

Three Evidences of a True Confession

Nehemiah 9:38; 10:28-29 HCSB In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement in writing on a sealed document *containing the names of* our leaders, Levites, and priests.... (10:28) The rest of the people--the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants, along with their wives, sons, and daughters, everyone who is able to understand and who has separated themselves from the surrounding peoples to *obey* the law of God-- (29) join with their noble brothers and commit themselves with a sworn oath to follow the law of God given through God's servant Moses and to carefully obey all the commands, ordinances, and statutes of the LORD our Lord.

Introduction (1 John 1:8, 10, 9; Jude 1:24; Psalm 37:23-24; Proverbs 24:16; 2 Corinthians 7:9-10)

It's one thing to pray a passionate prayer of confession as we saw the people pray in Nehemiah 9; it's another thing to actually repent and begin to lead a holy life. It's one thing to go through an emotional experience; it's another to establish real, meaningful guidelines for accountability and holiness.

Everybody and anybody can sin.

- **1 John 1:8 HCSB** If we say, "We have no sin," we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
- **1 John 1:10 HCSB** If we say, "We have not sinned," we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

However, praise the Lord, there is hope for us.

- **1 John 1:9 HCSB** If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God is able to protect us from stumbling,

- **Jude 1:24 HCSB** Now to Him who is able to protect you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless and with great joy,

However, if we DO stumble,

- **Psalms 37:23-24 HCSB** A man's steps are established by the LORD, and He takes pleasure in his way. (24) Though he falls, he will not be overwhelmed, because the LORD holds his hand.
- **Proverbs 24:16 HCSB** Though a righteous man falls seven times, he will get up, but the wicked will stumble into ruin.

The people in Jerusalem prayed a tremendous prayer that described their contrition over their own sins and their regret for the sins of their ancestors; but was it real? Was it worldly sorrow or godly sorrow?

- **2 Corinthians 7:9-10 HCSB** Now I am rejoicing, not because you were grieved, but because your grief led to repentance. For you were grieved as God willed, so that you didn't experience any loss from us. (10) For godly grief produces a repentance not to be regretted and leading to salvation, but worldly grief produces death.

Godly sorrow leads to real change and on to true spiritual health. Worldly sorrow is merely regret for lost benefits or embarrassment over having gotten caught! Obviously, that kind of sorrow will only lead to trying more devious ways to not get caught in the future!

Which kind of sorrow did the people of Israel have? I believe it was a true confession marked by godly sorrow and I want to give you three marks or evidences for that belief. In the process, I hope that you will covenant with me to own these three traits; to make them real in our lives as individuals and as a congregation.

Submission to God (Nehemiah 10:28-29; Psalm 25:8-10; Jeremiah 6:16)

Look at verses 28-29 with me:

- **Nehemiah 10:28-29 HCSB** The rest of the people--the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants, along with their wives, sons, and daughters, everyone who is able to understand and who has separated themselves from the surrounding peoples to obey the law of God-- (29) join with their noble brothers and commit themselves with a sworn oath to follow the law of God given through God's servant Moses and to carefully obey all the commands, ordinances, and statutes of the LORD our Lord.

Can we not all confess that we have not been obedient to the word of our God? Is it not an unfortunate fact that all too many times the voice of the world's culture has been louder in our lives than the voice of God in His Holy Scriptures? Is it not true that we often rely on the rules and opinions of men way more than we do "thus saith the Lord?"

There is no more critical time than now, both as individuals and as a congregation, for us to return to the simplicity of the old ways and to seek to once again be guided by the eternal Word of God alone.

- **Psalms 25:8-10 HCSB** The LORD is good and upright; therefore He shows sinners the way. (9) He leads the humble in what is right and teaches them His way. (10) All the LORD's ways *show* faithful love and truth to those who keep His covenant and decrees.
- **Jeremiah 6:16 HCSB** This is what the LORD says: Stand by the roadways and look. Ask about the ancient paths: Which is the way to what is good? Then take it and find rest for yourselves. But they protested: We won't!

One sign of true confession, of godly sorrow, is a readiness to submit to God's ways as described by His prophets and apostles in the Holy Scriptures. We do not worship the Scriptures. We worship the Author of the Scriptures and that means that we submit to the Bible as we would its Author.

Separation from the World (Nehemiah 10:30-31; James 4:4; Luke 16:13 cp Matthew 6:19-21; Romans 12:2)

- **Nehemiah 10:30-31 HCSB** We will not give our daughters in marriage to the surrounding peoples and will not take their daughters as wives for our sons. (31) When the surrounding peoples bring merchandise or any kind of grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or a holy day. We will also leave *the land* uncultivated in the seventh year and will cancel every debt.

We cannot fully submit to the Word of God without consequence. To rebel to God's mitzvot (His command/blessings) is the same as witchcraft; worshiping the devil!¹ On the other hand, to submit to God is to reject this world and its little god – the devil.²

One of the fundamental tenets that the elders of this congregation hold to is the immutability of God. God does not change. We believe that salvation came by grace through faith in the coming Messiah in the Old Covenant and that salvation came by grace through faith in the Messiah who had come in the New Covenant. The marks of a spiritual people are

¹ 1 Samuel 15:23

² 2 Corinthians 4:4

the same in both Covenants. Separation from sin and worldly mindsets is just as required in both Covenants. Listen to the Apostle James.

