

Ezra 5-6

When we have someone who gives their heart to Christ say on a Sunday morning, or for that matter whenever it might be. Amongst other things, one of the things I like to take the time to explain to that person, or perhaps persons is the difference between conviction and condemnation and how it is that they might recognize which of the 2 are taking place in their heart and life at any given time. Because condemnation is yet another tool, another weapon of our enemies warfare. We spoke Sunday morning about bitterness, how it's poison, something that the enemy seeks to ensnare us *by* and sterilize us *through*. Last Wednesday we spoke of the weapons of discouragement, fear, and frustration/division. We spoke of the fact that God has a plan for your life, something He wants to do both *in* you and *through* you for His glory. But that as sure as God wants to *cultivate* that work, the enemy wants to *counter* that work. And the greater the work, the greater the opposition, and that's exactly what we saw take place in Ezra ch 4, the enemy sweeping in to discourage the people of God from the work of rebuilding the temple. They played on their fears and their anxieties, sought to divide them against one another, and though each of those things no doubt did some damage it wasn't until the *accusations against* them turned to *condemnation towards* them that the work actually ceased.

And that's what condemnation does to me, it causes me to want to quit the work, and it comes straight out of the pit of hell. You recall what happened, the enemies of the Jews hurled accusations against the Jews before the king, and the same thing happens to you and to me. Who's the accuser of the brethren? Rev 12:10 tells us that Satan, accuses the brethren day and night before our God, our King, and he has no problem issuing to you a copy of the letter that he's stating. "He's rebellious individual, always blowing life, says he'll never do it again, only to violate his word over and over. She calls herself a Christian yet look at the way she flew off the handle, and went off on that person, cussed him and everything. He took part in this, she was watching the other," and on and on it goes. And so often the net affect of the accusations *against* us is to bring condemnation *upon* us, and we think, "That's right, I did, I don't know *why* I call myself a Christian, or why I'm even trying, I'm a hypocrite and might as well quit." And we issue our own cease and desist order and the work that God is doing in you and wants to do through you comes to an end, a stand still, a halt.

That's exactly what happened there at the end of ch 4 where we read, "Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased." And make no mistake that's exactly what the enemy wants to happen in your life as well, that the work of God in your life, what He's doing through your life might cease. Perhaps he's already accomplished that agenda, you find yourself at a spiritual stand still, still ok with respect to your *position* you're still in Christ, but you're in a horrible place with respect to your *condition*, no longer busy about the work of God in your life, the things He desires to do through your life. You're doing nothing as it relates to the Kingdom of God, as we approach Ch 5 they're all still ok with respect to their position. They're where they need to be, in Jerusalem, but they're in a horrible way when it comes their condition, it's been nearly 16 yrs since the end of ch 4 and the work that was going on has long since been abandoned.

These few chapters that we've been going through really aren't so much about our *walk* as they are our *work*. Being submissive and subservient to the *work* God wants to do through our lives.

Now before I get too far away; condemnation/conviction, you need to know that condemnation will seek to drive you away from God, it will seek to get you to quit, you start getting down on yourself, initially you become *apathetic towards* the work, then eventually there's a total *abandonment of* the work., branded "unworthy."

What we need to understand is that we were never worthy in the 1st place or else Jesus would've never come, so we're to reject condemnation understanding that, "*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*" Rom 8:1 Doesn't mean we never make mistakes, but that the pattern of our lives is to walk after the Spirit, not the flesh. And again, "*Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.*" Rom 8:34 So we're to reject condemnation, Jesus bore our condemnation and now robes us in His righteousness, we're worthy, not because of what we *do* but because of what He's done.

So as to where condemnation drives me away from God, seeks to get me to quit the work, conviction will draw me near to God, cause me to want to carry on, repent and carry on. Conviction comes from the Holy Spirit, condemnation is from the enemy, and if you've been under the heavy hand of condemnation upon your life, you should realize that just as sure as the enemy has tools by which he seeks to extinguish and *end* God's work in your life, God has tools to encourage and enable you to be busy about His work once again. And in short its taking in and trusting His Word, we might say the *word* of God, administered by the *people* of God, in truth and love. We read in Gal, "*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*" Gal 6:1 But you've got to come to that place whereby you'll allow the principles of the Word of God to become *practical application*, and serve as *proper motivation* in your life. Let's look at ch 5, it's been 15-16yrs since the work on the temple ceased.

Vs 1-2

Now the bible says, "...*he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.*" 1 Cor 14:3 So vs 1 we see these 2 prophets enter the equation (Haggai and Zechariah) and these *prophets* of God, minister the *word* of God in truth and in love. And in so doing the political leader (Zerubbabel, and the high priest Jeshua) receive the things that they said, and made of them practical application, received from them proper motivation, and they were enabled to persevere forward in the work once again.

