

A Radical Response (Ezra 10)

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Date: 30 June 2024

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[0 : 00] While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites, men, women and children, gathered around him.

They too wept bitterly. Then Shekeniah, son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, said to Ezra, We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us.

But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel. Now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children in accordance with the counsel of my Lord and of those who fear the commands of our God.

Let it be done according to the law. Rise up, this matter is in your hands. We will support you, so take courage and do it. So Ezra rose up and put the leading priests and Levites and all Israel under oath to do what had been suggested.

And they took the oath. Then Ezra withdrew from the house of God and went to the room of Jehoanun, son of Eliashib. While he was there, he ate no food and drank no water, because he continued to mourn over the unfaithfulness of the exiles.

[1 : 12] A proclamation was then issued throughout Judah and Jerusalem for all the exiles to assemble in Jerusalem. Anyone who failed to appear within three days would forfeit all his property in accordance with the decision of the officials and elders, and would himself be expelled from the assembly of the exiles.

Within the three days, all the men of Judah and Benjamin had gathered in Jerusalem. And on the twentieth day of the ninth month, all the people were sitting in the square before the house of God, greatly distressed by the occasion and because of the rain.

Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, You have been unfaithful. You have married foreign women, adding to Israel's guilt. Now honour the Lord, the God of your ancestors, and do his will.

Separate yourselves from the people around you and from your foreign wives. The whole assembly responded with a loud voice, You are right. We must do as you say.

But there are many people here, and it is the rainy season, so we cannot stand outside. Besides, this matter cannot be taken off in a day or two because we have sinned greatly in this thing.

[2 : 27] Let our officials act for the whole assembly. Then let everyone in our towns who has married a foreign woman come at a set time, along with the elders and judges of each town, until the fierce anger of our God in this matter is turned away from us.

Only Jonathan, son of Asahel, and Jaziah, son of Tikvah, supported by Mishlam and Sabathai the Levite, opposed this.

So the exiles did as was proposed. Ezra the priest selected men who were family heads, one from each family division, and all of them designated by name.

On the first day of the tenth month, they sat down to investigate the cases, and by the first day of the first month, they finished dealing with all the men who had married foreign women.

Among the descendants of the priests, the following had married foreign women. From the descendants of Joshua, son of Josedach, and his brothers, Masaiah, Eliezer, Jadub, and Gedaliah.

[3 : 28] They all gave their hands and pledged to put away their wives, and for their guilt, they each presented a round from the flock as a guilt offering. From the descendants of Umar, Hanani, and Zebediah.

From the descendants of Harim, Masaiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jahiel, and Uziah. From the descendants of Pashoah, Elioni, Masaiah, Ishmael, Nathaniel, Jozabad, and Elasa.

Among the Levites, Jozabad, Shimei, Kaliah, that is Kelita, Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer. From the musicians, Eliashib.

From the gatekeepers, Shalom, Telem, and Uri. And among the other Israelites, from the descendants of Parosh, Ramaiah, Isaiah, Malkijah, Mijamin, Eliezer, Malkiah, and Benaiah.

From the descendants of Elam, Mataniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah. From the descendants of Zatu, Elioni, Eliashib, Mataniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza.

[4 : 42] From the descendants of Bibai, Jehoanan, Hananiah, Zabai, and Athlai. From the descendants of Bani, Mishulam, Maluk, Adaiah, Jashub, Shiel, and Jeremoth.

From the descendants of Pahathmoab, Adnah, Kelau, Benaiah, Masaiah, Mataniah, Bezalel, Benuli, and Manasseh.

From the descendants of Harim, Eliezer, Ishidah, Malkijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, Benjamin, Maluk, and Shemariah.

From the descendants of Hashim, Mataniah, Matata, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremoth, Manasseh, and Shimei.

From the descendants of Bani, Madai, Amram, Uel, Benaiah, Bedaiah, Keluhi, Vanaiah, Metamoth, Eliashib, Mataniah, Mataniah, and Jasu.

[5 : 43] From the descendants of Benui, Shimei, Shimei, Shalamiah, Nathan, Adaiah, Magnadabai, Shashai, Shariah, Azarel, Shalamiah, Shemariah, Shalom, Amariah, and Joseph.

From the descendants of Nebo, Jeiel, Matithiah, Zabad, Zibina, Jadai, Joel, and Benaiah. All of these had married foreign women, and some of them had children by these wives.

