

Response to the Word: Confession and Repentance

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[0 : 00] Excellent. Good. Well, we turn now to our Bible reading, to hear God speak to us through! His word. And our Bible reading for this morning is from the book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah chapters 9 and 10. You can find that on page 404 of the church Bible. Paul will be preaching from chapters 9 and 10. I'm just going to read chapter 9 now, and then Paul will pick up chapter 10 later.

So Nehemiah chapter 9, beginning at verse 1. Now, on the 24th day of this month, the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth and with earth on their heads. And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place and read from the book of the law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day.

For another quarter of it, they made confession and worshiped the Lord their God. On the stairs of the Levites stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunai, Sherubiah, Bani, and Cheniah. And they cried with a loud voice to the Lord their God.

Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabaniah, Sherubiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethiah said, Stand up and bless the Lord your God from everlasting to everlasting.

Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven the heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them.

[1 : 55] And you preserve all of them. And the host of heaven worships you. You are the Lord, the God who chose Abram and brought him up out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. You found his heart faithful before you and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring, the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite. And you have kept your promise for you are righteous.

And you saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea and performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land.

For you knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers. And you made a name for yourself as it is to this day. And you divided the sea before them so that they went through the midst of the sea on dry land.

And you cast their pursuers into the depths as a stone into mighty waters. By a pillar of cloud you led them in the day and by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go.

You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments. And you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant.

[3 : 29] You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger and brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst. And you told them to go in to possess the land that you had sworn to give them.

But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments.

They refused to obey. And were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them. But they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt.

But you are a God ready to forgive. Gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and did not forsake them.

Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt and had committed great blasphemies. You in your great mercies did not forsake

them in the wilderness.

[4 : 28] The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day. Nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go. You gave your good spirit to instruct them.

And did not withhold your manna from their mouth. And gave them water for their thirst. Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness and they lacked nothing.

Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell. And you gave them kingdoms and peoples. And allotted to them every corner. So they took possession of the land of Sihon, king of Heshbon.

And the land of Og, king of Bashan. You multiplied their children as the stars of heaven. And you brought them into the land that you had told their fathers to enter and possess.

So the descendants went in and possessed the land. And you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land. The Canaanites. And gave them into your hand with their kings and the peoples of the lands that they might do with them as they would.

[5 : 32] And they captured fortified cities and a rich land and took possession of houses full of all good things. Cisterns already hewn in vineyards. And fruit trees in abundance.

So they ate and were filled and became fat and delighted themselves in your great goodness. Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets.

And they committed great blasphemies. Therefore, you gave them into the hand of their enemies who made them suffer.

And in the time of their suffering, they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven. And according to your great mercies, you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies.

But after they had dressed, they did evil again before you and you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies. So that they had dominion over them. Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven.

[6 : 44] And many times you delivered them according to your mercies and you warned them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments but sinned against your rules.

Which if a person does them, he shall live by them. And they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. Many years you bore with them and warned them by your spirit through your prophets.

Yet they would not give ear. Therefore, you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless, in your great mercies, you did not make an end of them or forsake them.

For you are a gracious and merciful God. Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love.

Let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people.

[7 : 54] Since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day. Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us. For you have dealt faithfully.

For you have dealt faithfully. And we have acted wickedly. Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept your law. Or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them.

Even in their own kingdom and amid your great goodness that you gave them. They did not serve you.

In their own kingdom and amidst distress. Amen. And may God bless his word to us this morning. Well, good morning.

Please do have Nehemiah open in front of you. That will be very helpful as we think about these two chapters together this morning. Let me ask a question.

[9 : 13] What happens when, as we saw last week in chapter 8, what happens when God's word is unleashed on his people?

Well, chapters 9 and 10 show us what happens when God's word is unleashed and does its transformational work in his people. What we see in these chapters is real confession of sin and also real repentance.

Both are necessary. Both are real marks of real faith. Both of those flow from a real reckoning with the living word of the living God.

As we grasp God's word, confession, repentance will flow. Now, chapter 9 details the confession of God's people.

And that flows directly into the covenant made by all the people, a covenant that details the specifics of their repentance. Look at the very last verse of chapter 9, which Keir didn't read very helpfully, because that belongs to the next section.

[10:25] So, final verse of chapter 9. Because of all this, in other words, because of all that we've just confessed, because of all this, we make a firm covenant in writing. On the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests.

