

Corporate Confession of Sins

Neh 9:2, 6-7, 9-10, 30-36
SS Lesson for 08/11/2013

Devotional Scripture: Dan 9:4-20

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson reviews how God responds to His people's **Confession of Sins**. The **study's aim** is to understand that there is a valid corporate confession of sin that is acceptable to and desired by God. The **study's application** is to apply Scriptural principles in any and all confession of sin.

Key Verse: Neh 9:33

33 However You are just in all that has befallen us; For You have dealt faithfully, But we have done wickedly.

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

The material in 9:5b-10:39 follows the normal covenant form used in the ancient Near East: preamble (9:5b-6), historical prologue (9:7-37), acceptance of the covenant (9:38-10:29), and the stipulations (10:30-39). The prayer in 9:5b-31 was voiced by the Levites on the people's behalf. It rehearses major events in Israel's history, first stating God's glory (v. 5b), uniqueness (v. 6a), and Creation of the universe (v. 6b). The Levites then spoke of God's work with Abram—calling him from Ur (Gen. 12:1) and making a covenant with him (Gen. 15:4-21). Then they recounted God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Neh. 9:9-12; cf. Ex. 1-15), and the giving of the Law (Neh. 9:13-14) and of manna (bread from heaven) and water (v. 15; cf. Ex. 16-17). On God's swearing an oath by His uplifted hand, see Exodus 6:8. But the Israelites' ancestors became disobedient and rebellious against God even to the point of worshipping a calf-idol (Neh. 9:16-18; cf. Ex. 32). However, God was still gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love (cf. Ex. 34:6; Num. 14:18; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). God continued to guide them... instruct them, and provide for them (Neh. 9:19-21). He helped them conquer their enemies Sihon and Og (v. 22; cf. Num. 21:21-35), and brought them into the Promised Land under Joshua (Neh. 9:23-25). In all this they enjoyed God's great goodness (cf. v. 35). Again the people rebelled (v. 26; cf. v. 17) so God gave them over to oppressors. But because of His great compassion He raised up deliverers, the Judges, who freed them (vv. 27-28). Through the centuries of Israel's sin (v. 29) God continued to be patient and to admonish them by the Holy Spirit... through the prophets (v. 30). But as a result of their ongoing sinning they were taken into exile (vv. 30-31). 9:32-37. In this concluding part of the Levites' prayer, they asked for relief, again acknowledging God's power, majesty (cf. 1:5; 4:14), and loyalty. Throughout Israel's history she experienced hardship because of her disobedience. Assyria was the first great power after Egypt that menaced Israel and Judah, beginning in the ninth century, over 400 years before Nehemiah's time. Even while the Israelites were enjoying God's blessings (from His great goodness; cf. 9:25) in the land, they were still sinful. Now they were slaves in their own land! (v. 36) Being slaves meant that they had to pay taxes to Persia, and Judah's governmental leaders had to give the Persian kings tribute from the produce of the land. Nehemiah's prayer ended with a plaintive admission of their great distress.

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

Nehemiah had no complaint with God regarding Israel's captivity, and he acknowledged God's sovereignty over the affairs of His people. Sin must be addressed; it cannot go unchallenged. When sin was introduced in the Garden of Eden, God could not just forgive Adam and let things continue as if nothing had happened. Adam's sin severed the relationship of perfect love between God and man. Creation would now stand opposed to Adam's labor, and he would need to fight the elements just to support life. "And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life" (Gen. 3:17). Rules are a part of every society; we cannot live in harmony without them. Rules are of no value if there is no penalty for disobeying them. Can you imagine any society without rules—where everyone could do whatever they pleased and there would be nothing to stop them? If someone wanted your car, he would just take it—and nothing would be

done about it. You say, "That is not fair." Of course it is not! That is why rules and penalties are needed. As God was speaking to the church of the Laodiceans, He told them that their value system was misdirected and that they needed to heed His warning. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev. 3:19). God is not the "bad guy" just because we do not understand all that He does; He is working out things for our good—which may work contrary to our will and desires. We desire to take a shortcut to cross a small stream to get someplace, but we may not be aware of a possible danger. If someone tries to hinder us from crossing that way, we might think he is interfering with what we want to do; but his warning could save our lives. God has said, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8-9). This is a truth we all must confess as we yield to the perfect will of God in all of life's circumstances. After all, is this not the relationship between a child and the parent? Remember when you were just a youngster and believed that you knew as much as or more than your parents. You were wrong! Just look at Jesus as He went to Calvary for our sins; the disciples would have done anything in their power to stop Him. Why? Because they did not understand the mind of God. When Jesus was explaining His coming death on the cross, Peter reasoned with these words: "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee" {Matt. 16:22). We will never understand everything, but we need to obey in all things. How can we ever understand the concept of being born again or that to save one's life, one must first lose it—that we must die in order to live?

