

# Committed (Part 2)

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Date: 01 December 2024

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'm going to read verses 1 through 18.

! Would you stand with me?! And let's honor the reading of God's Word together. Actually, 1 through 17. Therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children according to the counsel of my Lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God.

And let it be done according to the law. Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you. Be strong and do it. Then Ezra arose and made the leading priests and Levites and all Israel take an oath that they would do as had been said.

So they took the oath. Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the chamber of Jehohanan, the son of Eliashib, where he spent the night neither eating bread nor drinking water, for he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles.

And a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem, and that if anyone did not come within three days by order of the officials and the elders, all his property should be forfeited, and he himself banned from the congregation of the exiles.

[ 2 : 00 ] Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within the three days. It was the ninth month of the twentieth day of the month, and all the people sat in the open square before the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of the heavy rain.

And Ezra the priest stood and said to them, You have broken faith and married foreign women, and so increase the guilt of Israel. Now then, make confession to the Lord, the God of your fathers, and do his will.

Separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives. Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, It is so. We must do as you have said. But the people are many, and it is a time of heavy rain.

We cannot stand in the open, nor is this task for one day or for two, for we have greatly transgressed in this matter. Let our officials stand for the whole assembly. Let all in our cities who have taken foreign wives come at appointed times, and with them the elders and judges of every city, until the fierce wrath of our God over this matter is turned away from us.

Only Jonathan, the son of Ashael, and Josiah, the son of Tikva, opposed this, and Meshulam and Shabbatai, the Levites, supported them.

[ 3 : 13 ] Then the returned exiles did so. Ezra, the priest's selected men, has the father's houses according to their father's houses, each of them designated by name. On the first day of the tenth month, they sat down to examine the matter, and by the first day of the first month, they had come to the end of all the men who had married foreign women.

And then in verses 18 through the end of verse 44, it lists all those men who had transgressed God's word. May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? In Matthew chapter 18, verses 15 through 20, Jesus instructed us on how to confront sin within the church. He said, If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.

If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

[ 4 : 26 ] Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about

anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them. Jesus anticipated that there would be times when sinners whom he saved by his grace and who are a part of his body, the church, will sin in ways that bring conflict with others.

In such cases, Jesus gives clear instructions on how to address the conflict and teaches us that these confrontations should be motivated by a desire for restoration.

In other words, our motivation should not be to just let someone have it and think we'd be better off without you, we would be better off without your problems.

But I think our struggle in obeying this command doesn't center so much on how we confront others, but that we often don't confront others at all in their sin.

[ 5 : 44 ] We are prone to excuse ourselves and justify our inaction by thinking things like, well, somebody should say something, but I'm not going to.

And if I did, they probably wouldn't listen to me anyway. And you know, maybe it's not that big of a deal. Or they might think, well, what if I do that and they get mad at me?

What if they start yelling at me? What if they leave the church? I'm just a regular church member.

It's not really my business. Let's look at James 4.17.

James says, So whoever, whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is a sin.

Sins of omission result in sins of commission. To not confront sin as commanded by Jesus in Matthew 18 is a sin.

[ 6 : 49 ] In Revelations chapter 2 through 3, Jesus authors seven letters to seven churches in Asia Minor. In six of those seven letters, he confronts specific sins that are being excused or tolerated in these churches.

And his warning to them is that if they don't repent, he will remove their lampstand. He would not tolerate the sin that they were tolerating.

And if they did not repent, they would no longer exist as one of his churches. In Ezra, as we've seen, King Artaxerxes sent him back to Jerusalem and ordered him to teach and to preach and to govern the people according to the word of God.

Four months after arriving in Jerusalem and doing just that, some Jews came to him with a report that leading men in the city violated God's command not to marry foreign women.

Ezra responded, if you recall, by tearing his clothes, by mourning over their sin and praying to the Lord about it. His response set the stage for the revival that takes place in Ezra chapter 10.

[ 8 : 19 ] Revival is something God does. And he does it often through the reading, the teaching, and the preaching of his word as his spirit opens the eyes, the hearts, the minds of his people to see their sin, understanding God's wrath against sin, leading to repentance over sin, which includes a commitment to change their ways.

And so this morning's main idea from this message is the same as last week. If you look at last week's sermon and this week's sermon, it's really just one giant sermon. It's that revival happens when God's people commit to separate themselves from sin.

