

Spiritual Renewal – Step Nine
Putting Away Compromise
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.
September 10, 2023

Text: Nehemiah 13:1-31

Purpose: The people of Israel started out strong with plenty of promises ... but over time they became lax and failed to separate themselves from their neighbors, failed to bring the tithe into the house of God, failed to keep the Sabbath, and failed by marrying outside their faith community. Nehemiah returned with a holy passion and scolded the leaders and even physically attacked those that forgot their commitments. We need to examine our commitments and diligently seek to honor them with all of our heart, soul, and mind.

The little old couple walked slowly into McDonald's that cold winter evening. They looked out of place amid the young families and young couples eating there that night. Some of the customers looked admiringly at them.



You could tell what the admirers were thinking: "Look, there is a couple who has been through a lot together, probably for 60 years or more!"

The little old man walked right up to the cash register, placed his order with no hesitation and then paid for their meal. The couple took a table near the back wall and started taking food off of the tray. There was one hamburger, one order of french fries and one drink.

The little old man unwrapped the plain hamburger and carefully cut it in half. He placed one half in front of his wife. Then he carefully counted out the french fries, divided them in two piles and neatly placed one pile in front of his wife. He took a sip of the drink, his wife took a sip and then set the cup down between them.

As the man began to eat his few bites of hamburger, the crowd began to get restless. Again, you could tell what they were thinking: "That poor old couple. All they can afford is one meal for the two of them." As the man began to eat his French fries one young man stood and came over to the old couple's table. He politely offered to buy another meal for the old couple to eat. The old man replied that they were just fine. They were used to sharing everything.

Then the crowd noticed that the little old lady hadn't eaten a bite. She just sat there watching her husband eat and occasionally taking turns sipping the drink. Again, the young man came over and begged them to let him buy them something to eat. The man again explained that no, they were used to sharing everything together.

As the little old man finished eating and was wiping his face neatly with a napkin, the young man could stand it no longer. Again, he came over to their table and offered to buy some food. After being politely refused again, he finally asked a question of the little old lady: "Ma'am, why aren't you eating? You said that you share everything. What is it that you are waiting for?"

She answered, "The teeth." ¹

It would appear this couple would not compromise on their principle of sharing everything! Including the teeth!

NO COMPROMISE

But how many of us have faced a situation in our life and compromised what we once stood for or once promised? If we were honest, we could say we have all compromised – failed – sinned – backslidden – missed the mark – come up short – failed to meet the standard –

At every turn, every week, we read of tragic news of robberies and assaults. We learn of someone becoming so despondent that they commit suicide. We read far too often of people dying in an auto accident due to a drunk driver. You don't have to go far to find crime. Here in Kinston, there have been several murders over the past year. I am sure that didn't make the national news.

In all of these situations the perpetrator of these horrific crimes compromised their commitments to their fellow citizens and their family.

I don't have an answer as to why these people randomly kill others. I do not understand nor can I rationalize their actions. But I do know that what they chose to do was wrong.

We all face choices each day. A choice to do wrong or a choice to do right. Not all decisions are as drastic as I have mentioned. Some of our decisions are small compromises that draw us away from our previous promises and commitments.



When you turn to the Book on Nehemiah, you find a man of God who had a single vision for his people to return back to the homeland of their ancestors.



- He wanted them to promise to do right this time – unlike their forefathers.
- He led them to rebuild the walls, streets, and temple.
- He instituted a system of governance for the temple and for the other affairs of the city.
- He led them to commit to separate themselves from their neighbors.
- He led them to tithe, as instructed in Deuteronomy, and support the ministry of the Levites.
- He led them to remember the Sabbath and to keep it holy.
- He insisted that the people not let their children marry those outside their faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

In each of these requests, the people affirmed over and over, that they would listen to the word of God, not compromise their commitments, because they wanted the blessings of God.



They returned to the word of God, they obeyed what it taught, they confessed their sins and they worshipped God. They looked to each other to be accountable to. They gave of their tithes, they offered themselves in service to God, and they dedicated the walls with great thanksgiving and praise.

