

## Pursuing God: Righteousness, part 2 – The Freedom of Repentance

### Ezra 10

**MPS** God leads us through repentance that we might walk in right relationship with Him and bear a faithful witness in the world.

**OBJ** Every person can understand how to address conviction from sin to experience the freedom God brings by 6 Aspects of Biblical repentance.

#### READ Ezra 10.1-8

*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. <sup>2</sup> And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, of the sons of Elam, addressed Ezra: "We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. <sup>3</sup> Therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to the Law. <sup>4</sup> Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it." <sup>5</sup> Then Ezra arose and made the leading priests and Levites and all Israel take an oath that they would do as had been said. So they took the oath.*

*<sup>6</sup> Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib, where he spent the night, neither eating bread nor drinking water, for he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles. <sup>7</sup> And a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem, <sup>8</sup> and that if anyone did not come within three days, by order of the officials and the elders all his property should be forfeited, and he himself banned from the congregation of the exiles.*

**10:1-5** Chapter Ten begins with Ezra still under heavy conviction. As the people continue to gather around and join him in this state of conviction, one leader, Shecaniah, comes to Ezra and makes a corporate confession of their guilt in intermarriage. But notice, their conviction of sin does not leave them without hope. **Godly conviction gives hope to address sin through repentance, by turning away from sin and walking in righteousness through obedience.**

**TRANS** But no deed was done lightly.

**10:6-8** While Ezra's immediate response is to withdraw for more prayer and fasting, the people are assembled. The conviction that began with one man has now spread throughout the people and actions of repentance must be taken.

In **Ezra 10:9-17**, a corporate recognition of guilt and repentance is made by the people and they agree on a plan for their steps of repentance. Ezra does not allow them to only trust him. They have to take responsibility for their own sin.(.10-11) There are some who disagree, but they do not persuade the whole congregation. Ezra sits down with the leaders to determine who all this involves. They identify all involved. Ezra 10:18-44 lists all who were guilty of intermarriage. These were the people who had built their whole life around their sin. Though ignored until now, this list reminds us that nothing will be hidden nor ignored.

**God leads us through repentance that we might walk in right relationship with Him and bear a faithful witness in the world.**

**ISSUE to Address** There is one glaring issue we must deal with before we can get to the heart of this passage. This is the act that they undertook in their repentance, namely, putting away their wives from the foreign nations. **How do we make sense of that which we know is clearly outside of God's desire for marriage that occurs in this text? WHY is it acceptable for them to divorce their wives in Ezra?** I want to address these questions to acknowledge their value, but not spend too much time on them. The actions taken cause us to pause and ask them, but there is no pause for the Israelites in this passage, so the action does not form the central message or theme of the passage.

In explaining their actions I begin with a couple of parameters for understanding, and then some conclusions that we can rightly draw about the situation. First, their marriages broke faith with God. As we mentioned last week, these were not only recent marriages but a pattern that had been left unaddressed among the people. The central problem was that the



Israelites has convoluted and perverted their worship by these marriages. These were not wives who were believing foreigners, but unbelieving foreigners that maintained other religious traditions and brought that influence into the home, raising and training their children in worship of other gods. A second reason that frames the situation is that marriages in that day were not identical to what we consider marriage today. Many were little more than business arrangements made for profit or protection, agreements that formed alignments that had more to do with their prosperity rather than the priority of their home. Considering their motivations for these marriages, one commentator explains, we cannot really relate to what transpires in Ezra because we have no comparative analogy of their situation.<sup>1</sup> [In reality, these marriages not only convoluted and perverted their worship but were a done out of a lack of faith in God to begin with. Nothing about these marriages could nor did honor God but were antagonistic to the people's obedience.](#)

We should be clear though, this is not the casual acceptance of divorce as an amicable end if everything doesn't work out, if something better comes along, or if you simply change your mind; a rationale of irreconcilable differences. This passage in no way gives legitimacy nor validity to these modern rationales so easily accepted today. Jesus says divorce occurs because of the hardness of heart. Paul offers distinct parameters that allow for, but does not encourage, divorce from an unbeliever, including desertion, that the believing spouse is under no obligation to reconcile, but free to neither pursue them nor reconcile with them. But that is never an action precipitated by the believer. [Finally, we can confidently say that nothing that is taught nor shared here in any way contradicts anything the New Testament teaches about marriage and divorce.](#)

**TRANS** What we must take away from this passage in Ezra is the seriousness of sin among God's people and the need for real action in repentance. And this is where I want to now turn our attention.