And then chapter 10 goes on to detail the covenant of repentance. What is repentance going to look like for this people at this point in time? So, we'll look at this in two parts.

Chapter 9, verses 1 to 37. And then secondly, the very last verse of chapter 9, and the whole of chapter 10. Now, we're very much taking a bird's eye view. There's a lot to cover. So, we can't go into all the details.

If you've got questions about stuff, come and ask. But we're taking a bit of a helicopter view. So, chapter 9. We see here a prayer of real confession. A prayer of real confession.

Now, the events of chapter 8, which we saw last week, they began on the first day of the seventh month of the year.

[11:29] Later that month, they celebrated the Feast of Booths. And chapter 9 picks up things that very same month. Look at verse 1, the 24th day. This is all happening in a matter of weeks.

And we're given a brief summary of what's going on. Verse 1 there, the people gathered. They assembled with fasting and sackcloth, with earth on their heads. They separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

They confessed their sins. And what did that look like? Verse 3. They stood up in their place and read from the book of the law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day.

And for another quarter, they made confession and worshipped the Lord their God. At the very center of what they're doing here, the very heart of it, is again the word of the Lord.

A quarter of the day they spend. And what flows from that is repentance and rejoicing. God's word informs and shapes their rejoicing and repentance, as it does for us today.

[12:41] It's through a thorough engagement with God's word. A quarter of the day, that's three hours probably, they spent sitting under God's word, being taught and explained. It's probably the similar pattern we saw last week, remember?

Ezra would read. And then you have all these groups scattered around with 13 Levites explaining, unpacking, pressing home the implications of what they've just been reading from the law.

Little groups everywhere, probably quite big groups everywhere, scattered around with people preaching, pressing home the truths of God's word. That's probably the same thing happening here. Wholesome, wholehearted Bible teaching. And that led to confession for sin. That led to what we read here in chapter 9.

If you want a helpful summary of this chapter, what it's really saying, then you'd struggle to do better than verse 33. Look at verse 33. Yet you, the Lord, have been righteous in all that has come upon us.

[13:48] For you have dealt faithfully, and we have acted wickedly. That's a very good summary.

As they look back over their history, as they confess their sin, God has been faithful. We have acted wickedly. There was no attempt, is there, to hide away from reality here.

There's no hiding their rebellion. They are clear, aren't they, on God's faithfulness, but also clear on their own sin. We'll look at this prayer in three sections.

Number one, verses 6 to 15, we see the gifts of God's grace. As they look back in history, they rehearse the gifts of God's grace.

And the scope of this prayer is vast. It takes in God's amazing provision down through the centuries, beginning with creation itself. Look at verse 6. You are the Lord, you alone.

[14:47] You have made heaven, the heavens of heavens, with all their hosts, the earth and all that's in them. It then goes on to recount the call of Abraham and the great promises made to him of a land and a people.

It then goes on to tell of God's amazing rescue from slavery in Egypt, verse 9 and following. The giving of the law from verse 13. All the things that God has done and given to his people. Every single sentence has as its subject the Lord God. What he says. What he does. Who he is. And these people are in no doubt that they come in prayer to a giving God. His giving is above all praise. All the focus here in the first bit of this prayer is on the extraordinary gifts of his creating and covenant grace. Everything they have comes from the Lord. See, our God is a God who gives abundantly. Just consider the works his hands has made.

[15:58] Look at the creation. The universe. Look at the world around us. The mountains. The seas. The plants. All the creatures. In all their diversity and beauty. How brilliant and powerful must God be to do that?

To make all things. To sustain all things. How powerful is he? From the very tiniest of creatures we can barely see. To the vast movement of stars and galaxies.

It is staggering, isn't it? To consider all that the Lord has made. And yet, he is a deeply personal God as well.

He's concerned, even for individuals. You go from the cosmos down to one man, don't you? Verse 7. Abraham. The amazing promises God gave him.

Promises that he was able to keep. That's the whole point of recounting the Exodus saga. That's the next little section. Even in the misery of Egyptian slavery, God remembered his promises.

[17:02] He was able to deliver them. To rescue them from slavery. To take them to the promised land. It's so important that we remember the God to whom we come.

The people don't get to their sin to the next section. But here, the focus is all on the God they serve. Who is he? What kind of God is he? And particularly when we feel the weight of our own sin.