They were on a spiritual high! They would promise God most anything ... but ... over time ... they became full and wealthy ... and they became complacent.

Have you ever done that with your walk with God? Start out strong ... but later let one Sunday go by, then another, and then a month, and then a year. You stop reading the Bible, you stop praying, you stop going, you stop giving, you move down a path ... and before you know it ... you are far from God and compromise seems so ... well ... easy.



Let us turn and see how Israel turned out.

In chapter twelve, the nation was at a ceremonial, spiritual high. They had been faithful and they celebrated their renewed faith. Nehemiah felt the people were in good hands now. He had asked the King years earlier to be allowed to leave the city of Babylon and lead the people back to Jerusalem and rebuild the city. Now that that was accomplished, he wanted to go back and be in the service of the king.

The scripture does not say how long Nehemiah was gone. It does say it had been twelve years from the time the people and Nehemiah returned from Babylon to rebuild the walls to the return of Nehemiah's trip back to report back to the King. When Nehemiah returned, he could not believe what he saw.

They Forgot their Vow of Separation¹

They forgot their vow of separation. The first thing Nehemiah saw was a man called Tobias living in one of the storage rooms in the Temple. This man Tobias had been a thorn in Nehemiah's side all the time the people were rebuilding the city. He tried several times to undermine Nehemiah's credibility and authority. (2:10, 19; 6:17-19)

While Nehemiah was gone, one of the priests by the name of Eliashib had allowed one of his grandchildren to marry one of the descendants of Tobias. They were now connected through marriage. Tobiah had now infiltrated the people through marriage.

The room in which Tobiah was living was one of the rooms formally dedicated to store the offerings of the people – offerings of grain, oil, and wine. When Nehemiah saw what was happening, he didn't call a committee together or hold a summit – he threw Tobias' possessions out of the room himself. He would not allow spiritual wickedness to defile the work of God.

Tobiah is the modern day parallel of compromise. Tobiah slipped into the camp and led them towards compromise. The Jews had forgotten that *"No Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God."* They had forgotten they were to be separated *"from all the mixed multitude from Israel."* Once the spiritual leader was away, they went back to their old ways and allowed Tobiah into their lives.



They Forgot their Vows of Support

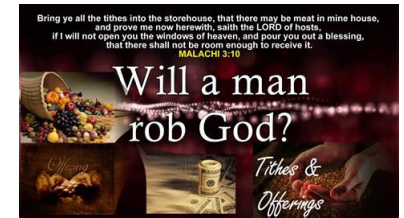
Secondly, they forgot their vow of support. The room in which Tobiah was living was set apart to store the tithe offerings from the people. The people had forgotten their promise to support the work of the ministry. Since there was no food for the priests and Levites, they were forced to go back to their old sources for support and they began working the fields once again. Instead of ministering daily in the temple, they had to go into the field to obtain enough to live. (13:10)

Nehemiah asked, *"Why is the house of God forsaken?"* He had set them apart for this ministry, but they were now abandoned by the people. They forgot their vow.

Because the people had failed to give, the rooms were empty. Because the rooms were empty, there was a vacuum. In the absence of righteousness, evil moved in.

Our hearts are very similar. If we do not fill it with the good things of God, then Satan is ready and willing to fill our hearts with evil, hate, and envy. If God is not filling your heart, you have allowed a vacuum to occur there, and Satan will quietly move in and you may not even realize it.

Without the resources to support the Levites, they had to abandon the work of the temple and look out for themselves. Even today, if the church doesn't take care of

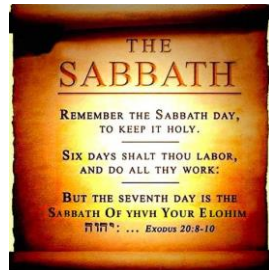


the needs of its ministers, then the ministers will have to look for other sources of support to meet the needs of their families. When that happens, the ministry suffers.