Right? It's a bit of remorse at the start. People sorry for their sin. And then they resolve to put away the foreign wives. And then there's a record of what happens.

But is that all there is for us as PCBC? No detail is by accident. And so we want to be thinking about this radical response together. So why don't we pray and ask the Lord to help us?

Father God, we thank you that you are faithful and just to forgive us of all our unrighteousness.

[7 : 15] We come before you as PCBC, knowing that we are broken. Knowing at the same time that all our sins can be forgiven in Christ. And yet we are confronted with a passage that is foreign to us, that shocks us, that we're not sure what to make of.

Help us see beyond the details. To see how each of us must deal with our sin radically. To deal with it together. And to honor God's word and obey it willingly before you, Lord.

We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. What steps must God's people take when there is serious sin in their midst?

Let's say one day we had an abusive leader among us. Or if we notice a costly compromise happening in our churches. Maybe a decline when it comes to the doctrines we teach, the truths that we hold to.

This is what we get to see in Ezra 10. A radical response to sin. And at first glance this sounds harsh, does it not? Especially if you are half the church.

[8 : 29] You are some of the women here and you're thinking, wow, that was harsh. To have these women sent away. Maybe some of you are even wondering, is this even racist?

Is there some kind of protection of the Jewish people going on here that's unfair even? My job in the next couple of minutes is not to answer all your questions.

Some of them are actually left unanswered. But I want to show you why these final words from Ezra are not what they first seem. In fact, they present a wonderful message, even for believers today. Sin is serious.

And all of us need to deal with it radically, together, so that God's word is obeyed willingly in our Lord Jesus. So my focus is not just to retell the story.

I think Eden's done a wonderful job. But let me draw your attention to one thing. Earlier this week, Eden and I were talking about it as we were contemplating the passage. Did you notice the rain? I know, it's pretty random, right?

[9 : 25] Did you notice the rain, right? Verse 9. We don't actually often get weather reports in the Bible, but verse 9 is actually very specific about the weather that day. It literally says, in the original language, the people were trembling over the matter, right?

The sin, and the rains. So actually, you want to imagine the scene, right? Imagine a crowd of people, young and old, and they're all shivering, and they're wet at the Temple Square.

If it sounds like a super rugby final, like, yeah, it probably is pretty close. That kind of atmosphere, right? Tense. Cold. Uncomfortable. No detail is by accident in God's Word, right?

The Holy Spirit inspired this moment in our text. I think what's going on here is this. Just as rain and judgment has overwhelmed the sinful people before, right?

Here is a judgment day at a national level upon God's people. They have sinned, and they have sinned, and they, as they confess to the Lord their sin, as they resolve to separate from the surrounding nations, I think these verses from 9, 10, and 11, this is what anchors the chapter.

[10 : 31] Nothing less than God's mission to bless the nations is at stake. There's holy people here. There's holy people here. They must confess their sin because it will impact the mission that they are sent on.

I know we usually walk through, you know, these chapters, you know, kind of in a straight line. But rain doesn't fall in line, right? Who's been out in the rain before? Kind of just splashes and then goes everywhere like this.

So, for today, I want to try something different. Today, I want to give us three points, but we're going to work from the center outwards, okay? So, we're going to start with the central three verses, and then we'll work outwards.

So, my first point is this. Three things Ezra teaches us about dealing radically with sin. Firstly, we need to, we see God's people here radically uproot deadly sin, okay?

Verse 9 to 11 is teaching us that deadly sin should be radically uprooted, pulled out. Listen to verse 10 again, all right? And Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, You have broken faith.

[11 : 38] You've married foreign women. You've increased the guilt of Israel. I think the first thing we need to understand here, PCBC, this is not a dig at non-Israelites in general, okay?

Actually, think about, the Bible is full of wonderful stories of non-Jewish people marrying into God's family, right? Can you remember some of them?

Think of those who joined God's salvation plan. They were grafted in. Think of last year. We went through Ruth's story. Ruth was a Moabite, right? Think of Rahab, right? At the walls of Jericho.

She's a Canaanite. Moses, famous guy. Did you know he had an African wife? Zipporah? So the Bible's not against, you know, mixed marriages in a sense, like when it comes to ethnicity.

It's a wonderful thing. As people embrace God's law, as they join God's covenant people, they are included by faith. It doesn't matter what their bloodline is. It's wonderful news, isn't it?

