

The Nature and Necessity of Repentance Part 2 - Confess Your Sins

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Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

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Turn with me in your Bibles to the ninth chapter of Ezra, Ezra 9-10, resuming our exposition of the book and these two chapters, actually, which we began last or the week before last, last time I was in the pulpit two Sundays ago. I appreciate Jess filling in for me and you can be praying for him as he's out of town in California for the Shepherd's Conference.

We're in Ezra 9-10. This last section of this first part, we said Ezra/Nehemiah is really a two-part book. It's one book in two parts. The book of Ezra and the book of Nehemiah originally were one book and so we're finishing the first part, I think, in the next, in this actually this series of messages that we started last time, two weeks ago. We titled it "The Necessity and Nature of Repentance," and that's the title of today's message. The necessity and nature of repentance. We've seen that what's happening in the book of Ezra at the time of our passage particularly, is that there has been a spiritual awakening among the people of God; that God has raised up Ezra to take a group of captives back from Babylon to Jerusalem. This is the second wave of the return of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem. The second wave happens under Ezra. The first wave happened under Zerubbabel. And the third wave's gonna happen a few years after where we are right now under Nehemiah.

So there were three waves of returns, actually there were three waves of exile too, and in this second wave of return that is led by Ezra, God does a great work in the hearts of his people when they get back. We noted Ezra's name means "help" and he's help from God and he brings the word of God to the people of God, and because he does, there is a spiritual awakening among the people. We've noted as we've worked our way through the book of Ezra that one of the key phrases in the book is "the hand of the Lord, the hand of his God, the hand of the Lord his God was upon him," three times in chapter 7 that phrase is used. The hand of God was upon Ezra. The hand of God is the power of God, the mighty power of God to accomplish miraculous things. So the hand of God was upon Ezra three times in chapter 7, three times in chapter 8, the hand of God is upon the people because the hand of God was upon Ezra, now the hand of God is upon the people, getting them back to the land, and now we see what the hand of God does in the lives of the people in Jerusalem who are now receiving the ministry of Ezra and the other returnees,

returned exiles, and what we see is a spiritual awakening; that when God's word, when God sends help into your life, what does that help look like? What is the most helpful thing that you can have at any moment in your life? And that is clearly one thing and it is the word of God. You and I always need the word of God.

The first thing that the Lord did when he created man in Genesis 1, the first thing that he did after he created him was he spoke to him. Man needed the word of God to understand his place in the world. Even before he was a sinner he needed the word of God. Jesus in his humanity when he was tempted, remember when Satan tempted him to turn the stones into bread? Jesus fully man, fully God, but living as true man, he says to Satan when Satan says, "If you're the Son of God turn these stones into bread," Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." The word of God is the one essential thing to the souls of men. In fact, there are two things that are eternal in this world right now, two things that will last forever. Only two: the word of God and the souls of men. That's all that is eternal. Your soul will exist forever. Every single human being's soul will exist forever either in the presence of God in the bliss of heaven or in the absence of God in separation from him in the agony of hell, and it's the word of God that brings about the new life that leads to heaven.

So what we see is the word of God has returned to the people of God. That's really the big picture of what's happening in Ezra. Here God sends a man skilled in the Scriptures, Ezra the scribe, Ezra the priest, and he begins delivering the word of God and what happens when God sends help into your life? He sends his word. How do you recognize that he's beginning to work? What does spiritual awakening look like? Sometimes we just think it's an emotional experience and people think they've had a spiritual awakening and they go off to some kind of sometimes a Christian retreat, even though retreats can be wonderful but, you know, you'll have people go have an experience and sometimes their experience is not grounded in the word of God. They think it's a Christian experience but it's not grounded in the word of God. It was an emotionally drummed up through music, through human effort, but when the word of God comes into your life, what happens? Spiritual awakening and how do you recognize spiritual awakening? The fruit, the necessary fruit of genuine spiritual awakening is repentance. When God really awakens us, when someone is regenerated, born again by the Spirit through the word, what happens is repentance. Faith as well.

Repentance and faith as we said last time, two weeks ago, are two sides of the same coin, the coin of conversion where someone is changed. They repent and believe. And what we have in Ezra 9 and 10 is an illustration of repentance, a beautiful illustration. The word "repent" is not used in the passage but we have the components of repentance laid out before us in the lives of the people through the ministry of Ezra. There are really three essential components of repentance that are illustrated for us in Ezra 9:1 through the end of chapter 10, three things that happen when someone repents.

