

Is God's Law Leading You To Godly Shame?

Ezra 9:10-15

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How does the Lord lead us from stubbornly walking in our own paths of stubborn disobedience and rather lead us to godly shame and humility in fleeing to Christ for His forgiveness and His power to mortify these besetting sins in our lives? I suggest we see three primary means of God's loving discipline in the life of one who is God's child through faith alone in Christ alone summarized for us in Ezra's public prayer in Ezra 9:6-15. When we wander from the path of reformation in our own lives, in the family, in the Church, and in the nation, these are the means God will use to draw us back unto Himself to renew our loving obedience in walking on that path to a biblical reformation.

First, there is the work of God in our lives wherein He leads us from our wayward path and draws us back into the paths of righteousness and truth by ever so gently pleading with us according to His many tender mercies shown to us and to our loved ones (Ezra 9:8). This is used so effectively by the Holy Spirit at times to break our hearts with a feather. How could we treat such a loving and gracious God with such ingratitude? We fall upon our knees humbled and seek His forgiveness, and we endeavor renewed loving obedience. In such a case, it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that breaks our hearts before the Lord.

Second, there is the work of God in our lives (as His beloved children) wherein He leads us from our willful transgressions and restores us unto Himself by firmly rebuking us with the righteousness of His Law and by revealing to us how we have offended Him as a Holy Father (Ezra 9:10). This means of God's loving discipline is used to break our hearts by firm

correction and pointing us to the good and righteous commandments of the Lord which we have treated with contempt and which we know in our heart of hearts to be right and good for us. At such times, our loving Father applies a more stern approach in His discipline of us, because we need to know that we have not only shown ingratitude for God's mercy, but also scorn for His righteousness.

Third, there is the work of God in our lives (as His dear children) wherein He leads us from our stubborn disobedience and ushers us again into the blessedness of renewed fellowship and communion with Jesus Christ by applying the rod to our backside in the trials and afflictions He brings into our lives (Ezra 9:7). If the Lord's whispering to us to consider His many tender mercies does not draw us with a broken heart to Him, or if the Lord's firm rebuke to look at His offended righteousness found in His Law does not lead us back to Him in humility, then our loving Father will apply the more severe rod of His discipline to bring us to that place of shame, wherein He brings some form of privation (in body or soul) until we finally cry out (as in the case of David), "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (Psalm 51:4).

May I also suggest that these steps are also helpful in the way we as parents train and discipline our own children in leading them from their stubborn disobedience to a broken and contrite spirit: (1) Plead in love with them according to the mercy shown to them in the Gospel; (2) Firmly rebuke them in love according to the righteousness of God's Law (telling them what commandment of God's Law they have broken); (3) Apply in love physical discipline to their willful disobedience. If this is how our Heavenly Father trains and disciplines us, it certainly is a loving, good, and right approach to the way in which we should train and discipline our own dear children.

The main points from the sermon this Lord's Day are the following: (1) Our Duty To Love And Obey God's Law (Ezra 9:10-12); (2) The Divine Consequences Of Stubborn Disobedience Against God's Law (Ezra 9:13-15).

I. Our Duty To Love And Obey God's Law (Ezra 9:10-12).

A. This Lord's Day, we then consider the third way which God (Israel's Father) used to draw His people back from their backsliding ways: God's Law. God used physical affliction (in the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Temple and in taking His people into Babylonian captivity), and used His tender mercies to draw His people back into fellowship and communion with Himself, but God also used His commandments to humble His people as well.

1. Now it is possible that some (who hear me mention that God used His Law to bring His people to a place of shame in fleeing to the Lord and in repenting of sin) might have certain questions raised in their minds about the purpose of God's Law and how God's Law and God's grace work within the plan of God.

2. There are professing Christians who go to one extreme and make obedience to God's Law necessary to our justification (whether water baptism, love, or new obedience). This is legalism and what Paul calls "another gospel" (Galatians 1:8-9), which Paul also calls "cursed", because it is a perversion of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:16).