As we consider the things that we have done. It's so important to remember the God to whom we come. It's the realization of their sin that has driven the people to this prayer of confession, isn't it?

They're confronted again with the reality of their rebellion. But that realization hasn't kept them away from God. It's not stopped them from approaching him. That might well be our response at times, mightn't it?

When we've gone astray, perhaps in a very big way. I can't possibly approach God. The things I've done. I can't possibly come to the Lord.

[18:15] It's all too awful. The things I've done. But these opening verses, they remind us of the God to whom we come. Who is it that we come before?

And because of who he is, a God of abundant grace. Grace in creation. Grace in making promises. Because of who he is, we can come to him.

Even as we're aware of our sin, we can approach him. And as the next section shows us so clearly, he is a God who is slow to anger.

In the face of his people's waywardness. He's so gracious. So the first part of the prayer shows us God's great gifts. Creation.

Covenant. But the middle section from verse 16 to verse 31 shows us the real tenacity of God's grace. The tenacity of God's grace.

[19:18] He is extraordinarily gracious, isn't he? He is faithful. And that presents itself in two ways. Through God's providing for his people.

But also punishing them. Whatever God does, even in the punishment, perhaps especially as he punishes his people. He does it in all ways in a way to preserve them.

To bring them back. Despite their constant rebellion. And these middle verses, they do chart, don't they? The absolute perversity of the rebellion of God's people.

Despite all that God had did for them. They've just been rehearsing all the things that God has done over the years. Despite all of that, they acted presumptuously.

Again and again and again. And yet, God still provides for them. He will not let them go.

[20:18] Look at verse 16. But they and our fathers acted presumptuously. They stiffened their neck. They did not obey your commands. They refused to obey.

But look on. Halfway down verse 17. But you are a God ready to forgive.

Gracious and merciful. Slow to anger. Abounding in steadfast love. He did not forsake them. Here is the history of a people who had been given so much by the Lord.

They had witnessed this amazing deliverance from Egypt. And yet, within a matter of days, weeks, they are rebelling. They want to go back to Egypt. Sin is so utterly perverse, isn't it?

As you think back perhaps on your own life and the things you do, the things I do. It's so utterly perverse, isn't it? When we think what God has done for us. And we know that sin over promises and totally delivers the opposite.

[21 : 24] It never works out well, does it? How perverse are we to keep returning? It's like a dog returning to its vomit. Why would you do that? But that's what we see here.

Time and time again. God's people rebel. The rebellion in the wilderness. The golden calf. Disobedience in the days of Joshua and Judges. The evil in David's time until the exile, which they are now coming out of.

It's a grim history that we read about here. We've been singing about it as well. We do need to see the utter perversity of sin. It is utterly self-destructive.

And what an affront it is to the God who's given us everything. God had given them everything. So gracious. And it's a warning that we need to heed today, isn't it?

The Apostle Paul would certainly say so. Referring to these same events in Israel's history. He says to the New Testament church, 1 Corinthians 10. Now these things took place as examples for us.

[22 : 35] That we might not desire evil as they did. So these things are an example that we wouldn't go the same way. Now it may not be blatant idolatry like it was here.

We may not be bowing down to golden calves. It may not be in your face. Sin. Sin. Perhaps. The reality is.

It's a cooling off. Towards the Lord. Our hearts have grown cold. How do we know if that's the case?

How do we know if our hearts. Have cooled towards the Lord. Despite all he's given us. All he's done for us. How do we know? Well do our hearts burn. For the things that the Lord loves.

And cares about. Do our hearts burn. For those in our city. Our neighborhoods. Who are lost. And dead in sin. Who don't know the Lord. Do our hearts burn for them?

[23 : 32] Do we care for the lost in our city? Do we love the saints? Do we love one another? Or are we cooling off. With our church family.

That's a pretty good indication. If we're growing cool towards the Lord. We don't really care about the lost. And we don't really care about our church family. How do we become lukewarm.

Indifferent.

To the Lord. His people. His purposes. There may not be. Big. Blatant. Sins. There may be slightly more subtle.

Drifting away. There are times. Where we need to come face to face. With the reality. Of our sin. And God's word will do that. God's word here.

Confronted the people with the reality of their rebellion. It's not a comfortable thing. But. That's what God's word does. But the bigger thing.

[24 : 33] Actually. To grasp. In this chapter. As well as the perversity of our sin. Is actually the overriding grace of God. Yes.