Now what does repent mean? Biblically it's helpful for us to define it again as a way of introducing this. To repent means to turn. There's two key words. The key Old Testament word for repent is to turn or to return, the word *shub* in Hebrew. To turn; to return. It

pictures a 180 degree turn. So you turn from sin and you return to God is the picture. That's repenting. The New Testament word, the Greek word in the New Testament is metanoia which means to change your mind; to change your thinking. It's actually the word noia comes from nus which means mind, it means a change of mind; to think again; to think after. And so metanoia means a change of mind and so that was the best Greek word they could pull out to describe what happens in repentance, but in a sense it's a part of it. How do you change direction? Well, there's a change of mind, there's a change of thinking, there's a change of heart that leads to a change of direction. That's what repentance is.

So when the word of God comes and awakens us, what happens is we see ourselves differently, we see our sin differently, there's a change of thinking about what's precious to us, what's valuable to us, and we rethink the way we formerly saw ourselves and our sin and our standing before God and we turn and we return. And this is exactly what happens to the people in this passage, Ezra 9:1-15. They really demonstrate repentance and what we're gonna see is there's, I mentioned three component parts of repentance. You can add a couple in but these are the three essential fundamental parts that are illustrated in the passage. Last time we talked about them, I mentioned there are gonna be three, I was gonna have three points in my message last time and I only got through one. I think I only promised two anyway. I said it was gonna be two, then one next time. Okay, let's be clear on that. We didn't go that far, right? So I said there's three points because there's really three parts of repentance and each part could be stated in an imperative. What does repent mean? Repent means, first of all, the last time, the theme of last week, two weeks ago message was mourn over your sin. Repentance consists in mourning over sin and we talked about that last time. We see it illustrated in the passage, that spiritual awakening happens and these people see their sin in a whole new way and they mourn over their sin. Led by Ezra, there is mourning over sin. That is a key part of what it means to repent. This is what Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 7 when he talks about godly sorrow that results in repentance. He makes a distinction. You can have worldly sorrow about sin, or you can have godly sorrow about sin and you can't tell the difference looking at it from the outside. Godly sorrow, though, will lead to repentance. Worldly sorrow doesn't lead to true repentance.

So mourn over your sins. That was last time. Now today we come to the second imperative that I think comes out of the passage that we see them do. If you're going to repent, you not only mourn over your sin and here's the theme of today's message. So the title is "The Nature and Necessity of Repentance," subtitle, "Confess Your Sins." Confess your sins. That's our theme today because this is what we see illustrated beautifully in the life and ministry of Ezra, the help that God has sent them. He leads them not only in mourning over sin but in confessing their sins and this is an important, fundamental, biblical concept. Christians are people who truly confess their sins. So confess your sins, that's the theme.

Let's begin reading at Ezra 9:1, we'll read through Ezra 10:1, and then also another couple of verses in the 10th chapter this time.

1 Now when these things had been completed, the princes approached me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations, those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites. 2 For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness." 3 When I heard about this matter, I tore my garment and my robe, and pulled some of the hair from my head and my beard, and sat down appalled. 4 Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel on account of the unfaithfulness of the exiles gathered to me, and I sat appalled until the evening offering. [There we have the mourning over sin, right?] 5 But at the evening offering I arose from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn, and I fell on my knees and stretched out my hands to the LORD my God; 6 and I said, "O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen above our heads and our guilt has grown even to the heavens. 7 Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt, and on account of our iniquities we, our kings and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity and to plunder and to open shame, as it is this day. 8 But now for a brief moment grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage. 9 For we are slaves; yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, but has extended lovingkindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us reviving to raise up the house of our God, to restore its ruins and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem. 10 Now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, 11 which You have commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, 'The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from end to end and with their impurity. 12 So now do not give your daughters to their sons nor take their daughters to your sons, and never seek their peace or their prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good things of the land and leave it as an inheritance to your sons forever.' 13 After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and our great guilt, since You our God have requited us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us an escaped remnant as this, 14 shall we again break Your commandments and intermarry with the peoples who commit these abominations? Would You not be angry with us to the point of destruction, until there is no remnant nor any who escape? 15 O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we have been left an escaped remnant, as it is this day; behold, we are before You in our guilt, for no one can stand before You because of this."

1 Now while Ezra was praying and making confession, weeping and prostrating himself before the house of God, a very large assembly, men, women and children, gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept bitterly.

