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Returning from Exile: Taking the First Step back to Church

A Commentary by Jason Curry



The Reverend Dr. Jason Richard Curry is Dean of the Fisk Memorial Chapel at Fisk University. He can be reached at jcurry@fisk.edu or www.fiskmemorialchapel.com.

God is perfect (Matthew 5:48, Psalm 18:30), but human beings aren't. When I was younger, I was upset with a good friend who did not follow through with a financial obligation. I expected him to be perfect, even though he wasn't. Eventually, I realized that I could not hold my friend to a standard of perfection because I was not perfect. If churches are composed of human beings who are not perfect, then there about bound to be financial, relational and spiritual challenges or problems in the local church. I know some people who were exiled by the Christians in the church because they had a drinking problem or a child out of wedlock. In so many words, they were asked to leave the church and return when they "got their act together." I also know people who've endured a self-imposed exile. They may return to the church for a funeral or special occasion, but they refuse to attend church on a weekly

basis because they have a problem with the members, the pastor or the overall direction of the church. Being exiled from the church, whether it is a self-imposed exile or an exile by church members, is harmful to the church body as well as to the person seeking Christ. The church or the body of Christ should always exemptify the love of God, and it is incumbent on those who know about the love of God to bring those in exile back in the body of believers.

In the first, second and third chapters of the book of Ezra, the author describes the difficult times faced by the Israelites who were exiled from Jerusalem. Their kings had been rebellious, and now they were living among a foreign people. The word of the Lord came to the prophet Jeremiah, and King Cyrus decided to let the Jewish nation return to Jerusalem. The people made many mistakes, but God forgave them, and God blessed

them as they began to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 3:8).

God is a perfect and loving God, but human beings are not perfect. If someone has said or done something that is not of God to you in the church and you have not attended church in a while, I encourage you to end your self-imposed exile. If you have been exiled from the church by members who were mean-spirited, I invite you to return to that church or a church so that you may continue to grow in Christ. The church belongs to God, not human beings. It is the very bride of Christ. If you haven't been to church in a longtime, I encourage you to return from exile.