

What Is the Fruit That Should Follow Repentance?

Ezra 10:6-17; Galatians 6:9

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Not only are we as God's people called to repent of our sin by way of godly sorrow over having transgressed God's commandments and having offended our holy and merciful God, but we are also called to bring forth fruit in our lives in keeping with that grace of repentance by way of our "purposing and endeavoring constantly to walk with him [the Lord—GLP] in all the ways of new obedience" (*Larger Catechism* #76). Thus, the grace of repentance will necessarily bear fruit that points to the reality of the repentance that God has graciously worked in our lives. Just as faith without works evidences a dead faith (James 2:17), even so repentance without fruit evidences a dead repentance ("Bring forth therefore fruits worthy [or meet for—GLP] repentance" Luke 3:8).

A mere confession of sin, dear ones, is not the fully developed fruit of repentance—it is a good and right first step in manifesting the fruit of repentance, but the fruit of our repentance is manifested as we continue (by God's grace) to purpose and endeavor new obedience through our trusting in the promises and power of Christ to sanctify us and through our acts of loving and thankful obedience to God's commandments in light of His mercy bestowed upon us.

In our text this Lord's Day, the Holy Spirit graphically portrays for us the fruits of repentance in the lives of God's people at the time of Ezra. From our text, let us note the following main points: (1) Urgency as a Fruit of Repentance (Ezra 10:6-8); (2) Willingness as a Fruit of Repentance (Ezra 10:9-14); (3) Perseverance as a Fruit of Repentance (Ezra 10:15-17).

I. Urgency as a Fruit of Repentance (Ezra 10:6-8).

A. We have for the past few sermons been considering the serious sin of God's people in forming inter-religious unions with the idolatrous people around them. We noted in the previous sermon that these unions were immoral relationships that were annulled by Ezra (God's Prophet) rather than valid marriages that were dissolved by divorce. The right and lawful actions now to be taken in consequence of these immoral relationships are detailed for us in the remainder of Ezra 10.

B. What we observe in the first place is the **urgency** displayed by God's people. There was no unnecessary delay that followed in bringing forth the fruits of repentance after this sin was publicly confessed by Ezra in the Court of the Temple. Ezra prayed and confessed the sin of these immoral relationships in the presence of God's people, which brought the people to grieve with a great weeping over their sin (Ezra 10:1). Dear ones, when is the last time your heart was likewise broken before God over your own sin and the sin of others? This is where true repentance begins.

1. The first manifestation of **urgency** as a fruit of godly repentance is that without delay the godly and biblical steps to take in dealing with these immoral relationships between the Israelite men and the idolatrous foreign women are outlined with full purpose to carry them out (Ezra 10:2-5).

2. The second manifestation of **urgency** as a fruit of godly repentance is that Ezra immediately arose and with a sense of urgency went into the chamber of Johanan (a priest), most likely to determine in consultation with the princes and elders of the people the next step to take. The **urgency** of Ezra is demonstrated by the fact that though he had fasted all day (after hearing the report of this grievous sin), the

matter before God's people was so urgent that he would not even stop to eat until a plan of action was determined (Ezra 10:6).

a. Dear ones, how often do our procrastination and our delay reflect upon the insincerity of our repentance? We allow time to unnecessarily pass, which dampens our initial resolve to remove ourselves from the presence and strength of those temptations that have ensnared us time and time again. We allow procrastination to deter us from our original purpose because it involves giving up cherished idolatrous loves in our lives that bring us pleasure.

b. Dear ones, allowing unnecessary time to intervene between our confession of sin and between our manifestation of the fruit of repentance is no friend to our repentance, but is rather an enemy to cool the godly purpose and passion of our repentance and the godly shame we originally sensed over our sin. The godly fruit of repentance will be manifested by striking while the iron is hot, rather than waiting until the iron grows cold. The fruit of repentance is godly, purposeful action, not slow, procrastinating inaction (Psalm 78:34-35—the idea of “rising early” and inquiring early in Scripture conveys the idea of urgency—Proverbs 8:17; Isaiah 26:9).