Skip on down to verse 11 or verse 10 after the people ask him to take action, he says in verse 10,

10 Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have been unfaithful and have married foreign wives adding to the guilt of Israel. 11 Now therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers and do His will; and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives." 12 Then all the assembly replied with a loud voice, "That's right! As you have said, so it is our duty to do.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we ask that You might grant us grace. We confess, Lord, not only our sinfulness which we acknowledge before You as we come to Your word, we even now in ourselves can only bring guilt but we rejoice at the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who is able to take away our sins, and though our sins are as scarlet, You make us white as snow in Him. And we thank You, Lord, that You make us able, then, through Christ to think Your thoughts after You, to be awakened spiritually and we pray, Lord, for the believers in this room and for the unbelievers, for the unbelievers that they would be awakened to true spiritual life today and would see their sin before Christ and run and flee to Him. For the believers, Lord, for us who have repented and placed our faith in Jesus, we still need to be awakened in a deeper way to see our sin that is still hidden from us. Show it to us that we might repent, that we might seek Your face, that we might rejoice more fully in our glorious Savior and His sufficiency. We pray in His name. Amen.

So spiritual awakening leads to repentance. True spiritual awakening, genuine spiritual awakening leads to repentance and repentance consists of mourning over sin and also confessing sin. After they began mourning over sin, he spends those hours humiliated, humbling himself, having torn his clothes, mourning, he then gets up and he stretches out his hands to the Lord and he begins to pray, and what he prays is he prays a prayer of confession. Chapter 10, verse 1 summarized it, "Now while Ezra was praying and making confession, weeping and prostrating himself." What I want us to do to look at this is to consider this message under three points and the first is to define what confession is. Our first point is what confession is. Secondly, we'll look at how we do it. And thirdly, we'll look at how God responds.

So what confession is. The word that is used in the passage in chapter 10, verse 1, and chapter 10, verse 11, Ezra was praying and making confession, chapter 10, verse 1, and then he encourages them, now therefore make confession in chapter 10, verse 11, the

word, the Hebrew word comes from the word hand, and so it's derived from the word hand. It means to hold out your hands. It means to point. Sometimes can be to cast away. But the way that we see it used in the context of sin is it seems to be pointing out your hand, holding out your hand to point at something. Holding out your hand to identify clearly something. And so the idea of the word confess, this word as it's used in the Old Testament in a number of different passages is the recognition of sin and the clear declaration of that recognition; that you recognize it and you affirm that you recognize it. It is to call sin, sin. It's to seek to label it biblically.

And we can see what this word means a little bit even by some contrast and we find in Psalm 32:5, if you'll turn with me to a couple passages, first the psalmist in Psalm 32. David, one of the great prayers of confession in the Old Testament, he uses this word confess and in the parallelism of the passage we're told what it is as we look at this verse. Psalm 32:5, David says, "I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'; And You forgave the guilt of my sin." I will confess, same word as we have in Ezra 10, 9-10, it's the word confess. It means to point out, but in the context of this verse, it tells us David said, "I did not hide my sin. I confessed it." So the opposite of confessing is hiding.

A really familiar passage maybe that you might have memorized is Proverbs 28:13, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes it will find mercy." The same word, confess, and then also the word cover is actually conceals. He who conceals his sin is the same word as cover in Psalm 32:5. So the opposite of confess is to cover, to conceal.

So what true confession is, is there's no attempt to cover it, there's no attempt to hide it, there's no attempt to disguise it. This is one of the things that we often do, especially when we confess our sins to each other but we do this to the Lord too, we have a way of disguising our sin by qualifying our confession which really makes it no confession at all. Biblically a confession is to call it what it is, to declare it as it is, and to say what God says about it. So when we say things like, "You know, I'm sorry I got angry but you really made me mad. What you said really hurt me." That's one. "I'm sorry I got angry but what you said really hurt me." That's not really a confession of sin. That's actually just a convenient way to blame them for your problem. "You know, I really would not have gotten angry if you hadn't said that horrible thing you said." That's really what you just said, isn't it?

So that's not biblical confession. It's not biblical confession in the Old Testament or the New Testament. In fact, a key phrase or verse that you ought to memorize if you haven't is 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." So we have to confess our sins. This is where the New Testament word helps us even to understand confession as well. The word in Greek in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins," is the word homolegeo. Homolegeo. Homo means same and legeo means speak or say. So homolegeo is to say the same thing. So what does it mean? It means you say the same thing that God says about your sin. You call your sin what God calls your sin.

It's amazing how we tend to hide things. We say stuff like, you know, we're easily offended and we say, "Well, I'm just really kind of a sensitive person." And what the Bible would call someone who's sensitive and easily offended is someone who is unloving. Your problem is you don't love. My problem is I don't love because love is not easily provoked. It keeps no record of wrongs. So if you're easily provoked, you're easily offended and you're keeping a record of wrongs, you're unloving. You're not sensitive, you're unloving. You're not being godly and you're not walking in love.

