

RENEWAL

THROUGH COMMITMENT

DATE

May 30 & 31

WEEK

5 of 5

OVERVIEW

Nehemiah 10

KEY VERSES

Nehemiah 10:28-29

SETTING THE STAGE

Throughout the book of Nehemiah, we have seen the faithfulness of a man who wanted to serve God and His people. It was a season of renewal for the Israelites. God had made a commitment to them to bring them out of Babylon, back to their homeland. God fulfilled His commitment. There was opposition externally and internally in this season of renewal. But God never wavered from His commitment. Nehemiah never wavered from his commitment to God going from cupbearer to leader.

Now it is time for God's people to make their commitment and not waver. They had heard the reading of the Torah; the Law, the stories of old. The people had stood in reverence to the revelation of God's Word. But there had to come a time to put action to what you believe. To make a commitment based on your values. If your values are based on the Scripture; then the goal is to embrace the Laws and ordinances of God found in His Word. We are to take the statutes of Scripture and commit to living them out even today, in a culture that has compromised and ignored the truths of God.

Today's lesson will challenge us to separate ourselves without isolating ourselves. It begins and ends with commitment to God to live in this world but not of this world. Jesus would put it like this as He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane the night before He was crucified.

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LESSON OUTLINE

1. Commitment to Separate
2. Commitment to the Sabbath
3. Commitment to Support

THINGS TO KNOW

- The people of God are free to choose whether to be committed to God or not.
- God has already chosen to be committed to His people forever.

RENEWAL

THROUGH COMMITMENT

Setting the Stage, continued >

JOHN 17:14 *I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵ I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. ¹⁶ They do not belong to this world any more than I do. ¹⁷ Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. ¹⁸ Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. (NLT)*

Jesus realized how important the Word of God was for His disciples to make a commitment for their lives to be committed to the truth of God.

Introduction

It is a familiar story on the dating scene. You have been dating for a while now. You have good chemistry and you cannot believe that they even laugh at your corny jokes. Your friends think there is potential for your relationship. But, when you start to have a conversation about defining the relationship, investigating what the future might hold, things suddenly feel uncomfortable. The person you are going out with starts to become indirect and dodgy. You are confused and feel rejected. Things were going so well. “What changed?” you ask.

They respond, “I have commitment issues.”

The term “commitment issues” gets thrown around a lot. For some, it is an easy way to get out of a relationship that you did not think was going anywhere. For others, it is a serious battle with committing to someone for a long-term relationship that will require fidelity and honesty. Whether it is a genuine reason or a cop-out; the person does not want to proceed in the relationship.

But commitment issues do not just dwell in the relationship realm. If we are honest, we live in a consumer mentality, month to month, subscription service culture that does not lend itself to commitment.

For the most part, we can have what we want when we want it and try something new with the click of a keyboard. Instead of a yearly contract with a gym we can fast pass our way to an assortment of gyms and fitness classes. Instead of one kind of razor, we can have a different fancy razor mailed to our house every month, or any time we would like. If you do not like the local coffee shop just keep driving, there are 10 more options in town. Brand loyalty is rare.

The attitude of consumerism slips into our spiritual life as well. When we feel like the church is not meeting our needs we are inclined to try something different. We have seen a drastic decline in those who are committed to the church in the past twenty years. America has seen almost a 20% drop in those who are committed to a local church. ¹ When God seems unfair to us or we become



¹ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx>

disgruntled with God's people, we walk away from Jesus and His church.

Historically, anytime the people of God walk away from their commitment to God it never goes well with them. While we think if we shed our commitment, we will be free; the Bible teaches us that when we are unfaithful to God we choose to be "cursed and overtaken." Consumerism has no place in Christianity, commitment is the key.

DEUTERONOMY 28:1; 15 *And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth....¹⁵ "But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all His commandments and His statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. (ESV)*

God never honors disobedience, unfaithfulness, or a cavalier disposition toward Him. But when we live a lifestyle committed to God we experience spiritual renewal in our life. Commitment and renewal go hand-in-hand.

This month as we have been studying the book of Nehemiah we have been tracing the story of renewal. We have seen renewal occur through prayer. We have seen how renewal can occur in our lives through new beginnings. We have discovered that renewal through leadership can occur in our lives through opposition and difficult circumstances. Last week, we looked at how renewal comes in our lives through revelation from God's Word. Today, we will look at how renewal can occur in our hearts through commitment.

In Nehemiah chapter 10 the people of God recommit themselves to the covenant their forefathers failed to uphold. The people of Israel show us three important principles to which we can commit in order to experience spiritual renewal in our own lives.

