



*Ministry of
Biblical Studies*

Reset

APRIL LENTEN BIBLE STUDY SERIES
"10 Steps to Spiritual Renewal"
April 24th, 2024

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Welcome to the Metropolitan Community Church
Ministry of Biblical Study Classes
April 24, 2024

“Is It Time for a Spiritual Reset In Your Life?” (cont.)

5. Gratitude: Renewal Requires Gratitude for God’s Mercy and Grace. Neh. 8:12.

- The people rejoiced and celebrated God’s mercy and grace. Once the full extent of God’s mercy and grace had become apparent, the people joyfully celebrated God in a feast: “12 Then all the people went away to eat, drink, to send portions, and to celebrate a great feast, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.” (Neh. 8:12). Teaching God’s law was central to the Jews’ joy. They could not fully appreciate what they had been saved from without fully understanding the extent of their sins.
- Praise and worship Jesus for His mercy and grace. When Ezra and Nehemiah observed God’s Feast of Tabernacles, they also experienced God’s joy: “And there was great rejoicing.” (Neh. 8:17). Jesus wants you to praise Him for His mercy and grace. He is your rock, even when you deserve His judgment: “The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock; and exalted be God, the rock of my salvation,” (2 Sam. 22:47). “My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; my savior, You save me from violence.” (2 Sam. 22:3). “The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He.” (Dt. 32:4). “The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” (Ps. 18:2, 31, 46; 19:14). Worship helps to clear your mind to receive God’s Word when you are in turmoil. Thus, you should never skip the worship service at your church. Do you praise Jesus for the price He paid for you at the cross?

6. Love for God: Renewal Requires Seeking a Deeper Relationship With God. Neh. 8:13.

- The leaders gathered to obtain a deeper insight to God's law. To ensure that they would not repeat their mistakes, the elders came to Ezra to gain deeper insights into God's law: "13 Then on the second day the heads of fathers' households of all the people, the priests, and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe so that they might gain insight into the words of the Law." (Neh. 8:13). God organized the Jews through tribes, clans, and families to ensure that everyone was accountable. Thus, as led by the Spirit, the leaders of each group of Jews knew that they had a special responsibility to better know God's Word so that they could lead the people that God had entrusted to them. Their decision to learn and follow the Word would bless the people. Conversely, they would bring judgment upon the people if they failed to follow the law and encourage others to do so.
- Have a love for God's law and His Word. The leaders all had a heart to draw closer to God by understanding His law and His Word better. God also blessed Ezra because he "had set his heart to [1] study the law of the Lord and [2] to practice it, and [3] to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel." (Ezra 7:10). The Psalmist also proclaimed: "O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day." (Ps. 119:97) "But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night." (Ps. 1:2). Having this love means that you enjoy spending time digging into God's law and His Word. Do you love studying God's law and His Word? Or, do you find it to be a burden?
- The greatest commandment: to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and might. After repeating the Ten Commandments, Moses distilled them down to just one in the Jewish call to worship or Shema: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." (Dt. 6:5). In Hebrew, the reference to a person's "heart" also includes their "mind." (e.g., Zech. 8:17; Dt. 9:4; 2 Sam. 13:33; 2 Kings 23:25; Esther 4:13; Is. 10:7). Centuries later, a Pharisee lawyer sought to

test Jesus. He asked Jesus to name the greatest Commandment (Matt. 22:34). Jesus responded by quoting the second verse of the Shema. Yet, because the word "heart" in Greek does not include the word "mind," He added the word "mind" when He stated the greatest commandment: "You shall love the Lord God with all your heart, and all your soul and with all your mind." (Matt. 22:35-38; Mk. 12:29-30; Lk. 10:27; Ex. 20:1-8). If you love God, you will want to keep His commandments out of love and not obligation: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome." (1 Jo. 5:3). Do you love Jesus' commandments out of devotion?

- The seven benefits in having a heart for God's law. Although not a path to salvation, there are seven benefits to studying God's law. First, through the study of the law your sins become known to you so that you can repent of them (Ro. 3:20; 7:7). If the law did not apply, there would be no sins for God to reveal to you. And if you believe that you are without sin, the truth is not within you (1 Jo. 1:8). Second, compliance with the law out of devotion (not obligation) is a sign of your love for Jesus. Jesus says that if you love Him, we will keep His commandments (Jo. 14:15, 21; 15:10; 1 Jo. 5:3; 2 Jo. 1:6; Matt. 19:17). He is the great "I AM" who gave Moses the Ten Commandments (Jo. 8:58; Ex. 3:14). Yet, Jesus came to correct people's motives in following the Ten Commandments. He wants your obedience to be motivated by love and not obligation. He therefore summarized the Ten Commandments as something that comes naturally once a person loves the Lord and his or her neighbor (Matt. 22:35-38; Lk. 10:27; Dt. 6:5). Moses taught us to live obediently as it is written. Jesus taught us to love obediently as it is written. Third, voluntary compliance with God's law and the Holy Spirit sets you free from slavery to sin. If you obey the law for the right reasons, you become a slave to righteousness. Yet, if you rebel against the law, you become slaves to sin (Ro. 6:12, 16; Jo. 8:34; Ro. 1:24-28; Eph. 4:19; Ps. 81:12). Fourth, voluntary compliance with God's law helps you to live a holy life, as every believer is called to do (1 Pet. 1:16; Lev. 11:44). When you are holy through moral conduct and a loving heart, you become a light to others (Dt. 4:5-6; Matt. 5:14). Conversely, you dishonor God and repel others when you break the law (Ro. 2:23-24).

