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The Reforms of Nehemiah

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10 I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given *them*; for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field. 11 So I contended with the rulers, and said, “Why is the house of God forsaken?” And I gathered them together and set them in their place. 12 Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse. 13 And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouse Shelemiah the priest and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah; and next to them *was* Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered faithful, and their task *was* to distribute to their brethren.

14 Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services!

15 In those days I saw *people* in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all *kinds of* burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned *them* about the day on which they were selling provisions. 16 Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold *them* on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.

17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, “What evil thing *is* this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day? 18 Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath.”

19 So it was, at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be dark before the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut, and charged that they must not be opened till after the Sabbath. Then I posted *some* of my servants at the gates, *so that* no burdens would be brought in on the Sabbath day. 20 Now the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice.

21 Then I warned them, and said to them, “Why do you spend the night around the wall? If you do *so* again, I will lay hands on you!” From that time on they came no *more* on the Sabbath.
22 And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should go and guard the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day.

Remember me, O my God, *concerning* this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your mercy!

23 In those days I also saw Jews *who* had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, *and* Moab.
24 And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people.

25 So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, *saying*, “You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves. 26 Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin.
27 Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?”

28 And *one* of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, *was* a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; therefore I drove him from me.

29 Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

30 Thus I cleansed them of everything pagan. I also assigned duties to the priests and the Levites, each to his service, 31 and *to bringing* the wood offering and the firstfruits at appointed times.

Remember me, O my God, for good!

[The New King James Version](#) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Ne 13:4–31.

Welcome to God's word for you. A Ministry of Sharon RP Church in Morning Sun, Iowa. Check us out online at www.Sharonrpc.org We pray that this message will be a blessing to you and that the Lord will use it to transform your faith and your life.

Well, congratulations. You've made it. It's the end of Nehemiah. Nehemiah Chapter 13, Nehemiah, Chapter 13. And this morning will be looking at the final chapter. The final Reforms of Nehemiah in versus 4 through 31. Nehemiah, Chapter 13. You can find that on page 441 of the provided Pew Bibles. This is God's word. Pay careful attention.

“Now before this, Eliashib the priest, having authority over the storerooms of the house of our God, *was* allied with Tobiah. And he had prepared for him a large room, where previously they had stored the grain offerings, the frankincense, the articles, the tithes of grain, the new wine and oil, which were commanded *to be given* to the Levites and singers and gatekeepers, and the

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The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God endures forever.

One of the hobbies that I've gotten - a pastime - is restoring cars from salvage yards. And it's amazing when you look at these these cars, you're always trying to look at the pictures either in other states, and you can't inspect them until you look at the pictures and you look real closely and you try to figure out “Okay, how did this accident happen? Is their body damage or is a really frame damage? Is there rust on this car? What is the interior look like? Is this going to be an absolute wreck? Or is it going to be worth the time invested to bring it back to its full glory, to bring it back to a state, that it could be driven and it will be safe for people to be in?” Well, this is what we find Nehemiah doing. Nehemiah has been gone for years. Nehemiah was the governor. This the previous 12 chapters were 12 years of Nehemiah's life that he was the governor. And he leaves and he has to go back to the royal court. Remember, he is the king's right hand man. He is the king's Cup bearer and his time is over. He has to go back home. But while he's there and Shusan, he comes back to something parents know all too well. Parents, How often have you cleaned the room? No sooner to go to the kitchen and you turn around and it looks like the Tasmanian devil has just come back through that room behind you and everything is in chaos again. This is what Nehemiah finds. We left Chapter 12 and the 1st 3 verses of Chapter 13 and the people of God had had cleaned everything up. Everything was how it was supposed to be. And I wish honestly, I wish Nehemiah ended a Chapter 13 Verse three. Everything was perfect and it continued on perfect. But that's not the end of the story.

What we find is that there is always a need for reformation. In the 15 and 16 hundreds, the reformers knew this and they had a phrase for it. We know these Latin phrases, five of them the Solas: Sola gratia, sola fide, sola scriptura, Sola gratia. We know the solas, but there was a six Latin term that they often used. It was semper reformanda - always reforming. Always bringing it back to the way it's supposed to be. Oh, the hymnodist is true when he said, “Prone to wander,” we find ourselves often prone to wander, and it's no difference here in Nehemiah.