- **James 4:4 HCSB** Adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the world's friend becomes God's enemy.

Listen to Jesus Himself:

- **Luke 16:13 HCSB** No household slave can be the slave of two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You can't be slaves to both God and money."
- **Matthew 6:19-21 HCSB** "Don't collect for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. (20) But collect for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. (21) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Listen to the apostle Paul on the matter:

- **Romans 12:2 HCSB** Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Go back and look again more carefully at Nehemiah 10:28. It says they separated themselves FROM the surrounding world and TO the law of God. Separation is not some fundamentalist, radical, wild-eyed, holy roller type of behavior. Separation is love. When you marry someone you promise to separate yourself from all other people and to dedicate yourself to them.

Separation from sin and worldliness: it's the second characteristic of a true confession. The third characteristic is:

Zeal for the House of God (Nehemiah 10:39; Haggai 1:2, 4-6, 8-11)

- **Nehemiah 10:39 HCSB** For the Israelites and the Levites are to bring the contributions of grain, new wine, and oil to the storerooms where the articles of the sanctuary are kept and where the priests, gatekeepers, and singers serve. We will not neglect the house of our God.

They promised, "We will not neglect the house of our God." "The house of our God" is used nine times in this section. The house, whether the Tabernacle, the Temple, or the building in which we congregate, is just so many sticks and stones. God the Father and God the Holy Spirit don't live in any given physical, localized place because they are transcendent.³ The fabric, the material of which these things are made is not intrinsically holy. It is the role for which it has been sanctified that gives it priority.

Therefore, when the people were promising that they would not neglect Hashem's house, they were saying they would obey His laws and provide the necessary means for the ministry to continue. The material is a very real symbol of the spiritual. You put your money where your heart is. When you neglect God's church, it is very likely that you are neglecting God.

- **Haggai 1:2, 4-6, 8-11 HCSB** "The LORD of Hosts says this: These people say: The time has not come for the house of the LORD to be rebuilt."... (4) "Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?" (5) ... "Think carefully about your ways: (6) You have planted much but harvested little. You eat but never have enough to be satisfied. You drink but never have enough to

³ 1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chronicles 2:6; 6:18; Acts 7:48-50; 17:28

become drunk. You put on clothes but never have enough to get warm. The wage earner *puts his wages* into a bag with a hole in it." ...**(8)** Go up into the hills, bring down lumber, and build the house. Then I will be pleased with it and be glorified," says the LORD. **(9)** "You expected much, but then it amounted to little. When you brought *the harvest* to your house, I ruined it. Why?" ... "Because My house still lies in ruins, while each of you is busy with his own house. **(10)** So on your account, the skies have withheld the dew and the land its crops. **(11)** I have summoned a drought on the fields and the hills, on the grain, new wine, olive oil, and whatever the ground yields, on the people and animals, and on all that your hands produce."

When we treat God's house lightly, carelessly, rudely, it is a sure sign that our spiritual life is at low ebb.

The people of Israel promised four different types of support:

Temple tax (vv. 32-33) – Since the Temple is not in existence today this particular aspect is *maleh* (accomplished, fulfilled and no longer enforceable). However, we do have to help maintain the work of the ministry. This means paying salaries (Luke 10:7), sharing with the needy (1 Corinthians 16:1-3), and being good stewards of all that God gives us (2 Corinthians 8-9), so that the Gospel may be sent to the whole world. Remember, "where you treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). If we are faithful servants of the Lord, we will want to do our part in increasing His kingdom.

Wood offering (v.34) – this would be the regular supplies that are required to keep the ministry going. In our case, it would range from paper plates to toilet paper to Sunday school supplies.

The firstfruits (vv. 35-37a) – In our case, it would be offerings we give to the Lord out of gratitude for windfalls. Nowhere do the Scriptures tell us how much of the firstfruits we are to bring (Exodus 23:19; 34:26), but there were three characteristics:

- It was to be brought before any further harvest was brought in.
- It was to be stored at God's house for ministry purposes (Nehemiah 12:44).
- It was to be in proportion to God's blessing and their devotion to Him.

The tithes (vv.37b-39) – I have generally found that those who challenge the tithe tend to be people that I would not consider to be particularly grateful to the Lord and as a consequence are not demonstrating a lot of spiritual growth in their lives. Those who are:

- grateful for being saved from an eternity in a lake of fire;
- grateful for being adopted into God's family;
- grateful for being forgiven for their rebellious past and given a righteous and merciful King;
- grateful for the gift of the Holy Spirit

– these people generally do not question the tithe. They usually make the tithe a financial priority and find ways to serve and give above and beyond that minimum!

Conclusion

Submission to God, separation from the world, and zeal for the House of the Lord. These three traits will characterize those who have experienced real godly sorrow and have made a good confession of their sins. These are characteristics of a child of God.