



Series:	Reference:	Title:	Date:
Nehemiah, Healthy Walls	Nehemiah 10	6 Things	7.16.17
Website Writeup:			
Under Nehemiah's lead, Israel is undergoing renewal to the point of committing themselves to some very important things. Chapter 10 reveals 6 of those things they commit themselves to as a community.			

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Sermon...

We've been tracing steps to recovery from spiritual ruin in the book of Nehemiah. The first seven chapters tell of rebuilding, teaching us how to restore our defenses; building healthy walls & gates in life.

Beginning with Chapter 8, we saw how to renew our minds by being re-instructed in Truth, which involves listening to the Word of God, acknowledging our faults, as well as confessing & praising God for his grace.

Which brings us to chapter 10 & commitment to a new lifestyle. Although it actually begins with the closing verse of *Chapter 9: In view of all this, [i.e., their confession & praise of God] we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it. (Neh 9:38 NIV)*

Anytime someone wants to show commitment, they sign a document. The Declaration of Independence, Petitions, Church & Mission Board covenants, Businesses, Non-Profits. When the Pilgrims landed in America they drew up the Mayflower Compact. Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation; these things changed the world. Commitment holds a certain power.

In Indonesia we always said there are two kinds of Church Planters; one would say, *"How much are you going to pay me for this?"* The other would say, *"Wow, you're gonna pay me for this!?"* It was the second group who signed a covenant & worked strongly. Although signing didn't solve all our issues, it definitely helped. There's something which binds us when we're willing to put our John Hancock on it.

This is what the Israelites do here - sign a covenant statement. As I said last week, we have our EXPLORE (membership) Class here where we review our statement of faith, vision, values, by-laws & sign a covenant together. It's not to be legalistic, but to officially say to each other, "I recognize Six:Eight as God's local body of Christ committed to build His kingdom as one on the Eastern Main Line."

In verses 1-29 Nehemiah, the leaders & all the people sign a covenant. The rest of the chapter, starting in verse 30, outlines six things to which they committed themselves. Let's look at them in order. Although, I must say, this is only a cursory look at these six things - we could spend a week on each. Firstly they said, 30 "We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons."



That may sound discriminatory in our modern desire to be multicultural, but realize, it wasn't a race thing, it's a faith thing. The surrounding people practiced public lewdness through sexually charged worship of other deities. Their immorality had spread disease, created issues of questionable paternity which led to the horrific sacrifice of their children to their god, *Molech*. To protect his people, God told them not to intermarry since it would undermine & pollute their faith. And, that's what had happened in Israel's history.

Solomon, David's own son, was said to be the wisest man who ever lived, but nevertheless married foreign women. Women who didn't share his view of God & who eventually introduced pagan practices into the worship of Israel. By the time Solomon's son came to the throne, the nation was divided, they could no longer exist as one. So this was a very wise pledge to make. And we also know that there was process & precedence for someone to come into the Jewish faith, sharing the values & lifestyle of God's people & they would be free to marry in that case - God's specifically guarding here against those who'd put personal desire before faith in the issue of marriage & by doing so undermine faith & community.

What we're concerned about of course is practical application now. This command is repeated in 2nd Corinthians, not concerning racial distinctions, but religious allegiances. *Paul says, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers, for what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever, or what agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?" (2 Cor 6:14-16)*

The principle is, God desires to be god of not only individuals, but families & communities as well. It works best when we unite ourselves with those who share our Christ-centered convictions. However, there are passages designed to help those who've united themselves with a non-believer, because God recognizes it occurs. Sometimes a spouse walks away from the Lord after marriage. Sometimes we marry someone during a time when we weren't as serious about our faith, but have come to a renewal later. Sometimes someone comes to faith after their marriage has occurred.

The point is, it happens. Anyone finding themselves in such a situation shouldn't despair. Your marriage isn't bad or wrong, it can be a beautiful testimony to Christ. God can work in & through it. Walk with the Lord well in prayerful hope Christ is glorified in your unique situation. This is simply practical wisdom for those of us who've yet to cross the marriage threshold; unite yourself with those who share your convictions, since faith is the foundation of community between peoples - make Christ the center & life will be easier for it.

Then we have the second promise; *31 "When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day. Every seventh year we will forgo working the land and will cancel all debts.*



The Sabbath & the Seventh Year are images of rest; something we all need. It's a fact, if you don't rest periodically your body will begin to deteriorate. Health isn't maintained by constant activity. So the Seventh Day is a wise thing to observe. It's a picture & prescription for us of learning to rest knowing God's at work. The Sabbath followed the pattern of creation. In six days God created the heavens & the earth, on the seventh day he rested - He stopped working.

