

would like to know Christ as your personal Saviour, then you have but one response to make: by faith invite Him into your life. To reject Him is to die in your sins (John 8:24) and to spend an eternity in punishment (Matt. 25:46). I'm sure you realize the decision that you need to make and that God wants you to make. You're right, invite Christ into your life now.

BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

"Responses of the Redeemed"

(Neh. 9:1-3)

Introduction

In Nehemiah chapter 8 it is recorded that the people of God experienced a joyous revival. The people were prepared for this revival because they were very receptive to the Word of God (8:1-8). As the Word was faithfully read and expounded (cf. 8:8), the people repented of their sins revealed in the Word (8:9). After their godly sorrow for sin, there came a renewed "joy of the Lord" (8:10) and further obedience to other portions of the Word (8:13-18).

The effect of the ministry of the Word continued in the lives of God's people. The feast of booths (8:13-18) had lasted for seven days (15th through the 22nd day of the seventh month) (8:18), but on the twenty-fourth day of the same month they assembled together with an exemplary response to their God (9:1). The ways in which these Israelites responded to their God are listed below (9:1-6). God expects the same response from His people today.

Outline and Comments

1. Devotion to God -- "assembled with fasting" (9:1a). True fasting is the negative result of positive devotion to God. The devotional aspect is the attraction to God and His heavenly things (cf. Col. 3:1-2). Genuine devotion results in the fasting aspect, distraction from earthly things and temporary abstinence from bodily needs such as eating, drinking, and sleeping. Fasting apart from true spiritual devotion to God is just "religious show" (cf. Matt. 6:16-18).
2. Sorrow for Sin against God -- "in sackcloth and with earth upon them" (9:1b).
Garments of "sackcloth," a coarse rough material made

of goat's hair, was often worn to show intense sorrow for sin against God. Less frequently, "earth upon them," i.e. dust thrown upon their head, was used for the same purpose. These people had a "godly sorrow" (II Cor. 7:10) which led to genuine repentance and restoration of spiritual joy and blessing (II Cor. 7:9; Ps. 51:12). In contrast, "the sorrow of the world worketh death" (II Cor. 7:10b). Judas (Matt. 27:3) and Esau (Heb. 12:16-17) had sorrow for what they had done and the consequences of their misdeeds. Their's was a worldly sorrow and not a godly sorrow for sin against God. Many people today express worldly sorrow with great tears, not because they are repentant of sin before a holy God, but because "they got caught" or suffered some selfish loss. Thank God! He knows the exact difference between these two types of sorrow, and when we draw near to Him in godly sorrow, He draws near to us with love and forgiveness (cf. Acts 20:21; Jas. 4:8a).

3. Separation unto God and from all sinful associations (9:2a).

Separation is both positive, unto God (cf. Rom. 1:1b), and also negative, from sin (II Cor. 6:17; II Tim. 2:19). In Nehemiah 9:2 the emphasis is on the negative: the Israelites were to separate themselves from all evil associations such as marriages to the ungodly (II Cor. 6:14-18). The believer is to have contact with sinners and to maintain a blameless testimony before them (cf. Luke 15:1-2). On the other hand, the believer is not to commit the sinful practices of unbelievers (cf. Ps. 1:1; Heb. 7:26). The believer is in the world but not of the world (John 17:14-18). Thus, isolation from the world is not the proper doctrine of separation, for isolation leads to asceticism and monasteries. Insulation from the evil of the world is the approach of our Lord (John 17:15). A ship in water is fine, but water in the ship is disaster.

4. Confession of sin to God (9:2b-3).

"Confession" of sin is mentioned in verse 2 and in verse 3. The latter mention of confession (v. 3) followed the reading of the Word of God. The Word acts as a mirror to show us our sin when we look into it (cf. Jas. 1:22-25). The Word also promises us that if we confess (Greek of I John 1:9, homologeō, "to say the same thing") our sins, God will faithfully forgive and cleanse us from our sins (I John 1:9). We must call 'em as the Word shows 'em (i.e. our sins).

The need for the believer to confess sin immediately when committed is seen in three immediate and disastrous consequences of sin:

- (1) Sin makes spiritual fellowship with God and other believers impossible until confessed (I John 1:5-6).
- (2) Sin makes prayer ineffective (Ps. 66:18).
- (3) Sin makes praise inappropriate (Isa. 29:13).

Confession of sin restores spiritual fellowship with the Lord (I John 1:7), establishes prayer communion with the Lord (II Tim. 2:22), and makes praise appropriate (Ps. 33:1).

5. Worship of the Lord, our God (9:3b).

It is only after expression of devotion, repentance, separation, and confession that we can worship God in the fullest sense. The foundation of worship is recognizing the absolute worthiness of our blessed Lord (Rev. 4:11) and our own unworthiness (Ps. 8:4-5). Because of the wonderful grace of Christ (II Cor. 8:9), we who are partakers of His grace can express true worship -- thinking God's thoughts after Him. These people had heard God's Word for three hours, "one fourth part of the day" (9:3); they had plenty of God's thoughts to think about (cf. Ps. 139:17-18).

Invitation for Salvation

God expects the above responses from His people who already know Christ as their personal Saviour. If you