So we need to call sin what God calls it. Confession is to say the same thing that God says about our sin. It is to say when we entertain lustful thoughts, it's to call it impurity, it's to call it adultery, it's to call it fornication. Jesus said if you lust in, if a man lusts in his heart after a woman, he's committed adultery already with her in his heart. So it's not, "I'm struggling with thoughts." You don't say that to God, you say, "I'm an adulterer. I've committed the sin of adultery. I got angry." Well, anger can be a sin but also if you yelled out in anger, you committed the sin of murder. Jesus says that. We read that a few weeks ago in our Bible reading time in Matthew 5. He said if you call your brother fool, you have murdered him in your heart.

So what confession is, confession is clearly saying about our sin the same thing God says about it. So let's, you have to learn the word. What does the Bible say about my sin and discipline ourselves to call it that. So I want, that actually I started getting into the second point. What confession is, is really saying the same thing about your sin that God says. Calling it out clearly. Pointing at it. So in a sense what happens is you stand over with God and point at yourself and your sin. You know, "I'm the sinner," but when I'm really confessing, it's as if I stand with God and say, "Yes, that is evil," and I'm pointing at myself. "Ty is a sinner."

So it's to say the same thing as God. So how do we do it? Second point. What confession is, to say the same thing God says about sin. How do we do it? Ezra helps us here as well in his example. To say the same thing, how do we confess? We say the same thing God says about three things, three subpoints under this second point. We say the same thing that God says about, first of all, your sin. We label sin biblically. Ezra uses biblical words to describe sin. He uses the word, one of the key words in the confession, what he actually says to the Lord as we're looking at just what he says to God in verses 6 to 15 when he says, "O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen above our heads." The word iniquities he uses three times in this confession: verse 6, verse 7. He says, "Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt, and on account of our iniquities." And also in verse 13. He says, "You have requited us less than our iniquities deserve." The word iniquity is, we kind of soften these in our minds as we hear them over and over but the word actually means in Hebrew to twist; to distort. In fact, the concrete meaning is to twist something; to bend it; to distort it; to make it, to deface it; to deform it.

So the extended meaning, figurative meaning is perversion. That's a strong word for sin, isn't it? Our perversions. He's saying we can't, "I'm ashamed and embarrassed to lift up

my face to You, my God, for our perversions have risen above our heads. We have twisted and distorted and defaced the things that You have called us to be and to do and they're above our heads. We're drowning in our perversions." You see, that's what happens when we're awakened to sin, when you're really spiritually awakened, you see your sin everywhere and the problem is not out there, the problem is here.

That's one of the differences between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. Godly sorrow is characterized by sorrow over what's in my own heart, not the consequences of my sin, that it's really messed up my life. Not how bad things are around me. Not how bad the other person is or the other person. No, godly sorrow is when I am really overwhelmed by my own sin and true confession, you label your sin biblically. You say the same thing God says about your sin.

There are some other words, though, he explains, he uses in the passage to show what sin is, the evil of it. First of all, verse 13, "After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds." He's calling what, calling sin evil. This is satanic. This is completely ungodly what I've done. Do you see how that's characterizing. It's not that I'm just messing up because we can have, you know, we have an attitude to err is human. No, that's not really right. It's true that humans err but that's not what God made when he made man. The reality is sin is something much worse than that. Sin is the perversion of what God has made and you and I all share in it, and it is evil in the sight of God, and when the Lord opens our eyes to see that, we are willing to call it what it is.

So Ezra says, "our evil deeds." He also describes sin in the passage, confesses it by saying in verse 10, a third key word in this passage that shows how we call sin what it is under our first subpoint here, label, call your sin the same thing, say the same thing about your sin God says is this word forsake, forsaken your commandments in verse 10, "Now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments." It pictures having something and then departing from it, leaving, leaving it behind, abandoning it. You have something precious. God has spoken to us. God himself, the God of the heavens has spoken to you and me. He's given us commandments and this is what Ezra is saying. "You out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, You spoke to the nation of Israel. You gave us Your commandments. You gave us Your precious word, the most precious thing that anyone could ever have. You gave it to us and we just discarded it and abandoned it like something that was worthless, and we let, we put it behind us and we forsook it." That's what sin is, it's the forsaking of God's commandments.