Revival happens when God's people commit to separate themselves from sin. And so again, this message this morning outlines four components of those who commit to separating themselves from sin, which leads to revival.

We covered one of those components last week and the issue about marrying foreign women. And if you weren't here, and if you have questions about that, I encourage you to go to our website and listen to that sermon and ask me questions if you have any.

But today we're gonna cover the other three. Now this message is important because it explains how God's people should confront sin. And it demonstrates how a commitment to that leads to revival.

[ 9 : 50 ] Jesus calls his church to be the salt and the light of the world. He calls us to be a city on a hill, a bastion of truth, to a world that is eager to exchange the truth of God for a lie and encourages us to do the same thing.

The church's influence is only as strong as its commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, which brings a desire to separate ourselves from sin and its corrupting influence.

My desire is that Highland Park Baptist Church, our church, our church will still be here when Jesus returns. How about you?

Or if you're visiting from out of town, I hope that you would want that for your church. And if that is what you want, then you must be committed to these components that not only make the church healthy, but they cause the church to thrive.

If you are not a believer, we are glad that you're here and I pray that today you will experience the revival that comes through salvation. I hope that God will show you through his word how committed he is to save sinners and to separate you from his wrath to come.

[ 11 : 12 ] And I pray that he will be gracious to give you new life, having shown you the seriousness of your sin, and that you will turn to Christ in repentance and faith and be saved.

Now, let's look briefly at the first of these four components before looking more intently at the other three just for overview. I should say the first was confronting sin, if you remember, and that comes from verses one through five.

Again, Ezra had received the report about Jewish leaders who had taken foreign wives in disobedience to God's word. And this sin was a big deal because it was one of the major issues that led to their being exiled from the promised land in the first place.

And so here we see a good beginning was in danger of experiencing a terrible ending. Ezra grieved over this news.

And many of the Jewish people joined him in his grief. A man named Shekariah directs their inward anguish towards external action.

[ 12 : 25 ] His father and his uncles were part of the group that committed this sin, but his fear and his love for God exceeded his love for his family.

And he told Ezra to rise up. He told him to address this issue and he gave him the encouragement that he and the people would support him. And now you could be thinking, well, isn't Shekariah kind of passing the buck here?

Isn't he doing, you know, Pastor Mike, what you just said Jesus told us not to do by thinking that someone else needs to do something about it, but it's not going to be me? Well, first, it isn't for certain, but I wouldn't be surprised if Shekariah had spoken to his father and had spoken to his uncles before he came to Ezra.

But more to the point, there are instances where the sin is so widespread, and in this case, widespread among the leaders of the people who should have known better that it required someone like Ezra to address the issue because he was the chief spiritual leader in Jerusalem and had received divine authority and responsibility to take on this formidable task.

So as it pertains to us, if there's widespread sin in the church and sin that involves our leaders, it may be better to take this issue to other leaders within the church.

[ 14 : 11 ] Prayer and discernment will help you know what to do. I was the associate pastor at the church I came from in Leavenworth for a year before I became the senior pastor there.

The senior pastor at the time was a great mentor for me, and he did a lot to prepare me in that year to eventually become the senior pastor in his place.

And so, you know, as we would meet, as we would go do things together, I would pick his brain about all different kinds of things. And one of them was about how to deal with issues that one church member brought to you about another church member.

And he said, well, you listen to them, and then you ask them, have you spoken to them? And if they say no, then you say, well, I'll talk to them, but I'm going to tell them that I've heard this about this from you.

And then he said, how they respond to that will tell you a lot, whether it's gossip, whether it's really that big of a deal or not, and ultimately put the responsibility back on them to obey Matthew 18.

[ 15 : 28 ] This is also a good time to talk about God's design for a plurality of elders to lead his church, to lead a local body of believers, because sometimes the pastor is the problem.

And if he is the only authority in the church, then that can cause even more issues. So be discerning.

Do something to confront the sin rather than doing nothing. Be like Shekinah who isn't afraid to confront sin and who is willing to encourage and to support and get behind the leaders to do something about it, standing behind them, letting them know that you are for them.

So that's the first component. We covered that in detail last week. Now let's look at the second component, which is contrition over sin. Contrition over sin.

Verses 6 through 8. I'm going to read those again. Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the chamber of Jehohanan, the son of Eliashib, where he spent the night neither eating bread nor drinking water, for he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles.