Commentary from NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

If God's people are to confess properly and adequately, they must confess that God is in the right and they themselves are in the wrong. This is confessing at a corporate level. This kind of confessing contrasts with that done at an individual level, illustrated by King David's confession "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:13; see also Psalm 51:1-4). Moses warned in Deuteronomy 30:15-20 that if the people did not obey the law, then God would not allow them to keep the land. That warning went unheeded, and God was true to his word. It is interesting that there is no mention of the "prophets" in this listing of the leaders of Israel in contrast with the similar listing of Nehemiah 9:32. The prophets were the ones who pointed out the sinfulness of the people, encouraging them to repent and turn back to God. Perhaps that is why the prophets are left out in this confessional list, which is concerned with assigning blame. The prophets were not to blame, although they suffered along with everyone else (the topic of v. 32, above). One of the most insidious sins of God's people is that of ingratitude. To take for granted God's gift of a good land and all the accompanying blessings has led to pride, selfishness, and corruption (see Deuteronomy 8:10-18; 9:4-6). On a few occasions a king might turn to God for deliverance, and God would deliver (example: 2 Kings 19:14-37). But for the most part, Israel's leaders were wicked in their words and deeds and did not repent, leading the people astray by their bad example (compare Jeremiah 44:15-18).

Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson

The outline of the lesson was adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary and from the points revealed by the study of the Scriptural text.

Verse	Phrase	Commentary
2	Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners	Confession Requires Separation from Sin
6	You alone are the Lord; You have made heaven	Confession Requires Acknowledgement of God's Power
10	You showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, Against all his servants,	Confession Requires Acceptance of God's Deliverance

Verse	Phrase	Commentary
	And against all the people of his land.	
33	You are just in all that has befallen us; For You have dealt faithfully	Confession Requires Acknowledgement of God's Faithfulness

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The Word of God is filled with examples of sinful people confessing sins, repenting, and receiving forgiveness by a loving and gracious God. We will see one such example in today's lesson. Last week's lesson considered events that concluded with the weeklong observance of the Festival of Tabernacles in the seventh month of the Jewish calendar. Today's text takes us to "the twenty-fourth day" of that same month (Nehemiah 9:1); thus our Lesson Background is the same as that of last week's lesson. Since the actions of today's lesson text follow so closely from those of last week's, we can see both as parts of a covenant renewal ceremony. This included historical reviews of the covenant relationship that highlighted the people's failures. There are many parallels to be drawn with the covenant renewal treaty of Moses in Deuteronomy 1–4. In addition to that example, the act of confession of sin by selectively rehearsing the history of God's people is found in Ezra 9; Psalms 78, 106; Daniel 9; and Acts 7, among others. Nehemiah 9:1 tells us that the event of today's lesson occurs on a particular day when the people gather to fast, put on sackcloth, and sprinkle "dust on their heads." These are ancient practices of grief and contrition. We see fasting in this regard in 2 Samuel 1:12; Joel 2:12; etc. Donning sackcloth is connected with mourning in Genesis 37:34; 2 Samuel 3:31; etc. The sprinkling of dirt or ashes in such a context is seen in Jeremiah 6:26. Seeing all three together, then, is a powerful indicator of the serious nature of the occasion (compare Esther 4:3; Daniel 9:3; Jonah 3:5, 6).

