

## 210205- Prayer and Forgiveness 38/05 February 5, 2021

Dear Friends,

It is an easy habit to focus all our Bible reading on the New Testament and to ignore the Old as related to a past history of the faith. In terms of the form of worship and lifestyle, the point is true. However, our God dealt with His children then in much the way He deals with us now. And the New Testament frequently reminds us that we need to study the Old Testament to learn of the Lord's righteous judgments against His erring children. Twice in his reminder to this truth in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul teaches us that much of the Old Testament serves as an example to us, *a negative example not to do as they did*.

We repeatedly read of God's Old Testament people sinning and bringing the Lord's stern chastening into their lives. These New Testament reminders warn us not to repeat the indifferent sinful habits of Old Testament believers, lest we bring the same judgment from the Lord onto us that He sent onto them.

In our study lesson for this week, we read of the Lord's warnings to Manasseh, Hezekiah's son. Manasseh ignored them, and the Lord sent him to Babylon for a season of serious chastening. While Manasseh refused to hear the Lord's righteous warning, he did "Listen" to the Lord's chastening. When Manasseh repented and prayed for the Lord's forgiveness, the Lord heard, forgave, and responded by delivering him from prison in Babylon and restoring him to the throne in Jerusalem. Our study lesson for the week reminds us of a prayer, belated to be sure, but a true-from-the-heart-prayer, and of the Lord's responsive forgiveness and restoration.

Our study lesson, and its context, also reminds us that "Private" repentance is not always sufficient to heal the open, infected wounds of our sins. In Manasseh's case, he prayed, he repented, and the Lord forgave and restored him. He even removed his pagan idols from the landscape. However, the people did not learn sufficiently of his change of heart and life. They continued in their idolatrous ways. They even tried to blend their old pagan ways with God's ways, instead of joining Manasseh in from-the-heart repentance. The New Testament reminds us of the need to confess our sins, "faults," the same as a sin. (James 5:16) As we see in Manasseh's careless example, we may repent and truly change our ways, but our failure to confess our sins is liable to leave those who witnessed--and followed--our sinful example to continue in the sin that we started. I am convinced that Biblical repentance includes confession that is as public as the sin. If you committed a sin against a family member in a family setting, your confession should be in a similar family setting. If you sinned in the dining room at church, your confession should be in the presence of the same group that witnessed your sin. Neither more public nor less than the sin.

Thank the Lord for such rich examples in Scripture, both of answered prayers and of the Lord's gracious forgiveness. We need reminders of both.

Lord bless,  
Joe Holder

### **Prayer and Forgiveness**

*And the Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken. Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God. (2 Chronicles 33:10-13 KJV 1900)*

Manasseh, Hezekiah's son, led the people into abominable sins. How often we read in the Old Testament history that the younger generation failed to learn lessons of godliness from the older generation, Samuel's sons as a prime example. If we read from the beginning of this chapter, we see the image of a wicked king who showed no regard for the Lord and His ways whatever. Verse 2 indicates that he more imitated the pagans surrounding God's people than his godly ancestors. Verses 6 and 7 reveal the sad details of his abominations, from child sacrifice to placing carved idols in Solomon's temple in Jerusalem.

*And the Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken.* This sentence reveals a divine pattern that many sincere believers fail to understand in our time. The Lord warned Manasseh and the people of their sin, and of His displeasure. The judgment that fell on them because of their sin was not a surprise. The Lord warned them, and they ignored His warning. Contemporary believers seem too ready to play the prophet and tell us that every calamity, from tornados to hurricanes to earthquakes to a new variety of flu virus are a divine judgment. Yet they never show us the Lord's previous warnings. If the Lord sends His judgment against His people, He will previously warn them and repeatedly command them to repent before sending His judgment. Absent a clear warning and call to repent, no one has Biblical grounds to claim that any disaster is a divine judgment.

*Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.* The Lord's judgment was a specific response to Manasseh's callous refusal to repent.

*And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom.* The Lord's people are often symbolized in Scripture as "Sheep." Sheep are beneficial animals, but they are by no means the smartest animal on the farm. They have a strong "Herd" mentality. Follow the crowd, even when you see the crowd going over the cliff into disaster. They often obsess over their immediate activity to the point that they become oblivious to "Clear and present" danger around them. Yes, the Lord is their shepherd, but He has not promised in Scripture always to protect them from their own myopic and deliberate blindness and foolish choices. Manasseh could have wisely learned from Hezekiah's example, but he obviously chose not to do so. It took a "Trip" to Babylon and cruel imprisonment to bring him to his senses.

