

## Steps to Spiritual Renewal – Step Five Becoming Accountable for Our Conduct

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Spilman Memorial Baptist Church

August 13, 2023

Text: Nehemiah 9:38-10:31

Purpose: We are called to live “in the world, but not of it.” We need accountability to one another to successfully navigate our walk of faith.

A big city California lawyer went duck hunting in rural Texas. He shot and dropped a bird, but it fell into a farmer's field on the other side of a fence. As the lawyer climbed over the fence, an elderly farmer drove up on his tractor and asked him what he was doing.



The litigator responded, "I shot a duck and it fell in this field, and now I'm going into retrieve it."

The old farmer replied. "This is my property, and you are not coming over here."



The indignant lawyer said, "I am one of the best trial attorneys in the U.S. and, if you don't let me get that duck, I'll sue you and take everything you own."

The old farmer smiled and said, "Apparently, you don't know how we do things in Texas. We settle small disagreements like this with the Texas Three Kick Rule."

The lawyer asked, "What is the Texas Three Kick Rule?"

The farmer replied, "Well, first I kick you three times and then you kick me three times, and so on, back and forth, until someone gives up."

The attorney quickly thought about the proposed contest and decided that he could easily take the old codger. He agreed to abide by the local custom.

The old farmer slowly climbed down from the tractor and walked up to the city feller. His first kick planted the toe of his heavy work boot into the lawyer's groin and dropped him to his knees. His second kick landed square on the man's nose. The barrister was flat on his belly when the farmer's third kick to a kidney nearly caused him to give up.

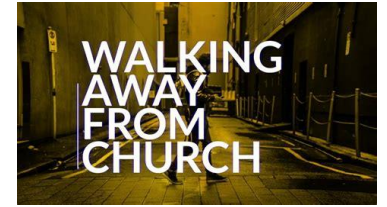
The lawyer summoned every bit of his will and managed to get to his feet and said, "Okay, you old coot, now it's my turn!"

The old farmer smiled and said, "Naw, I give up. You can have the duck."<sup>1</sup>

We laugh at this man that simply walked away from the Texas Three Kick Rule. But how many of us look at the Christian walk of faith in the same manner and simply walk away and give up?



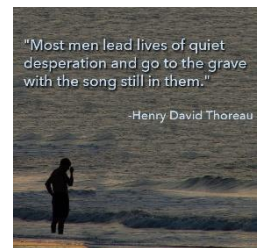
- It's too difficult to come forward and profess your faith in Christ.
- It's too difficult to allow yourself to be baptized.
- It's too much trouble to get involved in affairs of the church.
- It's too much to ask to go to Sunday school regularly.
- It's too much to ask for me to attend church every week.
- It's too much to walk the walk of faith publicly and privately.
- It's too much to ask me to be obedient to what Jesus taught.
- It's too much to ask me to be reconciled to my family, neighbor, or friends when we are at odds with each other.
- It's too much to ask me to be concerned with the poor, sick, and outcast.
- It's too much to ask me to be committed to a community of faith.
- It's too much to ask me to share my faith in God with others.



It's just too much ....

So, we grumble about these things, talk about it, and may even kick at it a few times, but eventually we give up and walk away.

If we were honest with ourselves, we all struggle with one or more of these challenges. It's just too hard, too much to ask, too much to expect. And so, we move forward in life



in quiet desperation searching for a substitute until our days on this earth are over. We substitute work, family, spouse, children, career, prestige, status, recognition, pleasures, and divergences – all to avoid our responsibility to God and His Church.

Over the past few weeks, we have examined a group of Israelites that have returned to their ancestral homeland. This is a group of people that were chosen by God to live in a land that God chose. God chose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to become the family from which a great nation would arise.

After Moses' death, under Joshua's leadership, they moved into the Promised Land and distributed the land among the twelve tribes of Israel. The nation was led first by Judges, and then later by the King chosen from among them. The first king was the tall, handsome, man named Saul. Saul rejected God's commands and was replaced by a man after God's own heart. That man was David.

Under David's leadership the people were united once again as the people of Israel. Under his son's leadership the nation experienced even greater unity. Even though Solomon was disobedient to God's clear word. During the glory days of Solomon, the people had a temple in which they could worship; they had vast wealth, and a homeland that they loved.