[16:43] And a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem and that if anyone did not come within three days by order of the officials and elders, all of his property should be forfeited and he himself banned from the congregation of the exiles.

Before launching himself into confronting people in their sin, Ezra retreats. Ezra retreats to the chamber of Jehohanan.

This was probably a room that was external to the temple but attached to it. Jehohanan, it's interesting, was the son of Eliashib, the high priest under Nehemiah, and the grandson of Yeshua who was the high priest when the exiles first returned to Jerusalem.

And so it appears that Ezra sought the counsel of some of the other elders who assisted him in seeking the Lord's will to issue this proclamation. What I think is especially of note here is that Ezra does not rush into judgment.

Ezra fasted from food and water because he was still mourning over the faithlessness of his people. And while no one can repent of another's sins, they can grieve for them and seek to intercede on their behalf in the hopes that God would be merciful.

[18:15] Abraham did this, if you recall, before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. More to the point, Jesus did this in Matthew as he looks upon Jerusalem and he laments over it in the rejection of him and expressing his desire that they would repent instead of facing judgment.

In Matthew 23, 37, we read about that. Jesus here saying, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it, how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you were not willing.

What we see in these verses is Ezra continuing to express a contrite heart as he prepares to confront the sins of his people.

A contrite heart does not take forgiveness from God for granted. It is grieved by the sins that grieve God.

In Isaiah 66, too, God says, all these things my hand has made and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look.

[19:31] He who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. In Psalm 51, 17, David says, the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart.

O God, you will not despise. God is pleased when we come before him in humility, grieved by our sin, grieved by sin and seeking his forgiveness and seeking his help.

As it pertains to Ezra, we have an example here of someone who took God seriously, sin seriously, and his task to confront sin seriously.

As it pertains to us, we have an example of the right attitude, a contrite attitude that prepares us to confront others in their sin.

Because confronting others in their sin should not fill us with joy. It should not give us butterflies in our stomach. Oh, I can't, I can't wait to confront this person.

[20:46] Because if we aren't careful and if we aren't contrite, we may confront sin in a sinful way. Jesus talked about that in Matthew 7, 1-5.

Judge not that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged. And with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?

Or how can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye while there is a log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Now, many people take verse 1 out of context. They think Jesus is prohibiting all kinds of judgment. And so you might hear someone say, only God can judge me.

And they say that as if God won't judge them, but he will. And that's not something to brag about. That's something to fear.

[21:59] In John 7, 24, Jesus gives this command. Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment. A person with a contrite heart will judge with righteous judgment.

Like Ezra, they will be brokenhearted over sin. Like Ezra, they will have spent time in prayer. Like Ezra, they will take no joy in confronting someone in their sin.

And again, if you wake up in the morning and you think, I can't wait to call people out today. I can't wait to get up in people's faces.

I can't wait to get in their faces and point out all of their sins. If that's you, you probably have a log sticking out of your eye and the person who you are confronting will not take you as seriously as the person who has spent a restless night with God in prayer preparing for that kind of confrontation. So a contrite heart is the second component. The third is confession of sin. These are the components that lead to revival and separation from sin.

[ 23 : 24 ] Now the time had come for Ezra to confront the sin of these men. And we know now, we've read it, what their reaction would be. I'm sure that Ezra during that time of prayer was praying that their reaction would be to confess their sin.

But maybe, maybe there was a part of him or a part of some of the others who were with him that wasn't so sure. Maybe they were wondering, what if these men refuse to confess?

What if they refuse to repent? Virtually everyone in the community is going to be present at this thing. Will they respect Ezra and his leadership?

Will they obey God's word? Or will they try to save face? Will they maybe try to orchestrate some kind of rebellion? It had happened before in their history.

I wouldn't be surprised if someone had that kind of worst case scenario playing out in their mind. But what we do know is that Ezra feared God.

[ 24 : 43 ] He did not fear men. Ezra knew God's word. He had spent plenty of time in prayer. He was confident that no matter what happened, he was on God's side and he knew that he was doing the right thing.

Verse 9 says, Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month of the twentieth day of the month and all the people sat in the open square before the house of God trembling because of this matter and because of the heavy rain.

I want to set the stage here real quick. The ninth month in the Jewish calendar would be around December or January for us, our time of year right now. The time for them, this time, was the time of the heaviest rain and the coldest weather.

weather. I've been to football games that time of year and that kind of weather. Maybe you have too or any other outdoor event and it's miserable, isn't it?