Are you and I that different from Manasseh? Have we ever deliberately chosen to ignore the Lord's leading because His way was "Boring" or whatever our rebellious assessment of our God and His ways happened to be? Have we ever awakened in the cruel prison of our own Babylon, separated from the Lord's fellowship and alone with our own convicted conscience? Have we ever ignored the Lord's warnings, but repented when affliction came? ***Ignore the voice of God, but "Listen" to affliction. Sad indeed.***

God is not limited to the way of chastening to teach us His ways. We bring that chastening onto ourselves when we deliberately choose to ignore Him and His ways, chasing our own idols and indifference to God and His ways. He sends chastening on us only after we have refused to hear His "Voice" in our conscience and in the words of Scripture. For modern believers who claim, "Oh, not to worry. Chastening is no big deal," I urge you to walk with Manasseh on his journey to Babylon. Is a Babylonian prison "No big deal" compared to sitting on the throne of victory over our selves and our spiritual adversary with Jesus? Are Babylon's fetters and thorns "No big deal" compared with living as a "...king and priest" with Jesus? I fear the sin of indifference is as prevalent and as devastating to authentic Biblical faith as many of the blackest sins.

*But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.* (1

Corinthians 10:5-6)

*Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. (1 Corinthians 10:11-12)*

Twice in one lesson Paul reminds us that the Lord's judgment against His sinning people in the Old Testament appears in our Bible to give us a glaring example and warning. Yes, the Lord is long-suffering. Yes, He sends us repeated warnings, ***not judgment without warning***. But never doubt. The Lord's chastening judgment is not paralyzed. It does fall upon us, and, when it falls, it falls with severity. A wise parent will administer chastening, measured to be just severe enough to curb the child's dangerous, often self-destructive behavior. Never excessive, but also never so minor as not to be painful enough to urge the child to give serious regard for needed repentance. Our Lord is far wiser than any human parent who ever lived. Be careful not to test His long-suffering. You might learn the hard way that His chastening is not as "No big deal" as you thought.

Ponder the sin of indifference. It is pervasive in the Christian community across all varieties of Christian belief. If you believe you can live as you choose, and the Lord will bless you so long as you are simply sincere in your choices, you have the spiritual "Virus" of indifference. If you have decided that God doesn't really answer prayers, that you are a victim of the cruel world around you, and you can't do anything to make it better, you have the virus. Have we joined the indifferent people of Malachi's day?

*Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered. (Malachi 3:14-15)*

Do these words sound like an echo of your own thinking? Do they sound like a people steeped in indifference and unbelief?

When Manasseh realized that his judgment was the Lord's righteous judgment against his sins, our passage says that he humbled himself before the Lord and prayed. If you did not have this chapter in the Bible, if you only had Manasseh's "History" to judge, would you predict the Lord's response? Or would you hold a hard line against Manasseh? The Lord often surprises us with His goodness and His forgiveness. Thank the Lord for loving and merciful forgiveness.

So what was the situation in the kingdom at this point? Back to normal; everything is good again? No, not at all. Yes, the Lord heard Manasseh's prayer, and He answered that prayer, ended Manasseh's imprisonment, and returned him to Jerusalem as king again. Yes, Manasseh removed his pagan idols from the temple, and tore down the pagan altars he had constructed. So what is wrong with this picture? Read on in the chapter.

*Nevertheless the people did sacrifice still in the high places, yet unto the LORD their God only. (2 Chronicles 33:17 KJV)*

If we follow modern Christian tradition, and its "All about me" obsession, we'll look as far as Manasseh's commendable repentance and celebrate. However, the problem this wicked king created was broader than himself. He set a sinful example that many people in the nation learned all too well and followed. He repented, but, apparently, he didn't do nearly as much as he needed to do to publish his repentance and to call on all the people to learn from his repentance. Many of the people continued in Manasseh's sins because of his bad example.

Think about a personal experience you may have had with sin in your life. At some point, the Lord's chastening got your attention, and you repented, truly so. You returned to a godly walk. You even felt

godly remorse for your former sins. But at this point, you failed to fully deal with your sin. How many people saw your sinful habit in action, and thought, because you were doing it, they could practice it as well. You repented, but you didn't communicate to them their need to repent and seek the Lord's forgiveness and healing.

How far can a repenting believer go to publish his repentance so that every person who saw him in the sin and followed his bad example will also see his godly sorrow and repentance, and follow that example as well? How many people observed you in the sin, but you don't even know they saw you? How can you heal this lingering egregious scar of your sin? It is literally impossible for you to personally approach every person who fell into their own path of sin by your bad example. You have only one reasonable and righteous response to heal this open wound caused by your sin. Scripture, Old and New Testament alike, teaches us to confess our sins. I suggest that our common response to this idea of confession fails to heal this open wound that your sin caused. We often pridefully refuse this Biblical requirement with "I'll confess my sins to God, but they are no one else's business. I refuse to confess them to any human." We can only attempt to heal that consequence of our sin by confessing it in a way that those who likely witnessed our sin also hear our confession and know that we no longer defend or practice it.

***Do we follow Manasseh or do we follow Jesus and Scripture?***

Elder Joe Holder