But after a long series of kings that did evil in the sight of the Lord, God allowed the city of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel to fall into the hands



**Moses and Joshua – Leadership Comparison**

Moses	Joshua
The people recognized Moses' leadership.	The people acknowledged Joshua as their new leader (Josh. 1:1); 4:14).
Moses led Israel out of Egypt by the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex. 14).	Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land by the crossing of the Jordan River (Josh. 3-4).
Moses was Israel's military leader during the exodus and the wilderness wanderings.	Joshua was Israel's military leader in the conquest of the land (Josh. 1:8-9).
Moses removed his sandals when God spoke to him through the burning bush (Ex. 3:5).	Joshua removed his sandals before God's presence (Josh. 3:10-11).

of the Babylonians. They were disobedient to God's clear teaching and God's clear words. They had decided it was too hard to follow what God had commanded and they followed the lusts of their own flesh and the desires of their own heart. God was displeased and judgment came. After 70 years in Babylon the tide turned and the Persian Empire was now in control. Under the leadership of Nehemiah, the people were allowed to return back to their homeland.

Miraculously, in 52 days, the people of Israel rebuilt their city. But they were still a people that had forgotten what God's word said. They did not know or understand God's laws, ordinances, statutes, precepts, principles, teachings, commandments, testimonies, and judgments. They needed to know God's word in order to live by it.

So, under Ezra's leadership, the people came and listened to the Word of God read. The people were pricked to their heart as they heard about how they had failed to heed God's commands. They decided to become obedient to God's teaching and reinstated the Feast of Tabernacles. This was one of three commanded Feasts found in Deuteronomy.

As they gathered there for a weeklong campout, they listened to God's word and became more convicted of their sin. As they gathered again after their weeklong celebration, they came and for a quarter of the day, they listened once again to God's word. And for the next quarter of the day, they confessed their sin and they worshipped God. These four steps were utilized in order to help the people identify how they had strayed away from God and how they could be reunited in fellowship with God once again.

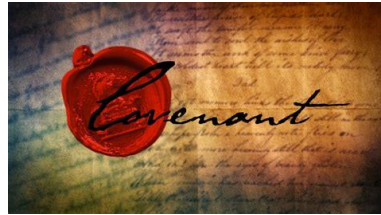


They (1) studied God’s word, (2) they became obedient to it, (3) they confessed their sin, and (4) they worshipped God. Today’s sermon focuses upon the fifth step in Spiritual Renewal. They became **accountable to one another for their conduct.**

In Nehemiah 9:38, we find the Israelites making a “*sure covenant*” which was sealed by its leaders, Levites, and priests. They made themselves publicly accountable for keeping God’s standards of conduct.

### **Those Signing the Covenant<sup>2</sup>**

The very first name listed of those that signed the covenant was Nehemiah. His name was followed by 83 other people committed to keeping the covenant of God. That list included 22 priests, 17 Levites, and 44 other leaders. These were people who had “*separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God.*” (10:28) In other words, they were making a conscience, informed decision about turning from the world back to God. This was not emotional appeal; it was a clear decision by the priests, Levites, and leaders. This list also included their “wives, their sons, and their daughters.”



### **The Promises found in the Covenant**

In this covenant, they made several promises. They included (1) separation from the world, (2) submission to the Word of God, and the (3) honoring or setting apart the Sabbath.

## **1. They Vowed to Live Separated from the World**

Verse 29 says they would “*walk in God’s laws, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes.*” The first area in their life that needed correction was they were not to inter-marry with their pagan neighbors.

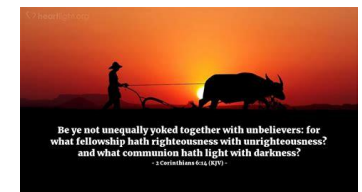


If you read some of the account found in Ezra, you will see some of the people had already given their daughters to their pagan neighbors and their sons had taken wives from their pagan neighbors. They actually were required to dissolve those marriages and covenant again to be holy and separated from their pagan neighbors and marry only ones of the Jewish faith.

From the early days in Israel’s history, inter-marriage posed the greatest problem. When an Israelite married outside their faith, their commitment to the statutes, ordinances, and Laws found in the Law, were ignored or partially obeyed. They often adopted the ways of worship to Baal, Ashtaroth, or Moloch and their hearts moved away from God. That was Solomon’s area of weakness and it caused Him to stray from God and go after strange gods.

This is not just an Old Testament principle. This is mentioned as well in the New Testament.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 reminds us to not be “*unequally yoked.*” It is very difficult for a believer in Christ to marry someone that does not have the same





love for Jesus Christ as they do. If you are a young person you need to hear this message clearly.