We're to work, make decisions, to act & make choices, but remember our activity will never be enough to accomplish what we hope to achieve - it won't accomplish everything. God must be at work in it as well. He'll back up our labor & use it in ways we never anticipated. We don't have to worry about doing it all ourselves. We're to do what we can, expecting God to use it. A repeated lesson all through Scripture. God, taking our simple effort using it in ways we'd never imagine. The seventh year teaches us to rest & trust, it brings health & perspective to life.

We see this in Leviticus 25, God says to Israel: "Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live safely in the land. Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live there in safety. You may ask, 'What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?' I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in." {Lev 25:18-22 NIV}

Again, God's way of teaching his people, we can't supply all our needs, but he can & will. We see this in the life of Hudson Taylor, the missionary to China who learned great lessons about God's ability to supply. Eventually he came up with the slogan of his mission board, *"God's work done, in God's way, will never lack God's supply."*

Thirdly, they promise to supply the needs of the Temple. *32 "We assume the responsibility for carrying out the commands to give a third of a shekel each year for the service of the house of our God: 33 for the bread set out on the table; for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; for the offerings on the Sabbaths, at the New Moon feasts and at the appointed festivals; for the holy offerings; for sin offerings to make atonement for Israel; and for all the duties of the house of our God. 34 "We—the priests, the Levites and the people—have cast lots to determine when each of our families is to bring to the house of our God at set times each year a contribution of wood to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the Law.*

They recognized the need for offerings & sacrifices year to year. The history of Israel clearly reveals an emphasis on shedding the blood of animals & offering up their crops to God. By doing that, they're never allowed to forget the cost of redemption. Blood shed means death has occurred. Their problem with sin was so serious, it couldn't be solved by merely re-instructing the mind. Only death can cure it - there's a power aspect here in which mere Christian intellectualism falls short. These bloody offerings foreshadow the death of Jesus & our remembrance of that at the Lord's Table. We can never allow ourselves to forget the cost of our redemption.



As Peter put it: *“We are not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ,” (1 Pet 1:18- 19a).*

Fourthly, they.....assumed responsibility for bringing to the house of the LORD each year the first-fruits of our crops and of every fruit tree. 36 “As it is also written in the Law, we will bring the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, of our herds and of our flocks to the house of our God, to the priests ministering there. 37 “Moreover, we will bring to the storerooms of the house of our God, to the priests, the first of our ground meal, of our grain offerings, of the fruit of all our trees & of our new wine & olive oil.

Why was God so concerned about getting the first of everything dedicated to him? He tells us in the book of Exodus - “After the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites & gives it to you, as he promised on oath to you & your forefathers, you are to give over to the LORD the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the LORD. Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. [You have no right to have it unless you will redeem it.] Redeem every firstborn among your sons.

In days to come, when your son asks you, “What does this mean?” say to him, “With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. This is why I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons. And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the LORD brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand.” (Ex. 13:11-16 NIV)

They’re remembering their own salvation in which Egypt foreshadowed Christ's conquering of sin & death in our lives. The Angel of Death passes over us when the blood of the lamb is painted on our doorposts - we’re set free! Which leads them to recognize the ownership of God on their lives. 1 Cor 6:19b-20a tells us “You are not your own; you are bought with a price.” In Christ we transition allegiance from a task master bent on our destruction, to a benevolent king bent on bringing full life. The lie we believe is, we’re our own masters creating our own destiny. But the Bible says we’re subjects of a King. Living under his rule & reign, we follow his ways. We’re not our own. Which means we don’t come to him to approve our plans, rather we come to him asking, “What will you have of my life?” Like those I oversaw in Indonesia, “How much are you gonna pay me?” As opposed to, “You’re gonna pay me!” The people of Israel too “were bought with a price”. They belonged to God. He directs their affairs.

Fifthly, is the matter of tithes. “And we will bring a tithe of our crops to the Levites, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all the towns where we work. 38 A priest descended from Aaron is to accompany the Levites when they receive the tithes, and the Levites are to bring a tenth of the tithes up to the house of our God, to the storerooms of the treasury. 39 The people of Israel, including the Levites, are to bring their contributions of grain, new wine and olive oil to the storerooms, where the



articles for the sanctuary and for the ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the musicians are also kept.”

It was about this time that the prophet Malachi was saying to the people, “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse and prove me now herewith, says the LORD, that I will open the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing such as you are not able to contain,” (Mal 3:10).

This promise to pay 10% is the response to that appeal. God ordained the tithes to be used for the support of the Temple & the ministry of the Levites & Priests, in order that there might be spiritual guidance among this people & that ministry to the Nations would go unabated. When you come to the New Testament *the motive of giving* is God’s primary concern, not necessarily the amount. We’re to give as a response of gratitude for the blessings he’s given us. God pays careful attention to motive. Offerings mean something when they’re given with a cheerful thankful heart to be used for the support of the local faith communities ministry. God’s ordained this as the way by which the ministry & spiritual guidance of the church, would be supported. You give because God’s first given to you; your heart becomes filled with thanks & out of that gratitude you give freely to the Lord.