God's people sinned. Greatly. There's no attempt whatsoever. To downplay that. Or hide it away. Not at all. It's confessed. But there is a greater reality. God's grace.

Is what shines brightest here. In this chapter. Look at halfway through. Verse 17 again. But you. Are a God ready.

To forgive. Gracious. And merciful. Slow to anger. Abounding in steadfast love. He did not forsake them. Isn't that incredible?

When you see what they've done. God did not forsake them. Look on to verse 28. But. After they had rest.

[25 : 33] They did evil again before you. And you abandoned them. To the hand of their enemies. So that they had dominion over them. Yet. When they turned and cried to you. You heard from heaven. And many times.

You delivered them. According to your mercies. That's the great reality. You heard. You delivered them. Look at verse 31. Nevertheless.

In your great mercies. You did not make an end of them. Or forsake them. For you are a gracious. And merciful God. That's the great reality. In this chapter.

God is gracious. He is merciful. And so as you ponder. This long chapter. This rehearsal. Of Israel's waywardness.

The big thing. The greater reality. Is the graciousness. And patience. Of God. That's the bigger reality. One writer put it this way.

[26 : 32] Against all human expectation. And all laws. Of ordinary probability. God's love for them. Proved to be a love. That no sin. Could weary.

Or exhaust. It would not let them go. Grace. For sinners. For the unworthy. For those who fail. For those who rebel. This is the glorious message.

God. For those who fail. For those who fail. And that is our great hope. Isn't it? That is the ground. Of our hope. That God is gracious. If it weren't for God's amazing grace.

We would all be doomed. All of us. Verses like these. Ought. To help us realize afresh. The astonishing faithfulness.

That God has demonstrated to us. Time and time again. He is our God. And he is gracious. And merciful. And perhaps.

[27 : 32] You do feel. That your own sin. Has wearied. And exhausted the Lord. But there is always a way back. There is always a way back. Because God is gracious.

And it is because of who God is. That the people. Can make their plea. In the conclusion. To this great prayer. From verse 32. To verse 37.

It is a plea. Based upon. God's grace. And it begins there. Verse 32. With these words. Now therefore. Our God.

The great. The mighty. The awesome God. Who keeps covenant. And steadfast love. In other words. In light of the history. We have just rehearsed. In light of all. We have just said. About our history. The history.

Summed up. By verse 33. Yet you have been righteous. In all that has come upon us. You have dealt faithfully. And we have acted wickedly. That's the reality. We've been wicked.

[28 : 30] But God is faithful. Their prayer. Has not sought to minimize. At all. Their sin. Or rebellion. But it also recognizes. That their only hope.

Their only hope. Is found. In the very character. Of God himself. That he. Is gracious. And their present situation.

Is not good. As they emerge. From exile. Look at the middle of verse 32. Let not all the hardship. Seem little to you. That has come upon us. Look on to verse 36. Behold. We are slaves. To this day. In the land. That you gave. To our fathers.

And it's rich. Yield. Goes to the kings. Whom you have set over us. Because of our sins. Their situation. Is not great. It's desperate. They're a long.

[29 : 26] Long way. From the promises. Made to Abraham. In many ways. Their situation. Is desperate. And yet. There is no.

Explicit request. Made here. In this prayer. There's no. Obvious. Explicit. Request. Made of the Lord. There is no. Direct appeal. Made to the Lord.

To act in a certain way. Rather. The appeal. Is implicit. The Lord. Is well able.

To read. Between the lines. Of our prayers. The implicit appeal. Is for the Lord. To once again. Extend. His grace.

To a way. With people. To restore them. That's the appeal. Look at how you've been acting. In the past. Lord. You've done this. Time and time again. Now look at our situation. Do the same.

[30 : 20] Please. Their prayer. Is based entirely. On the character of God. A God. Who has demonstrated. His great compassion. And grace. In the past. That is the ground.

For their confidence. But also. Ours. As we approach. The Lord. We are all too aware. Of our sin. Aren't we? Our constant. And foolish. Wandering away. From the Lord.

And his ways. We feel the weight of it. We must. But we mustn't become so preoccupied. With our own sin. With the reality of it. That we fail to look up.

And see our Savior. To consider the great act of rescue. He has done in history. In the past. Where he died. In our place. For our sin. And that is the great certainty.

