

Pastor's Corner: – 5-11-2019 – Perception and Reality

This past week something happened in my wife's business that got me to thinking about the nature of reality and how our reality is often shaped by our own perceptions. In this particular situation, Amy was trying to coordinate an inspection on a house she is selling. The owner of the house was very concerned that the inspector would be "poking around" her house. She asked Amy, "If something goes wrong or goes missing, who do I sue?"

Throughout the whole transaction the seller has shown herself to be the type of person who believes everyone is out to get her, to rip her off, or to take advantage of her. She was convinced that the inspector just couldn't be trusted, and she was ready to lawyer up, just in case.

Of course, the reality is that inspectors are in the business of inspecting houses, not causing mayhem on unsuspecting sellers or casing the joint for an underground crime ring. But in this case, reality didn't matter. All that mattered was perception. So, Amy had to gently calm down her client and explain that in 13 years of Real Estate she has never had a situation where an inspector needed to be sued. I think her client was soothed, but I wouldn't be surprised if she had her lawyer on speed dial.

I think this perception and reality thing impacts us in church as well. For example, the difference between a growing church and a dying church is often one of perception. Let me explain.

In a growing church the mindset of the members is generally positive. They believe their church is awesome, that their leaders are dedicated, their programs are powerful. The members of growing churches believe that there is a lot of mission potential out there and that God is about to do something great. There is hope and confidence and positivity in a growing church. What's funny is that the positive perception may not actually be based on reality, but it doesn't matter.

I was associated with a church a while back that was very proud of how healthy they were. They talked about how exciting the church was. They bragged about how dynamic it was and how many great things were happening. I was really excited to be there and see what amazing things were happening. What I found was that it was pretty much like most churches I have been at. There wasn't anything objectively exceptional about the church, but the members believed that there was and that was enough. The church was full and vibrant, not because it had exceptional programs or people, but because everyone was enthusiastic and positive. It's weird, but true, perception becomes reality.

Of course, this principle can negatively impact a church as well. A church where everyone is negative, see's nothing but doom and gloom, and is mired in hopelessness will inevitably become a dying church. When the perception of church members is that the community is resistant to the gospel, that we don't have anything to offer, or that there is no chance we will grow – well, that perception becomes reality as well.

So, what is your perception of our Bismarck Seventh-day Adventist church? Do you see it as a church with infinite potential made up of godly caring Christians, or do you just see shortcomings and problems? I think we can actually shape our church's reality by changing our perceptions. Our own attitudes towards our church will define what kind of church we are.

Of course, we should also ask the question, when Jesus looks at our church, what does he see? Shortcomings and weaknesses? Sure. He's not blind to our faults. But he also sees our potential. He sees the things we're doing right and how things can be better if we put our trust fully in him. Take a look at the letters to the seven churches in Revelation and you will get a good idea of how Jesus views the church. For every criticism or correction, Jesus offers a promise. The greater the challenges the church faces the greater the promises that Jesus offers. There is no challenge we face as a church (real or just perceived) that we can't overcome when we put our trust in Jesus.

I, for one, think our church is pretty great. I think we've got good people here. People who love Jesus and love one another. I think we've got a concern for our community and a desire to see God's kingdom grow. My perception of our church is that we've got a lot of good stuff going in our favor. I'd invite you to join me in setting aside all negative talk about the church and look forward with faith to what we can be. Let's shape our church reality by dwelling on the good and looking for the best.

Happy Sabbath Pastor Tyler