It's awful. It's incredibly uncomfortable. You can't keep warm and you can't stay dry. Your teeth chatter and instead of enjoying the game or enjoying the event, you're just thinking, when is this thing going to be over?

[ 26 : 04 ] I can't wait for this thing to be over. And I think that these details are provided because they add to our sense of just how uncomfortable all of this was. The situation was uncomfortable.

The weather was uncomfortable. Nobody would want to do this. Dealing with a tough issue was bad enough. Now they had the weather to endure and contend with.

But important matters such as the one in Ezra 10 must be dealt with. And so Ezra does not call for some kind of a rain delay.

The matter had to be dealt with. I don't know about you, I know I have been in a similar kind of situation, facing a difficult thing.

You've thought about it, you've prayed about it, you've grieved over it, but then you're just ready to face it. You're ready to get it over with.

[ 27 : 09 ] And I think that's where Ezra is at this point. We're dealing with this, we're going to deal with this right now. Verses 9 through 12 or 10 through 12, it says, And Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, You have broken faith and married foreign women and so increased the guilt of Israel.

Now then make confession to the Lord, the God of your fathers and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives. Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, It is so, we must do as you have said.

So, we have this confession, a commitment to separate from sin, which brings revival. Praise the Lord. But I think someone could read this and think, wasn't this a forced confession?

These men had no other option. They didn't come. They were going to lose all of their property. They were going to be exiled. So, they were forced to come. They were forced to confess.

Well, verse 8 says that they would forfeit their property if they did not come to the meeting. It's hard to get guilty people to show up to a meeting where their sin is going to be confronted.

[ 28 : 32 ] In Ezra's case, he was God's chosen man to lead his covenant people. Ezra had to maintain and enforce his standards, the standards that God laid out for his people and his word, or else the sin would continue to taint and corrupt the community.

The application for us is that God's desire for his church is that every member confess their own sins to him and seek his forgiveness on their own.

But as we've seen in Matthew 18, Jesus anticipated that this won't always be the case. Some church members won't listen. They won't confess to any kind of wrongdoing.

They refuse to take the steps to make things right. And in that case, the matter is brought before the church. Church discipline at that level is potentially divisive.

Some members are more inclined towards mercy. mercy. And they'll see that step as lacking compassion and lacking love.

[ 29 : 51 ] And again, we must be careful about trusting in our feelings over the Bible. Because Jesus said, if a member refuses to repent after all the steps that he's told them to take have been taken, they then must publicly be brought before the church and publicly removed from the church.

And again, the point of all of this is not permanent expulsion, but in the hopes that being removed from the church, they will see the seriousness of their sin and they will seek restoration.

Galatians 6.1 says, Again, when I was first pastoring my church in Leavenworth, I had a seminary student who was a member of our church, who became a member of our church, and who became a good friend of mine.

And we would, together, we would go out witnessing together. I mean, we canvassed neighborhoods, we walked miles together sharing the gospel. And at the end of the year, I saw that we had an extra \$800 or something like that in a ministry account that wasn't being used for anything.

And so I asked some questions, I went through the proper channels in the church to get approval, to give that seminary student, my friend, money, that money to pay for his spring tuition.

[ 31 : 38 ] And he was thankful, he was overjoyed. And I told him that, you know, in the future, maybe, if there was extra money like that, you know, we want to support you, and there's the possibility that if that was ever the case again, I could ask again, and maybe we could help you out with your tuition.

Well, the next semester came around, and he handed our treasurer his tuition bill. And he said to her, Mike said the church was going to pay for my seminary.

And so I met with him, and I recapped our previous conversation and what I did say, that I hadn't made that commitment, and he got angry with me, and he called me a liar, and he took the matter to the other leaders in our church, and at that point it was my word versus his word.

And I'll skip the details, but our leaders believed that he had misunderstood what I said, but he left our church angry and still adamant that I had lied to him.

in further conversations with him did nothing to change his mind. That broke my heart. That was hard. And I remember replaying that conversation over and over again in my mind and thinking, did I say something that misled him in any way?

[ 33 : 22 ] Years later, maybe two years later, something like that. I found out that he was pastoring a church, and not long afterward, I received an email from him apologizing for what had happened and how it had happened.

And I wrote back expressing my love for him and my regret for how this had ended too. The relationship was restored, but it took a long time.