[12 : 37] What's going on here in Ezra 10 is something a bit different than ethnic issues. The word in Hebrew that's translated here as foreign women that Ezra talks about, the word here foreign is actually not the usual word that we use to describe a Gentile or a non-Israelite.

This exact phrase, foreign women, *Nashim no Kriot*, only appears here a couple of times in Ezra 10. It appears in Nehemiah 13, again, dealing with some similar issues.

We'll see that later. And then it appears one other time in the Old Testament. In 1 Kings 11, 1, the narrators describe *Nashim no Kriot*, foreign women who clearly turn King Solomon away from his responsibility for leading God's people.

Under God's law. That's what a king of Israel should have done, right? Okay, to hold on to God's law. And yet he married a lot of different people, foreign women, in a sense.

These were no ordinary foreigners. There were people who were from the surrounding nations who not only didn't share the faith of God's people, their ultimate allegiance, the gods they worshipped, were totally different.

[13 : 52] You see, church, the sin here that they're confessing of is not just intermarriage with a foreign race. The sin here is intermingling with foreign religions. The temptation is not just a foreign woman from another race.

The temptation here is a forbidden woman. Think of like the adulteress that Proverbs, the book of Proverbs, warns about. My son, don't go to her. Same phrasing.

That's what's going on here. They often say this. The first generation will preach the gospel. The second one will assume it. And the third will forget it.

Sixty years on, these Israelites, whose parents had sacrificed so much to get back to Jerusalem, to restore worship.

Generations on, they've forgotten their identity, their mission in Yahweh. They've been happy to intermarry into other religions. Some of you know the first commandment, right, out of the ten.

[14 : 52] Then you shall have no other gods before me. This is what God says to a people he's rescued out of Egypt, out of slavery. So to intermarry back into foreign religions is what Israel calls here an abomination, chapter 9.

He says that word three times. It's a serious phrase. It's saying this is not okay. And here in verse 10, he tells us this is why it's increased the guilt of God's people.

And so they must confess their sin. Verse 11. They must do God's will. They must separate themselves from people who do not share their faith. Now you might be wondering, good for Ezra, but do we need to be this radical today?

You might be thinking, if you're like me, you read this passage, oh, I'm so glad that we're not in Ezra's time. Aren't we now under grace? Isn't God loving and merciful? Isn't it wonderful that we have more freedom now in Jesus?

And yet Jesus says, if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. He says, of course, not literally, that you should tear it out. His point here is that deadly sin, sin that will destroy you inside out, needs to be dealt with radically, does it not?

[16 : 09] Although Paul, he says to the Ephesians, we've heard this when we went through Ephesians, among you, he's talking to Christians, there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality or of any kind of impurity or of greed because this is improper for God's holy people.

Or maybe to the Corinthians, we heard this book last year, he cries out, flee from idolatry, right? Because you were bought with a price. Flee from desecrating your body, God's temple.

We get this principle, being radical with sin in real life, right? Radical with darkness, brokenness. I mean, if you had a cancer, some of us, you know, our family is struggling with cancer.

Talking to someone recently, a friend whose mom has just started with chemo. Why would you poison your body with chemo? Why would you willingly let your hair fall out?

It's because you do whatever it takes to get rid of the cancer. Same here in a spiritual sense. John Owen puts it this way, he's a Puritan.

[17 : 17] He says, be killing sin or it will be killing you. But maybe you're here and you're wondering, PCBC, are Christians required to do exactly what Ezra says?

Is this the right remedy, okay? So, this bold request, send away the people. That will solve our problems. Let me say from the outset, a wrong response to these three verses, Ezra 10, 9 to 11, is to then come away saying, as Christians, this teaches us to divorce our unbelieving spouses.

We cannot read Old Testament stories, narratives like this. Remember, we learned this two weeks ago. We don't just shoot in a straight line, right, from the Old Testament to us today.

Okay? You're just going to miss the target each time if you just throw in a straight line from back then right to us today. We need to arc through the cross. We must shoot and arc through Christ if we're to apply this passage to us reasonably.

And actually, Paul models this for us, the Apostle Paul. He says in 1 Corinthians 7, 12, and he specifically counsels against this idea. We don't just divorce unbelieving spouses.

[18 : 31] If any Christian brother has a wife, he says, who consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. And then he, again, says it vice versa, Christian sister with a husband.