And so what is the first reform that we see Nehemiah doing when he gets back? Well the first is in verses four through nine. Nehemiah comes back and he finds out that Eliashib, the high priest,

has made an alliance with Tobiah the ammonite. We haven't heard much about Tobiah for awhile, but Tobiah is a foreigner. But we need to be careful. See, Tobiah's name shows that he is actually one who by profession, says that he follows God. His very name means ya is good, God is good. And yet we find his actions are against reformation. Talk is cheap. Tobiah is able to say, Oh, I believe in God, but not want to keep what God has said. See, God has said no moabite or ammonite was to be allowed in the congregation of God. And what has Eliashib done? More than just in the congregation of God. He makes him a room. In versus four through nine. We find that Nehemiah comes back after a period of time away and he finds Tobiah. One of the enemies of God. Who had charged Nehemiah with high treason, now has an apartment in the temple itself. What is Nehemiah's response to this? Nehemiah is furious. He kicks him to the curb. He ejects him from his apartment. He takes all this stuff and he throws it out into the street. Tobiah has no right to be there. But why was Tobiah allowed to be there in the first place? Why was that temptation there for Eliashib? Why is it when Nehemiah left that this ungodly alliance was allowed to be made? Well, what room does Eliashib the high priest give to Tobiah? He gives him a store room. Notice what Nehemiah says about the store room. Nehemiah Chapter 13 verse 5 And he had prepared for him a large room where previously they had stored the grain offerings, the frankincense articles, the tithes, the new wine oil, which were commanded to be given to the Levites and singers and gatekeepers and the offerings for the priest. Notice the word Previously. Again Nehemiah Chapter 12, at the end, the people actually bring in the tithes. They bring in the offerings they bring in the 1st fruits. But sometime between Nehemiah leaving and coming back, the people had stopped. It's really easy for people to get swept up into a religious emotional high. Only foreign subsequent weeks, months and years for that zeal to erode beneath their feet. And we find the Levites hungry again. We find the singer's not cared for. We find Eliashib hearing somebody say, "I'll upkeep the temple. Give me, Give me a seat, give me a place in the temple and I'll be there." Remember, Tobiah has all the resource. He is the ruler of Transjordan. He's also a governor. He's able to feed them. He's able to feed the singers. But we find out It's not always the case. It's not a man of his word. Because they're still hungry. They're still hungry. Well, read that in the next section. The priest and the singers aren't allowed just to stay there. Because Tobiah doesn't keep up his end of that.

But what we find here is the reality that we always need reforming. See, religion doesn't come easily. You know this in your own heart. Religion does not come easily. True religion is part of it is discipline. Now the Holy Spirit is the one who enables us to do that. But we have to strive for religion. This is why Paul tells us we need to run the race with perseverance. We always need reforming and it takes hard work.

So let me ask you in your own life; If we went to the temple of your own heart, what store rooms have you given to covetousness? What store rooms have you set up for your own personal idols? What place is there that you had said, "Here I will devote to the Lord." Is that your store room that you have said, "Lord, I will bring you the first fruits of my relationship with my spouse." And instead your eyes have wondered elsewhere. What areas of the temple of your heart need cleansed? What garbage needs thrown into the street? What idols do you need to kick out of their apartments?

But it wasn't just this unease alliance with Tobiah, but we find in versus 10 for 14 that Nehemiah needs to reform the tithes. Look with me at verses 10 through 14. "I also realize that the portions