3. There are also professing Christians who go to the other extreme and proclaim that having been justified by faith alone, they are entirely set free from obedience to the Law of God as a Christian. This is called "antinomianism" (against law). Dear ones, it is necessary that we

understand the purpose of God in giving His Law, so that we neither abuse it nor neglect it, but rightly use God's Law for His glory and our good as He intended in Scripture.

B. What is the purpose of God's Law? There is basically a three-fold purpose of God's Moral Law identified in Scripture.

1. **God gave us His Moral Law to reflect to us (as in a mirror) His righteousness and our sin (and therefore our need of Christ).**

a. Even before sin came into the world, God entered into a Covenant with Adam promising life to Adam and all his posterity (by ordinary generation) upon the condition of perfect obedience to God and threatening death to Adam and all his posterity (by ordinary generation) upon disobedience (Covenant of Works). The specific commandment God gave to Adam was that he was not to eat of a particular tree in the Garden of Eden (namely, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil), and if he did so, he would bring the curse of death to himself and to the human race. Now God did not forbid Adam to eat of the tree because the tree was poisonous or evil (in itself). God chose to use this commandment to reveal His authority and His righteousness: namely, that He is Lord of all and that whatever He commands is good and right. As absolute Lord, He is not to be questioned. As perfectly righteous, He can do no wrong. But that is precisely how the serpent (Satan) tempted Eve (and through Eve tempted Adam). "Has God said?" Satan tempted Eve to question God's authority, God's righteousness, and God's goodness. Eve disobeyed the authoritative, righteous, and good Law of God and then Adam likewise disobeyed and ate of the forbidden fruit, plunging the human race into sin and rebellion against God. God's righteousness was revealed in the Law, but man rebelled against it.

b. Since the fall of man into sin, the Law of God continues to reflect the righteousness of God, but in so doing it also

reflects the sin and rebellion of man against God and His good Law (“for by the law is the knowledge of sin” Romans 3:20). God gave to man the Ten Commandments as a summary of God’s Law, and like a mirror it reflect God’s righteousness, but also reflects how each of us have failed to perfectly keep God’s Law. To the contrary, we have all violated God’s Law and all fall under God’s judgment. Now there is nothing wrong or immoral with God’s Law (Paul says it is holy, just, and good in Romans 7:12). The problem is with us as sinners—we cannot perfectly keep it (Romans 3:10,23). Therefore, God’s Law condemns us all for our sin and rebellion against God (“Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” Galatians 3:10). Here then is the dilemma for man (not God). How are any of us to be saved from the just condemnation that we deserve from the holy God who created us and whose Law we have rebelled against in thought, word, and deed (anger, lustful thought, envied others, coveted what other have, lied, loved something or someone more than God, shown disrespect to your parents)?

c. Here is the resolution to our dilemma. God sent His only begotten Son to take on human flesh (being 100% God and 100% man), to live a sinless life, and to pay the debt of sin on the cross for all those who will look in faith alone to Christ alone as their only righteousness and sin-bearer before God (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 10:12-14 cp. Hebrews 7:19). Thus, dear ones, it is the Law of God that reveals to us how we have sinned and rebelled against the Lord, and it is the Law of God that sends us to the Gospel (Good News) of Jesus Christ to find in Christ the only righteousness and the only forgiveness for sin of which God will approve. The Law does its work in revealing that there is nothing within us and nothing done by us that can save us—it is Jesus Christ alone who can save us. Thus, God gave us His Moral Law to reflect to us (as in a mirror) His righteousness and our sin (and therefore our

need of Christ in the Gospel). This is the first aspect of God's purpose for His Moral Law.