Church isn’t a business, it’s community, but we have business to attend to; rent to pay, salaries, equipment, helping our community, missions, etc. There’s nothing unspiritual in that - it’s necessary & part of our spiritual life. John Kulp & Rob Granholm’s roles as finance guys here are spiritual roles. The decisions we make about our money are spiritual decisions, not business decisions. They have impact on building the kingdom of God. Our giving should go through the local church; to things which reflect our values & mission together - in our giving we act as community. In response, let’s give freely to what Jesus has done for us.

Then we have our last promise, “*We will not neglect the house of our God.*” This is their commitment to faithfully worship at the Temple. Through the history of Israel, the Temple, or Tabernacle, was called ‘The House of God’. God’s presence was there in the Holy of Holies. In the New Testament, the building isn’t ‘the house of God’ in form of brick & mortar, rather *the people are the house of God*. ‘Where two are more are gathered’ speaks of the power of the local faith community; God resides in it.

We need to minister to each other. Paul prayed the Ephesians may come to know...“*with all saints, what is the height and depth and length and breadth and to know the love of Christ which passes understanding,*” (Eph 3:18-19 KJV). We can’t do that without each other in the room. Hebrews admonishes to that end: “*Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching,*” (Heb 10:25), referring to the return of Jesus.

As we see it nearing, we need all the more to gather in need of each other’s support. The trend these days is the worship service is *optional*. Unlike former generations for whom the church service was first priority. We need to be in this service, where we get an



overall vision, deeper teaching, baptism, practice the Lord's Table together, encouragement, worship, etc., things you don't get anywhere else. Our faith community should be first priority because Jesus is first priority. He works through the local church, not just individuals. It's important for you to be here.

Let's quickly review these six things:

1. God wants to be Lord of our families & communities.
2. Learn to work & live out of rest.
3. Remind yourself of the cost of your redemption.
4. Remember, salvation means we give Christ authority over our lives.
5. Support the local church out of gratitude.
6. Gathering is priority because Jesus is priority.

Very practical, but these things take discipline. You can't just shove your hands in your pockets, sing a few hymns & this all happens. We choose to commit, which is countercultural today. Some people say that's putting yourself under law, it's not. It's merely recognizing the centrality of Jesus working through the local church. Disciples disciple! We don't govern by law, rather under grace we need accountability as fallen people.

All that being said & for as wonderful a time as this was for Israel, sadly these people failed to follow through in the long run... History reveals all the old sins were revived. They once again lost the blessing of God. *Maybe it's because in Verse 29, they said, "[We] bind [ourselves] with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses," (Neh 10:29 NIV). They depended on their own efforts to obey; with a curse & oath. They said, "We will do this or else", relying on their their own will power. Gritting their teeth, swearing to perform & waning in their expression of need before God. Yet, that's what the Gospel says to us, God is faithful, we can be fickle, so God makes a promise to us swearing on himself the only one who is fully able to uphold the covenant. Remember last week we talked about Genesis 15 & God making this covenant promise solely based on his ability, and not ours - that's grace.*

It's good to write it down & remind yourself of commitment. But we must remember it is really **Christ who sustains all this**. Paul says, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* (Phil 4:13 KJV). When we fail, there's grace to return & go at it again.

We bounced through this chapter very quickly. If you wanted to do a thorough study on these six commitments they made, that would be fodder for a good longterm quiet time.



Community Group Leader Questions:

Taking each one of the 6 commitments Israel made, walk through them and discuss where you are with them...

1. God wants to be Lord of our families & communities.
 - 1.1. Do we see that our decisions about what earthly covenants we make have to withstand the litmus test of God's authority & communal lordship over them?
 - 1.2. When you are 'yoked together' with someone else in marriage, or business or any other commitment, what does that mean? (It's helpful to look at what a yoke is)
2. Learn to work & live out of rest.
 - 2.1. Do you rest & see the value in it?
 - 2.2. What does the ability to rest & trust God will work through your efforts say about you?
3. Remind yourself of the cost of your redemption.
 - 3.1. How do you actively keep fresh the notion that you were bought with a price?
 - 3.2. How does that notion inform your heart & actions in life?
4. Remember, salvation means we give Christ authority over our lives.
 - 4.1. Is Jesus just Savior, or is he also Lord over your life?
 - 4.2. Do you allow Him the freedom to speak into and direct your choices?
5. Support the local church out of gratitude.
 - 5.1. Do you support the local church at least 10%? If not, why?
 - 5.2. What does a cheerfully giving heart reveal about us?
6. Gathering is priority because Jesus is priority.
 - 6.1. Do you see the value of community? That Christ ordained the Church and resides in it in a unique way?
 - 6.2. What are the benefits of 'Body-Life'?
 - 6.3. How is being a healthy member of the Body an act of worship to Jesus?