Fifth, the Ten Commandments provide a standard of righteousness to aspire to, not a means for salvation (Ro. 3:20; 2 Tim. 3:16). Sixth, voluntary compliance with God's law brings wisdom and understanding (Dt. 4:5-6; Ps. 119:98-105). Only "fools" reject the wisdom of God's law (Prov. 1:7). Finally, Moses promises certain conditional "blessings" (not salvation) for those who follow the law (Dt. 28:1-13). One example is in the area of health (Ex. 15:26; Lev. 26:3-13; Dt. 28:2-14). Another example of this is in the area of prayer. When you follow the law out of devotion (not obligation), He can clearly hear your prayers (Jam. 5:16). Conversely, when you openly rebel against Him, your prayers may be "hindered" (1 Pet. 3:7; Jo. 9:31; Ps. 66:18; Prov. 28:9; Isa. 1:15). The reason for this is that sin cannot be in His presence (Hab. 1:13). When you act righteously, your prayers are a sweet aroma (Ps. 141:2; Rev. 5:8; 8:3). Are you eager to share God's law with others?

7. Obedience: Renewal Starts With Full Obedience to God's Word. Neh. 8:14-18.

- Ezra leads the Jews in celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles / Sukkot. Finally, Ezra led the Jews in celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles / Booths / Sukkot, in the exact manner God required. "14 And they found written in the Law how the Lord had commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month. 15 And that they were to proclaim and circulate a proclamation in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the hills, and bring olive branches and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of other trees with thick branches, to make booths, as it is written." 16 So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courtyards and in the courtyards of the house of God, and in the public square at the Water Gate, and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. 17 The entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths. Indeed, the sons of Israel had not done so since the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day. And there was very great rejoicing. 18 He read from the Book of the Law of God daily, from the first day to the last day. And they celebrated the feast seven days, and on the

eighth day there was a festive assembly in accordance with the ordinance." (Neh. 8:14-18). Solomon dedicated the first Temple during the "feast" during the seventh month of Ethanim (2 Chr. 5:2-5; 1 Kgs. 8:1-2). This would have correlated with the Feast of Tabernacles / Booths or Sukkot (Lev. 23:33-43). When he was still walking with God, Solomon observed the three yearly feasts and sacrifices in Jerusalem (2 Chr. 8:12-13; 1 Kgs. 9:25; Dt. 16:1-17). These included the Feasts of Unleavened Bread, Weeks, and Tabernacles (Ex. 23:14-17; 34:22-23; Dt. 16:16). Yet, even Solomon did not properly follow the law regarding the Feast of Tabernacles. Nor did David or any of the kings after Solomon. Nehemiah records that the Jews had sadly failed to observe the Feast of Tabernacles in the manner God prescribed by living in booths for a week since the days of Joshua (Neh. 8:17).

- Celebrate Jesus by depending upon Him. To remember their time in the wilderness, the Jews built small booths or tents to dwell in for one week. The temporary structures were a means to remind the Jews to depend upon God, not themselves. Jesus also wants you to depend upon Him for your needs and not your own works or wealth.
- The required balance in studying God's law. It might be tempting to see the Jews' efforts to live in booths as evidence of legalism. When studying the law, it is important to note what the law will not do. It is not a route to salvation. If that were the case, Christ's death was not necessary (Gal. 2:21). Long before Jesus ever came, God condemned the Jewish religious leaders who had turned the law and the festivals into a set of ritualistic obligations. People did what they were told, but their hearts were not in it. "I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies." (Amos 5:21; same Is. 66:3). Jesus' greatest condemnations were therefore directed at religious leaders who turned the law into a set of legalistic rituals (e.g., Matt. 23:24). We must be careful not to do the same in studying the law. Christ came to fulfill the law (Matt. 5:17). By faith in His atoning death, we are no longer judged under the law as a condition of our salvation: "But now we have been released from the law,

having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter (Ro. 7:6; 8:3; Gal. 5:18). These warnings have caused many modern Christians to treat God's law like toxic waste. Some assume that because Jesus fulfilled the penalty for breaking the law, there is no point in studying it. But this is also a mistake. In many cases, this is the equivalent of treating Jesus' death on the cross as a license to sin (Ro. 6:1-2).

NOTES

