

AUGUST 10

Ezra 10

V. 1 It seems strange that Ezra made confession of his own sins, since he himself didn't do anything. We will see the ultimate example of this in the book of Daniel. There is a formula for prayer given by Moses, and reemphasized in the dedication prayer of Solomon, that says that those seeking God's grace for the nation need to confess their own sins and the sins of their fathers. It isn't just a formula for prayer, but if a person cannot sense his own need for forgiveness and doesn't understand that we are all wrecked creatures, there is pride. And pride makes prayer powerless.

Vs. 2-5 This is a miracle in itself. The people were weeping and were totally in agreement and they were repentant. When does that happen? Notice that the people were willing to submit to even the harshest remedy. Somehow their hearts were humbled before the Lord and they only needed good, godly leadership. These people encouraged Ezra to stand in the gap.

According to the law, if these women renounced their other religions and became worshipers of Yahweh, the men could marry them. The problem, of course, is that worshiping Yahweh really hadn't been important to the husbands, as evidenced by disobeying the law and marrying women who worshiped foreign gods. There was no model of what it meant to be a follower of God. There was no positive reason for the women to change. There was no example of why worshiping the Lord was important. In a case like this, the best the leaders might hope for was compliance. You can't make people believe by threatening them.

Vs. 6-8 This section brings up an interesting point. All the people were to gather on the third day, or they would be banned from the congregation of the exiles. As was always true in Israel, if the people didn't like God or the law, all they had to do was move. A little to the south was Egypt. A little to the north was Syria. Or they could have just stayed in, or gone back to, Babylon or Persia. There was no need to do any of this unless someone really wanted to repent and to honor God.

Vs. 9-15 So, they left from Babylon in the first month, arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month and now this is the ninth month. This was a major assembly of the people and it was pouring heavy, cold November rain. The people were freezing, adding to the distress of the matter, but moving them to a quick decision. Every case would be examined. This would give couples and families time to talk and make decisions. Ruth left everything to go with Naomi. I'll bet Ruth's name was mentioned more than once in those days.

V. 15 Notice that there were four leading men who opposed this. I wonder why. Jonathan and Jahzeiah were against taking action and then there were two men who supported Jonathan and Jahzeiah; one of whom was Meshullam. It might be that there was some politicking here since according to v. 29, Meshullam was guilty of marrying a foreign woman, and by extension, opening himself to being tolerant of other gods and other worship.

Vs. 16-17 Again, we have a time frame for all of this. It took them ten days after the assembly to select the men to do this. They began in their tenth month and were finished three months later.

Vs. 18-24 For the priest and Levites, because they served the Lord in the temple, they had to marry Israelite women. Now if they didn't want to be priests, all they had to do was pack their bags and move with their wives and kids. Notice at the end of v. 18, some of the sons of Jeshua and his brothers married foreign wives. This is the Jeshua (Joshua) who was high priest and a leader with Zerubbabel.

Vs. 25-44 When you read this list, it doesn't seem like so many people, so what was the problem? First, as Paul said yesterday, *a little leaven leavens the whole lump*. Second, these

people were leaders and people in the leading clans, meaning that their action had a deeper impact on the entire population. Third, if these were the leaders, this probably isn't an exhaustive list for all the people.

What is even more interesting is that many of these people came back to Israel from captivity for the glory of God. Most of the people who returned with Zerubbabel were men of faith on a mission. After 80 years, the mission got mired in the stuff of life. The focus on the work of God on earth and the plan of redemption became blurry and was lost. The faith of following Yahweh couldn't compete with the wild women of Baal worship and "Why shouldn't you be able to enjoy a good pork chop with your neighbor?" Faith looks funny removed from the redemptive purpose of God on earth. That kind of faith can't compete with a life lived for having a good time on earth. There is no shopping or comparison here where we get to choose the best, most enjoyable and fulfilling life on earth. Truth is truth. This is a dying planet. We are on a sinking ship. Faith is meant to save us so we can know God and help others before they stand before God. And this faith shows us the love of the Father and of the Son who reached out to save us when we didn't care and were His enemies.

The generation that returned with Zerubbabel returned in faith. Eighty years later, they realized they had become lost on earth. Ezra was the man God sent to redirect them to honor God with their lives and to follow Him. The message for us is that our faith always has to be focused on following the Lord in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples. If Christianity is removed from its commission, it becomes merely an alternative among many lifestyles, and the sea of humanity is free to flow unhindered to judgment and to hell. We love and follow Jesus, who gave His life as a ransom for humanity, who came to seek and to save that which is lost. And so we follow, as our Lord led and still leads.

1 Corinthians 6

This is a very interesting chapter, full of theology. It goes to show that all of our actions involve some very important theology, or the misunderstanding of that very important theology.

Vs. 1-8 Just think of all the underlying teaching that is in this section. The overt message is that Christians shouldn't sue Christians, and if there are disagreements, they should go before the elders/spiritual men. Underlying all of this is the sovereignty of God and our situation on this earth.

Vs. 2-3 WOW! If that's the case, how can we afford to follow in the sin of the world and the influence of its rulers? Not only that, it certainly means that the end of this tragic affair on earth is judgment of the lost and of those who rebel against God.

V. 7 How many of us, for the sake of Christ and His testimony, for the salvation of others, would be willing to suffer this kind of abuse? But notice, it is really a command from Jesus to anyone who is a disciple.