That we have. God has been amazingly faithful. And gracious to us. Hasn't he? He sent his own son. To die.

[31 : 15] For us. And so our prayers. Can echo theirs. You have dealt faithfully Lord. We have acted wickedly.

And yet all we can do. Is fling ourselves upon your grace. And we can do it with confidence. Because we look back. At that day.

In history. When Jesus died. In our place. For our sin. The triumphant note here. Is not our sin. But salvation. In Jesus. That's. The prayer. Of confession. And it leads. Directly. Into. And is totally. Inseparable. From. Real. Repentance. Look at verse 38. Which flows. Straight on. From verse 37. Because of all this. We make a firm.

[32 : 11] Covenant. In writing. And that is what chapter 10. Is all about. I'm not going to read it all out. Because. It's hot. And. I want to try and get through.

And keep us all awake. But chapter 10. Charts. The repentance. A pledge. Of real repentance. From God's people. That is what flows.

From real. Confession of sin. This chapter. Details. What repentance. Is going to look like. For this people. They make a firm. Covenant. In writing. Yes.

God is gracious. But that grace. Demands. A response. It requires. Real repentance. A renewed. Submission.

To God's. Revealed will. A public. Confession. To follow him. And what we see here. Is. A commitment. Made. With their lips. That their lives.

[33 : 07] Were to be lived. In obedience. To God's rule. And they made it. Publicly. It's a binding. Commitment. They're making. Before him. The Lord. And everybody else. It's a public.

Commitment. That is what it meant. By the word. Covenant there. Verse 31. A public. Commitment. To God. And before others. To obey his commandments. And if you wanted.

A summary verse. Of this. Half of our passage. Then. Verses. 28. And 29. Of chapter 10. Would do well. Look at that. Chapter 10. Verse 28.

The rest. Of the people. The priests. The Levites. The gatekeepers. The singers. The temple servants. And all. Who separated themselves. From the peoples of the land. To the law of God. Their wives. Their sons.

Their daughters. All who have knowledge. Understanding. Join with their brothers. Their nobles. And enter. Into a curse. And an oath. To walk. In God's law.

[34 : 04] That was given by Moses. The servant of God. And to observe. And do. All the commandments. Of the Lord our God. Has. And his rules. And his statutes. That's the summary.

All the people. Are putting their name. To this covenant. Saying. We will obey God's word. We will do. Just as the Lord. Commanded Moses. We're going to do it. Two key things.

To note about this. Chapter 10. About this repentance. Number one. It is a public commitment. Verses 1 to 29. It's a public commitment.

Now the first 29 verses. Are simply a list. Of names. We've had lots of these. In Ezra and Nehemiah. And they're important. It's easy to overlook.

To skip past. The names. But. Publicly putting your name. To something. Is no small thing. To publicly put your name.

[35 : 04] To a document like this. Is no small thing. The list. There. Includes leadership. Those set aside. For full time ministry. But also. Lay leaders. Nehemiah.

And Zedekiah. Head the list. And we have 21 priests. 17 Levites. And 44. Lay leaders. In addition. To all those. Named. We have.

All the rest. Of the people. Verse 28. They are not putting. Their individual names to it. But they are all. Consenting to it. Publicly putting your name.

To something like this. It's not insignificant. You are making promises. Not just before other people. But before the Lord himself. James Philip.

Put it this way. It is of course. Possible. To consecrate oneself. To the Lord. In all sincerity. Very quietly. Without anybody knowing.

[36 : 03] And it can be. A very genuine. Consecration indeed. Nevertheless. It is true. That making it known. Either by public testimony. Or by writing.

As here. Or by any other method. Puts. An unmistakable. Seal to it. For it means. Burning. One's boats. And being. Unable.

To retreat. Or withdraw. It is nailing one colors. To the mast. For all to see. It is a public. Commitment. And that's one reason.

Why. As a church. We take. Seriously. Church membership. You stand. Before the entire congregation. You take vows.

In public. Just. As the congregation. Of God's people. And Nehemiah's day did. They stood together. They publicly committed. To serve the Lord. To serve one another. The New Testament. [37 : 01] There's never any conception. That the Christian life. Is a solitary one. A real follower of the Lord. Is to be a committed member. Of his church.

Belonging to Jesus. Means you belong to his people. And so it's right. To make a public commitment. Like that. And you make. Public commitment. To the church. Through baptism. Or if you're already baptized.