Unless the unbeliever chooses to leave, you're actually meant to keep your marriage vows. I pray often for Kathy. She's a wonderful woman, part of a previous church of ours.

She came to faith in Jesus 20 years ago, but she was already married to her husband for 10 years and from an unbelieving Christian family. And by faith, she is still faithful to her non-Christian husband.

To me and to many others, she is a living parable of Jesus' loyal love. Praise the Lord for people like Kathy. And yet, behind this wonderful situation and behind the situation in Ezra, I think we can draw a general principle in these three verses, in this situation.

And the principle is this, there is a spiritual danger of being willingly, of choosing to be yoked, joined together, believer and unbeliever.

[19 : 43] There's a danger when you do that that carries on for us today. Paul, again, writes to worldly Christians. He tells them, do not be yoked together with unbelievers.

For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? What fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there within Christ and demons? Again, of course, this teaching doesn't mean that we just turn away from the world and we just kind of live here in PCBC and never talk to anyone else again.

I mean, many of you come from, you know, households where your parents aren't Christians, your friends and family aren't Christians. It would be impossible. And how would we proclaim Christ to them otherwise, right?

I mean, we have to strike a balance, right? We don't shun the world. That's how Billy and I, we unexpectedly found ourselves dancing and singing Tuttiramaingaiwi, right? At my GP's office, right?

We're just kind of, you know, that's one thing to do that, right? It's fun. But it would be something totally different if I was asked to partner with the world in a different sense.

[20 : 46] Let's say I was asked to make a food offering like Matua, Brad Hamie, was talking about. I was asked to grab and lift up that offering to say an incantation to the stars as deities.

Don't be yoked together with unbelievers. To be joined together, to be intimately bound in service, whether in business, whether in marriage, whether in ministry, when your most foundational truths in you are so different.

It cannot be done. It is spiritually devastating. It's as foolish, Paul says, actually, and he uses the word yoke. It's as foolish as, who knows what a yoke is?

Okay, you kind of put this big wooden thing on an animal, right? Like an ox. Usually two oxes, oxen. And then they drag and they can pull the plow together.

They can do the work that you can't do yourself. It's as foolish, though, as yoking together a large ox and a small donkey of a totally different shape. And asking in the pool, it's too painful.

[21 : 55] Both the ox and the donkey would be very uncomfortable. Adrian Reynolds puts it this way. When churches do this, when they're too influenced by those who do not profess Christ, the results will be eventually disastrous.

Of course, there is an application for us today, isn't there? When it comes to questions around finding a life partner, I get it.

Most of us here, right, are young, unmarried adults. Most of us here, I'm sure in groups, or after groups, over dinner, it's the who's taken and who's not questions that swirl about.

But, I mean, look, even at Bible college, right, I was there in Sydney three years, we had all kinds of nicknames. Our nickname for our Bible college was Sydney Bridal College, or Single Married Before Christmas.

Love is in the air, right, even there. And I know it's hard to partner up in the Lord, as God's Word calls us to. I get it.

[22 : 58] And statistically, there are more women than men in the church. Among many unreached people groups, actually, most of the people who come to ChristFest are women. And then what happens next is one of their earliest prayer requests is, I need to find a godly, I need to find a Christian husband.

Because otherwise, I'll be married off to a non-Christian. They might not even have that choice. Even in New Zealand, right, we have freedom of choosing and dating and swiping. I once took a wedding for a Christian couple, and the way they found each other was through online dating.

And look, if you have challenges in this area, if you are struggling, don't do it alone. Marriage is hard enough when both are Christians. Us, you know, some of us here, right, Hakan and Ting, Isaac and Cynthia.

Look, it's hard enough. Don't walk through these challenges alone. Come talk to myself, Cheryl, Eva, and Vincent. But please realize, God's plan and will for every single one of you, regardless of how old or young you are, is not actually a relationship status.

It's not a financial goal. God's will for you is your holiness. If you're a Christian here, and you're willingly stepping into a partnership, a romantic relationship, whatever, with someone who isn't a Christian, or maybe they say they're a Christian, but you can tell they are so far behind, you need to reconsider that relationship.

[24 : 32] Because to uproot physically, emotionally, financially, it wasn't easy back then either, was it? It's not easy now. Let me tell you, it gets worse. It's harder.

Down the line. Yes, it's radical. Yes, it's costly. But let me tell you, there's rarely a happy ending when it comes to unequally yoked relationships, including marriages.