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

We live in a day when self-esteem is highly valued. We are urged to think the best of ourselves in order to achieve our full potential. Counselors are busy helping clients to overcome a poor self-image and to believe in their worth. The Christian faith is often castigated for teaching that all are sinners, which allegedly keeps people from realizing their potential. Indeed, the whole idea of sin against God is scorned as a religious invention to oppress people. With due recognition that some do need to overcome a poor self-image, we find the fact of sin a dark reality in ourselves, our society, and all human history. Scripture from beginning to end is concerned with human sin and God's solution for it. It teaches that the first step toward true self-esteem is repairing a broken relationship with God caused by sin. Christ died for sin, but we must acknowledge that our sin makes us hopeless without His salvation. Thus, confession of sins is essential to enjoying God's favor and spiritual blessings. The returned Jewish exiles in Nehemiah's day realized this. Confession is primarily an acknowledgment that something is true or to view something in the same way as someone else. In a spiritual application, it is agreement that any action or thought that God calls sin, we must also call sin. In confession, one admits guilt for one's sin. We should not try to make an excuse or plead that some other person or circumstance forced us to sin. When we confess sin to God, we admit that His Word and actions are right and that ours are wrong and an offense to Him. We acknowledge that punishment for our wrongdoing is just, and we plead for God's mercy and forgiveness. Confession of sin is a most serious subject. It has been carried out by mankind in many different ways. What we study here is a record of God's people, the children of Israel, in a state of revival and mourning about their sin, draped in sackcloth and covered with ashes (Neh. 9:1). Their confession, drawn out from them by the Lord, has much to teach us. While as a body they all publicly confessed their sin to God, they did not confess it to another human being.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Confession Requires Separation from Sin (Neh 9:2)

2 Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

Separation from hindrances (2)

Hindrances that should be thrown off (Heb 12:1)

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Hindrances of rebellious deceivers (Titus 1:10-11)

10 For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. 11 They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach — and that for the sake of dishonest gain.

Hindrances that lead to lack of respect for others (1 Peter 3:7)

7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Hindrances of different gospels (Gal 1:6-7)

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Confession of own sins (2)

Confession of sin to gain purification (1 John 1:9-10)

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

Confession of sin to obtain forgiveness (Ps 32:5-6)

5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord" — and you forgave the guilt of my sin. 6 Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him.

Confession of sin to find mercy (Prov 28:13)

13 He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

Confession of sin where there is fear of people rather than God (1 Sam 15:24-25)

24 Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them.

Confession of sin knowing that there still may be consequences (2 Sam 12:13-14)

13 Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan replied, "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. 14 But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the Lord show utter contempt, the son born to you will die."

Confession of corporate sins (2)

Confession of sins to restore our covenant relationship with God (Lev 26:40-42)

40 "But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers — their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, 41 which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies — then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, 42 I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.

Confession of sins that require separating ourselves from wicked influences (Acts 19:18-20)

18 Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. 19 A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. 20 In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

Confession of sins with humbleness (2 Chron 7:14)

14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Confession of sins as part of examining our ways (Lam 3:40-42)

40 Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord. 41 Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven, and say: 42 "We have sinned and rebelled and you have not forgiven.

Confession of the sin of rebellion (Dan 9:4-6)

4 I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands, 5 we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. 6 We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

Confession Requires Acknowledgement of God's Power (Neh 9:6-7)

6 You alone are the Lord; You have made heaven, The heaven of heavens, with all their host, The earth and everything on it, The seas and all that is in them, And You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You. 7 "You are the Lord God, Who chose Abram, And brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans, And gave him the name Abraham;

God has power because He is the only God (6)

God is the only God and there is no other (Deut 4:39)

39 Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other.

God is the only God because He is over all (Eph 4:6)

6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

God is the only God because He is the God of all men (Rom 3:28-30)

28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. 29 Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, 30 since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

God is the only God because He is the creator (Mal 2:10)

10 Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?

God has power because He is the Creator (6)

Creator from the beginning (Gen 1:1)

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Creator of the heavens (Ps 33:6)

6 By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.

Creator of the earth's foundation (Prov 3:19)

19 By wisdom the Lord laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place;

Creator of all things (1 Cor 8:6)

6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

Creator and builder (Heb 3:4)

4 For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything.

Creator of the universe (Heb 11:3)

3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

God has power because He is Lord (7)

God is Lord because He is the only one who truly reveals mysteries (Dan 2:46-47)

46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. 47 The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery."

God is Lord because only God who should be exalted (Ps 46:10)

10 "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

God is Lord because He is the creator (Ps 100:3)

3 Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

God is Lord because He made everything (Acts 17:24)

24 "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;

Confession Requires Acceptance of God's Deliverance (Neh 9:9-10)

9 "You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, And heard their cry by the Red Sea.

10 You showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, Against all his servants, And against all the people of his land. For You knew that they acted proudly against them. So You made a name for Yourself, as it is this day.

