

We're in Nehemiah chapter 10 tonight. I'm actually gonna read the last verse in Nehemiah 9, because it leads us right into that. And then we'll read the entirety of chapter 10 before we pray together. Before we do that, let's pray together. Gracious Heavenly Father, thank you for your word that reveals to us your holy character, that reveals to us sufficient means to lead us to Jesus, to salvation, to a sense of our own inadequacy apart from you, to a deep need of your grace and mercy to sustain us. We're thankful for your word that is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword. We thank you for how it is breathed out by you and therefore useful for us. We ask your blessing tonight as we study Nehemiah 10. Would your Holy Spirit be my help and our guide tonight? Would you help us to hide these words in our hearts that we might not sin against you? Pray in Jesus' name, amen. Okay, last verse in chapter nine. to set us up, that is verse 38,

chapter nine, where it says, because of all this, we make a firm covenant in writing. On the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests. And then on your study guide, if you've got one of those, to follow along with me, beginning in Nehemiah chapter 10. On the seals are the names of Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hekeliah, Zedekiah, Sariah, Azariah, Jeremiah, Pasher, Amariah, Malkijah, Hattush, Shebaniah, Malak, Harim, Miramoth, Obadiah, Daniel, Genethon, Baruch, Meshulam, Abijah, Mizramim, Meaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah, these were the priests. and Levites, Jeshua the son of

Azariah, Benue of the sons of Hinnadad, Cadmiel and their brothers, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Peliah, Hanan, Micah, Rahab, Hashebiah, Zachar, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Bani, Beninu, the chiefs of the people, Parash, Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zatu, Bani, Bani, Asgad, Bibai, Adonijah, Bigvi, Adin, Atur, Hezekiah, Azur, Hodiah, Hashem, Bezai, Harith, Anathoth, Nebai, Magpias, Meshulam, Hezer, Meshezabel, Zadok, Jadaiah, Pelletiah, Hanan, Aniah, Hosea, Hananiah, Hashod, Halohehsh, Pilha, Shobek, Rahom, Hashabnia, Maaseah, Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, Malak, Harim, and Bayana. The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law that was given by Moses, the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our God and his rules and his statutes. We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them. And I only have one half of that sheet, sorry. Do y'all have the back of the sheet? Didn't realize that until I flipped

it over. Thank you, Eric. On this Sabbath, or a holy day, and we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt. We will also take on ourselves the obligation to give yearly a third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God. For the showbread, the regular grain offering, the regular burn offering, the Sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed feasts, the holy things, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel and for all the work of the house of our God. We, the priests, the Levites, and the people have likewise cast lots for the wood offering to bring it into the house of our God according to our Father's houses at times appointed year by year to burn on the altar of the Lord our God as it is written in the law. We obligate ourselves to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of every tree year by year to the house of the Lord. Also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, and the firstborn of our herds and of our flocks. And to bring the first of our dough and our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil to the priests. to the chambers of the house of our God, and to bring to the Levites the tithes from our ground, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all our towns where we labor. And the priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive the tithes, and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse. For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the chambers where the vessels of the sanctuary are, as well as the priests who minister and the gatekeepers and the singers. We will not neglect the house of our God. Thank you. What is repentance, really? We hear that word a lot, and like all theological terms, sometimes it's helpful to consider what it's not to give us a clear idea of what it is. So, what is repentance not? Well, it's not remorse. Although remorse may be part of repentance. It's not regret for the consequences of sin. It's not feeling bad and regretting doing something because you got yourself in trouble. Although that may also be part of repentance. It's not feeling good about feeling bad. It's not being morose and sort of doing emotional penance until you make yourself feel bad enough about something to acquire what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called cheap grace. Repentance or grace without repentance. So, it is not those things. What is it? What is repentance? Well, I can think of no better definition than the one the Westminster divines came up with a few hundred years ago. And it is, repentance unto life is a saving grace, something given by God. It's not something we conjure up in our hearts. Whereby a sinner, out of the sight and sense, not only of the danger, but also