**ILLUS** As a child, I was staying at my aunt's house one day and riding my bike. There was a section of sidewalk that had been pushed up to form the perfect bike ramp. I had been told not to jump it on my bike. And you know what I did so often as a child when told what not to do. Fast forward: I had a wreck and skinned my knee badly. It scared my aunt, and that scared me. So, I lied to my aunt, and then my parents about the wreck. I blamed it on an older, red-head, bully across the street. A few days later when my parents discovered the truth, my dad took me back to my aunt to apologize. Then to the kid across street to explain what I had done (unknown to him) to apologize. That was hard and humbling! But it was totally freeing and 'sticks' as one of the most redeeming examples of repentance in my life.

**Christians are called to be people of repentance.** Last week we saw that God brings conviction to lead and guide us in righteousness through repentance. This week, repentance turns us back to God to walk in obedience by real, concrete actions. [Conviction grows<sup>10:1</sup> until repentance is practiced. And repentance brings freedom from sin's slavery<sup>9:9</sup>.](#)

Repentance is often mis-understood and mis-handled. Repentance never means to make other arrangements with God, but to act in accordance with God's Word. It's not merely 'doing the right thing instead of the wrong', or 'making the right decision instead of the wrong'. Repentance is the work of redemption that turns away from and turns to Christ. Paul describes repentance in 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 'turning from idols to serve the living and true God'. [Repentance puts us in right relationship with God, with self, others and the world when we confess that God is right and just, confess that we have sinned against God, and receive His forgiveness and cleansing through Jesus to walk in obedience.](#)

**OBJ 6 Aspects of Biblical repentance** help us understand how to respond to conviction to experience God's freedom.

### **#1: In Biblical repentance PEOPLE are included. .1-5, 16**

Ezra makes the people take an oath to participate in the repentance beginning with the spiritual leaders and heads of homes. And this before they even knew all that would be involved. Repentance always includes others not because it depends on them, but because our sin or redemption includes or affects them in some way. There are **those involved in the sin**. Others may be 'included with us' in our sin or 'affected by' our sin. Either way, they are involved and must be

<sup>1</sup> J. G. McConville, [Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther](#), The Daily Study Bible Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985), 70–71. McConville states, "the action of Ezra is without analogies because his situation is without analogies, certainly in modern times."



included in our repentance. **A Christian's responsibility is to labor for redemption through Gospel repentance** by pursuing people to acknowledge and confess sin (included) or ask for forgiveness (affected). Second, there are **those that are "with us" in redemption labors**. This is one of the most difficult and encouraging factors in repentance. Their presence is a blessing. Jesus is the only Mediator with God but God's people are to be a help and encouragement to practice full repentance<sup>5</sup>, provide accountability<sup>16</sup>; and confirm with us that it is done<sup>16</sup>. Repentance has a magnetic affect; it "connects" to guilt over sin in others and draws them in to repent, not for the sins of others but for their own sins.

Some ask, **How many should be involved in my repentance?** This general **Principle is helpful. In repentance, the Scope of involvement should be proportionate to the scope of inclusion in the committing of the sin.** Involving more people almost always means committing more sin by gossip or slander, or some other secondary sin. The only exception is where you involve others who help to mediate, and never simply to medicate your hurt feelings or tender wounds of embarrassment.

**APPL** **"How do I know if I should go to them?"** Seek counsel from a godly person that will be honest and give you solid Biblical counsel. But if you are asking, God has probably placed that on your heart and you should go to that person.

**APPL** **"What if I'm 'receiver of' or 'encourager to' another?"** Don't dismiss the act. Receive it, forgive, and express gratitude.

## **#2: In Biblical repentance there is a PRICE to be paid. .6-8, 18-19**

**There is a price for refusing to participate (.6-8).** Ezra sets a price that shows the importance of this practice. This reminds us that the highest price to be paid is the one who will not repent. There are two main costs we incur when we refuse to repent. We continue to carry the shame and guilt of our sin. And, failing to repent hardens us to the Spirit's work. When we refuse or neglect to repent, we deny the work of Christ for us and quench the Spirit in us.

**There is also a price for faithfully following through (.18-19).** Even in repentance, trusting the ultimate price Christ paid for us, there is always a price we pay 'here and now' by "consequences"; in a relationship, paying for damage, etc. Maybe one of the biggest prices we pay is embarrassment of pride. The reason pride gets hurt in repentance is because humility is practiced. Repentance doesn't excuse us from consequences. It leads us through and uses them to redeem in every way.