Either what happens is you'll end up pushing Christ to the edges of your life in order to accommodate, preserve peace in your relationship, so you become less of a solid Christian, a committed Christian, or actually your unbelieving partner gets pushed to the edges because you'll be so fired up for God and they can't keep up and it's unequally yoked.

It's not fair on them either. The unity and oneness that God pictures when it comes to marriage, it's just almost impossible in a marriage that is uneven, imbalanced.

Actually, it's why none of the pastors here will actually agree to take a wedding between a Christian and a non-Christian. It's just not worth the lifelong sorrow to your soul. But look, don't take it just from me, please.

[25 : 50] Listen to this Christian woman. She married a perfectly nice and yet non-Christian man. And then years later, she put it this way, if you think you're lonely before you get married, it is nothing compared to how lonely you can be after you're married.

Or ask the aunties who by no fault of their own, they have non-Christian husbands, right? And they wrestle to raise their kids in the Lord single-handedly.

Sometimes, actually, I think, I wish we had like, I don't know, K-drama quality videos, you know, series on Netflix or something that just follow the stories of some of these amazing men and women who are wrestling and finding life tough in unequal marriages.

You just follow their stories, right? It might be better than actually just a sermon on Ezra 10 or anywhere else. Just show you their sorrow. Whether in marriage or business or elsewhere, there is a danger, a spiritual danger of an imbalanced union.

And what it can do, as it did with Ezra's people, it can tear you away from the Lord. And so it is disobedient. It is spiritually devastating. And Ezra 10 would tell us today, where there's deadly sin, we need to root it out radically.

[27 : 11] Let's move on. We're going to move on from the center of this chapter. All right? Next, let's think about how unrepentant sin should be collectively confronted. So you notice there's actually two kind of passages, right?

Before 9 to 11 and then after 9 to 11. And so we're trying to compare them together. So if you've got a paper Bible, it's a bit easy. You can see both at the same time. But have a look. Whether it's the kind of oath language, right?

We vow to do these things in verse 5. Whether there's that proclamation through all Judah and Jerusalem. That's a very public statement in verse 7. And then look at verse 12. There's this mention of the whole assembly gathered together.

This is Ezra's people, the people of God, collectively dealing with sin. You notice that? This is a together effort, a team effort.

Yes, actually, they take time to make sure that everyone is consulted and talked to, to delegate and deliberate. Even when a few people have a dissenting opinion, verse 15, like there's a few people that are not happy with the decision, they weigh that up as well.

[28 : 16] All right? It really sounds like a massive, massive QMM, if you ask me. It's a collective response. And this kind of response to sin, it really cuts against our culture today, doesn't it?

Sin is something you hide in private, and then when you find out, you deal with it in private. Very rarely will we come to everyone, even in a group setting, a small group setting, and say, I'm struggling with da-da-da.

Please help me with da-da-da. We live, after all, in the age of this Western, expressive, freedom.

We assume, right, the most important thing in life is to look to myself to discover what I am, who my true self is. So it's the air we breathe that's very individualistic.

Right? After all, you've memorized it, this is me, that's the anthem. Right? Or I was born this way. Or I am hope. The Bible is clear, though, that our sins don't just have personal consequences.

[29 : 20] I mean, play along for a while, right? Let's say someone in church cheats on their spouse. Is it just a private affair? Of course not. Hurts their children?

Hurts the other married couples who've been walking alongside them? Or think about, I don't know, a young adult who's manipulative or selfish in their behaviors with each other or with others in the church.

Doesn't just harm themselves, obviously. Others are scarred. Even for sins we think of as private, we just, they just happen in our bedroom or whatever. Someone out there is suffering because of it.

So to collectively deal with sin is right. Of course, we manage this in careful ways. We make sure that people are not shamed unnecessarily.

But I think, can I say, like, dealing with sin collectively like this in Ezra's time, it has several benefits. One is that there is safety in numbers. There are some cases of spiritual disobedience that are just really obvious, right?

[30 : 26] You can just see it walking down the street. But there are some cases of sin, of idolatry, that are deep in the heart but they're not as obvious to spot.

You can't just point to a certain day and time that you can correct. Often only God has the full picture or there's safety in numbers. A few people have seen something concerning.

Far easier to go forward with dealing with serious sin together with a consensus so that God's people, such as in Ezra's time, are united in service.