Fourth key word here on labeling sin sin or calling sin the same thing God says about our sin is in verse 14 he says, "shall we again break Your commandments." So sin is iniquity, sin is evil deeds, sin is forsaking the commandments of God, and it's also breaking the commandments of God. This word break means to break into pieces; to have the commandments of God and to break them into pieces. You can't help but recall Moses when he sees the people sinning and he casts, remember the 10 Commandments God has given him, the inscribed, the 10 Commandments in two tablets of stone? Moses sees them sinning and he slings the commandments forward and they shatter on the ground because that's what's happened to them. They're already shattering his commandments. Just giving

them to him, giving them to the people, they said, "We'll, keep them." He then gives them the tablets of the law and they're already shattering the commandments.

This is what sin is, it's to forsake the commandments is to break the commandments. It's to devalue and to destroy. It's an attempt to destroy what God has said. So our sin, we have a low view of sin, don't we naturally? We think sin's a small thing. We have a way of explaining it away. We have excuses. We want to get past it quickly. Are you like that sometimes when you want, you have an issue, you've sinned and you just want to make a quick confession to whoever you've offended and, "Okay, let's get behind this. Let's move on. Put this behind you. You're supposed to forgive me." And there's no real sense of the magnitude of what's happened. True confession is not like that. A biblical confession inspired by a true spiritual awakening that the Lord has wrought will own sin for what it is. It will take full responsibility for what sin is.

So how do we do it? We say the same thing God says about your sin, that's the first subpoint under this point number 2, how do we do it? Say the same thing God says about your sin. Label it biblically. Secondly, say the same thing God says about what your sin deserves. This is true confession biblically. To say the same thing God says about what your sin deserves.

A word that's repeated in this confession four times is the word guilt. Starting in verse 6 after he says, "For our iniquities have risen above our heads and our guilt has grown even to the heavens," then in verse 7, "Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt." Verse 13, "After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and our great guilt." Verse 15, "behold, we are before You in our guilt." It's also used in chapter 10, verse 10. This word guilt is a word which speaks of the breaking of God's law but it's a word that speaks about both an act and a condition. Both an act and a condition. So the King James actually translates the word trespass. If you have a King James Bible, you'll see trespass instead of in our great guilt, it says in our trespass because the word actually means to trespass against a commandment. But the way it's used, it speaks of not just the act but the condition that results from the act. That's guilt. You do something and then you're now guilty. You break the law and you are guilty before the law, you see.

So the word in this passage I think the emphasis is on the guilt of the law, of breaking the law but how Ezra as he confesses his sin, he acknowledges to say the same thing God says about what my sin deserves means I see my true condition before God. I have violated his law and I stand guilty, I stand under judgment. I understand that my sin deserves judgment, to be cast away from the presence of God. So I accept God's verdict on my sin and I agree with God about his verdict on my sin. That's what saying the same thing that God says about sin. I not only agree with him about labeling, I agree with him about what it deserves.

My sin deserves hell. Every sin deserves hell and every sin we're completely responsible for. The bible never allows us to blame our sin on anyone else. Even though it does talk about stumbling blocks, a stumbling block is someone who helps encourage someone to sin some way, and the Bible, Jesus is very clear about you don't want to be a stumbling

block to your brothers. Even though he says that about stumbling blocks, it doesn't take away the responsibility of the person who stumbles over the stumbling block. We're still guilty of our sin. You cannot blame others for your sin.

Now is it normal to blame others for your sin? Read Genesis 3. Remember when Adam and Eve sinned? God says to Adam when he comes into the garden, he says, "Where are you, Adam?" Of course, the Lord knows where Adam is. He wants Adam to see that Adam is hiding. And Adam says, "I'm hiding from You because, we're hiding from You because we're naked." And God says, "Who told you that you were naked?" It's amazing the Lord asking questions, isn't it? That itself is really powerful to think about. I mean, God doesn't need any answers. He knows everything that's going on in Adam's heart. He knows it all. Why does he ask questions? Because asking the question forces on the part of the person responding to the question a level of self-reflection. So it's much better if you're confronting someone about something to try to use questions as much as you can rather than make declarations about their sin. No, you make declarations once God shows you your sin, you make declarations, and there's a point where after you help them, you're willing to make a declaration. No, that really is sin and you must repent of it. But you start out trying to ask questions so that you get them to reflect. He says, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I told you not to eat?" And what does Adam say? "The woman You gave me, gave me of the tree and I ate." He blames the woman but he blames God. "The real problem was You gave me that woman. You made a mistake in giving me that woman and she gave me the fruit, and it just happened." You see, blame-shifting and then what did he say? Then God says to the woman, "What is this you have done?" What does she say? "It's the serpent. He deceived me and I ate." It's like, it's just part of sin itself is to not accept responsibility.