You make. Commitments to serve the Lord. And his people. In this particular church family. Every time we do membership. They read out the vows. And everyone says. We will. We'll do this. Everyone can see. That you've made this public. Vow. This commitment. And that then helps. Doesn't it. For us. To hold each other to account. And we need that.

Because. We are prone. To wander away. Aren't we? We have ups and downs. We do. Foolish things. We do things.

[38 : 03] Which run. Contrary. To the public vows. We make. Of membership. To the church. And sometimes. It needs a brother. To come alongside. And say. Look. Remember those vows. You took. Come on.

Let's keep these vows. Together. Together. We need that. Left to our own devices. We will drift away. But because we do make those vows.

We can keep each other to account. Such. Is the nature. Of public promises. Like the ones made here. In Nehemiah. People put their name to it. It's a wise step to make.

Because it helps us. Keep on the straight and narrow. In terms of our obedience. To God's words. So it's a public commitment. That's important. Number two. The second thing. Is. It is very specific. In terms of the commitment required. From verse 30. To the end. They didn't just make vague promises. Yes. I'll obey God's law. No. They made it specific. To what that was going to look like.

[39 : 02] For them. At that particular point. In history. And there are five key areas. Verse 30. Deals with marriage. Verse 31. Deals with the Sabbath.

Verses 32 and 33. Deal with funds. For worship. Verse 34. Deals with firewood. And verse 35. To the end. Deals with offerings. Let's look at it. In two broad categories. Number one. Separation. From the world. Separation from the world. That's the first major area.

Of obedience to the Lord. They talk about. And that's verses 30 and 31. And sometimes. It is necessary. To issue negatives. For the spiritual good.

Of God's people. And the two main areas. In focus here. They are always. A battleground. In the life of God's people. Always. It was for them.

[39 : 55] Then. And also for us. Right now. These two areas. Are always a battleground. Who we marry. And how we guard our Sundays. Who we marry.

And how we guard our Sundays. A failure to maintain. A right separation from the world. In both those areas. Spells spiritual danger. For God's people. Marry somebody.

Who is not on the same page. Spiritually as you. Marry someone. Who is not a Christian. Then your own walk. With the Lord. Becomes much more difficult. Considerably harder.

You raise children. That becomes considerably harder. That's putting it mildly. God's law is very clear. In this matter. Isn't it? As one commentator put it.

Intermarry with pagans. And you can kiss. Covenant faith goodbye. And sadly. That is the reality. You see it happen. You see it with students.

[40 : 54] Coming through. Very keen. It released the word. But a few years later. You hear.

They've got married to someone. Who's not a believer. And they're not going to church anymore. They've drifted. Happens all the time.

Who you marry. Is really key. Likewise. The whole approach to the Sabbath. The Lord's Day. Look at verse 31. And if the peoples of the land. Bring in goods or any grain.

On the Sabbath day to sell. We will not buy from them. On the Sabbath. Or on a holy day. So they understand. That there was a risk. That the whole patterns of life.

Might be dictated. Not by God's word. But by the world. The buying and selling of goods. On a Sunday. To dabble in a bit of shopping.

On the Sabbath. What's the harm in that? But they knew actually. That would undermine. The whole purpose. Of the Sabbath. A day of God. Given rest. To focus upon him.

[41 : 53] To worship him. And the great joy is. We don't have to be like the world around us. We don't have to be like the nations around us. Constantly working. Never stopping. Knowing God's goodness.

We have a day. Set aside. Set apart. To be with the Lord. To be with his people. And they knew. They needed to guard. Their Sabbath. So are you guarding?

Your Lord's day. Setting aside. For the Lord. And his people. Or. Are the priorities. Of the world. Crowding in.

Like it was here. The nations around. Coming to sell their goods. On the Sabbath. Is the world. Crowding out. Our church.

Commitments. Relegating it. To second. Or third. Place. Behind. I don't know. The kids sports pictures. Or the. Kids party. Or the cinema trip. Guard your Sundays.

[42 : 50] It's such a joy. To guard your Sunday. Set it aside. The whole day. For the Lord. I get to say no. To children's soft play. Birthday parties. That is a great joy.

I can say no thanks. What a blessing. If you've invited me. To a soft play party. Thank you. But it's not my personal favorite.

But there is a right. And a good separation. From what. Would otherwise. Pull us away. From. The Lord. And his people. Now there's nothing wrong.

