

Pursuing God: Righteousness, Part 1 - The Grace of Conviction

Ezra 9

MPS God brings gracious conviction to confront sin and lead His people to confession for the glory of His Name in redemption.

OBJ Every person should embrace conviction as God's gracious love for us because of 3 Truths.

INTRO **Have you ever been right on the cusp of something exciting, only to have a major setback occur?** I remember as a none-year-old kid we were getting ready to head out of vacation. We loaded the Gran Torino Station Wagon, the extended version of glory with the back hop seats. The excitement and the energy were uncontrollable. And just before it was time to leave, my dad walks in and announces that there is a problem with the car. Suddenly the whole world went dark. After several hours of mechanics in our driveway replacing the water pump, we were finally able to take that vacation.

Ezra records so much good, missional advancement that God leads His people in. God sovereignly works to glorify His Name by calling His people to trust and follow Him to return to the land He gave them. He unites His people for mission by consuming their worship with His glory. And opposition arises because people want glory that is due to God but it does not stop them. God awakens and authorizes His people to obey His commands, even in the face of opposition. He empowers their obedience by a hope in salvation which motivates, sustains and fuels their obedience. Then He centers their lives on His Word to walk in faithful obedience to His commands. But when we come to Ezra 9 and 10 all this missional momentum comes to a hard stop, or so it seems. Chapters 9 and 10 tell one episode of God leading His people in righteousness. We will break them into two parts for our study.

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READ Ezra 9:1-2

"After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations,... ²For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost."

Though not without problems, the mission advances as the second groups of exiles complete the journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. They get settled and established in the land. And just when everything seems to be working and momentum is building, something breaks. Or, more accurately, something broken is discovered. **The people of God have remained in their sinful disobedience to God.**

Ezra is told that the Israelites have intermarried with the people of the land. Verse two provides a list of the people with whom they have intermarried. The list represents more than only certain people with whom they have married. The list represents the people God had forbidden them to intermarry since they crossed into the Promised Land.¹ The problem was not a racial or ethnic prejudice against any particular people.² The Old Testament never forbids marriages based solely on race, ethnicity, nor nationality. The story of Ruth and Boaz, from which King David is a descendant, proves God's blessing when done according to His command. The problem was purity of religion. They had not made a commitment for obedience to God their first priority in the most important relationship of life.³ The Israelites had been commanded to marry within their

¹ Derek Kidner, [Ezra and Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 12, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 76. Kidner states, "The list of foreign peoples in verse 1, with its archaic sound, recalls at once the string of names which, with minor variants, had been a keynote of the ancient promises and warnings about Canaan."

² F. Charles Fensham, [The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah](#), The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 125. Fensham states, "The term "holy" shows that the term "seed" has nothing to do with racial prejudice. It is the people whom God had elected as his people (Exod. 19:6) to carry his revelation, to be a light to the nations (Isa. 42:6)."

³ Mervin Breneman, [Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther](#), electronic ed., vol. 10, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 149. Breneman records, "The Old Testament did not completely forbid intermarriage with foreigners. Indeed several important "men of faith" had non-Israelite wives (Gen 16:3; 41:45; Exod 2:21; Num 12:1; 2 Sam 3:3). The most striking example is in the Book of Ruth, which



“spiritual” clan (i.e., the worshipers of the Lord).⁴ They were made holy by God, meaning ‘set apart for’, but had not separated themselves in obedience to and in accordance with their identity as God’s people. **God’s people were not living true to their identity but intermarried and defiled the purity of their worship to God as His people.**

Ezra’s response demonstrates the seriousness of the sin. He tears his clothes and pulls his hair out.(.3-4) This was a common act of deep mourning over sin. Other leaders gathered around him and joined in the mourning. At the evening sacrifice he prays before the people out of the conviction of sin. He acknowledges their guilt as a people.(.6-7) He recognizes God’s favor and mercy that has been upon them(.8), and the steadfast love of God in their slavery(.9). Ezra’s confession identifies the true nature of their sin. They have forsaken God’s commandment by embracing the impurities and abominations of the people of the lands.(.10-11) And this has been done principally through intermarriage with them. God’s people and their offspring have now given themselves to worship other gods.(.12) He culminates His prayer by acknowledging that God has been more gracious and merciful to them than they deserved. But the people have not been careful to obey His commands.(.13-14) Ezra concludes His prayer by confessing that God is right and just in His conviction. And the people are before Him in their guilt, unable to stand and without excuse.(.15) So much had been accomplished by the people, but so little attention given to God in their lives. They performed what they thought would satisfy God but didn’t prioritize what He had commanded. **So Ezra casts himself before the Lord in deep conviction because of the people’s sin.**

Theology of Mission

WHY does God do this? We can make sense of why God stops bad things. **But why doesn’t He accept what they can do for Him and just leave “well enough” alone regarding what they were doing for themselves?** God is on mission in the world for the glory of His name. Anything that is not true to His glory is not worthy of His Name. His mission is not about what His people do for Him, but what He has done for His people. **God glorifies His Name in the world by the redemption of His people. Therefore, people, specifically that are called by His Name, who do not live redeemed do not glorify His name.**

This leads us to ask another question. Does God stop the mission because of the people’s sin? It seems like God halts everything until this one thing is made right. Thinking about God’s mission in this manner seems to be a typical pattern not only for the Israelites but also for Christians today. This is the wrong way to think about what God is doing. **And if we get our thinking about this wrong, we get everything wrong.**

There is a right way to think about all God is doing here. “Chapter 9 is central to the whole book because of the sharp contrast which it draws between the people of God as it ought to be and as it actually is.”⁵ These are God’s people, holy unto Him, set apart for His purposes and His glory. But they were living in deep sin, negligently and willfully disobeying without regard for His holy commands. Ezra is grief-stricken as he recognizes that this is what sent into exile to begin with. God is not “stopping mission” to do something different or distinct from, but to fulfill His purpose in mission. He is redeeming His people to display His righteous glory in the world. **When God brings conviction of sin, He is making us more like Jesus!**