So we have to understand it is our bent to always try to hide from the reality of our sin. It has been since the beginning and it will be until Jesus makes a new heavens and a new earth the reality for everyone who's not yet gone on to heaven. Until the day you die, you will have to fight against this. But true confession is to call it as it is and to take full responsibility because even if someone else causes me to stumble, I'm still guilty. Let me give you a verse for that, 1 Corinthians 10:13. This takes away any ability to hide behind it's somebody else's fault. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful and with the temptation give you a means of escape that you can bear up under it."

So the faithfulness of God is such that every time you're tempted no matter how many stumbling blocks are thrown in your way, God is there and he is ready to help you overcome the stumbling blocks. So when you and I stumble, we are 100% responsible for our stumbling and you must not blame your sin on anyone else otherwise it is not confession. We have to own our sin and we own our sin and we own what our sin deserves, our sin deserves judgment, it deserves wrath. This is to see sin as it really is.

One of the things that's interesting about, I mentioned that one of the words he uses is "forsake your commands" in verse 10, "For we have forsaken Your commandments." That same word is used in verse 9, "But now for a brief moment grace has been shown

from the Lord our God." I'm sorry, "For we are slaves; yet in our bondage," verse 9, "our God has not forsaken us." Contrast between verse 9 and verse 10. Even in our sin and our bondage that's resulted from our sin, God has not turned his back and abandoned us. He's still here with us but we, verse 10, have forsaken him. We have forsaken his commandments. Our sin is all the more ugly because of God's kindness and love to us which we have sinned against.

So how do we do it? We say the same thing God says about your sin, say the same thing God says about what your sin deserves, and thirdly, say the same thing God says about where your sin leaves you. This is the third subpoint under number 2. Say the same thing that God says about where your sin leaves you. Where it leaves you is in complete helplessness. It leaves you with no rights and absolutely no claims for forgiveness. This is so important. You have, you and I when we sin, when I sin I have no claim on forgiveness. Forgiveness must be granted freely by the person who forgives. There is no claim that you have when you sin against a brother that he must forgive you. No, you have nothing to say toward that other than, "Please forgive me." You have incurred a debt, the debt stands, it's his decision to let it go.

Now there is an issue that he needs to take up with Jesus if he's not gonna forgive you and if you're not forgiving your brother or sister, Jesus wants to deal with you about that and me about that. If you don't forgive, you know, if we don't forgive one another, he won't forgive us Jesus prays in the Lord's Prayer, God won't forgive us. In other words, if you won't forgive your brother, it calls into question whether you really have been forgiven by God yourself. If you're having a problem with unforgiveness, that's something to examine your soul under, are you really abiding in the forgiveness of God yourself or have you forgotten the magnitude of what he's forgiven you? One or the other. You may not be a believer, you may be a believer who just needs to remember the wonder of what God has forgiven you from and drinking that in, meditating on that, and then being able to forgive.

But it still stands that the person who has sinned has no claim on forgiveness and you see this in verse 15. Ezra says, "O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we have been left an escaped remnant, as it is this day; behold, we are before You in our guilt." We are standing before you in a state of condemnation. We are before you in a state of deserving your judgment. No one can stand before you because of this. There's no claim of, "You must forgive." There's simply the acknowledgment that we're helpless.

This is what happens when the Lord really opens our eyes to see our sin before him like Isaiah saw in Isaiah 6, "Woe is me, I am undone for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the Lord." I see him in his holiness and I see myself and my sin and there is nothing that I can say other than, "Woe is me!" That's what happens when the Spirit awakens you to the reality of your sin. Helpless.

This is why Jesus said the beginning of salvation, what does he say? Remember we've been reading Matthew 5, the Beatitudes. What's the first Beatitude? The Beatitudes are

the "Blessed are," remember? And it basically means, "Oh, how happy are you when you're like this." The first one, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are the poor in spirit," and the word pictures a person who is completely impoverished with no hope of sustenance. There's another word for poor which pictures kind of a hand-to-mouth scraping through life. They're poor but they're kind of finding a way. No, this is the word they're completely destitute. "Blessed are those who are completely destitute in spirit. Oh, how happy are you when you're completely destitute in spirit, for yours is the kingdom of heaven," Jesus says. That's the pathway to heaven, to see our destitution before God, our complete helplessness.

So how do we confess our sin to God? We say the same thing God says about our sin, we say the same thing God says about what our sin deserves, and we say the same thing that God says about where our sin leaves us, it leaves us completely helpless with our mouths shut, hoping in his mercy. Now the third point, how God responds to this kind of confession. How God responds to this kind of confession. The Lord is going to bless the people in Ezra's day. He's going to give them a plan of how they can follow through on the next step of repentance and he's going to do great things through Nehemiah and in years to come, and he's going to send a Messiah. And we can look at how God gives us other windows into how he responds to confession. When we truly come to him and we call sin what he calls it, we understand that what our sin deserves the same thing he says it deserves, we understand how helpless we are just as he says we are, what does God do? I want us to look again at Psalm 32 that we looked at earlier, David's confession where we saw the same word confess, remember, he confessed his sin rather than hiding it?