for the Levites had not been given to them. For each of the Levites and the singers who did the works had gone back to his field.” Hear that, remember, in Chapter 12 that they had brought in the tithes. They had brought in the first fruits. They had brought in the new wine. They brought in the oil. They had brought in the wood. Everything was going so well. And now Levites and the singers. Where are they? Are they in the temple anymore? No, no, no. They have to go back to their fields. Do you know how many churches in America are able to have a full time minister? It's pretty rare. More and more and more pastors. There's a whole field called Bi Vocational Ministry, where pastors are no longer able to dedicate themselves to prayer and to the word. I remember talking to one of my friends at an evangelical seminary where I attended for a few years. And as I was talking to him about our congregations and how we average somewhere between 35 to 60 people. And he said, “And you guys actually have pastors?” “Well, yeah, we have pastors. Why wouldn't we?” He said. “Well, in our denomination, we have to have a minimum of 300 people before our pastor can we have a full time salary?” It costs. It's sacrifice. You sacrifice daily by giving of tithes and offerings. It is hard - and you know it. Oh, it is such a temptation. It is such a temptation when you are carving out that tithe to just say, “Well, this is an area of the budget we can, just decrease a little.” And that's what they did here. That's what they did here. But what does Nehemiah do? Nehemiah brings them back, he says in verse 11. “I contended with the rulers and said, Why is a house of our God forsaken.” Remember in Chapter 10 Verse 38 they had promised with these exact words, “we will not forsake the house of our God.” That was their covenant promise. And here he says, “Why is the house of our God forsaken?” You've gone back on your promises. So goes the leaders and he confronts them. And he tells them to do good according to their word, and he sets up everything that they're supposed to do. See, It's really easy in our lives to get content with, making money with living the good life. It is really easy to get caught up in work and to forget that our first devotion is to the Lord. Things were going well. We're gonna look at the next few verses. Things are going well. There's grape to be tread. There's wine to be made. There's food to be brought in. People are just busy. Let me suggest to you that the greatest danger to the American Church is not persecution but affluence. The deceitfulness of wealth and the desires of this world. That's what Luke tells us. Those are the weeds that will quickly choke out the seed. So he tells, Nehemiah tells them to do this hard thing to bring back in the tithes. And he appoints trustworthy men. Faithful men to oversee that work. And he prays, “Remember me, Oh my God. Concerning this. Do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for its Service.”

Where you cheaping out on God. Where are you in your life not bringing the first fruits. Where in your life, as you inspect your own life as you as you look closely at the damage in your own life. As you as you narrow in on different areas of your life. Where is it that you are cheaping out on God? Is it in your sexual purity? Is it in your finances? Is it in your work? Is it in your Bible reading? Is it in your friendship? Is it and how you're using your mouth? What areas have you refused to say, “Lord, this is yours.” But you're just busy going about whatever you want to do. I promise you you are not a slave those things. God tells us in Romans Chapter six, that we are not a slave to those things. We can put Him in front of everything else. We are not a slave to those sins.

Nehemiah gets especially worked up. Nehemiah get especially worked up in versus 15 through 22. The longest portion of these reforms. 15 through 22, and specifically what the people were doing on the Sabbath day. I was just telling Rosalie this morning, sometimes God just work

things out in perfect timing. All week with our Children, we've been memorizing the fourth Commandment out of the catechism. Which is the fourth commandment. The Fourth Commandment is thou shalt remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy. And you know all the words that go on from there. And so God tells them this is one of my 10 words. One of the 10 Commandments. And here we find after Nehemiah is gone. The people are treading grapes for wine on the Sabbath day. But not just that. See when when the people of God are neglecting this good gift that he gives them of resting, giving them one vacation day in seven. We find is that they're also burdening others. Remember in the fourth Commandment. It's this really odd part in our mind, right? Thou shalt not do any work. Neither thou nor thy sons, nor thy daughters nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor that cattle nor thy stranger who resides within thy gates. But it's interesting. Why does God include cattle there? Beast of burden, Donkeys, horses, things that are to carry. Things to shoulder those burdens. Because God created in his normal pattern, rhythm of life, that even animals need a break. You were not made to work 24/7/365. God gives you one day in seven to stop and to take a siesta. To say no. Nope. I'm not gonna answer those e mails. Nope. I'm not gonna make my kids clean their rooms. Kids, Did you hear that? You don't have to clean your room on Sunday. He gives us one whole day that we can tell our our employers. No, I'm sorry. I'm going to go spend some time with God and with my family. And I'm just gonna rest. You can wait till tomorrow. Now there are legitimate times when it's necessary to work on the Sabbath. And Jesus tells us that, he shows us that there's work of necessity. You still need to eat. You still need to drink. Those things are necessary. We still need if somebody gets hurt for a paramedic to go and to heal on the Sabbath, we still need doctors in the ER to mend people when they need care on the Sabbath. But those are the exception to the norm. We need a rest for our souls. And we find this. This is the pattern that God gives us in the New Testament. In John, Chapter 20 after Jesus is resurrected, the apostles come together on the Lord's Day, no longer on the sixth day, but now on the first day of the week. And they come together and they and they come together to encourage one another. And then, in the Book of Acts, we find it again an acts Chapter 20:7, where the people are gathered together and they look at God's word with Paul. And then we find again in first Corinthians 16:2 that the people when they gather together. That's when they're to bring up the offerings and the tithes for the work of the Ministry and of the poor and of missions. And then in Hebrews, Chapter 10: 24-25 We have a specific command by God to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another. And so much the more as the day draws near. And even John in Revelation, Chapter 1:10 He calls this Christian Sabbath the Lord's Day. This is when he receives his vision from God. There is a blessing that God gives us in the seventh day in the Sabbath rest that He provides for us. And the Israelites here again rejecting it. Again in Nehemiah, Chapter 13:15-22.