3. The third manifestation of **urgency** as a fruit of godly repentance is that without delay the Ezra and the leaders of Israel put their plan into action to call the people of God throughout Jerusalem and all Judah to convene in Jerusalem within three days (Ezra 10:7—perhaps within three days of receiving the proclamation). Note how **urgency** (as a manifestation of the fruit of godly repentance) is conveyed by Ezra and the leaders of Israel to the people of God—if they do not heed this proclamation to assemble themselves for this convocation, they will “forfeit” their material substance and possessions (i.e. their material possessions will be seized and devoted to God in the Temple), and they will be excommunicated from the fellowship of God's people and from the ordinances of God's Temple (a picture of God's judgment that awaited the nation as a whole in removing them as a people from the land, from their possessions, and from the blessed ordinances of God). Now do you think the people of God received that proclamation with a sense of **urgency** or with a sense of complacency and procrastination?

a. I ask you, dear ones, does the fruit of your repentance evidence an urgency of purposeful action without delay to look to Christ and His promises immediately, and an urgency of purposeful action to make out a plan as to how you will flee that temptation in the future?

b. I submit, dear ones, the genuineness of your repentance will be manifested by the **urgency** you manifest in demonstrating the fruit of your repentance. For where there is genuine repentance there will be **urgency**—not complacency, not procrastination, nor excuses offered for delays. There will be action, rather than inaction.

II. Willingness as a Fruit of Repentance (Ezra 10:9-14).

A. In response to the urgency of the proclamation, we are told by the Holy Spirit that the people assembled in Jerusalem within the stated period of three days, trembling before God over the seriousness of the sin of uniting in immoral relationships with foreign idolatrous women (which would eventually lead to the destruction of the holy marriage /family, and to the destruction of the holy religion revealed in Scripture), and trembling because of the fierceness and intensity of the rain that fell upon them as they sat in the street before the Temple (Ezra 10:9).

1. Perhaps God sent such an intense rain at that precise time to test their **willingness** and resolve to brave whatever the inclement weather or deterring circumstances in order to manifest the fruit of their repentance. When circumstances in life (even intense circumstances) will not deter our **willingness** and resolve to show forth the sincerity and fruit of our godly repentance, there is good hope of God's work of a godly repentance in our lives.

2. Whereas, when we allow various circumstances in our lives (whether the cares and

busyness of this life, the reaction of others to our repentance, the difficulty and discomfort to ourselves in denying ourselves and taking up our cross, the humiliation of our pride in nailing it to the cross, or the idolatrous lovers in our lives that hold our first and highest affections over Christ) to break our **willingness** and resolve to pursue the plan of action and attack against our besetting sins, then a firm assurance of a godly repentance in our lives is thrown into a confusing and perplexing state, which only leads to further defeat and discouragement in our walk with the Lord.

B. The **willingness** of God's people to take the very right and godly action to manifest the fruit of their repentance is declared by them collectively after Ezra proclaims to them all the difficult, heart-wrenching steps that must be done by them (Ezra 10:10-12--"As thou hast said, so must we do").

1. Dear ones, chaffing and complaining (with our voices or in our hearts) at the difficult steps needed to take as a fruit of repentance and outlined by those who hold a lawful office under Christ is not a manifestation of **willingness** as a fruit of repentance. The one who is willing to manifest the godly fruit of repentance is more concerned with **willingly**, lovingly, and thankfully doing the good pleasure of the Lord, than with the inconvenience, humiliation, heartache, and discomfort he/she may have to experience ("Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, **and do his pleasure** [God's pleasure is stated next—GLP]: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives" Ezra 10:11).

2. From where does this grace of **willingness** come? "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13). I ask you, dear brothers and sisters, is there any sound reason for your unwillingness to pursue the godly fruit of repentance? Of course not. You (who are justified by faith alone) are commanded to work out the salvation that has been worked within you, to exercise yourselves to godliness, to put to death the old man of sin and to put on the new man of righteousness, to deny yourselves, to take up your cross, and to follow Christ; for God is the One who works that willingness within you to do His good pleasure rather than your own comfortable, convenient pleasure.

a. Dear ones, the power of Christ is ours, and the willingness of Christ is ours. Does that mean that having the willingness of Christ will make God's good pleasure easy, comfortable, and without heartache to the sinful, self-serving nature and flesh of man? Not at all. However, the willingness of Christ, which is the gracious gift of every Christian redeemed by the blood of Christ, will make God's good pleasure right, desirable, and reachable to a faithful degree.

