephesians and the false prophets in Revelation 2:2—there will be encouragement and blessing. But if there is *failure*—as with the spiritual leaders in Pergamum who tolerated those who offered false teaching and led people astray—there will be admonition and a challenge to make it right.

Something most pastors do not realize when they begin a new ministry is this—the church may have faced several corporate crises long before the new pastor arrived—and they failed those tests, refusing to learn from them. God will not allow the church to move on and accomplish the good, purpose-driven, visionary objectives of that new pastor until those lessons are learned.

So the key question—*Why does God hold present church leaders accountable for the church's past?*

### The Biblical Foundation

In II Samuel 21, Israel experiences a three year famine. David goes to God in an effort to learn from this current crisis. The Lord tells him that the present famine can be traced back to “*Saul's bloody house.*” (21:1) In essence, during Saul's regime, the King had violated a covenant Joshua made by seeking to eradicate the Gibeonites. In response, *God disciplined the whole community/country because of the actions of a king who lived twenty-five to thirty years before them.* It was up to David's present leadership team to do whatever it took to right this past wrong. The Lord would not let them “off the hook”—despite their *ignorance of what had happened* or the fact that *they were not directly responsible for it.*

The famine was God's “megaphone” to get their attention—and it worked!

There is also a New Testament precedent. In Matthew 23, Jesus pronounces judgment upon the Scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy. One of the charges against them was in regard to the past—

*What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you build tombs for the prophets your ancestors killed, and you decorate the monuments of the godly people your ancestors destroyed. Then you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would never have joined them in killing the prophets.' But in saying that, you testify against yourselves that you are indeed the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Go ahead and finish what your ancestors started.* (Matthew 23:29-32)

Once again, we have a new generation which seeks to divorce itself from the actions of previous generations. The Pharisees were saying—“*Hey, we're more enlightened now—we would never have been party to killing the prophets!*” They were letting themselves off the hook because “*that was then and this is now!*” But Jesus puts them right back on that hook! By admitting that they were organically connected to those who committed sins—for which there was never any repentance or responsibility taken—they bear the guilt in the present.

The same is true in the church—things have happened under previous pastoral regimes and no one has ever taken responsibility for it. Therefore the guilt *remains*, and the congregation and spiritual leaders continue to carry those sins.

Our natural protest is to say—“*Wait a minute—that’s not fair!*” But it is the way of God. Jehovah sees a connected stream from the past community to the present community. Although the perpetrators may no longer be present, there has been no release of responsibility. The contemporary community continues to pay the price until their leaders do what is necessary to make things right.

Some examples of the “past haunting the present” that I have seen in my work as an Intentional Interim—

- Churches that have a history of “bad endings” with pastors repeat this pattern over and over again.
- Leadership teams that lose the trust of the congregation pass this same problem down to the next group of leaders.
- Congregations that experience poor communication with their pastors and leaders continue in that pattern.
- Financial mismanagement by a treasurer or pastor is replicated in the generations that follow.

The short answer to the question of this teaching as to why God holds *present* church leaders accountable for the congregation’s *past* is this—*when sin is committed, something must be done about it.* According to Proverbs 28:13—

*People who cover over their sins will not prosper. But if they confess and forsake them, they will receive mercy.*

To paraphrase for our purposes, “*Churches who cover over their sins will not prosper. But if they confess and forsake them corporately, the church will receive mercy.* But unless and until that happens, those iniquities will remain as a cloud over every future generation.

Let us resolve to be the generation that takes responsibility for any and every offense committed by the church so that the cloud can be completely removed. Then we can once again see the glory of God in the church (Ephesians 3:21) and get on with fulfilling the Great Commandment and Commission of Jesus Christ!

## DEALING WITH THE PAST—PART V IDENTIFICATIONAL REPENTANCE

(With quotes from *Healing the Heart of Your Church* by Dr. Kenneth Quick, used by permission)

### Introduction

The concept of *identificational repentance* flows from an understanding of *mediatorial authority* that we looked at in Part II. By way of “identificational repentance” we can identify with the perpetrator(s) of an injustice or injury. Because we are identified with him/them, we can *stand in their place* and shoulder the responsibility he/they never did. In doing this, we can also enable “innocent bystanders” a way to release the pain and anger they may have internalized—they can extend forgiveness and experience reconciliation whether the original offending party(parties) would choose to participate or not.

### Scriptural Precedence

Consider the following passages that demonstrate how a “present” generation can identify with and repent for the sins of a “past” generation—

*Then I said, “O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of unfailing love with those who love him and obey his commands, listen to my prayer! Look down and see me praying night and day for your people Israel. I confess that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family and I have sinned! We have sinned terribly by not obeying the commands, decrees, and regulations that you gave us through your servant Moses. “Please remember what you told your servant Moses: ‘If you are unfaithful to me, I will scatter you among the nations. But if you return to me and obey my commands and live by them, then even if you are exiled to the ends of the earth, I will bring you back to the place I have chosen for my name to be honored.’ “The people you rescued by your great power and strong hand are your servants. O Lord, please hear my prayer! Listen to the prayers of those of us who delight in honoring you.*

(Nehemiah 1:5-11) **[Note how Nehemiah refers to how “we” have sinned, and then at the end, he brings it into the present by saying he wants God to “listen to the prayers of those of us who delight in honoring You.”]**

*Those still left alive will rot away in enemy lands because of their sins and the sins of their ancestors. But at last my people will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors for betraying me and being hostile toward me. (Lev. 26:39-40)*

*He is to lay both of his hands on the goat’s head and confess over it all the sins and rebellion of the Israelites. In this way, he will lay the people’s sins on the head of the goat; then he will send it out into the wilderness, led by a man chosen for this task. (Leviticus 16:21) **[Note here the “transfer” of the people’s sins to the goat as a form of “identificational repentance.”]***

*Lord, we confess our wickedness and that of our ancestors, too. We all have sinned against you. (Jeremiah 14:20)*

Of course, our “ultimate example” of *Identificational Repentance* is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—

*For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ. (II Cor. 5:21)*

*He personally carried away our sins in his own body on the cross so we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. You have been healed by his wounds! (I Peter 2:24)* **[Just like we may need to ‘stand in the gap’ to confess the sins of another generation which we did not commit, Jesus “stood in the gap” for us, taking upon Himself sins that He did not commit.]**

### Practical Implications

Combining all of the teachings on “Dealing with the Past,” we can see that our role as pastors and elders is to use “Identificational Repentance” to bring healing, restoration, and reconciliation to the present body of Christ. Former leaders never took responsibility for their sins, and those sins remain until we fulfill our duty. As God’s appointed leaders for this flock, we have both the right and the responsibility to repent for all of the sins of the past—in a specific way where we have good information, and in a general way where we may lack the specifics.

We are now ready to discuss both the content and importance of letters to all former pastors and staff members to make sure that this church has a clear conscience. We will ask them specifically to share with us any ways in which they may have been offended during or at the conclusion of their ministries. As sin is revealed, we can utilize our “mediatorial authority” and “identificational repentance” to confess these matters and put this behind us once-and-for-all.

This also sets the stage for our “Solemn Assembly”—a time when we can stand before the people and lead them in a corporate repentance for those things in our past that have haunted and hounded our present—and threaten to hinder our future if we do not confess and forsake them.

Great days of blessing are ahead as we humble ourselves before the Lord and His people. Let us pray that God will go before us in these important days as we seek complete restoration and reconciliation!