

A CALL TO REPENTANCE

Finally, the people of God are called upon to “turn from their wicked ways.” Confession and repentance are key factors in the Solemn Assembly. Many Christians are offended when it is suggested that they may need to repent. However, one has only to look at the spiritual condition of the nation and also the church to agree that there is need for corporate as well as personal repentance. We would do well to consider the following list (compiled by other Evangelicals) of ways the church is incurring the displeasure of God:

1. His people have disregarded His Lordship for their own selfish desires and self-serving practices (Matthew 7:21-27; Luke 6:46).
2. His people have not honored His holiness and are not becoming holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:16-17).
3. His standards and commandments in His Word are not being used to determine right and wrong (Isaiah 5:20).
4. His people are disoriented to Him and apathetic to His voice and activities (Luke 19:41-46).
5. His Bride has prostituted herself with worldly values, priorities and methods and is not preparing herself for the wedding feast at Christ’s second coming (Ephesians 5:25-26).
6. His warnings have been ignored again and again (Romans 10:21; Ezekiel 12:21-28).
7. His house is not known as a “house of prayer for all nations,” and He is displeased with much of the religious activity and worship of His people (Matthew 21:13).
8. Many leaders remain in personal sin and disobedience and have not led His people to corporate repentance (Jeremiah 23). [At East Bay Calvary] it is vital that we “own” our sins as the Spirit has admonished us. We must be bold enough, yet humble enough, to name those sins – sins such as legalism, racial prejudice and bigotry, hardness of heart, materialism, competitiveness, moral laxity, elitism and exclusivity. May the Lord help us to have the spiritual grace and strength not only to acknowledge our spiritual needs, but in contriteness of spirit to ask for [God’s] mercy and forgiveness.

THE PROMISE OF GOD

When God’s people respond to His call to “humble themselves and pray, and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways,” then He has promised that He would in turn, “hear from heaven and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” [As we obey] the voice of God in the calling of a Solemn Assembly, God will keep His promise to send revival – true revival – life-transforming, [life giving] revival. [A Solemn Assembly at East Bay Calvary Church may be the most important and far-reaching decision ever made in the 73-year history of our church.]

The above article, used by permission, is taken from “The Meaning of Solemn Assembly” by Dr. Robert E. Fisher in “Spiritual Renewal Manual,” edited by P. Douglas Small, pp. 8-12. Dr. John Strubhar, Interim Pastor at East Bay Calvary Church, has edited the document to make it applicable to East Bay Calvary Church of Traverse City, MI. His edits are marked by parentheses.

THE SOLEMN ASSEMBLY

WHAT IS A SOLEMN ASSEMBLY AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR OUR CHURCH?



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THE SOLEMN ASSEMBLY

Throughout history God has used the Solemn Assembly as a means to bring revival. Of the twelve periods of renewal recorded in the Old Testament, every one was preceded by the calling of a Solemn Assembly. The followers of Jesus gathered for what could be called a Solemn Assembly for several days before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church on the Day of Pentecost. In America, historical documents verify that before every major national revival, emphasis was placed upon fast days and Solemn Assemblies.

Solemn Assemblies were called during times of spiritual crisis, usually a crisis precipitated by the righteous judgment of God upon the sins of the people. It was an emergency action – a desperate plea to withhold further judgment. The words of the prophet Joel demonstrate this kind of urgency: “Consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God and cry out to the Lord... Blow a trumpet in Zion and sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble” (Joel 1:14, 2:1a). God’s call to Solemn Assembly is probably summarized best in the classic passage found in 2 Chronicles 7:14: “If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

A CALL TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD

It is important to note that the call to Solemn Assembly is not issued to sinners, but to God’s people (“If my people...”). In fact, the first order is given to the leaders – the ministers. “Guard yourselves and lament, you priests; wail, you who minister before the altar; come, lie all night in sackcloth, you who minister to my God” (Joel 1:13). Every one of God’s people, including young people and children, is called to participate. “Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and the nursing babes” (Joel 2:16). In keeping with this command, it is important that we involve the entire constituency of [East Bay Calvary Church] – leaders, ministers and laity – in the Solemn Assembly process.

A CALL TO EAST BAY CALVARY CHURCH

In this call God gets even more specific: He says, “If my people, who are called by my name...” We call ourselves [East Bay Calvary Church] ... We are His people called by His name – and we accept the challenge and responsibility that this command of God implies. We are prepared to follow God’s plan to bring revival to our [church].

A CALL TO HUMILITY

One of the greatest hindrances to personal and corporate revival is spiritual pride. This subtle sin manifests itself in an attitude displayed in the Revelation passage already noted: “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing” (Revelation 3:17). The image is one of smugness, self-sufficiency and superiority. Unfortunately, this is an attitude that is pervasive in the church today. We do not recognize our true spiritual condition. Like the church at Laodicea, we may well find ourselves to be “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” (Revelation 3:17). Rather than crying out to the Lord in humility and contriteness of spirit, we harden our hearts and become “too righteous to repent.” We need to heed the admonition of Joel: “Now, therefore, says the Lord, turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. So rend your heart and not your garment” (Joel 2:12, 13).

A CALL TO PRAYER

The prayer called for in 2 Chronicles 7:14 is intense and pleading. It involves not just tears, but wailing, mourning, trembling and crying out to the Lord. It is the desperate plea of God’s people for forgiveness and for the hand of judgment to be stayed. It is very serious business.

A CALL TO SEEK GOD

A clear indication of the apostasy of the contemporary church and of its need to repent is the emphasis on money and material possessions. Popular preachers and teachers tell us that God is obligated to prosper us not just spiritually, but financially as well. The inference is that to be a successful Christian and to be happy, we must not only keep up with the Jones, but we must leave them in the dust. The glitzy sets for Christian television programs, the elaborate clothes and the affluent lifestyle of many Christian leaders model this philosophy. The admonition to “set your affection on things above” and to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Colossians 3:1; Matthew 6:33) seems to have gotten lost in the shuffle. In our effort to seek wealth, power, gifts, and blessing, we may well have overlooked the most basic spiritual need – to seek the face of God. It is interesting that the Lord admonishes us to seek His face. That means we should know Him intimately, look into His eyes, and listen for His voice. Jesus declared that the greatest of all commandments is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). To seek God in this way is one of the prime purposes of the Solemn Assembly.