Deliverance from affliction (9)

Deliverance from deadly peril (2 Cor 1:10)

10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

Deliverance from troubles (Ps 34:19)

19 A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all;

Deliverance from trials (2 Peter 2:9)

9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

Deliverance from temptations (1 Cor 10:13)

13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Deliverance from evil attacks (2 Tim 4:18)

18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Deliverance from oppression (10)

Oppression of the weak (Ps 12:5)

5 "Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise," says the Lord. "I will protect them from those who malign them."

Oppression that has no comfort (Eccl 4:1)

4 Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed — and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors — and they have no comforter.

Oppression that brings destruction upon the wicked (Isa 30:12-14)

12 Therefore, this is what the Holy One of Israel says: "Because you have rejected this message, relied on oppression and depended on deceit, 13 this sin will become for you like a high wall, cracked and bulging, that collapses suddenly, in an instant. 14 It will break in pieces like pottery, shattered so mercilessly that among its pieces not a fragment will be found for taking coals from a hearth or scooping water out of a cistern."

Oppression of the widows, fatherless and aliens (Zech 7:9-10)

9 "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. 10 Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.'

Oppression brings the judgment of God (Mal 3:5)

5 "So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me," says the Lord Almighty.

Deliverance in spite of man's unfaithfulness (10)

Man's faithfulness is tested by what he does with what he has (Luke 16:10)

10 "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.

The more given, the more faithfulness is demanded (Luke 12:48)

48 But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

There will be trouble and distress for the unfaithful (Rom 2:9)

9 There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile;

Unfaithfulness is when you know good but don't do it (James 4:17)

17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

Unfaithfulness is when one doesn't endure (2 Tim 2:3-7)

3 Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs — he wants to please his commanding officer. 5 Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. 6 The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. 7 Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Confession Requires Acknowledgement of God's Faithfulness (Neh 9:30-36)

30 Yet for many years You had patience with them, And testified against them by Your Spirit in Your prophets. Yet they would not listen; Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.

31 Nevertheless in Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; For You are God, gracious and merciful.

32 "Now therefore, our God, The great, the mighty, and awesome God, Who keeps covenant and mercy: Do not let all the trouble seem small before You That has come upon us, Our kings and our princes, Our priests and our prophets, Our fathers and on all Your people, From the days of the kings of Assyria until this day.

33 However You are just in all that has befallen us; For You have dealt faithfully, But we have done wickedly.

34 Neither our kings nor our princes, Our priests nor our fathers, Have kept Your law, Nor heeded Your commandments and Your testimonies, With which You testified against them.

35 For they have not served You in their kingdom, Or in the many good things that You gave them, Or in the large and rich land which You set before them; Nor did they turn from their wicked works.

36 "Here we are, servants today! And the land that You gave to our fathers, To eat its fruit and its bounty, Here we are, servants in it!

Faithful in patience (30-31)

God is patient because He is compassionate and gracious (Ps 86:15)

15 But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

God is patient because He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities (Ps 103:10)

10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

God is patient because He does not want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9)

9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

God is patient because it means salvation (2 Peter 3:15)

15 Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

Faithful in promises (32)

God is faithful to His promises because He is loving to His creations (Ps 145:10-13)

10 All you have made will praise you, O Lord; your saints will extol you. 11 They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, 12 so that all men may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. 13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made.

God is faithful to His promises because of the power of His words (2 Peter 3:4-5)

4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." 5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water.

God is faithful to His promises because God cannot lie (Heb 6:13-19)

13 When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, 14 saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." 15 And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. 16 Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. 17 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. 18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain,

God is faithful to His promises because His promises have been thoroughly tested (Ps 119:140)

140 Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them.

