

Are Revival and Reformation Possible in the 21st Century?

Listening to Heaven's Appeals

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Ellen White was deeply concerned. She had returned from Europe in the early summer of 1887. She had been away for two years and what she found when she returned to America greatly troubled her. The church she loved and had given her life for was struggling. There were institutional challenges, theological controversy, personality conflicts, and administrative rivalries. Throughout 1887 and 1888 she spent time traveling to Camp meetings, writing, counseling church administration and preaching as God opened the doors of opportunity. As the General Conference Session of 1888 drew nearer, she became increasingly concerned and impressed that if church leadership and the delegates to that session humbled their hearts before God in earnest prayer, confession, and repentance that a mighty spiritual revival would follow.

In August of 1888 Ellen White wrote a personal letter of earnest appeal to the delegates appointed to the upcoming General Conference Session. The letter opens with divine counsel that speaks to both her generation and ours. It is as relevant today as it was then. It speaks to the delegates in a General Conference Session long ago and one that is soon to come. The delegates at the Minneapolis General Conference Session in 1888 had great spiritual needs and the delegates to the for the St. Louis, General Conference Session have similar spiritual needs. She writes,

“We are impressed that this gathering will be the most important meeting you have ever attended. This should be a period of earnestly seeking the Lord and humbling your hearts before Him. I hope you will regard this as a most precious opportunity to pray and counsel together; and if the injunction of the apostle to esteem others better than ourselves is carefully heeded, then you can in humility of mind, with the spirit of Christ, search the scriptures carefully to see what is truth. (1888 Materials, Ellen White Letter, August 5, 1888, Published by White Estate).

The importance of this letter for the delegates at the 1888 General Conference Session and those preparing to attend the 2022 St Louis Session one hundred and thirty-four years later can hardly be overestimated. According to the prophet of God, for the delegates, the 1888 session would be “the most important that you have ever attended.” Her August 5th letter emphasizes three specific areas. She appeals that each delegate prepares their heart for the upcoming session

in “humility of mind with the spirit of Christ” urging them through the power of the living Christ to “cleanse soul and spirit from every defiling influence that would separate you from God.”

Corporate revival follows personal revival. All genuine revival begins when God’s people are revived individually. It is this personal heartfelt work that Ellen White was calling for before the General Conference Session. Her first appeal is for prayer, earnest seeking God, and heartfelt confession and repentance. Her letter is reminiscent of two great prayers in the Bible. Daniel’s prayer for the deliverance of Israel in Daniel 9 and Jesus intercessory prayer in John 17. Daniel’s prayer emphasizes confession of sin, humility of heart, and repentance of soul in the light of God’s forgiveness and mercy. Jesus’ prayer focuses on the love of God, the Word of God, and the unity of the people of God. Ellen White’s letter to the delegates of the General Conference Session in 1888 includes all three of these points of emphasis.

The second area of emphasis in her letter is an appeal to the delegates earnestly study God’s Word. Her letter is both kind and compassionate but very straightforward. She laments the “laziness” in careful Bible study. She urges the delegates to prepare for the session by seeking the truth of God’s Word through a “close critical study of the scriptures.” She appeals to ministers “not to take for granted” the truths of scripture. Reading this letter, we hear an echo of Jesus great intercessory prayer for His people in John 17 verses 14 and 17.

“I have given them your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world...Sanctify them by Your truth, Your word is truth.” There is sanctifying, life changing power in God’s Word. It is the Holy Spirit through God’s word that brings revival and reformation. It is the Holy Spirit through God’s word that leads to confession and repentance. It is the Holy Spirit through God’s word that recreates new spiritual life in the soul. As Jesus so powerfully stated, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” (John 6:63)

The apostle James speaks of “laying aside all filthiness and wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls. (James 1: 21) Peter speaks of being born again, “not of corruptible seed but incorruptible through the word of God that lives and abides forever.” (1 Peter 1:22) The epistle to the Hebrews adds, “For the Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Deep heart searching, heartfelt prayer, confession, repentance, and serious Bible study are

central to any genuine revival. The word of God pierces our inmost souls, drives us to our knees, enables us to sense our unworthiness and leads to trust fully, completely, and solely in the righteousness of Christ for our salvation.

In harmony with Jesus' instruction in John 17 Ellen White's letter to the 1888 General Conference Delegates also urges them to put away their differences, settle their personality conflicts and for Christ's sake respond to one another with "Christian kindness and tenderness." Reading her letter to the delegates it becomes obvious that she is deeply concerned about the unity of the church. Her words are filled with tenderness, but they are direct. She appeals that delegates be "divested of envy, jealousy, and evil surmising." She urges them to put away "all selfish ambitions." Then makes this remarkable statement. "The love of Jesus Christ existing in the heart will consume these little things, or greater things, which tend to divide hearts. Satan's sees that in unity there is strength; that in variance and disunion there is weakness."

Unity was on the heart of the prophet as the 1888 General Conference Session approached. It was on Jesus' heart as well as His crucifixion approached. In that great intercessory prayer, He pleaded, "I do not pray for these alone but also for those who believe in Me through their word. That they may be one as you Father are in Me, and I in You that they all may be one in Us that the World may believe that you sent Me." (John 17:20,21) The unity of the church is one of heaven's divine credentials that we belong to Christ. Unity in Christ does not mean we will always see things alike. It does not mean there will be no differences of opinion. It does mean that we will always treat one another with dignity and respect. It does mean that the eternal truths of the Three Angels Messages that unite us are greater than anything that divides us. It does mean that Christ's mission to reach the world with the everlasting gospel consumes our differences and focuses us on the proclamation of the gospel in this critical time of earth's history.

Revival-the renewal of spiritual life, and reformation-a change of corporate and personal behavior, rarely occur spontaneously. There is a period of seeking God, studying His Word, the confession and repentance of sin, unity of heart and mind that prepares the way for the mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts reveals this preparation for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost before Pentecost ever took place. There would have been no outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost without the infilling of the Spirit in the Upper Room. The disciples were of "one accord" and met seeking God in prayer, contemplating His Word, and confessing

their sins. (Acts 1:12-14; see also Acts of the Apostles, pgs. 36,37) Ellen White's letter before the Minneapolis General Conference Session is an earnest appeal for the delegates for the upcoming General Conference today and the church at large to prepare their hearts for a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit during the General Conference Session. Here are three practical things each delegate can do to prepare their heart for the GC Session.

1. Seek God ourselves for a deeper devotional life through earnest heartfelt prayer, confession, and revitalized Bible Study.
2. Ask God to reveal any barriers to the unity of the church in our own hearts. Confess any envy, jealousy or pride that may be lurking deep within. Ask God to give us the grace to reach out to others that we may have offended or who have offended us seeking the unity of the body of Christ.
3. Unite with God and our brothers and sisters around the world in the upcoming Ten Days of Prayer in January and a Presidential monthly online prayer service especially for GC Committee members and GC delegates studying the great prayers of the Bible and praying together beginning at the end of January and continuing to the General Conference Session.

The words of the prophet speak to our hearts today, "We are impressed that this meeting will be the most important you have ever attended." We cannot orchestrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. God's spirit moves where He wills but we can prepare today for the mighty outpouring of the latter rain in the future. Through the moving of the Holy Spirit on our hearts today we prepare for a greater moving of the Spirit tomorrow. May the 2022 General Conference Session be a time of spiritual renewal, genuine revival, and lifechanging reformation for each one of us to usher in a mighty mission movement for the finishing of God's work on earth.