This rule of not marrying outside of your faith may seem harsh or difficult, but it is an important rule. The guiding rule I used years ago in my life was: *“Only date someone that will make a good mate.”* That person needed to believe the same things about God as I did. If we cannot agree about the most important thing in our lives, then how can we successfully manage the other lesser important issues? Don’t allow yourself to become emotionally involved with someone if they will not be a good marriage partner. You are only opening yourself up for grief and heartache if you do.

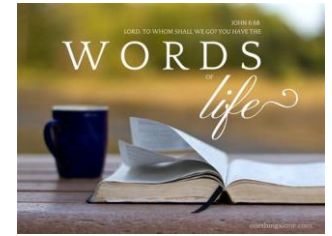
Several years ago, there was a movement among young people called *“True Love Waits.”* It was a covenant not to become sexually active until marriage. But it should mean so much more. I came across a pledge that some people make regarding waiting for the right person. *“I commit to dating and marrying a person who is committed to Jesus Christ. I will not compromise my testimony or my faith in this area. I vow to remain separate from the world in this most sacred area of my life.”* Then the students would sign it and date it. This covenant is not suggesting you should put off all dating as one book once said, it is saying that you will not knowingly continue to be involved in a relationship where you are *“unequally yoked.”*

Now this may not guarantee you a life of marital bliss, but it will increase the possibilities.



## 2. They Vowed to Be Subject to God’s Word

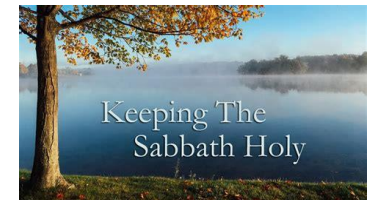
Not only did the people of Nehemiah’s day separate themselves from their pagan neighbors in the area of marriage, they also vowed to be obedient to God’s Word. They were not simply committing to be better students of the Word of God; they were committing to be **doers** of the word of God. They committed to “walk, observe, and do” all of the commandments of the Lord. They studied the Word of God to be a Doer of the Word of God.



First, they observed the Word. They studied it, they tested it, they hid it in their heart, they placed it on their tongues and now they did what it instructed. The Bible comes alive to us when we read it and apply its principles in our life. When we develop a “learn-obey” mentality, then our faith becomes a living part of us. We need to allow the Bible to be our marching orders for all the areas of our life. As we do this, God’s word becomes more precious to us and our study of God’s word becomes even more insightful.

## 3 They Vowed to Set Apart the Sabbath

The third area in which the Israelites covenanted together was related to the observance of the Sabbath. We need to remember the Sabbath was given specifically to the Jews. We as Christians do not observe the Sabbath,

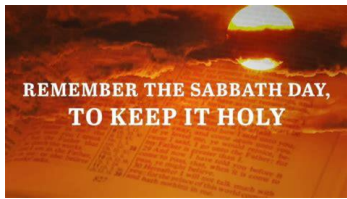


instead we observe the Lord’s Day. Sunday was the day in which our Lord and Savior was resurrected from the dead. The early church began to meet

together on “*the first day of the week.*” Since then, Christians have set apart Sunday as our day of worship and rest.

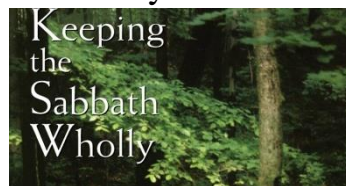
In Nehemiah’s day, the Sabbath was their day of rest and worship. They realized they had failed to observe this day and they covenanted together to once again make this a priority. After Nehemiah had the walls of the city completed, a thriving business enterprise began to emerge outside the city. Vendors from all around would come selling their items. Even though the Jews were not working on their Sabbath days, they still used it as a day of business and commerce. Nehemiah closed the doors of the city and would not let any vendors into the city again. Finally, they got the message and they stopped defiling the Sabbath through the buying and selling of wares.

According to David Jeremiah in his book on Nehemiah, he said that nine of the Ten Commandments have been repeated in the New Testament. The only one not mentioned is the one about the Sabbath. Our Sunday is not the same as a Jewish Sabbath.



In the Old Testament, the Sabbath was to be kept H-O-L-Y. The people of Israel were to be HOLY people, they were to live HOLY, and they were to keep that one day

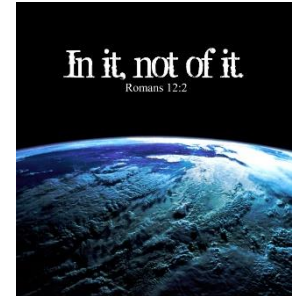
HOLY. Christians are supposed to keep Sunday W-H-O-L-L-Y for the Lord. We set aside one day of the week in the same manner God set aside one day of the week in which they were to rest from their labors. This was a creation ordinance not a Jewish law. As Christians we need to set apart one



day during the week to rest. We are not under the Jewish law concerning the Sabbath. We need one day of the week in which we can rest mentally, physically, and spiritually. We can honor God by observing Sunday as a day of rest and worship.