Of course this would be a perfect time to read the books of Haggai and Zechariah in your personal studies to see exactly what it was that they were saying, and how it was that they were helping. And what you'll find is that they were at opposite ends of the spectrum when it came to their approach or style of ministry, how they helped. The things they said though both equally true and much needed, were very different. You'll find that Haggai was more of a down to earth "This is how it is" type thing, he spoke straight to the conscience of the people, but Zechariah was a visionary, a mystic sort of a man, he was having all these visions and saw from where they were then basically to the end of the world, the 1st coming of the Messiah, the 2nd coming, he saw 7 lamps and 2 olive trees, flying scrolls, he just had all these wild spiritual experiences that God used to minister to the people through him, he appealed more to the emotional side, he dealt with the heart. So Haggai was speaking the conscience of the people, Zechariah was appealing to and encouraging the hearts of the people and in so doing the people were motivated and activated into continuing on in the work.

They helped the people of God, through the word of God to get back into the proper spiritual condition so that they might begin in God's work again. Haggai spoke like in such a way as to spur and convict their conscience. Leave Ezra, let's look at Haggai Ch 1(830) Vs 1-11

See the progression, from procrastination, to stagnation, from apathy, to abandonment. They stopped the work, then as they quit focusing outwardly, they begin focusing inwardly, left God's house in ruins and started putting time effort and energy into their own homes instead.

Now is it wrong to work on your home, or work towards a goal that benefits your family? Not at all, but when your own agenda takes precedence over God's agenda for your life, then we have a problem. We might say they ceased seeking 1st the kingdom of God, and began building their own, that is they were focusing on their own desires to the neglect of God's desires for their lives.

Haggai says, "What do you mean by saying, 'Well, it's not time to start on the temple,' when you're living in luxury homes and the temple hasn't been touched in 16 yrs? Do you ever wonder why you're working so hard and ends never quite get met, and how everything you're doing seems to fall just short of the need no matter how much effort you put forth? It's because God's trying to get your attention, quit catering to your own priorities and repent of your backslidden condition and be renewed in why God called you here in the 1st place, go to the mountains, get wood, begin the work on the temple, seek 1st the kingdom of God and not your own agenda and God will bless your life." You see, what's your priority? Why is your marriage failing? Is Jesus in the center of it? Are you giving Him His proper place in it? Or are you continually fighting over money matters, who's supposed to be doing what and never getting on your face before Him in prayer, or letting the water of His word wash over your lives together?

Perhaps a particular ministry, or calling, or commitment, isn't panning out, have you allowed the Lord to search out the heart of the matter, is there someplace, somewhere you went askew, began doing things in a more lethargic manner or self seeking way, are you being somehow disobedient to the heart of what it is God's called you to do? If so, you need to repent of those things and get back to what it is you're supposed to be doing, that God might once again begin to bless your life. Now I'm not saying that every hard time, or rough road is a sign of disobedience on your behalf, but you know in your own heart how God is dealing with you and if there's an area in need of repair in your heart, and in your life that you might get back on track with why it is He called you in the 1st place, that plan He's prepared for you. (Vs12-14)

You see their focus was re-establish and the work was renewed.

Now Zechariah said things like, *"This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the LORD of hosts. 'Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone With shouts of "Grace, grace to it!' Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying: 'The hands of Zerubbabel Have laid the foundation of this temple; His hands shall also finish it.'"* Zech 4:6-9 So he came along with the emotional encouragement and support, and Haggai spurned the conscience, the combined effect being an incredibly diligent effort on the behalf of the people. These 2 guys issued exhortation, edification, and comfort to these men. And they assimilated the Word of God into their being allowing it to become practical application and proper motivation to get them back in the saddle.

Vs3-5

What's happening here? Renewed effort, renewed opposition, its just going to happen, I don't know if they were hostile in their investigation, but the bottom line is that they're placing pressure on them as to why it is and if they have the authority to even be doing what they're doing. "Hey, what do you guys think you're doing, what are the names of the guys overseeing the work, and by whose authority are you commencing this project?"

And we like this phrase in vs 5, "But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, so that they could not make them cease," the bible tells us, *"The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their cry."* Ps 34:15 And throughout the scriptures we read things like, "The hand of the Lord was upon them," or as we have it here, "The eye of the Lord was upon them."

And the idea there is the providential sovereign hand of God's care and guidance was with them and blessing them. You see Haggai had told them that the reason things were so week to week with the provision they had was because they weren't really committed to and/or working for the Lord (meaning they'd been neglecting His call upon their lives) but now that they've commenced and committed to the Lord in that capacity, His providential hand of protection and blessing is immediately upon them. We see it over and over again, God honors and blesses obedience.

Doesn't mean we won't struggle or see hard times, they're in the throws of resistance the moment they committed, but God is there to fight for them and see them through the circumstance. God was giving them the strength and fortitude to carry on in the midst of opposition and resistance. And He'll do the same thing for you, you commit to Him, He'll commit to you, you draw near to Him, He'll draw near to you, He honors and affirms your decisions to honor Him.