In those days, I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath and bringing in sheaths and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs and all kinds of burdens which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day.

And we see Nehemiah warning them. Remember what the Prophet Jeremiah said. God had promised. This is what took us in the exile. Jeremiah told us this. Chapter 17 Jeremiah, Chapter 17. I'll give you the page number there if you want to follow along. Jeremiah, Chapter 17:19.

“Thus the LORD said to me: "Go and stand in the gate of the children of the people, by which the kings of Judah come in and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem; 20 "and say to them, Hear the word of the LORD, you kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who enter by these gates. 21 `Thus says the LORD: "Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; 22 "nor carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, nor do any work, but hallow the Sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers. 23 "But they did not obey nor incline their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear nor receive instruction. 24 "And it shall be, if you heed Me carefully," says the LORD, "to bring no burden through the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but hallow the Sabbath day, to do no work in it, 25 "then shall enter the gates of this city kings and princes sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their princes, accompanied by the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city shall remain forever. 26 "And they shall come from the cities of Judah and from the places around Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin and from the lowland, from the mountains and from the South, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings and incense, bringing sacrifices of praise to the house of the LORD. 27 "But if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day, such as not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.”

Nehemiah tells him this is one of the reasons why God destroyed Jerusalem. The walls have just been built and we're going back to the same sins. Oh, prone to wander is our heart. Oh, how stiff necked we become. Again and again and again. Why is it? Why is it that we bristle at this command, specifically? I'm gonna ask you. Seriously, I want you to sit back. Maybe this is just my experience. But when I talk with people about the 10 Commandments and I talked to them about you show not murder, nobody tells me. “Oh, that's a foolish rule. I shouldn't listen to that.” Or if I tell someone you shouldn't steal, very few people will tell me now they might try to justify themselves why they had to steal. But people will very rarely say, “Oh, that doesn't apply to me.” Why do we bristle when we come to the Fourth Commandment to the Lord's Day to the Sabbath Rest? Why is it? I think part of it is because we want to act like we own our days. That we own our lives. That we make our plans. That we want to do what we want to do. But God has something prepared that's good for you. See, the Sabbath is a day that the book of Hebrews tells us that the rest it's a rest. To remember that someday we will enter into Christ our eternal rest. Here on the Sabbath. When we get to gather with God's people, we get we get a glimpse, just a small taste of what it's like to be with God's people forever. Here we get a taste of hearing God's word that gives us the hope and the joy of Jesus Christ. Do you keep the Sabbath Day? This isn't about legalism. This isn't about being evangelical pharisees. Oh! we can become that. Oh, we sure can become judgmental. We sure can wag our finger. We sure can look at the world and say, Oh, you sinners out there. And yet, How often do we neglect in our own hearts the words of the psalmist? I was glad to hear them saying Lad has come into the house of the Lord. How often do we neglect to tell our souls the Sabbath is a delight. Today you get to rest soul. Today we will think upon Christ. Today we will be the people of God and be reminded of our hope. Oh, it's a blessing. To forsake the assembling of the saints and to admonish each other with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs of seeing with grace in our hearts. Oh Brothers and Sisters, will we keep the Sabbath once again?

But there's a last reform. I know I'm late, but this is too good to pass over. Look with at me at the final reform of Nehemiah versus 23 through 30. "In those days, I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Amon and Moab. And half their Children spoke the language of Ashdod and could not speak the language of Judah but spoke according to the language of one of the other people. So I contended with them and cursed almond struck thumb and pulled out their hair and made them swear by God, saying, You shall not give your daughter's his wife their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons, or for yourselves. Did not Solomon the King of Israel."

