

The Unburied Body

980122

It was a different world in the days before germs were discovered. People just couldn't believe that there was a real need for cleanliness. Doctors would examine dead bodies in the morning and then go examine their patients, including expectant mothers, in the afternoon without washing their hands. They refused to believe that germs existed because they had their own theories about disease. They turned a blind eye to statistics that proved the death rate went down when doctors washed their hands between examinations.

Hospitals were to be havens of hope for the sick. They were to be a place where people could get well and return to their place in life. But because of the unburied bodies left there, people were getting sicker and even dying there. Our churches are, in a similar way, to be the haven of hope for our souls. Can it be that there is an unburied body in ours?

Christ talks about this principle in Matthew 23:27-28:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

We all have a revulsion about touching something dead. God warned the Israelites about it, not explaining about germs but calling it "uncleanness". In Numbers 19:11 He says through Moses, "He that touches the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days." Today we understand how corruption can spread throughout the community if the uncleanness is not dealt with. Of course, Christ was talking about a spiritual application of this.

It seems that the church at Corinth had problems with this sort of thing. Paul talks about it in 1 Corinthians 5:1-2:

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?

Here we have a spiritual skeleton in the closet. This is a church which has a body that hasn't been properly buried yet, and it really stinks and keeps everyone sick. Ultimately people leave. Why won't the church bury it? Do they not see it and smell it? Unfortunately they have whitewashed over the situation and think that it has been dealt with. But there is no remorse among those who created the problem. There is no effort being made to clean up the situation until Paul begins to prod them into action.

We all know of modern day examples of this problem. Everything looks fine on the outside; a new building, a new program, a new minister (or chiefly getting rid of an old one). But there is something still terribly wrong. Why is the church not growing if everything is in such good shape? Those who intend to be leaders in the church must deal with the situation. But sometimes instead of burying the body, they bury their heads in the sand.

Actually it is up to each of us to try to keep the church clean and full of life. We cannot blame everything on the leaders. Just as the Israelites were commanded to remove all leaven from their household once a year, we must strive to remove the evil from our midst. We cannot survive if we hide a body where we store the water of life.

© Copyright 1998, Heard Lowry