Chapter 32, verse 5, "I acknowledged," Psalm 32, verse 5, "I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.'" How does God respond to that? "And You forgave the guilt of my sin." The Lord forgives. The Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious. Remember when Moses saw the glory of God? He asked to see God's glory and it wasn't so much what he saw as what he heard. Remember he said, "Show me Your glory," and God said, "Okay, tomorrow I'll show you My glory," and he hid him in the cleft of the rock and the Lord passed by in front of him and he saw the robes of God's glory behind him. It's all he could see. But as he passed by in front of him, what was significant is what Moses heard. Moses heard the word of God revealing who God is to him and this is what he heard, "The Lord, the Lord," that is, Yahweh, Yahweh, "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin but who will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, then the iniquity of the fathers, upon their children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Him, but showing mercy to thousands who love Him."

The idea is God says, "I'm ready to forgive if you will come to Me on My terms, but if you will not come to Me on my terms, I will visit your guilt upon you. You will experience My wrath," because he is holy. But the wonder of that, I love that, who is God? Compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, and then who forgives, and what does he forgive? He takes

it to the highest level, three things, he forgives iniquity, transgression and sin. He forgives all sin.

That's how God responds to it. Someone has said it this way, we want to cover our sin, we want to hide it, we want to, you know, to dismiss it in some way, to explain it away, and when you look at what God says in Psalm 32 and Proverbs 28, "He who conceals his sin will not prosper, that he who confesses and forsakes it will find mercy," or Psalm 32:5, "I acknowledge my sin to You and my iniquity I did not hide. You forgave the guilt of my sin." Someone has said it this way, what you cover God will uncover. If you cover your sins, God will uncover it and expose it and you will suffer for it. If you cover it, God will uncover it, but if you uncover it. Look at Psalm 32:1 if you're still there in Psalm 32, "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered!" Same word in verse 1 as verse 5, "my iniquity I did not hide," or cover. I didn't cover my iniquity, I acknowledged it, I confessed it, and yet you forgave it and when you forgave it, what did you do? You covered it. What you uncover, God will cover. So you come clean to God. You tell him exactly what your sin is. You call it as he calls it and then he covers it in love and calls you his holy child through faith in Christ Jesus has made that possible, so that we can acknowledge fully our sin and what it really deserves is judgment and hell. Everything that I've done makes me, every single sin would make me worthy of hell if I just committed one. It's that bad. If I saw it the way God sees it and that's the way it is, if I saw it the way God sees it, I would understand that fully.

So I have piled up sin upon sin upon sin every day of my life. I deserve hell a million times over and so do you, and yet Jesus was sent into the world to bear our sins and to suffer the just punishment of our sins and he experienced the wrath of God for our sins on the cross as he hung there in our place. God punished him fully, meting out justice to the nth degree, and in doing that if you will place your faith in Christ, repent of your sins and cling to Jesus, then your sins are taken away and his righteousness is given to you. Your sins are covered by the blood of Christ and he will remember them no more. What you cover, God will uncover. What you uncover, God will cover and God will send his blessing.

I want to share with you something that I think's really interesting and it relates to our passage in a tangential way but it's just, I want to share it with you today. In Ezra, it hit me, well, actually some time ago but it relates to our passage in this, that what's happening here, what does God do as a result of their forgiveness and when we confess our sins? The most beautiful picture of confession, this is a beautiful picture of it but there's another beautiful picture of confession in the Old Testament. I want you to look at this, look it up. I'm gonna summarize it because of time. Look at Daniel 9 and make a note of this. Daniel 9 took place 80 years before Ezra's confession, okay? In 538 BC, Daniel or maybe 539, we don't know exactly when, right around that time, Daniel reads in the book of Jeremiah that the captivity is gonna last 70 years and he reads that and he realizes he was one of the first captives and he's been captive for like 57 or 58 years at this point. I mean, I'm sorry, 67 or 68 years. He's an old man. He realizes the captivity is supposed to be over and he does something surprising. He doesn't do what I would have done, I would have started, I would have sent out a broadcast email, "The captivity is

almost over! Celebrate!" No, Daniel mourns over sin and he confesses sin and he has a beautiful confession of sin in Daniel 9 where you'll find, you know, words like sin and iniquity and transgression and rebellion. He's confessing the sins of his people the same way Ezra did, joining in with their confession. He confesses it and 25 different words in like 11 verses he uses to talk about sin, rebellion. I can't even think of all the words he uses over and over and over again.