Luke 6:27-36 *"But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. ³¹ And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.*

³² *"If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. ³⁵ But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. ³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*

For the sake of the Lord and His gospel, it also applies to when we are being abused by other Christians. Our recourse is Matthew 18.

Vs. 9-11 So, what is the point Paul is making here? He isn't saying this to degrade the competence of unbelievers, but he is saying that they are lost and are subject to all of these things we have been freed from. By God's grace, we see more of life and reality than they do. We have the wisdom of the Spirit, and we understand the power of sin and the judgment coming against this planet. We know the love of God in Christ, and we can show them how to be saved.

Vs. 12-20 This is a separate problem in the church, but somehow related to the past problem.

Note here that when Paul quotes an opponent or false teaching, he immediately answers in a very clear way. There is some confusion in chapter 14 about women being silent in certain settings in the church. Certain people dismiss that teaching, saying that Paul was quoting an opponent; but it isn't apparent that he was quoting anyone. This example is typical of other instances we'll see where Paul quotes his opponents. Chapter 14 doesn't fit into this at all.

V. 12 Notice how the Jews had over reacted to "freedom" in Christ. Somehow they equated knowing Christ to being free from the restraints of the law and morality, as if the spiritual didn't connect to the physical.

Vs. 13-14 Someone was teaching that liberty in Christ meant liberty to be immorally sexually active. That is nothing new, but it was disturbing that Christians were accepting that. In Germany I met this mindset among Christians too. The idea is that the act of sex is simply human, and besides, God forgives. I met German leaders, who when challenged to prove that sex before marriage was wrong, were speechless.

Back to the argument here: The Lord owns our bodies. If He is Lord, we need to obey and go with Him.

Vs. 15-16 Apparently some of the believing men were getting dates with prostitutes, thinking they were immune to moral requirements. Paul shows the spiritual stupidity in that view. Corinth was a very immoral city. To call someone's mother a "Corinthian Woman," was to call her a prostitute. Just like the men in Ezra's day who walked away from faith to marry foreign women, there was a sexual component here also. It was this sexual attraction that led them to disobey Christ, cleverly veneered with some spiritual reasoning. Now of course, someone would say that it was in fact immoral to do this with prostitutes, but not with someone you were planning to marry. But Paul will address that in chapter 7 and give a motto that has appeared on many wedding invitations, "It is better to marry, than to burn with passion," or the short version, "That we might not burn."

We have found a lot of ways to define *one flesh*, but the Spirit makes it pretty clear that "joining your members" is how it happens. And God is not tricked by "how far" or by definitions of words. Jesus said that if a man looks lustfully at a woman (even a computer image) other than his wife, he has already committed adultery.

V. 17 This has always been a challenge for me. Our relationship and growth in Christ aren't automatic. As we obey and follow closer, we get more of Him. Being united with the Lord is also abiding in Christ from John 15.

V. 18 When I read this I think of Joseph leaving his robe in Potiphar's wife's hands when she went for him. Many men and women are being ruined by their sexual passions, not because they have passions, but because they don't discipline themselves and keep them in check.

Vs. 19-20 What an amazing statement. The Holy Spirit is within us, and we are to live to glorify God. And this has everything to do with how we look at sexuality on this planet.

Just as an aside, notice that Paul doesn't go totally nuclear about their immorality. The Spirit doesn't write off anyone as unusable or irredeemable - not that this issue isn't important. Paul and the Spirit are saying it is, but with repentance and forgiveness, lives can get back on track. God understands our need and our weakness sexually far better than we do. As important as our sexuality is and how it permeates all of our songs and jokes and media, we are still pretty ignorant when it comes to this stuff. Chapter 7 will set some things straight for the disciples at Corinth.

Psalm 31:9-18

There are many parallels of David's experience of suffering to Jesus' suffering, Psalm 22 for example. Of course, David was a sinner and Jesus wasn't and some of David's troubles were caused by his own failing. Those parallels can't be made with Jesus, yet the Spirit has chosen to use David as an example to illustrate some of what Jesus felt on the cross. Last time we read this I mentioned imagining this as what Jesus felt as He went through His journey to the cross. If you want a good parallel to this, read Isaiah 53. For example, notice the parallel between v. 11 here, and Isaiah 53:3.

Vs. 9-10 David suffered for many years running from Saul. It was not only unfair and unjust, but David had been anointed by Samuel to be king of Israel when he was about twelve years old. Now David was in his twenties, possibly close to thirty, and this promise looked hard to believe. Was the waiting because of his own sins? It probably seemed like it at times. But we have the benefit of knowing that God did deliver David and that these years of waiting were years where God was engineering David's heart. He does the same with us.

Vs. 11-13 David was a hunted man. There was no better way to win Saul's favor than to say you didn't like David or to tell Saul where he was hiding. David lived under that kind of disdain and pressure. And to think, this is what Jesus endured for us.

Vs. 14-18 Look at everything David learned. This is also why God allows us to wait and to suffer as we follow Him in the harvest. I don't know what speaks to you, but v. 16 is what I want more and more. And as God teaches us, people in the harvest see more of Him in us.

Proverbs 21:3

Amen, and instead of *sacrifice* you could add, "or going to cool worship services." I see righteousness and justice as linked to the harvest and our work in it.

Matthew 12:18-21 "*Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. ¹⁹He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; ²⁰a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; ²¹and in his name the Gentiles will hope.*"