## **#3: In Biblical repentance there is a specific PURPOSE to repentance. .10-12**

Ezra identifies the specific sin and the people take personal responsibility. **Repentance clarifies what has taken place in our life (.10-11).** Just as conviction comes with specific detail, that 'detail' informs how we are to labor for redemption in repentance. God is gracious to grant 'specific detail' in repentance so that we know what is being 'taken off of us', and learn what is going on within us that tempts and leads us into sin. In repentance, we *bear* responsibility for our sin and don't blame others (.12). When we bear responsibility for our sin, then we know Christ has forgiven our us for that sin and we carry its shame and guilt no more. When we will not admit our sin, it cannot be atoned.

**Repenting of 'un-named sin' is as an 'anonymous prayer request'**, it is very seldom of any good purpose. Both can easily breed false piety and pretentious recklessness. Their usage should very rare. Jesus died for sin: Name it. Confess it. Own it. And repent so God can get it off of you.

**TRANS** When conviction shows the 'people', 'price', 'purpose' of sin, it also reveals the process we are to take to labor for redemption in repentance.

## **#4: In Biblical repentance there is a PROCESS that we must endure. .7-8,13-14,16-17**

**Repentance follows the 'same steps' taken in committing the sin.** The process of repentance is to redeem sin's affects. You can't always 'undo' what was done, but it can be redeemed. If you shortcut a part, the process will not be complete.

**The process will be proportionate to time, depth and degree of involvement.** Too often we just want everything to 'go away'. As a substitute for the gospel, we try to 'place over' life, instead of 'putting on' Christ. But we must *"die with Christ"* if the power of Christ's resurrected life is to be experienced. The process often involves making relationships right with God



(obedience) and others (blessing & faithful witness). This process will take time, require **patience with others** as we wait for forgiveness, and **patience with self** as we grow in maturity.

**Repentance is not a quick fix, but laboring for complete redemption.** ‘Exactly’ what to do will not always be clear. It may be difficult to contact a person, unsure exactly how to approach them or what to say to them. But what will be clear is ‘what you need to do’. And you cannot control how another will respond, but you are not supposed to. **Trust God in what He is leading you to do, give grace to others in their response, and leave the rest up to Him.**

#### #5: In Biblical repentance there will be PAIN involved .3, .11b

There is **pain that we will have to endure**. Some want to bail before heartache, thinking their mourning is enough and they shouldn’t have to bear more. **When you hit the ‘nerve’ of your sin, it will be the most acute pain in the process.** But until you get here, you can’t redeem sin. Our pain reminds us of what Christ atoned for us. Remember that God is working.

**There is pain that we may inflict on another.** Your repentance will often be painful to others. Many don’t want to think that inflicting pain in some way can be redemptive. Pain comes NOT from the act of repentance, but the sin we are repenting of, and demonstrates how painful and destructive our sin is, to us and others.

**ILLUS** Surgery is painful, but a part of healing. Pain doesn’t mean it’s not healthy, right or that we should stop. *Denying self* (emotional), *taking up our cross* (physical) and *following Jesus* (killing pride) are all painful, and each in their own way. The pain of repentance, though minor in comparison, reminds us of the true destruction of all sin as it steals, kills and destroys.

#### #6: In Biblical repentance the PRIZE is worth the labor.

Until we learn to practice repentance we will never experience the freedom Christ died to give us. Repentance brings freedom that releases us from sin’s power over us. Then, when redeemed, there is no shame or condemnation remains. “*Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret*”<sup>2Cor7:10</sup> Until one has repented, we cannot say that faith is present because faith is only verified in obedience. But what we can say is that when we do repent, God always forgives and cleanses, and restores the joy of his Spirit.

**CLOSE** Repentance is our ‘labor’ of faith, but more so about God’s work in us as we work out our salvation.”<sup>Phil2.12-13</sup> God leads us in repentance through conviction to freedom. **The Promise of Repentance: the Gospel tells us that we can follow, all the way, because Christ has finished the work for us on the cross.** When God convicts of sin and leads you into repentance, know this, Christian, He is there with you, waiting to work in and redeem you.

**God leads us through repentance that we might walk in right relationship with Him and bear a faithful witness in the world.**

Have you repented, turned from your sin to trust Christ?