And I share that story because sometimes these kinds of confrontations, like we see in Ezra chapter 10, have an immediate confession, an immediate restoration.

In fact, I would say that most of the time when we follow Matthew 18, most confrontations end with that first step. There's forgiveness, there's love extended to one another, but sometimes it doesn't, sometimes it takes a lot longer.

A lot of times, people leave the church before those steps can be taken. It's hard, but there's hope that those who are in Christ will come back together.

[ 34 : 41 ] I believe that these men were not coerced to confess their sin because they feared losing their property. That wasn't the case, but they were changed by God's Word, and they saw how big

the sin was that they were taking lightly.

However, their sin left a lot of untangling to do, which these men acknowledged in verse 13, bringing us to the fourth and final component for those who commit to separating themselves from sin, which leads to revival, which is a coordinated effort to kill sin.

Coordinated effort to kill sin in verses 13 through 14. But the people are many. This is their response. And it's a time of heavy rain. We cannot stand in the open, nor is this a task for one day or for two, for we have greatly transgressed in this matter.

Let our officials stand for the whole assembly. Let all in our cities who have taken foreign wives come at appointed times, and with them, the elders and judges of every city, until the fierce wrath of our God over this matter is turned away from us.

These men took accountability for their actions, and they also offered a solution to make things right, to avoid God's wrath from coming upon them and their community.

[ 36 : 02 ] But not everyone agreed, and we see, and we read about that in verse 15, these men who weren't for this decision, whether that was because they refused the way that they wanted to carry this out, or because they wanted to continue to be married to their foreign wives, we don't know.

But what we do see in verse 16 is a coordinated effort to put an end to sin that was threatening their community.

And this is what repentance looks like. It is a coordinated effort, a will, a desire to turn away from sin, and not just to turn away from sin, but to detest it.

Like Proverbs 26 to 11 says, like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.

Repentance is the opposite of that. Repentance sees sin and its consequences as something grotesque that is not worth feasting on anymore.

Repentance seeks God's forgiveness and seeks God's help. And those who are truly repentant seek accountability from others. they take every effort to avoid seeing and touching things that hurt them and hurt those whom they love.

[ 37 : 22 ] Jesus used strong language to communicate the effort we must take to separate ourselves from sin in Matthew 18, 8 through 9. He says, and if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.

It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.

It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire. Now Jesus is using hyperbole there. He isn't saying to literally mutilate your body, but he is saying that sin's presence in your life is something you must take seriously to sever yourself from.

maybe you know, maybe you are involved in some kind of sin that you haven't taken very seriously. Maybe you know that. Maybe God has exposed that to you this morning and you feel dirty, you feel gross, you feel guilty, you feel unlovable.

[ 38 : 44 ] Friend, I understand the way that you feel, and I have good news for you. Because right after talking about the serious steps that we should take to separate ourselves from sin in Matthew 18, 8-9, Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18, 12-14.

He says, what do you think if a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray? Does he not leave the 99 on the mountain and go in search of the one that went astray?

And if he finds it, truly I say to you, he does not say, you stupid sheep, I'm so tired of you, you're going to be dinner tonight. No, he rejoices over it more, more than over the 99 that never went astray.

That's crazy. So it is not the will of my father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. The sorrow you feel over your sin is a gift of God's grace.

grace. It's the good shepherd calling out to you his lost sheep, finding you, putting you on his back and bringing you back into the fold, rejoicing.

[ 40 : 13 ] God had a coordinated plan, a divine and eternal plan to redeem sinners through the sacrifice of his only son, Jesus Christ.

Galatians 4, 4-7 says, but when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

And because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, crying Abba, Father, so you are no longer a slave, but a son. And if a son, then an heir through God.

God went through great lengths in his coordinated plan to save you. Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice on the cross to atone for your sins.

He endured the wrath of God the Father for your sins, and he rose again on the third day as victor over sin and death. He confronted our sins.

[ 41 : 27 ] He set us free from their eternal consequences. He gives us new life, a new heart, by faith in him. He is more eager to forgive you than to condemn you.

Your efforts to separate yourself from sin will fall, or will fail, I should say, apart from your trust in Jesus and what he's done for you.

Your efforts to separate yourself from sin will fail apart from your love for Jesus and your desire in knowing him to be more like him.

So how do we adjust our lives according to what we've read, what we've heard in this text? Repent of your sin. Repent of the sin that you want to conceal.