Again, Paul, in the New Testament, he actually appeals to this kind of together principle when it comes to dealing with sin, believe it or not. Do you remember the church in Corinth? There was a case, a clear case of a spiritually deadly sin.

Listen to Paul, right? I can't believe it, guys. There's a man in your church having his father's wife. Are you proud of this? Paul, he's writing from outside. He's not part of their church.

[31 : 26] He loves him very much. He planted that church. He exclaims, shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? Can you see what Paul's doing?

He's appealing to them collectively, team, church. church. You need to deal with this sin. I don't know whether the struggle is with laziness and just not showing up to church, not because you can't but because you won't.

Whether you secretly are dealing with some moral issue. I don't know, a friend with benefits. Whether you're living a double life, okay? So well behaved here but just really, really rotten to your family.

Look, in God's family you should expect and actually maybe you should welcome if brothers and sisters come alongside you. Try and deal with sin with you. Help you to see Jesus and to turn back to him.

Because it's Jesus, isn't it? He's the one. He's the sacrifice, our Passover, the one who was shed, whose blood was shed so we could be free. To turn a blind eye to sin would be to cheapen the cost of Christ's death for us.

[32 : 34] And look, the most common way we can deal with sin together, collectively confronted is to do what Ezra did, right? Gather people together and wrestle with God's word. We do this every Sunday.

We open up God's word together and we're confronted. I'm confronted, you're confronted and we're given the grace of the Lord Jesus. Challenge to repent from our sins, believe in the Lord Jesus. There are lots of other ways we collectively confront unrepentant sin.

Some of it might just be to come alongside someone for a coffee. Some of it might just be to parent your children with an eye on Jesus and how we fall short before Him.

And sometimes we do need to confront unrepentant sin and what is often called church discipline, right? Taking careful steps. Again, we don't want to unnecessarily shame people but sometimes we have to deal with a brother or sister.

Try and win them back to the Lord. To their profession of faith, what they declared at their baptism. And if they don't repent, sometimes as a collective we need to clarify to the world that we don't think they're a genuine member of the church.

[33 : 47] I hope that day never comes. But if we ever need to bring to our QMM an item like this on the agenda, please don't be shocked.

unrepentant sin, the Bible says, it needs to be collectively confronted, not just individually left aside. Happened in Ezra's day, it does and it should happen in our day as well.

And look, rightly practicing the Lord, church discipline, it's not punishing someone or pushing them out. It's not unclipping someone from the rope, right, and letting them fall to pieces.

Actually, it's pointing out to them, hey, look, we're all clipped in, but you're not. And walking with us as if you are is spiritually deadly. There are all sorts of other ways to deal with the sin collectively, right?

I don't know. I love this recent example. Chatting with a pastor friend in another church, recently he started a fight club for men, right? What's first rule of a fight club? Don't talk about a fight club.

[34 : 51] But this group does meet and they're honest about their struggles with temptation in their lives. And they're going to fight this kind of poisonous stuff that's coming in clothed with the armor of Christ.

And the pastor himself is joining in the fight, right? That's a great response to sin collectively. Just as there is safety in numbers when we respond to serious sin, there is glorious grace, much grace, when we respond to temptation as a group.

Here in Ezra 10, we see God's people, they collectively confront sin that is not dealt with, unrepentant. How will we do the same as PCBC?

Because finally, our passage also points out how God's people in Ezra willingly obey the law. Willingly obey God's law.

I think it's so clear, isn't it? From the start of the chapter to that list, that record family by family of who responds and obeys, we are seeing here a people at their best.

[35 : 58] God's people who respond rightly to a confrontation of their evil. In fact, I think there's even an undercurrent of joy in their willing obedience.

Look at verse 2. He says, Shekhaniah, the son of Jehiel, says, he addresses Ezra, we've broken faith with our God. We've married foreign women, but even now, there is hope for Israel in spite of this.

Do you speak like this when it comes to your sin? They do. Do you speak like this when it comes to obeying God's law? They do. Right? Let it be done according to the law, verse 3 says.

There's a real willingness, isn't there, to listen to the counsel of the Lord through Ezra. And we want to keep this willingness in mind when our eyes, you know, just glaze over at those families at the end.

Right? Verses 18 to 44, right? It's not going to end up in your wallpaper anytime soon. That's okay. But just notice how exact and how willing people were to obey God's law.

[36 : 56] Right from the top, verse 18 starts with the leaders. Some of the sons of Joshua, sons of Josedach, these were the top people in God's people at the time. Notice how willing even the leaders were to obey.