Vs6-8

Real quick, you know how vs 8 translates? They were giving a 1st fruits effort as unto the Lord. The work goes on *diligently* (man's responsibility) and *prosper*s in their hands (God's response). We love to see diligent labor as unto the Lord, the bible says, "*In all labor there is profit, But idle chatter leads only to poverty.*" Prov 14:23 It's so disheartening to see a .5 effort when someone is tacking the Lord's name on to it, when you're representing the Lord, hey, do your utmost for His Highest, work diligently as unto the Lord. Of course the bible says that we're to do everything we do as unto the Lord, so whatever task or job you've committed to do your best to be diligent *about* it that God might be glorified *in* it.

Now the words "heavy stones" literally means "Rolling stones" so you can see that joke coming a mile away. But the idea there is that they were so huge they were drug over timbers or whatever so that they could be rolled onto the sight because they couldn't be carried.

And this phrase "Temple of the Great God" doesn't mean that Tattenai sees Him as the all-powerful Omniscient Creator, but rather that he considers Him to be the Chief or primary God of that area, remember they believed in localized deity.

Vs9-12

2 Things here #1 We generally understand God to be loving, gracious, merciful and kind, all of which are true. But don't be deceived, as vs 12 points out, He can be provoked to wrath. You lead your life in a non repentant state of sin and idolatry giving yourself over to the cares of this world and the lusts of this life and *you will* invoke the wrath of God. Don't live under the illusion that we can all live like hell and in the end all go to Heaven, you know, lead a life after the flesh and then reap the rewards of the Spirit, it's possible to cross the line. And the children of Israel did just that, they provoked God to wrath, and He delivered them to chastisement and discipline that they might repent (which is always God's desire). Remember this vs that speaks to us with regards to the non repentant individual who claims to be a Christian? "...*deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*" 1 Cor 5:5 God is way more concerned for your eternal well being than your temporal state of comfort. And if you're in sin and refuse to repent, as a child of God, He will deal with you accordingly.

2^{ndly} they draw attention to the fact that even Nebuchadnezzar was nothing more than an instrument of discipline in the hand of God, it wasn't Nebuchadnezzar who conquered them, it was God who was dealing with them and seeking to bring them to a place of repentance. It's the Romans 8:28 principle in affect, as a child of God we trust that some how and in some way God is working out the details of our lives be they good, or apparently bad, for our eternal good and His eternal glory, God was the One in control, working His plan, not Nebuchadnezzar.

Vs13-17

The seeming implication being, "We doubt that you'll even find it, but should it exist let us know your desire concerning the matter."

Ch 6

Vs1-8

Translation, "Quit harassing and hindering them and get to helping them. And not only can they build, but the tax revenue generated from your region is to fund the whole thing, give them whatever they need." Or another way to say it, the tables have turned, here they were trying to question and hinder the work, but in the end they're commissioned to help. That's a God thing, before they were barely able to make ends meet because of their miss priority, now that they've stepped out in faith to begin again the work God had called them to and forged on in spite of the resistance, look at the way God honored their obedience. Remember this vs? "*Surely the wrath of man shall praise You;*" Ps 76:10 The New Living Translation reads, "Human opposition only enhances Your glory." In other words, the more men resist the work of God, the more glory God gets when He accomplishes the work. How many times I heard that our being in this place by June 19th was a practical impossibility. But it just made for God's opportunity, and all the more glory to Him, because He did just that. As these guys sought to resist the Lord, they just paved the way for His greater glory.

Vs9-12

There's a little variance as to what exact means of capital punishment he was in reference to, be it literal hanging. I read in one place that the Persians had utilized crucifixion, we know that they practiced death by impaling, Darius had impaled 3,000 Babylonians after conquering their city, so this wasn't an idle threat by any means. Tear down his house, impale him on one of his own timbers and make a trash dump of his place, what do you reckon will be the outcome?

Vs13-14

They quickly/readily complied with the king, they did their work diligently as well. But again notice where credit is given, they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. Credit was given to the Word of God administered by the people of God, they were faithful to administer God's Word, and God's people responded in ready compliance, they had a mind to work, God blessed and the work got done.

Vs15-22

Of course the Passover speaking of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ the Lamb of God, for the sins of the world. The Passover looking forward to the cross, the Lord's supper looking back on the cross, all of it centers on Jesus Christ and Who is who partakes in the feast, those who are clean, who've separated themselves from the filth of the nations, washed in the blood of Jesus Christ "*Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.*" 2 Cor 6:17-18 And the Lord has made you joyful and the Lord has made me joyful, and He wants to strengthen your hands, not only in your walk with God, but your work for God, be renewed, repentant, refreshed in your commitment to His work *in* your life, and His work *through* your life.

Prayer Points: God search our hearts, see if there be any wicked way in us individually, collectively before You. Help us to prioritize You and Your kingdom, Your desires for our lives. We don't want to simply have a right position in You, but we desire a right condition before You, spur our conscience, move upon our heart, motivate us by Your word through Your Spirit. Help us to find the proper motivation, and make practical application of your encouragement and exhortation to us in Your Word. That we not grow weary in doing well, that we choose to be vessels of honor, set apart to You, used for Your glory, in Your name.