### **“In it, not of it.” (In the World, Not of the World)**

We are called to live in the world, but we are equally commanded not to be of it.



We are called to be the salt and light of the world. We are to become involved in people’s lives and be the change agents God wants us to be in the world, but not take on all the trappings of the world.

Isolating ourselves behind church walls or monasteries only separates us from the world that needs our message of Jesus Christ. When we become so identified with the secular trappings of the world, it makes us hard to distinguish from others living only for themselves. When we become so disconnected with people around us and yet copy the worldly trappings by having our own Christian logos, clothing, and language, it only alienates us from a world that is dying, separated from God.

We are to live in this world, but not be of it – that is our call.

The people of Israel during Nehemiah’s day signed a covenant of accountability to one another. They agreed to live under covenant with God and each other.

## Church Covenant

There is an insert in your bulletin that was a part of every Southern Baptist Church. I got this copy, which was glued in the front of my 1975 Baptist Hymnal. It is not found in the 1991 hymnal we use today.



Before we read this together as a congregation, I wanted to speak to what this Church Covenant is asking individuals to agree to.

The first is our relationship to God through Jesus Christ. We become a child of God by accepting Jesus as our Savior. Secondly, we follow that decision by baptism. This is an outward way of expressing to ourselves, the community of faith, the outer community, as well as the world, that we are identified with Jesus Christ and none other.

Thirdly, this covenant emphasizes the need for worship, following the ordinances, and the teachings of the church in our life. It acknowledges our need to support the ministry of the church with both our tithes as well as our talents.

We are to study and know God's word. We are to live as holy a life as we possibly can and be a good witness to others by living righteously.

We are to love one another, not gossip about others, help others that are sick, and quickly seek reconciliation with others when our relationships are broken.

And if we do leave from this fellowship, we will join another church and contribute to the ministry there.

I have met a few people that have said they don't need the church. Well, I have learned that I DO need a church. I need a community of faith to be accountable to as I attempt live out my faith.

I thought it would be very fitting for me to have available a copy of this covenant for anyone to sign if they felt they wanted to take that step of commitment. At the end of the service, I will leave a copy of this on the Lord's Supper Table for you to sign, if you want to do that today.

Let us turn to that covenant and read responsively. (Read the Church Covenant)

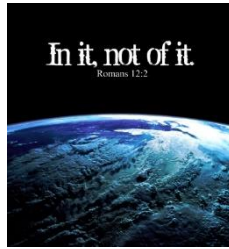
## LET US PRAY

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Mikey's Funnies, Sept. 24, 2009 "A Duck Funny"

<sup>2</sup> Outline taken from David Jeremiah's book on Nehemiah

There is a poem written by John Fisher that makes this point all too well.



“In it, not of it” the statement was made  
When Christian One faced the world much afraid.  
“In it, not of it” the call was made clear,  
But Christian One got something stuck in his ear.  
“Not in it, or of it” was the thing that he heard.  
And knowing the world was painfully absurd,  
He welcomed the safety of pious retreat,  
And went to potluck for something to eat.

Now Christian Two, he knew what to do,  
He’d show those fundies a thing or two!  
How will the world ever give Christ a try  
If we don’t get in there and identify?  
So “In it, and of it,” he said in his car,  
As he pulled in and stopped at a popular bar.  
“I’ll tell them the truth as soon as I’m able  
To get myself out from under this table.”

Along came Christian Three jogging for Jesus,  
In witness sweats made of four matching pieces.  
His earphones are playing a hot Christian tune  
About how the Lord is coming back soon.  
“Not in it, but of it” he turned down the hill  
And stops in for a bite at the Agape Grill.  
Like the gold on the chain of his “God Loves You”  
bracelet,  
He can have the world without having to face it.

While up in heaven they lament these conditions  
That come from changing a few prepositions.  
“Not in it, or of it” Christian One thought  
But who in the world will know that he’s not?  
“In it, and of it,” thought Christian Two.  
But who in the world will know that he knew?  
“Not in it, but of it” thought Christian Three.  
But who in the world watches Christian TV?

And the Lord said to Gabriel, shaking His head,  
“In it, not of it. Wasn’t that what I said?”