b. Dear ones, if it is God who works within you both to will and to do His good pleasure, then cease and desist from all the ways in which you make excuses for your sin, for your lack of repentance, for your unwillingness to pursue the fruit of repentance. God's willingness is our willingness, our strength, and our victory in working out the fruit of repentance in our lives. Martin Luther wrote, "Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness." There is no place for despair or hopelessness when it is our Almighty God and Savior who works within us both to will and to do His good pleasure. Are you trusting in your own mere willingness, or are you trusting in God's willingness?

C. It was subsequently proposed by representatives of the people that they willingly proceed with an orderly method of trying and adjudicating all of the cases that needed to be heard (Ezra 10:13-14). This was not a delay tactic, but an action that would carefully consider each of the cases, so as to determine whether the foreign women were idolatrous or were converts. Good order is not an enemy of the godly fruit of repentance. Whereas it may very well happen at times, that which is not given any prayer, thought, or plan (but is carried out rashly and without good order) will fall by the wayside. Dear ones, your **willingness** as a fruit of godly repentance will be evident by a godly and biblical plan to take you through the day of temptations you face. Your willing action to bring forth fruit meet with repentance will not be haphazard filled with heat, but little light, but rather a plan to flee temptation, a plan to draw upon the willingness of God through prayer,

a plan to nourish the thoughts and mind with Scripture, a plan to arise without delay if you should fall with renewed love and obedience as you eye the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

III. Perseverance as a Fruit of Repentance (Ezra 10:15-17).

A. Having begun to actually do what they covenanted to do (as a fruit of godly repentance) by way setting up temporary courts to deal with each of these cases, they began hearing cases on the first day of the tenth month (Ezra 10:16) and persevered to complete these hearings on the first day of the first month—a three month period of time (Ezra 10:17).

B. Here we see that there was not only a willingness, but also a perseverance in doing what was urgent to do, and also a perseverance in doing what they stated they were willing to do. Dear ones, the fruit of godly repentance is not complete with only an initial sense of urgency, or even with a willingness to do what is right, but rather the fruit of godly repentance is realized in the actual doing of what we willingly resolved to do.

1. Many make a confession of sin, many state their willingness to forsake sin, but it is those who in patience persevere in doing what they have resolved (and covenanted with the Lord) to do that show forth the fruit of repentance. Oh, how we need to grow in the grace of perseverance, in finishing what we begin. And when we fall, arising again and again and again to persevere in manifesting the fruit of a godly repentance. Dear ones, we only truly fail when we fall and do not arise again from our failure, when we give up and quit. For the righteous man/woman is not one who never falls in his endeavors to bring forth the fruit of godly repentance, in fact he/she falls seven times, but arises again as the fruit of godly repentance (Proverbs 24:16).

2. The Holy Spirit speaks to us struggling saints (through the Apostle Paul): “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Galatians 6:9), i.e. if we don’t give up. The question is: Even if the flesh is weak, is the spirit truly willing? Is the heart broken over the sin and ashamed before the Lord? The Lord promises that you shall reap, if you faint not. You shall see the fruit of a godly repentance realized in your life in overcoming the power of that sin in your life, if you faint not. Are you clinging to this promise from God?

C. We can only imagine how painful this separation must have been to the men and women involved in these immoral relationships (especially where there were children involved).

1. The grace of perseverance does not promise a painless and effortless path when pursuing reformation in our individual lives, in our families, in the church, or in the state. But dear ones, that is when perseverance, endurance, and steadfastness shines forth with such glorious brilliance—when we willingly persevere in the midst of many pains, heartaches, setbacks, persecution, and tears (Psalm 56:8; Hebrews 6:11-12).

2. Jesus is our perseverance (Hebrews 12:1-3)! Just as God is our willingness, so Christ is our perseverance. Dear ones, with Jesus as our perseverance, we will see the fruit of godly repentance in our lives, just as the Israelites saw it finally realized in their lives in the midst of many tears in sending away their idolatrous lovers (Ezra 10:17).

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