2. God also gave us His Moral Law and placed it in the hand of Christ the Mediator in order to reveal to Christians who are justified by faith alone in Christ alone the standard by which we demonstrate our loving and thankful obedience to Christ for His amazing grace shown to us in the Gospel (Psalm 119:97; Luke 6:46; John 14:15; 1 John 5:3). Dear ones, if we call ourselves Christians and yet do not love His commandments and endeavor by God grace to walk in obedience to them (seeking His forgiveness when we violate them), the Lord Jesus (not me) says we have no right at all to call Him our Lord. When we who are justified by faith alone in Christ alone are said to not be "under the law" but "under grace" (Romans 6:14), Paul does not mean that we no longer have any duty to obey God's Law (1 Corinthians 9:21). He means that the power of sin shall not have dominion over us, because we are not under the Law (as a Covenant of Works that offers no power to overcome sin in our lives); to the contrary, we are under grace (as a Covenant of Grace that not only offers but has secured for us through Christ all the power and grace that we need to overcome sin in our lives). Thus, God gave us His Moral Law to direct us how we are to please Him and to bring Him glory. This is the second aspect of God's purpose for His Moral Law.

3. God also gave us His Moral Law in order to restrain public evil in society (1 Timothy 1:8-10; Romans 13:3-4). As we have already seen, the Law of God cannot change a person's heart from being wicked to being righteous—only the Gospel of Jesus Christ can do this. However, when those in authority establish and enforce God's righteous and good laws (along with just penalties when these righteous laws are violated), God's Word and our own experience reveal that the wicked hide in darkness (for fear of being detected). This is borne out in history and in

our practical experience that as laws forbade and punished adultery, sodomy, incest, etc. were enforced, those practicing such violations of God's Law hid themselves in darkness, so that they would not be exposed and punished (these sins were still practiced, but they were practiced in secret—not in public). But once these righteous laws were overturned, every manner of immorality has now been clamoring to be legally protected (I saw just yesterday that a judge overturned a law forbidding polygamy). Thus, God gave us His Law to restrain public evil in society. This is the third aspect of God's purpose for His Moral Law.

C. Now moving from the three-fold Scriptural purpose of God's Law, what commandment of God's Law did Israel stubbornly disobey? Let us read Ezra 9:10-12. That commandment of God's Law that is found in Deuteronomy 7:3 (we considered this law in detail in a previous sermon, and so we will not give a detailed explanation at this point). In summary, God commanded His people to avoid that close and familiar fellowship with the unbelieving nations and people around them, so as not to intermingle with them for the purpose of enjoying their fellowship; for to do so would lead them into intermarrying with them and lead them away from the one true living God and into idolatrous practices (as happened with the wisest mere man that ever lived, Solomon, in 1 Kings 11:1-4,9,10). Thus, Israel (after their gracious deliverance from Babylonian captivity) followed the example of Solomon. Instead of learning from Solomon's failure, they followed his backsliding example.

D. Application

1. Dear ones, we may think that we can flirt with and play with fire (those besetting sins in our life) and yet not get burned (but we will). Or we may think that we can escape all of the consequences of our stubborn rebellion against the Lord because we can quickly seek

forgiveness for our sin (but we cannot). Or we may think that we can satisfy our own sinful desires and pleasures and that this will not affect other areas of our life (but it will). Dear ones, if we do not learn from the example of Solomon and Israel, we will repeat their failures and reap the consequences of God's fatherly displeasure as did Solomon and Israel.

2. Note that Ezra makes very clear that God's people are without excuse for their sin, because God had given to them His commandment (Ezra 9:10). How many excuses do we make for the sins into which we fall? Like Adam and Eve, we shift the blame to others (parents, siblings, friends, etc.), rather than expressing a sorrowful shame and broken heart over that besetting sin into which we fall (time after time). We resist the conviction of the Holy Spirit in applying the Law of God to our lives, by seeking rather to run away from God's conviction (like Jonah), by seeking to bury it in busyness, in work, and in pleasures (like sex, partying, drunkenness, and drugs—but to no avail), by comparing ourselves to others in such a way as to make ourselves not look so bad (at least I'm not like him), and by focusing on our strengths and ignoring these sins (a balancing act). Dear ones, let us not follow Adam and Eve in this regard, but let us follow Ezra (in Ezra 9:6). By God's grace and through fervent and constant prayer, let us flee temptation, and pursue Christ and His resurrection power. Let us not simply cut off the sin in its outward manifestation, but by God's grace let us root it out of the heart and out of the affections, so that we hate and abominate it, because we love Christ and His righteous commandments so much. After all of our words have been spoken as to our love for Jesus Christ, the real test of that love comes down to this: Will we (by God's amazing grace and power) forsake and starve that besetting sin to death because of our greater love for the Lord Jesus Christ. If we will not apply and continue to apply the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection to uproot that besetting sin for the love we have for Christ, how will we ever give up our