Repent of the sin you want to conceal. You know, there are many today in churches, pastors and churches who teach that all a sinner has to do is believe in Jesus and that repentance has nothing to do with salvation.

[ 42 : 33 ] But Jesus said that he came to call sinners to repentance in Luke 5, 32. In the Great Commission before he ascended back into heaven, Jesus said that repentance for the forgiveness of sin should be proclaimed in his name to all the nations.

The Apostle Paul summed up his gospel as repentance towards God and a faith in our Lord Jesus Christ in Acts 20 verse 21. Repentance is something that we do at the beginning when we are saved through our faith in Jesus Christ.

It is something that we continue to do throughout our Christian lives as we seek to become more like Jesus and we want to be less like ourselves. As for verses 18 through 44, all of these names listed, all of the men who committed the sin of marrying foreign wives, why, we ask, would Ezra end this book by listing all of these men who committed this sin.

Now one thing, Ezra and Nehemiah originally we think were written as one. So this wasn't really the ending of this book and I encourage you to go on and read Nehemiah.

But it's here and we have to deal with it. And I think that it's here as a warning for others to avoid the earthly consequences of sin and to avoid repeating the same transgression.

[ 44 : 15 ] I also think, as we look at all of Scripture, I think that it's here, and this may sound strange, I think that it's here to comfort us. All of the great heroes of the Bible were sinners.

Only Jesus was sinless. All of our great heroes in Scripture, they were sinners. sinners. They all fell. They all failed. They all sinned.

They all needed God's grace. And God doesn't cover or conceal any of that in His Word. And it's there as a reminder to us to comfort us, if this person could fail, then I can too.

That's the warning. And the comfort is, if this person can be redeemed, if this person can be forgiven, if this person can receive God's mercy and grace, then I can too.

And so this morning, the invitation is a few things. One, if you're aware of something, a sin going on habitually in a believer's lives, you understand that you have the responsibility to confront it.

[ 45 : 38 ] And like Ezra, I encourage you to get someplace alone with the Lord in prayer and seek wise counsel and to do that. And I think what you'll find is that in doing that, as hard as it seems to be beforehand, you will see God at work in that.

And for you who maybe you know that there's a sin that you've been trying to conceal and cover up and excuse, you can't. God sees all and God knows all. And so it's better for you to come to him this morning and repent of that sin and to seek his help and to seek someone else's help to help keep you accountable than for God to expose that sin in a way that will bring a lot more shame and a lot more hurt to you, to the people that you love, and worst of all, to your testimony as a Christian, as a follower of Jesus Christ.

So one or the other, that's the invitation. Also, if you're an unbeliever, you've heard God you know the lengths to which God has gone to save you. And I hope that you've heard God's word and that his spirit has opened your eyes to see your need to repentance.

And if that's you, there's a time after I pray for you to come forward and to pray for whatever the issue may be, I'll be here to talk with you. And if that's uncomfortable for you, I'll be here afterwards.

I encourage you to find me. And if that's still too uncomfortable for you, please reach out to me. Text me, email me, call me. I want to talk with you. I want to help you as much as I can.

[ 47 : 07 ] Right now, let's pray. Lord God, we thank you for what you've done for us. Lord, we have sinned, we've all sinned, we've all fallen short of your righteous, perfect standard.

And God, in your grace, instead of letting us just continue to live in sin, continuing down that path that leads to death and eternal separation from you, instead of that, Lord, you confronted our sin by sending your son Jesus.

And Lord, not only in confronting it, you dealt with it. By his sinless life and through his sacrificial death on the cross and his victorious resurrection, Lord, we know that we have faith to be restored, to be revived, to have eternal life, a new life in you, where, Lord, you continue to show us your grace, you continue to be merciful and to forgive us.

Even when you uncover the sins that we want to conceal, God, there is your grace in that, keeping us from going down a path that leads to worse things for us and for those whom we love.

And so, Lord, I pray that here at Highland Park that we would take your word seriously, that we would be obedient to you, that we would handle these kinds of confrontations in a way that is than the way that you prescribe in your word, that, Lord, there would be healing, that there would be restorations when those things take place, and that ultimately, Lord, our church would be one that thrives in our obedience to your word and would be a city on a hill, a bastion of truth, a place where your word is proclaimed trained and obeyed.

[ 48 : 57 ] We ask this. We need your help in doing it. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.