the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God and upon the apprehension of his mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for and hates his sin as to turn from them unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with him in all the ways of his commandments. Note that to repent is not just to turn away from one's sins in their entirety, but also to turn completely to God. Well, to their credit, the restored people of Judah who have come back from exile and are in the process by God's grace of rebuilding their community, respond very well to the preaching of Ezra, of the law, and of the godly leadership of Nehemiah. When they're convicted of their sin as a response to hearing the word of God preached and taught, and they realize anew that their exile was really a divine chastening for the result of their own sin, they repent. Not just moroseness, not just tears, not just regret, but actual, genuine, biblical repentance. And not just in abstract generalities, they really get down to brass tacks in this passage. Very meaningfully specific repentance in detail. They repent very specifically and they show that the proper response of people who have received God's grace despite their sin is genuine repentance and then thankful obedience. Obedience which springs from a love of Christ and a thankfulness to him for his grace. Notice in verse 28 that they not only turn from the peoples of the lands and their corrupt pagan practices, but they also turn to God and his law. They not only separate themselves from idolaters, but they also draw near to God in a new and fresh way. So this takes form through what we might call covenant renewal from time to time in scripture in the Old Testament we read of renewing the covenant that God has made with them and their response to that covenant. It's also what we might call a time of revival of genuine Holy Spirit outpouring that brings people to repentance for their sins and to contrition and to joy on the far side of that repentance as they endeavor after new obedience. So two headings this evening, which you'll see on your sheet, the signers of the covenant, and then the obligations of the covenant. First of all, the signers. No covenant, whether it's the Mayflower Compact or whatever, is official until it's first ratified. And so by signing this document, they ratify it and put it into effect. The people that chose to do that, sign and seal this document in a public way and in a judicial way. This is an official document, it's not just a religious exercise, it's also a civic exercise. And there are four different groups that participate in ratifying this covenant. The first group we see are the civic rulers of the people, and there seems to be just two of these. One is Nehemiah the governor, and the other is Zedekiah, who seems to be his personal secretary, or you might say his right-hand

man. Zedekiah is the one who helps Nehemiah with logistical matters. So the governor takes the lead in this national repentance, as a good leader should. Leaders should pave the way. So Nehemiah is not the kind of leader who says, ironically, follow me, I'm right behind you. I'm right behind you all the way, so follow me. He's not the kind of politician who kind of sees the way the political winds are blowing and then tries to get ahead of those trends to glorify himself, not at all. Nehemiah is a true leader. who seeks the Lord's will and then leads in that direction. And he's such a true leader and a genuine leader and an effective leader that the people jump on board and follow him eagerly and passionately as he does this. So the civic leaders, two of them. The next group are the priests, who of course are the spiritual leaders among the people. We see these in verses two through eight. Please don't make me read their names again. There are 21 priests listed here. And one name that you might expect to see there but you don't is the name Ezra. Why didn't Ezra sign this document? He's a priest after all. We know he was present in the community. So why didn't he sign the covenant? Well, what we do see is the name of Ezra's father, Saraiah. Saraiah was the patriarch of his family. So it's expected that Saraiah would sign not only on his own behalf, but also on his family's behalf. His children, including Ezra. So when someone saw this list of signatories on this document, they would have read not only the name Saria, they would have read Saria's entire clan, including Ezra. The next group that's listed are the temple helpers and worship assistants, who were of course from the tribe of Levi, as specified by God's word. If you're the kind of person who is into comparing various lists of names that are found in Ezra and Nehemiah, then you might recognize some of these names because they overlap with some of those other lists. Two of those names, Hashebiah and Sherebiah, for example, were two of Ezra's traveling companions when he made the trek from Babylon to Jerusalem years ago, these men went with him. Also, six of these men you might recognize from just a couple of chapters ago. When Ezra read the entire law in one sitting and some of the leaders among the people helped him to read it and to apply it, you'll recognize six of those names from that list. So there were 17 of these, and we read their names in verses nine through 13. The next group that's listed here are the heads of families, or the chiefs of the people, they're sometimes called. And again, it was normal and it was expected for the head of a household, for the patriarch, to sign on behalf of his entire family. Now, the word patriarchy is a bad word in our culture anymore, unfortunately. Our culture seems obsessed with quote-unquote overthrowing the patriarchy. Well, we gotta be careful with that because godly, humble, strong, biblical patriarchy, the kind that's espoused by scripture,

is really the backbone of covenant family life. And the family, of course, is the basic unit of society. And so if the family falls, guess what? The culture is not far behind. So patriarchy in itself, as defined