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1. COMMITMENT TO SEPARATE

NEHEMIAH 10:28-30 *Now the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons and their daughters, all those who had knowledge and understanding,²⁹ are joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of GOD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes;³⁰ and that we will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.*

Nehemiah recounts Israel committing to be separate from the peoples around them. After they had heard God's Law read to them by Ezra, they realized that they were to be distinguished from among the other nations of the world. Moses wrote in Exodus 19 that the people of Israel were to be a treasured possession among all peoples for all the earth is mine and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Exodus 19:5-6). (ESV)

God's people have always been called to separation. This is a difficult concept for us to grasp because Christianity does not operate in a vacuum. We may go to work with people who are not Christians. We do business with non-Christian mechanics, shop at supermarkets filled with non-Christians and send our children to non-Christian schools. We are surrounded by non-Christian culture every day. The church is called to be like a boat. A boat is in the water but does not let water inside. We are called to be in the culture, but we must not let the culture in, or we sink.

Separation always involves a **from** and **to**.

Nehemiah 10:28 tells us that the people of Israel *separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God*. Separation involves leaving the former things and clinging to the better things. We see this in every area of life. If you are committed to running a marathon you separate yourself from comfort and cling to the training regimen. When you commit to a diet you separate yourself from eating whatever you want and cling to your meal plan. Commitment involves separating yourself from the former things and clinging to the better things.

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The best way to illustrate this is through the picture of separation that we see through marriage. When a man and a woman stand before God and their family on their wedding day it is an act of union but also an act of separation. They are separating themselves from all possible mates and devoting themselves to one another for the rest of their lives.

Warren Wiersbe writes, "Separation is simply total devotion to God no matter the cost."²

Our separation from the world is the distinguishing factor of our faith. At the end of the age, Jesus Himself will come to separate the church from the rest of the world. He will separate the wheat from the tares and the sheep from the goats. (*Matthew 13:24-30; 25:31-33*)

We are called to separation, but we are not called to isolation. Christianity is not an individual sport, it takes a team. Separation only works with a congregation, not in isolation. Separation that ignores the strength and accountability of the community leads to sin and self-destruction. Lone Ranger Christianity never pans out well.

Solomon so wisely wrote in Proverbs 18:1, *Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire, he breaks out against all sound judgment.* (ESV)

We are called to commit ourselves to a lifestyle of separation but that does not mean we have to do it alone. The church is a place where you can be encouraged, strengthened, and spurred on toward living a life of separation. The church is oxygen to a dwindling flame that a dark world tries to extinguish. (*Hebrews 10:23-25*)

2. COMMITMENT TO THE SABBATH

NEHEMIAH 10:31 *As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the sabbath or a holy day; and we will forego the crops the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.*

One of the ways in which we commit ourselves to a lifestyle of separation is by committing ourselves to Sabbath. For the Gentile culture, the idea of Sabbath was absurd. The Sabbath was just another day on the calendar without any significance. However, for the Jews—the Sabbath was a day that was to be devoted to rest and contemplation on spiritual things.

Since the Garden of Eden, the LORD instituted a rhythm of Sabbath into the fabric of human existence. Six days of work and a day of rest.

² Warren Wiersbe, *Be Determined* Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996, p. 135.

The Sabbath was a reminder to the Jewish people that their success was predicated on their relationship with God. It was truly an act of faith to believe that God would take care of their needs as they honored the Sabbath.

The Gentiles did not rest. They had seven days of open markets. They had seven days to make money. They had seven days to work their fields to get ready for the harvest. When we honor the Sabbath in our own life we confess to the world that less is more when God is honored. With God, six can be greater than seven.

But to honor the Sabbath was not just to adopt the weekly rhythm of rest and contemplation. There is more. By committing to honor the Sabbath the Israelites were agreeing to honor the whole scope of the Sabbath.

Every seventh year they were to let the land rest so that it might regenerate itself. This would require a great amount of faith, as they had to trust God would provide for their food for two years. They also agreed to the Year of Jubilee (*Leviticus 25:8-22*) and that meant trusting the LORD to provide for them for three years every fiftieth year.

What an audacious and bold commitment. Committing to Sabbath means that we come to the acknowledgment that God is sovereign over all time and all resources. After all, time belongs to God and He is the owner of all resources. It is a commitment to rest and reflect. When we neglect the Sabbath, we are essentially saying that God cannot provide for us. Committing to the Sabbath is to recognize that less is more when God is honored.

For so many of us, the idea of Sabbath in our culture seems so archaic. With a world that is more connected than ever before with more activity and more opportunity for busyness; it seems crazy to think we could push pause on the unnecessary and to pursue the divine.

We live in a world where we are already committed to so many things – there does not seem like there is enough time to rest and reflect on spiritual things. For a lot of us, Sunday is not sacred. We forfeit our commitment to church because our other commitments take priority on our calendar. Other activities move to the forefront and the Sabbath gets put on the back burner. As Christians, we do not follow God because of convenience, we follow God because of commitment. God has always called His people to honor the Sabbath. We are to be committed to live a Christian lifestyle. Saying yes to rest and reflection means saying no to other things.