Nehemiah reprimanded the leaders in that community and they responded by bringing the tithes back into the storehouse of God.

They Forgot Their Vows of the Sabbath

The third vow the people forgot was their vow to honor the Sabbath and keep it holy. (13:15-2) They had promised to keep this day holy unto the Lord. They promised to not buy or sell on that day but they lapsed and forgot the Sabbath.



Violating the Sabbath was one of the primary reasons the people of Israel had to spend seventy years in captivity. You see, they not only were to observe the Sabbath every seven days, they were supposed to remember the Sabbath of the land as well and let it rest every seventh year. For 490 years their forefathers had ignored the law of letting the land take a Sabbath's rest. They did not trust God to provide for their needs. In effect, they "owed" God seventy years of rest for the land. So, God removed them from the land for seventy years to allow them to go into captivity. How easily the people forget to remember God.

The pagan vendors from the city of Tyre moved into the city of Jerusalem to sell their goods to the people. When Nehemiah returned, he confronted the leaders of Judah

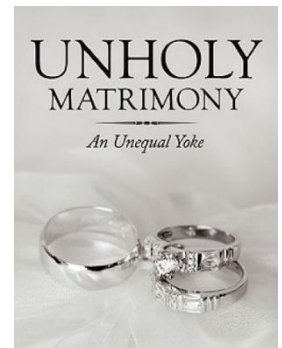


just as he had done over other issues. He took charge of the gates of the city and made sure they were closed on Friday night and not reopened until Saturday evening. When Saturday morning came, he told the vendors the gates of the city were closed and if he found them there again, he would come after them with a sword. They got the message and they did not come back on Saturday anymore. (13:21)

Nehemiah knew God's word and knew that he and his community of faith needed to be found faithful in keeping God's word. Nehemiah knew that if the people continued to lapse into this state of perpetual compromise, that God would once again destroy them as He had done before.

They Forgot the Sanctity of Their Vows

The last area in which Nehemiah confronted the people was their inner marrying of foreigners. (13:23-28) They had forgotten the sanctity of marriage in the sight of God. During the days when Nehemiah was gone, the people had allowed their sons and daughters to marry their pagan neighbors. If you thought Nehemiah was angry about their other areas of compromise, this one seemed to make him the angriest. He contended with them, pulled out their hair, struck some and pronounced curses upon them. Not the kind of words we call curse words – rather he judged them with the curses of God.



He reminded them that Solomon violated God's law in this same manner and His compromise led the nation to worship other gods and turn their hearts from the one and only God

– the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – the One that led them out of their bondage in Egypt and into the Promised Land. The Jews knew they were wrong and Nehemiah was right.

But don't some Christians do the same today? We are commanded in scripture (2 Corinthians 4:14-18) to not marry someone that is not of the Christian faith. But don't some people rationalize their decision, knowing that this is not what God has chosen for them? As you begin to think about who you might marry someday (if you are not already married), only look at those that have the same faith as you. God wants to bless you. Violating this commandment of the Lord only brings heartache.



I cannot imagine the courage it took for Nehemiah to stand before the King and ask for permission to come and rebuild Jerusalem. Now that that dream has become a reality, he realizes they may lose it all because of the people's compromises. He was determined to lead them back to the ways of God. It must have broken Nehemiah's heart to see them turn from God's commandments.

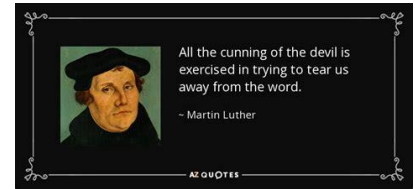
We can draw two important lessons from this passage of scripture.

Two Lessons

These lessons have to do with our facing the enemy and putting away compromise in our life.

1. Be Aware of the Craftiness of the Enemy

First, we need to be aware the enemy of God – Satan himself – seeks to invade our life and lead us away from God. He will use every opportunity to exploit our weaknesses and invade our territory. The scripture says that Satan only seeks to kill, steal, and destroy. He will only do this when we make a room for him to come in and live. (Like Tobiah) David Jeremiah shared the following illustration from his book on Nehemiah.