Right? Where they had been involved in intermarriage with other religions. They make promises to put away their wives. They make guilt offerings as well. You can challenge us as leaders to be the first to confront our sin.

Please do. If we don't admit our guilt, how can others follow suit in our church? Willing obedience to God's law. Look, after carefully listing every single family that willingly obeyed, right?

And actually, it's a small minority out of Ezra's people, the total number that we've seen before. How does the book end? It actually ends, verse 19, with worship restored, right?

Offering for sin. Guilt. Offering means that sin is atoned for. And it ends with sin properly dealt with, even down to, yes, sending some of these illegitimate families away.

[38 : 02] Where do they go? Why them? What happens to them? The book doesn't say. And I can't make up an answer for what happens to them. And here, there's something a bit hollow, right?

A bit unfinished about this book. Is there not? I mean, of course, the story actually continues. Nehemiah is another book. We'll look at this after the July holidays as a church.

But even when you look at that final verse, all these unmarried foreign women, some of the women had even born children. It just seems like a bit of an anticlimax to the story. The step of casting off of foreign whites even seems a bit, a bit over the top.

A.D.A. Carson says, there's something noble and courageous about this action. There's just something also heartless and a bit reductionistic about it. I think it's meant to make us feel very unsatisfied.

Unless something changes dramatically, what happens here in Ezra is just going to happen again. Unless something changes in Ezra, God's people after this time in history will just keep self-destructing.

[39 : 14] Yes, every believer must deal with sin. We see this from Ezra 10. Every believer must address sin collectively. We see this. Because God's word is to be obeyed willingly before the Lord.

And yet, it's hard, isn't it? The biggest problem after all this is that our hearts are prone to wonder. The biggest problem when dealing with sin is that our own hearts don't want to deal with it.

We don't just need new rules, a new setting, a new strategy. We need new hearts. And on our own strength, it is impossible to have a new heart.

We are priests, representatives of God, who need a priest ourselves. We are God's people and yet, we fail to deal with sin radically. We need, we need someone who has dealt with sin radically on our behalf.

For our eternal judgment that we deserve for sins, we have the Lord Jesus. Just like the blackness of the night sky, right, that we admire this weekend, helps us see the stars clearly, and we recognize the darkness and the hollowness of our hearts in a passage like this.

[40 : 29] It helps us to see and behold the light of the world more clearly. Yes, God is still sovereign. He's working out his good plans so his people can worship and obey him joyfully.

And yet, as we end Ezra, we need to realize only the coming of Ezra's Messiah and his new covenant will relieve this tension of how will we truly deal with sin.

PCBC, all of us today, from Ezra 10, need to then keep going to look to Christ, our bright morning star. He's our wayfinder. He's our matariki.

Only he could proclaim as God's true great high priest, I've come to fulfill the law, he says. And then he does so. How? He nails our guilt, all our shame, all our mistakes.

He nails it to the cross. He is enough. Yes, we despair at this unfinished ending. This sadness of women and children cast away.

[41 : 35] And yet, think of Jesus. He made the most radical response, did he not, to sin? He cast away himself willingly. The book of Hebrews says he suffered outside the camp to make holy a people, his people, by his own blood.

He was cast off, so we never have to be before a holy God. That is the good news in a nutshell, is it not? So friends, when you struggle to say no to an offer to be unequally yoked, friends, when we as a church have to practice the Lord's discipline in painful ways, brothers and sisters, when it's just hard to obey God's word week in, week out, we look to Jesus.

We look to him. We choose to be set apart with him, to worship him only. In him is the pattern to obey, in him is the power and desire to do it. Through the wairu atapu, the Holy Spirit.

In his holiness, in us, we find our holiness in him. I can't tell you all the temptations and sins you will face this coming week.

I can tell you, though, from this passage, to ignore it in our midst will ruin us. To be able to be a city on a hill, a light for the nations, we must look to a bright shining star beyond us.

[43 : 04] Those who are wise, Daniel says, will shine like the brightness of the heavens. And those who lead many to righteousness, they will shine like the stars forever and ever. In Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, our star, may that be us today as well.

Let's pray. Lord, we give you thanks for this book with its obscure names, with its difficult scenarios, with the blackness of the sins listed, we find grace.

Help us now, even as we respond in song, to remind each other that Christ is enough for us. We thank you, Lord. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.