When we understand why God brings conviction of sin then we can understand His true purpose for mission. The purpose of serving God’s mission in the world is the glory of His Name among all peoples of the world. The glory of God’s Name is displayed by His wonder-working power that makes dead people alive, that forgives and cleanses from sin, that redeems. God sends His people on mission to make them more like Him so when they tell the world about Him they see just how powerful and awesome, how merciful and gracious, how steadfast and loving He truly is! He sends His people on mission not to show the world how great they are but to show the world how great He is! **Serving God’s mission is NEVER about what we can do for Him, but ONLY about all He has done for us, to redeem and make us righteous in Jesus Christ.**

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shows that David was a descendant from such a relationship. But when it would involve a compromise of faith or practice, intermarriage with the pagan peoples of Canaan was forbidden.”

⁴ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Ezr 9:10–12.

⁵ J. G. McConville, [Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther](#), The Daily Study Bible Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985), 60.



What happens in Ezra 9 is no surprise, but it always seems to surprise many. Some misunderstand conviction and what role it serves in Christian growth. [Conviction is one of the first and most important lessons for a Christian to learn](#), and is essential for real, Gospel transformation to occur. It demonstrates God's love and grace alive and working in you. God leads and guides by Holy Spirit thru conviction. Two verses help us understand the role of conviction in pursuing God.

First, understand the purpose of conviction. The Holy Spirit exposes our sin and shows us our guilt in breaking God's Law for the purpose of reproof and turning us back to God.

"And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." John 16:8

Second, understand the feeling of conviction is a bone-throbbing, grief-strickeness that breaks hardness and turns to God.

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

2 Corinthians 7:10

These verses show how conviction reveal God's gracious love for us and why we must embrace it when Holy Spirit brings it. [Conviction allows you to feel the weight of God's judgment w/o the punishment of it.](#)

OBJ [Three Truths beckon us to embrace God's gracious conviction as His love for and wonder-working power in us.](#)

Learn to embrace Godly conviction because...

Truth #1: Conviction comes from God to lead us back to Him. .1-5

Conviction is from God by His Holy Spirit as a labor of His love and grace toward us and His power working in us.

Conviction produces Godly righteousness by its full work within us.

1. Conviction identifies sin from God's command^{Rom7:12} by revealing where we love our 'sin' more than God's provision (the Law), and where we substitute His glory for lesser glory. Ezra 9.1-2 says "*not separated themselves...mixed with people of the land.*" God's plan was given in his Word. The people substituted a 'lesser glory' of their own plan.
2. Conviction reveals the scope of sin, by our involvement and sin's pervasiveness so that nothing remains hidden. The sin in Ezra 9 was vast and widespread. When we come under conviction, God is gracious to reveal all those involved; the people, sometimes places, so we know how redemption must be pursued.
3. Conviction shows the depth of offense against God and often its affect toward people.^{9:2} One great topic of debate has always been to believe that "my sin only affects me'. The Bible teaches that your sin never only affects you.
4. Conviction stills us before God to stop us from continuing in sin and destruction. Clarity comes in hearing from God through conviction when we humble ourselves. But if we ignore God's conviction, it sears our heart toward God.
5. Very often, our conviction will become a confession of clarification for others. When we share what God has convicted us of, others will join us to confirm their own conviction.

When under conviction we are left only to turn to God. But in conviction we always know we can turn to God. [God grows godly character in his people through conviction, by leading us back to Him for His redeeming power to work in us.](#)

Learn to trust Godly conviction because...

Truth #2: Conviction reveals sin's full measure and reminds of God's goodness and grace. .6-9

Conviction has an '**acuteness**' that shows the intensity and depth of sin's damaging affects on life and a growing devastation within; shame, guilt, defeat, oppression, slavery, plundering of life. Sin 'programs' our heart to desire things that destroy and our mind to seek things that condemn. Conviction graciously grants us to feel the weight of sin before God, without being crushed. Psalm 32 teaches how conviction does this.

¹*Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*

²*Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

³*For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.*

⁴*For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.*

⁵*I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity;*

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Psalm 32:1-5



In Conviction, **hope is revealed in contrast to sin through the gospel**. Sin is always revealed by God's perfect Law, but God doesn't leave us under law. Through conviction He guides us to a greater hope in Jesus Christ. Hebrews 7.19 states, "(for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God."

And then, **conviction clarifies personal responsibility without destroying our identity**. It doesn't allow us to forsake our responsibility but shows that no matter how much work we do, we cannot make right for our sin. ONLY God could show us the weight of our sin without crushing us, and only God would do this. We are reminded of His steadfast love.

Learn to trust Godly conviction because...

Truth #3: Conviction leaves us without excuse before God but hoping and trusting in Him. .10-15

The clarity "C" brings shows clearly, "we have forsaken God. We have nothing to say before him. AND, **this is exactly where we should be before God**. As Romans 1:20 says, before God we are "without excuse". **Conviction brings us to this point because until we reach the point of being 'without excuse', we can never be with God.**

Through conviction God leads us to the only place where we can meet with him; "*Behold, we are before you in our guilt*". There is no longer any room for question in our mind. We submit all to God, acknowledging that He is Truth, Just and Righteous, "*for none can stand before you because of this.*"

And here before God we hope in his mercy and love, in need of His grace. **The best place to experience God's full transformation is when we are completely 'before him'**. The **prayer of conviction** resonates within, "*And now God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments. Behold, we are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this.*" **When we respond to God's conviction in humility and surrender, we always are found in his grace.**

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