

Ezra Set His Heart

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The example set by Ezra in the Old Testament book bearing his name, is worthy of constant examination. To give you some important background information, the book of Ezra records events immediately following the release of the people of Judah from Babylonian captivity. A man by the name of Zerubbabel was instrumental in the rebuilding of the temple. Ezra, who came some time later, was instrumental in the important task of getting the priesthood operating again. We might say Zerubbabel concerned himself with construction, Ezra with reformation. Both were involved in the process of restoration. Zerubbabel focused on the physical building, Ezra on the spiritual rebuilding of the people.

Scripture tells us that Ezra was “skilled” in the Law of Moses.

This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the Lord his God was upon him (Ezra 7:6).

Being “skilled in the Law” does not happen by accident. It comes through patient study and application of the Word. It comes through experience. In fact, the Hebrew word translated “skilled” in this verse means experienced. It comes from a root word, which means to be quick. Ezra was skilled in the Word. Does the word “skilled” describe your familiarity with the Word of God? Are you “skilled” (experienced) with the Scriptures? As Christians we should be “skilled” in the Word (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15; Heb. 5:12-14). How did Ezra get his “skill”? Look at this description of the man:

For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Ezra 7:10

There are several points of interest here that can help us to become more skilled in the Word. However, first notice that Ezra had “set his heart” to do some important things. To set one’s heart is to make a commitment. It is to make up one’s mind. Ezra had set his heart to:

Study the Law of the Lord

By study, we are talking about becoming a student of the Word. The Hebrew word rendered “study” means to seek, to inquire, to investigate. Ezra set his heart to seek the Law of the Lord and to investigate it. Remember that Ezra was a scribe. As a scribe, Ezra knew the Law. I take it he knew the Law better than most (if not all) of his peers. Still, he remained a constant and dedicated student of the Scriptures. He never got to the point where he thought he knew it all. He continued to study. That speaks volumes about the character of Ezra.

Do you realize that one way to lose much of the joy of being a Christian is to stop studying the Scriptures? It is exciting to learn! There is incredible joy in making new discoveries in the Word. There is gladness in understanding, and a confidence in knowing.

The Word is spiritual food (Ps. 19:10). If you do not eat, you do not grow. If you do not eat you become sickly, weak, frustrated, and discouraged. Eat! Acquire a hunger for the Word. Seek it! Investigate it! Do not just read it, study it!

Each child of God must “set their heart” to study the Scriptures. That means meditating on the Word and searching the Word for answers to life’s questions. It means consulting the Scriptures on a regular

basis for direction and guidance in their life. It must be a continual never-ending process.

The best doctors are those who, even after graduating medical school, continue to study medicine. That is how they become (to borrow from Ezra's description) "skilled." Would you want to go to a doctor who was not educated in the latest advancements in medicine and surgery? Why not?

The best attorneys are those who, even after graduating law school, continue to study law. That is how they become "skilled." Would you want an attorney working for you who was not educated in the most recent application and interpretation of the laws? Why not?

The best preachers and Bible class teachers are those who continue to study the Word. They don't rely on what they have previously learned. They continue to research and investigate. They test their positions with the whole of Scripture.

Ezra set his heart to study the Scriptures. That is how he became skilled. He also set his heart to:

Practice what the Scriptures Taught

It is one thing to study the Scriptures, but it is another to actually practice what God tells us to do. It is one thing to memorize Scriptures like Mark 16:15-16, but another altogether to actually put them into practice, i.e. to get up and actually go out and teach. To truly be motivated and disciplined to actually practice the instruction of this verse, we must set our hearts.

In the same way, you can study and memorize a passage like Ephesians 4:32 "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." While memorizing this Scripture is good and necessary, of even greater importance is that we actually practice what it is teaching. To do so means we must honestly and completely forgive those who have wronged us in some way and have sought our forgiveness. Forgiveness is more than words, it is revealed in the heart and in our actions. If we do not practice forgiveness, we miss the essence of Christianity.

There are other examples we could look to in regards to practicing what we study in the Word. Simply put, to practice the Word, is to put the truth to work. James described what we are talking about here very well, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (James 1:22). Ezra set his heart to study the Word, to practice the Word, and lastly:

To Teach it to Others

Do you want to really grow in the Word? Do you want to really grow in the faith? If so, then teach it to someone else. Tremendous growth comes through teaching. Do you know who learns the most (who grows the most) in just about any Bible class? It is the teacher of the class. Often they have more material prepared than the class is able to cover. As a teacher, you research areas where those who are students usually will not, and that produces growth. You cannot successfully teach a Bible class by simply answering the questions on the material, such as a student might do. You must anticipate questions from the students. You must formulate your own questions. In all of this, the teacher always learns more than the students. The one who teaches a class will experience much greater growth than the student of a class. You too can experience great growth by teaching the Word to someone.

Ezra set his heart to teach the Law of the Lord in Israel. He was blessed through his efforts, and so were those who benefited from his heart's desire. If we will set out hearts to teach others the Word of God, we will be greatly blessed.

What a Wonderful Example

What a wonderful example Ezra provides for us! Let us "set our hearts" to model this example of diligence in the Word of God.