Well, what the Lord does is the Lord sends an angel to him. Gabriel comes to him and tells him that the Lord has heard his prayer. The Lord has heard his confession. What does God do when you confess? Daniel in this moment confesses the sins of his people the same way Ezra did but 80 years before Ezra, and God sends him a revelation from an angel. The angel tells him something extraordinary. The angel tells him there are 70 weeks decreed for Jerusalem. Seventy weeks. It's 70 weeks of years, 490. He says from a decree to rebuild Jerusalem, when a decree is made to rebuild Jerusalem it'll be 70, actually he says 69 weeks, 7 plus 62. Seventy weeks are decreed but it's gonna be 69 weeks from the decree until Messiah the Prince comes. What I'm telling you is Daniel received revelation exactly when the Messiah would be announced in response to his confession. He confesses, he lays it bare before the Lord and the Lord sends him the message of the Redeemer to come and it is awesome.

And it hit me even more clearly as I've been working through Ezra, the decree he's talking about is the decree given in Ezra 7 to Ezra to go back that Artaxerxes gave in 458 BC. It's not the Cyrus edict in 538, and I don't think it's Nehemiah's edict that he gets. We don't really have the recording of it, we just know that Nehemiah got the word to go ahead and go. But we have the edict in Ezra 7, we're told in a couple different places in chapter 4, verse 16, and chapter 9 here in the prayer, that they were seeking to restore the ruins and rebuild the wall, and so I think this is, this is the decree that Daniel was hearing from Gabriel about, the angel. 458 BC.

Now 458 plus 25 is 483. 483, that is 69 weeks of years. That's 69×7 , 483. 483 years. So once the clock started ticking, it's 483 years Messiah the prince comes. Well, I've worked this out and you can trust me but you can also check it out too, you know, there is no 0 AD, no 0 BC. You go from 1 BC to when New Year's happened, of course, they didn't know it was 1 BC and 1 AD at that time, but now when, you know, when the New Year happens, the next year if they had known, it would be 1 BC, "Happy New Year, it's 1 AD!" Not 0.

So 1 AD. Then the next year it's 2 AD. Well, what that basically says if you add 483 plus 25 and you start at 1, not 0, $25 + 1$ is 26 AD. 26 AD is the time that many scholars think Mark is talking about in Mark 1 when he says this, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: Behold, I will send My messenger ahead of you, who will prepare Your way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.' John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." John the Baptist is saying, "The Messiah is here" 483 years after the decree to Ezra if 26 AD is right, and of course, there's a lot of and there's some particulars about exactly when

was the decree that Ezra in the year 458, but what I'm trying to tell you, this is what you can know: that when you confess your sin, when you uncover your sin to God, when you go to him, he will cover your sin, draw near to you and show you his salvation. He will show you his Savior. He will reveal Christ to you more fully, and you will see his glory, and you will love him more, and you will understand his forgiveness and the wonder of what it is. That's what happens when you confess your sin. As long as you hide your sin and you explain it away, then you will not receive the blessing of God. God resists the proud but he gives grace to the lowly and humble.

So humble yourself before the mighty hand of God that in due time he may exalt you. That's what we see throughout the pages of Scripture that those who uncover their sins before a holy God and lay themselves bare and say, "Have mercy on me, the sinner," as Jesus said about the publican and the tax collector, remember? I mean, the Pharisee and the publican, "I tell you this man went home justified." God loves brokenness. He loves a broken heart confessing sin truly. That is the wonder of the God that we have.

Let's go to him in prayer.

Our Father, we rejoice in who You are, Lord, that You have chosen not to treat us as our sins deserve but You have chosen to show mercy to those who will repent and confess. Lord, help us to stop hiding. Help us to not be like Adam and always be seeking to shift the blame. Help us to own our sin. Help us to be people of integrity who are willing to look at ourselves in the light of Your word and truly call sin what it is in our own lives, and to understand what we truly deserve and to understand how helpless we are, and to understand our only hope is mercy and salvation through You, and to understand that that is the point that which You want us to continually be because You are a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin. Lord, be glorified in our hearts. Help us to be more and more broken as we walk each day as we see more and more of our sin, but help us as we confess and truly come to You. We know that You're gonna make us more and more pure and yet the closer we get to You, the more we'll see the remaining sin, even though it's less, we'll see it with more clarity. Help us keep hating it and clinging to Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.