With people coming into Jerusalem. Selling their goods. On every other. Day of the week. There's nothing. Intrinsically wrong with that. There's nothing wrong. With soft play parties. That on a Sunday. If it takes you away from church.

And his people. It's a problem. Isn't it? Guard. The Lord's day. And again. People who don't do that.

[43 : 48] You will over time. See them drifting away. Other things crop in on a Sunday. I've seen that happen. Families once stuck in. With church life. Before you know it.

The kids parties. Have turned into kids weekends away. They're never back in church again. Guard your Sundays. That's the first area. That this covenant deals with.

The second area. Is all to do with supporting. The worship of God. From verse 32 to the end. The focus here. Is on worship. In the house. Of God. The phrase. House of God. Appears eight times. In this section. Three areas are mentioned. Funds. To support the work. Of the house of God.

Firewood. To enable the burning. Of offerings. At the altar. And the giving. Of first fruit offerings. Funds. Firewood. And first fruits. Now. As you look at that. Can all seem a bit niche. Firewood.

Really. We're talking about wood. The third part.

[44 : 44] Of a shekel. For grain offerings. Is all quite detailed. And. Can't we just overlook this? But the point is this. Ought we not.

To be diligent. When it comes. To the worship of God. And serving him. To be. That seems to be the message. No wood. Equals no worship.

It's pretty important actually. Seemingly minor details. When it comes to the worship of the Lord.

Are massively important. Those who have been shown such grace.

As these people knew they had. They will not find it tedious. To be concerned with every aspect. Of the worship of God. Even. If it's small matters.

Like ensuring. There's enough wood. In the store. To enable the offerings. To be burnt. And so too for us. Our giving. In terms of our time. Our talents. Our treasure. That is a central aspect.

[45 : 44] Of our worship of the Lord. The message here. Seems to be that. We ought to be diligent. As we give. For the sake. Of the worship of the Lord. The final verse.

Of the chapter. Nails it. We will not. Neglect. The house of our God. We will not neglect. The house of our God. And that. Plays out.

In the nitty gritty. It's not just a vague. Statement. No no. It's very specific. What this looks like. Is firewood. And shekels. And grain offerings.

As we grasp again. The magnitude. Of our sin. As we see God's grace. We will understand. A fresh. The wonder. That we are welcome. To God's eternal family.

And therefore. We have the privilege. To serve him. We get to call him father. We get to worship him. We get to be part of the local church. We get to serve him. And join with him. In mission.

[46 : 42] To reach the lost. In our city and beyond. We get to welcome others. Into his family. So whatever we do. Whatever part we play. No matter how small it might seem.

Whether it's ensuring. The heating is on. To make sure this place is warm. In the midst of winter.

Whether it's those. Who are first to arrive. And unlock the building. Get it ready. Whether it's those.

Welcoming people at the door. Those down at the creche. Looking after the kids. Whether it's people playing the piano. Whatever it is. No part is too small. All of it. Is to be done diligently. And carefully. Because of who we do it for. That's the great message. Of these chapters. Jack.

The woodcutter. Around the back. Sorting out the wood for the altar. He was doing a really important job. It wasn't too small. To be left out. From this great covenant of repentance. It mattered.

[47 : 46] So see again. The character. Of our God. That's the message of this. A couple of chapters. See again. The God whom we serve. He is so gracious.

So utterly faithful. And we. We are so often drifted. So often wandered the way. So often acted wickedly. And yet. And yet.

He welcomes us home. In light of who God is. And what he has done. The only reasonable response. We can make.

Is the response we read about here. We confess our sin. We throw ourselves upon his mercy. We repent. We rededicate ourselves.

To serve him. To obey him. What did Jesus say? If you love me. You will. Keep my commandments.

[48 : 41] Whoever has my commandments. And keeps them. He it is. He loves me. Let's pray shall we. And we'll sing together to close. Our heavenly Father.

We thank you so much. For your goodness. For your grace. To us. Time and time again. You extend to us. Amazing. Wonderful grace. And so.

In the light of who you are. Would we not. Keep away. Even as we realize again. Our sin. Would we not shy away.

But actually come. Knowing who you are. Knowing that you delight. To welcome sinners home. And so help us to do that.

Help us to confess. Help us to repent. And help us to serve you. The rest of our lives. We ask it in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Yes.

[49 : 41]