

REPENTANCE AND RESISTANCE - part 2

As the book of Ezra unfolds, we learn how God raises up His servants to guide His people into His will. This includes confession of sins and repentance, so that God's people actually walk in His ways and according to His written-down Word, to build up His kingdom.

7- CONFESSION OF SINS - Ezra arrived in Jerusalem and explained his mission, to teach the people to be obedient to God's written Word. They responded with personal and corporate confession of sin. In fact, this was a terrible situation. They had intermarried with pagan peoples of the land, against God's specific commandments. This is not about ethnicity, but a matter of true conversion to the one true living God.

"Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?" (2Corinthians 6:14). "For this is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality" (1Thessalonians 4:13).

8- REPENTANCE FROM SINS - Ezra's guilty congregation included leaders of the people, who were especially guilty of this sin. Leaders may never be perfect, but should be repentant, growing, obedient, faithful and dependent, to diligently conduct themselves as role models, trusting and obeying God.

As Ezra hears their confession, what does he do? Rail against them? Exact punishment? Ezra 9:3-15 records his powerful and profound response. At once he tore his garment and hair, and sat appalled, ashamed to lift his face to God: "For our guilt has risen higher than our heads and mounted up to heaven, to our utter shame." Ezra modeled trusting and obeying God. He modeled repentance, turning from sin and to God. He asked God to "grant some little reviving" to be obedient to His purposes.

9- REPEAT OR RESIST? - Confession is agreeing with God about the reality of our sin. Repentance is the other side of the coin, turning away from sin and toward God. Jesus said, "repent and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:16). "Repent and turn to God and do deeds in keeping with repentance" (Acts 26:20). "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent" (Revelation 3:19).

Biblical confession acknowledges sin and repents of it, turning away from sin and turning toward God, for forgiveness and the spiritual power to obey Him. Dr. Neil Anderson notes that God has not called His people to a hopeless treadmill of "sin-confess-repeat" but rather to a holy training in transformation: "sin-confess-repent-resist." As you turn from sin, by Christ's power within, you grow stronger in resistance to temptation. You become more like Christ, holy, as you trust and obey by the Holy Spirit's power.

10- PATTERN OF REPENTANCE - Ezra 10:1, "while Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women and children gathered to him out of Israel, for the people wept bitterly." A spokesman responded to Ezra, "we have sinned, therefore let us make covenant with our God to put away these wives and children, because we tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to Law."

Prof. Derek Kidner notes, "instead of whipping a reluctant people into action, Ezra has pricked their conscience to the point they now urge him to act. The extreme measures were wholly of their own choosing, and so all the more binding." God's hand was upon Ezra as a teacher, because confession, repentance, and pledges for judicial action were done by the authority of the local leaders, in response to the Word of God. All this was foreseen by God as He gave Ezra the authority of His Word and of the King.

11- POWER IN REPENTANCE - Believers come to Christ by repentance and faith, and then live for Christ by repentance and faith. We turn from the lies of the world, flesh and devil, and turn to the truth of God, believing and receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior with all our heart and mind and will. All you are trusts all that Christ is, as you trust what He says in His Word, and step out in faith to obey it, live it.

At their humble request, in repentance, Ezra used his authority as granted by God and the king, to legally resolve the situation involving unlawful marriages, through the judges and magistrates. Verse 12, "then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, it is so; we must do as you have said." Over the next two months they made guilt offerings in the temple, and worked to resolve the problems.

12- ARE YOU ON THE LIST? - Businesses guard email lists as valuable assets, not to be divulged. But here, God makes it all known. Ezra 2 and Ezra 8 open with lists of obedient people who returned to the land. Ezra 10 closes with a list of the repentant who returned to the Lord, in trust and obedience to His grace. Would you be included? Having come to Christ in repentance and faith? Living for Christ by repentance and faith? These are recorded in "the Lamb's book of life" (Philippians 4:3 and Revelation 3:5), who have believed and received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who paid for your sins.

Then your life is His life lived through you, to accomplish His purposes. God tasked Ezra with the spiritual condition of the people, not just building of the temple. "You like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1Peter 2:5). Return to Christ in repentance and faith, cleansed from sin, so that together we can build His kingdom, in unity of heart, mind, will. Because like Ezra, Jesus has given His authority to His disciples, to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). Do so, in repentance and faith, by His power! ☐