Faithful in spite of man's disobedience (33-35)

God is faithful even in man's unfaithfulness, (2 Tim 2:13)

13 if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

Man's unfaithfulness does not nullify God's faithfulness (Rom 3:3-4)

3 What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? 4 Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar.

God is faithful to do all that He purposes (1 Thess 5:24)

24 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

God is faithful because all He promises must be fulfilled (Num 23:19)

19 God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

Faithful in response to humility (36)

God is faithful to humility because it is a requirement for being with Him (Isa 57:15)

15 For this is what the high and lofty One says — he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

God is faithful to humility because it is a blessing (Matt 5:3)

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

God is faithful to humility because it leads to justification (Luke 18:13-14)

13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' 14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

God is faithful to humility because it is a part of submission to God (James 4:7-8)

7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

God is faithful to humility because it is a prerequisite of being lifted up by God (1 Peter 5:5-6)

5 Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from Steven Cole

Nehemiah 9 should be linked with Nehemiah 8, where the people heard God's Word read and wept in repentance as they realized how seriously they and their forefathers had sinned. But it was a time for a feast and so Nehemiah and the other leaders exhorted the people not to weep, but to rejoice, adding, "for the joy

of the Lord is your strength” (8:10). But now, two days after the end of the Feast of Booths, the people gather again, this time with fasting, sackcloth, and dirt on them to express grief over their sins. Again the law of the Lord is read for several hours, and then the Levites, perhaps led by Ezra, pray in repentance, asking God to take note of their subservience to a foreign king (9:5-38). Along with Ezra 9 and Daniel 9, it is one of the great prayers of confession in the Bible. It is full of rich instruction about who God is, who we are, and how God has graciously worked on behalf of His people.

Some by nature tend to be more introspective and conscientious, always lamenting over their imperfections and sins. Others can commit serious sins with hardly a twinge of conscience and shrug it off with a glib, “We’re under grace!” If you are the gloomy type, you probably need to camp out in passages like Romans 8, which asks, “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns?” “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:33, 34a; 1). If you are the glib type, who too easily shrugs off your sin, then you probably need to camp out in passages like Nehemiah 9, which confesses both personal and corporate sins. Keep in mind that this prayer of confession followed and flowed out of the extended reading of God’s Word (9:3). The Word of God reveals to us the true condition of our hearts. Sin deceives and blinds us to our true condition. We’re prone to compare ourselves to others, invariably to those who aren’t quite as godly as we are. But “the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:12-13). The Bible lays bare the true condition of our hearts before God.

There is a paradox in the Christian life: the longer you walk with God, the more godly you become. And yet, the more godly you become, the more you are aware of the terrible depravity of your own heart. It was not at the beginning of Paul’s Christian life, but toward the end that he said, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all” (1 Tim. 1:15). Even so, the more that you come to know God and your own heart through His Word, the more you will realize how prone to sin you really are. This will keep you at the foot of the cross, trusting in God’s free grace. Ongoing repentance takes sin seriously and takes the necessary steps to break from it. True repentance accepts responsibility for sin and does not blame God. As they prayed (9:33), “You are just in all that has come upon us; for You have dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly.” The chapter ends on what may seem like a down note, with the mention of the great distress of the nation. But as Kidner points out (p. 113), “The great distress which ends the prayer is a sign of life and of a vision that has not been tamely given up.” Because God is so rich in mercy toward sinners, whenever His word convicts us of sin or reveals the sins of our nation or our fathers, we should come before Him in repentance, appealing to His great compassion and grace.

(Adapted from Sermon notes by Pastor Steven J. Cole, Flagstaff Christian Fellowship www.fcfonline.org)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

There is a little congregation near my home where I often serve as the “supply” preacher. The congregation has a liturgy each Sunday where sins are confessed corporately. After the congregation repeats the confession, the worship leader recognizes forgiveness and acceptance of the promised grace of God. The congregation responds with a hearty “Amen!” There is something good and real about that liturgy. By contrast, the church where I am a member seldom confesses sins corporately. We hardly even talk about sin. A problem in many cultures today is the highly individualistic and narcissistic attitudes that prevent people from identifying with the sins of their ancestors, much less their own personal sins. Many seem to have a difficult time criticizing their own country for social and economic injustices of the past and present. Perhaps it is time to admit corporate guilt for the sins committed by our culture and country, for social and economic wrongs in the past and present. Admitting personal sins on a daily basis is also very appropriate. Today’s lesson is a call to confess.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. Separation from sin must accompany the confessing and forsaking of sin (Neh. 9:2)
2. True worship focuses, at least in part, on the character and works of God (vs. 6-7)
3. God's past judgment of sin should serve as a present-day warning to us (vs. 9-10)
4. It is God's mercy, not our merit, that allows Him to forgive our sin (vs. 30-32)
5. True confession must proclaim God as just in disciplining us for our sin (vs. 33-34)
6. Spurning God's goodness always leads to His discipline and our heartache (vs. 35-36)