life (if called to do so) for the love that we have for Jesus Christ?

II. The Divine Consequences Of Stubborn Disobedience Against God's Law (Ezra 9:13-15).

A. Dear ones, in these verses we once again are reminded that if God's people do not stop their stubborn rebellion in making excuses for their transgression of God's Law, fearful and severe consequences of His fatherly discipline await them. If we sow such corruptible seed, Paul says (by inspiration of the Holy Spirit), we will reap the corruptible seed that we have sown (Galatians 6:7).

B. Finally, Ezra casts himself and God's people upon the mercy of God in not only delivering them from His fierce fatherly anger for such stubborn rebellion against His mercy and Law, but also in granting to them a godly shame and repentance that eyes the mercy of God and grants to them forgiveness and loving obedience (Ezra 9:15).

Dear ones, do you not desire with all your heart to be free of those shackles and those heavy burdens that you have been carrying around for many years? You can be free through the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. You do not have to be overcome by that sin. You have chosen to be overcome by that sin and to live in that misery. For you, dear ones, who trust alone in Christ alone for your eternal salvation, are more than conquerors through Christ who loved you (Romans 8:37). Christ has already nailed to the cross that sin and purchased freedom from the guilty, penalty, and power of that sin. Christ's bodily resurrection proves without a doubt that Christ is Conqueror (as are you through faith in Him).

Dear ones, Israel was led away from the Lord their God as their first love because of idolatry in their hearts. They loved and served their own will, their own desires, their own ambitions, and their own pleasures more than they loved and served the God who had saved them and delivered them from the bondage in Babylonian captivity. That was Satan's temptation to Eve from the very beginning in Genesis 3:5: "And you shall be as gods" (or God—same word, *elohim*, as used earlier in verse 5). Satan offers vain and lying promises that we will find the happiness and the fulfillment we seek, if we simply follow our own ways (make ourselves God of our lives). But it is a lie. Following our sinful, willful ways leads not to freedom and joy, but to bondage and misery. True joy can only be found in Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:21).

A good friend reminded me that the Protestant Reformation (in the 16th and 17th centuries) was God's deliverance of His people from the Babylonian captivity of the Papal Antichrist and the Harlot Church of Rome (similar to God's deliverance of Israel from their Babylonian captivity). And as Israel violated God's Covenant with the Lord by intermarrying with the idolatrous nations about them, so Protestant and Reformed Churches have likewise violated God's Covenant with the Lord by intermarrying with Rome and her institution and celebration of the Christ-mass (a holy day of the Papal Antichrist). Dear ones, should we not find ourselves dumbfounded like Ezra over such intermarrying? Should we not be humbled before the Lord and with Ezra cry out, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens" (Ezra 9:6). Listen to the words of that faithful minister and servant of the Lord, George Gillespie:

Shall the chaste spouse of Christ take upon her the ornaments of the whore? Shall the Israel of God symbolise with her who is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt [or Babylon—GLP]? Shall the

Lord's redeemed people wear the ensigns of their captivity? Shall the saints be seen with the mark of the beast? Shall the Christian church be like the antichristian, the holy like the profane, religion like superstition, the temple of God like the synagogue of Satan?" (*A Dispute Against English Popish Ceremonies*, in Gillespie's *Works*, Volume 1, p. 80, Still Waters Revival Books).

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