A Christian woman in Ireland planned to hold cottage prayer meetings over the next three weeks. She invited her neighbor to come but she declined. The first week, the woman had thirty-five people in attendance for her prayer meeting. When she saw her neighbor again, she told her neighbor that her house was filled with people. She asked if she would be interested in coming, again the woman declined the invitation to come.



The second week, the meeting was held and more came. When she saw her neighbor, she asked how many came. She replied there were fifty-one this week, and the house was full. She asked again if she would be interested in coming, but she declined.

The third week, the meeting was held and more people came. When she saw her neighbor again, she wanted to know how many came. She replied there were sixty-two.

She said the house was full and it was the best meeting ever.

Her neighbor was curious and asked, “Every week you said your house was full. How can that be?” The first week you had thirty-five, the next fifty-one, and this past week you had sixty-two.” The woman who hosted the cottage prayer meetings said it is very simple.

We simply kept moving our furniture out in the yard as more people came, so the house was always full.

This is a great illustration for us. When the enemy comes and tries to sneak in on us, we simply need to keep it filled with the things of the Lord and move out the other things that clutter our lives until the Lord alone fills our house. If we do that, then there will not be a vacant spot in our lives for Satan to slip into and take up residence.

Are you constantly keeping your heart full of things that are not of God? Are you willing to remove the furniture of this world to make room for the things of God? We need to allow Christ to have a greater place in our lives in order to live up to our kingdom potential.

2. Be Aggressive in Confronting the Enemy

A second observation is that we need to be aggressive in confronting the enemy. When you examine the verbs used in relation to Nehemiah



and his confronting the enemies of Jerusalem you find some very aggressive words.

- He **“contended”** with the enemy (11, 17, 25).
- He **“commanded”** others to do certain acts. (9, 19)
- He **“testified”** as to what God’s word said. (15, 21)
- In verse 8 we see he **“threw out”** Tobiah’s furniture from one of the rooms in the Temple.
- In verse 25, we see he confronted those that intermarried through such verbs as **“cursed”**, **“struck”**, and **“pulled”** out hair.

He was bold in every area to move the people back to honoring God and to be obedient to their prior covenant with God. He didn’t pray or seek counsel. He addressed them boldly and with courage. He saw the enemy and went to work to correct the wrong.

I have learned in life that problems simply don’t go away. You must be aggressive in order to create a different future than what you now have. Sometimes we think if we simply wait then things will be different. You are only fooling yourself. Satan wants us to wait, don’t rock the boat, bite our lip, and keep quiet. But we need to confront the sin before us.

If we don’t confront the sin that is in our lives, whether it is in us or coming from others, then it will only grow. It will not go away; it will only advance on us. When we do step up to confront the wrongs before us, we don’t have to be quite as aggressive as Nehemiah – but we do need to – as Barney Fife once said – “Nip it in the bud.”



Nehemiah took steps to remove the leaven that was growing in their midst. Sin must be aggressively confronted – in our lives or in the life of the church.

We need to wake up to the compromises we have committed and determine in our hearts today to purge them from our lives and aggressively reclaim them for the Lord. The enemy of God is relentless in seeking to destroy us.

Those that walk in full disobedience to what God's word says invite judgement upon themselves. Do not allow room for Satan to enter into your life.

May you and I seek to say as Jesus once said, "*Get behind me Satan.*"

Do not allow him to have a foothold in your life. Stand firm on the word of God, confess any known sin, give to the ministry of God, give of your time – talents – and resources, worship Him regularly, share your burdens with others, and then praise God for His goodness. If we are found doing these things week in and week out – then there will be no room for Satan to move in and take over our life.



May we commit today to put away compromise and stand fast in the Lord.

LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹ Mikey's Funnies, Nov. 6, 2009

² Outline from David Jeremiah's book on Nehemiah