God is calling us to commit to Sabbath; resting in the presence of God with the people of God dwelling on the works of God.

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3. COMMITMENT TO SUPPORT

NEHEMIAH 10:32-33; 39B *We also placed ourselves under obligation to contribute yearly one third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: ³³ for the showbread, for the continual grain offering, for the continual burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moon, for the appointed times, for the holy things and for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God... ³⁹ Thus we will not neglect the house of our God.*

For the Israelites, there was a temple tax that was instituted back in Exodus (*Exodus 30:11-16*). This tax helped to support the work that was done in the temple. Wiersbe writes, “The tax was a reminder that God had redeemed them and paid a price to set them free, and that they should

behave like people who belonged to God.”³ Here in the book of Nehemiah, the people did not see the tax as a burden. They were not giving to the work of the Temple in a state of drudgery. Giving went further than duty, it was a delight. They obligated themselves to contribute and support the work of the House of God.

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:7 ESV)

The way in which we give tells more about our hearts’ commitment to God than it does about our financial portfolio. First, we must acknowledge that God does not need our gifts. All things belong to Him. He is the owner of the cattle on a thousand hills (*Psalms 50:10*).

What God desires is not the gift, but the giver. In the New Testament we read, *Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:7 ESV)* God is more interested in the state of our heart as we give than He is in the size of our gift. Giving can become a challenge because our possessions start to possess us. We think possessions will bring us security and happiness.

The average American will interact with 4,000 to 10,000 advertisements for products every day.⁴ The advertisements are constantly sending a message that what you have is outdated, you need something new, life will not be fulfilling without a certain product. But the volume of advertisements that we are exposed to daily should make us keenly aware that our hearts are perpetually discontent with the things we have in life. The Creator of our soul knows this. He knows things become outdated and we become discontent. But through giving, he has provided a solution. Winston Churchill has said, “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

One of the most fulfilling things we will ever do is give to the work of God. The Gospel calls us to forsake a lifestyle that is defined by accruing possessions and to venture into a partnership with God. Through giving, we can participate in the work of God. When we give financially to the work of the church, we send the Gospel to the deepest darkest places in the world. When we commit to supporting the House of God, we commit to advancing the Kingdom of God.

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We will experience the thrill of renewal as we commit to supporting the work of the church. Through our generous and cheerful giving, God will begin to renew calloused parts of our hearts. Where we are hard-hearted, God will bring tenderness. Generosity is a recognition of God’s ownership over our lives.

One of the most refreshing things about reading this passage was the liberty that God gave in generosity. Everybody can bring something. In Nehemiah 10:34 we read:

Likewise, we cast lots for the supply of wood among the priests, the Levites and the people so that they might bring it to the house of our God, according to our fathers’ households, at fixed times annually, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the Law.

Since the fire on the altar had to continually burn it took a steady supply of wood. The leadership cast lots and called on different families and clans to bring wood to the altar. When you think about the total operation of the Temple, collecting wood would appear to be such a small task that many would think was insignificant. But it was necessary. In the House of God, no work is small

³ Wiersbe, *Be Determined*, p. 138.

⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2017/08/25/finding-brand-success-in-the-digital-world/#30cece91626e>

and no amount of support is insignificant. There were no prescriptions given in the Law as to how many times a year this was to take place, nor was a specific method given. There was a need and the people could fulfill it. Tradition tells us that several times a year people would stop what they were doing, and they would collect firewood for the altar. Everybody could bring something. Everybody could participate in worship by supporting the work of God.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

Few people in the world know commitment like a Navy SEAL. Their training is rigorous and gruesome. The few men who are Navy SEALs have a resolve that is atypical of most men. They are committed to the honor and rich heritage that comes with being a SEAL. They are committed to responsibility, humility and their Country. They are committed to the safety and well-being of others above themselves. They are committed to leadership and authority. The Navy SEALs are committed to upholding the Constitution and protecting freedom at all costs. We respect them and honor them for upholding their commitment.

As God's people should not our commitment to God be significantly stronger than a Navy SEAL?

Spiritual Renewal enters our life when we renew our commitment to God. A renewed commitment to separate ourselves from the world produces a holy zeal. A renewed commitment to Sabbath produces a renewed confidence in the replenishing work of God in our hearts. A commitment to support the House of God reaffirms where our treasure really is. God has designed us to be people of commitment. We are made in His image and our commitment to Him is in response to His commitment to us.

Some of us have a commitment issue. But God does not. God has always been committed to our good. In the Garden, He warned us of the impending death that would occur if we ate of the tree. But He was committed to covering us and forgiving us by dying on His own Tree, the cross. God's commitment to us today is evident as He has placed His Spirit in us to convict us of sin, lead us in truth, and instruct us in righteousness.

He has always shown His commitment to us freely and His commitment moves us to live a life committed to Him.