And it goes on. You remember that story of Solomon? How he had ah, harem full of wives. And he had allied himself with the King of Egypt Pharaoh, and he had allied himself with the king of Sidon and Tyre. And he had alied himself with all these kingdoms taking on foreign wise. And even though God had blessed him and given him wisdom and riches and a full kingdom. His heart was pulled a stray. His heart was pulled away from the Lord. Family could do that to us at times. Family can do that in your lives. Family could do that when we really want to keep God's word and we love people and yet they want us to do these things. We feel pressured into celebrating these things. We don't know how to respond.

The New Testament gives us two ways that we respond to this. First is the commandment of God. Hear that carries over into the New Testament. We shall not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. It starts in choosing a godly spouse. Children, you are young people. You are going to be attempted to kook at someone and a desire a spouse, and that is a good thing. It is a good thing for you to want to be married. But I'm promising you. If you yoke yourself together with an unbeliever, your desire for God will always be rubbing against the other person. And it's hard and it creates turmoil because it creates pain in the marriage. Because one person wants to serve the Lord this way. And the other person wants to go and do these things and believe this way and act this way and to live their lives. And you will find conflict. And you will be tempted to go away from the Lord. Now hear me out. I'm not saying that you are looking for the theologically perfect spouse. We are looking for spouses, who are godly. For at least Christians. That's base level.

But here it's gone so bad that the people cannot even speak the language of Judah. What does that mean? They're speaking the language of the of the ammonites of the Ashdodites. It means they don't understand God's word when it's read and preached. When the Torah scroll is opened. And even if they do come to synagogue, and they read out the words, the Children can't understand what's being read. There's now a barrier between God and their Children and God has declared their Children to be holy.

We must inspect our hearts. Young people. You must inspect your hearts as you are looking for a spouse. As you desire to get married. Are you looking for a godly spouse. Are you looking for one who will encourage you to love the Lord? Or just one that you think is really, really pretty? No. We must have first priorities.

Nehemiah shows us here that even though the Reformation had started in Chapter one, reformation must happen in every generation. Semper Reformanda. We must always be inspecting our hearts. We must always be looking at our lives and seeing. "Is this how which should be?"

But again you're going along the road with ditches on either side. As you go along this Christian road you have the ditch of legalism on one side. Because some of the Jews heard these words after Nehemiah took them seriously and thought we can do this. We will do this. And created laws for themselves. They were called pharisees. And started begin to think that they were righteous in and of themselves. That's a ditch you'll need to stay out of - legalism. We follow these things out of faith and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The other side is lawlessness. To think, Oh, this is Old Testament. Oh, this is gone. Oh, this is old and grace abounds. No. There's a narrow road that God gives us that we must walk carefully in our Christian lives. Filled by the Holy Spirit. Not a slave to sin. Walking in righteousness with confidence that it is God who has begun a good work in us. And it is He who will bring it to completion.

So Christian, run that race. In your bulletins today you have an inspection list. Here's your homework for this week. Here's your homework for this afternoon for this Sabbath. Look at your inspection list. Are there areas of your life that you need to restore. Are there areas of your life that you need to say? Lord, I need work on this and you need to go to God's word and you need to get direction. I'd encourage you when you find those areas of your life. If you don't know how to where the corrective measures are, how did how to make this area for your life, right with God - Come and talk to John. Come and talk to Jim. Come and talk to me. We'll do discipleship. We'll pray with you, will care for you. It's what God has called the church to do.

Let's pray together now. Lord, we thank you. There is a call for us for reform. Oh, but, Lord, we thank you that this reform does not belong to us. But ultimately you, Lord, are the one who wipes away our sin and conforms us more and more to the image of Christ. Lord, let us delight in your law. Let us find joy in doing what you love. Lord, not because we are perfect, but because we have a perfect safe in Jesus name. Amen.

Thanks for listening to this week's message from God's word for you. A ministry of Sharon RP Church in rural southeast Iowa. We pray that the message would be used by God to transform your faith and your life this week. If you'd like to get more information about us, feel free to go to the website sharonrpc.org We'd Love to invite you to worship with us. Our worship time is 10 a.m. Every Sunday at 25204 160th Avenue Morning Sun, Iowa 52640. May God richly bless you this week.