by God, by scripture, is a very good thing. Abusive patriarchy that demeans and disrespects women and children instead of honoring them and protecting them is bad. But I hope y'all understand that it's the abuse rather than the patriarchy that is bad. So our culture is trying to throw out the baby with the bathwater on this issue as it does many others. But faithful biblical patriarchy is a very good thing. It should be preserved. It should be restored when it's lost. And this was a good demonstration of that. Covenant family heads stepping up to the plate and signing this on behalf of their families. And godly men stepping up to the plate to protect and care for and lead their families has never been more needed than it is now, obviously. So, signers of the covenant. Secondly, and finally, obligations. of the covenant. What do these people sign on for exactly in this document? Well, they don't just come up with a list of goals that they might want to work on one day when they have time, and they don't really come up with a wish list that they sort of want to accomplish. They actually bind themselves at all costs to obeying these things. They know that if they do, covenant blessings are in store for them and they know that if they don't, covenant curses are in store for them and will come down on their heads. We see this in verse 29. We enter into a curse and an oath. We confess that we actually deserve the curses of God if we should fail to keep our covenant obligations. They recognize that not keeping the covenant is what got them into hot water and therefore sent them into exile to start with. So they're swearing their loyalty to God, admitting that they have fallen far short and trying to do better by God's grace here. And loyalty to God, means actually loyalty to his word, doesn't it? Because God's word is a reflection of his character and it originates in the mind of God himself. So they're taking an oath here to walk in God's law that was given by Moses, the servant of God. So we see here Nehemiah's very, very strong view of scripture, which matches up quite nicely to our own view of scripture. Nehemiah sees scripture as a divine book, as God's book, as something breathed out by God. This is not man's law, this is God's law. And it's a revelation of God's holy character. But notice that Nehemiah also sees scripture as a human book. in the sense that God used human agency to reveal himself to us. So it is God's law, but notice what it says here. It was given by Moses, God's servant. So Moses wrote the Pentateuch, but he only did it as he was carried along, as it were, by the Holy Spirit to write precisely what God wanted to be written.

So Moses spoke from God, to use the words of Peter. Moses wrote from God. So Nehemiah's high view of scripture accords very, very well with our own, as we believe in the plenary, verbal inspiration of scripture, that it is infallible, that it cannot fail us, that it's utterly reliable. Why is that? Because it is inerrant. It has no errors in it, in the original autographs. Why is it inerrant? Because it comes and is breathed out by a perfect and holy God. How could it not be perfect? So we don't give scripture its due, the reformer said, unless we regard it as though God himself walked into the room and we heard the words coming out of his holy mouth. And we also don't do it justice even by having a high and lofty view of scripture, which the ARP does. We regard it as infallible and as inerrant. But we're not giving scripture its true due till we not only affirm it, but when we obey it. That's the key. And the signers of this covenant are saying, we not only hold it to be high and holy, we commit ourselves to obey it at all costs. We will submit to the statutes, we will follow the rules, we will embrace the laws. He uses all kinds of synonyms to flesh out the multi-dimensional character of God's word. that it requires discretion and wisdom and comparing scripture with scripture to understand it rightly and apply it. And we can devote our entire lives to diligent and sober study of God's word, and at the end of our lives, we haven't even scratched the surface of its riches and its depths. But the language is that those statutes should be engraved, verse 29, not on tablets, it's implied, but engraved where? On our hearts. Chiseled in our hearts by the Holy Spirit in a way that's permanent and perpetual and abiding for life and influences all of our thinking and all of our actions. So what specifically will we obey and why? Well first the why part. It was not out of a sense of obligation. It was not out of a sense of legalism. As if they were trying their very best after a time of failure to sort of work their way back into God's good graces. Not at all. Rather, the last chapter, chapter nine, reminds us that it was out of a strong sense of gratitude, thanksgiving to God for grace that they had already received that really motivates this covenant renewal. And that's always the logic in scripture. That's always the order. First comes God's grace, and secondly, always comes what we do about God's grace. So they wanted to commit themselves to faithfulness in six different areas, briefly. First of all, family faithfulness. The first area they committed themselves to was family faithfulness. Like our own culture, the families of Judah had been weakened during the 70 years of exile, and so it was time now to restrengthen those families, and the place to start is marriage. And the first rule of marriage

in Judah was that they were not to marry outside the faith. So they say we will not give our daughters to the people of the land. Now, you could read that and say the letter of the law was that they were not to intermarry with the Canaanites and the Hittites and so forth. That's what the law actually says. So if a good Jewish boy took that too literally, he could say, well, doesn't say I can't go find myself a cute little Samaritan girl to marry. But they understood not only the letter of the law, but the spirit of the law, and so they interpreted it as broadly as possible here. They used all-embracing language.

We will not give our daughters to whom? To the people of the land, to non-Israelites, to non-Judahites. And nationality is not really what's important here, and nor is this a racial matter at all. This is not an example of racism. Moses, you'll remember, had an Ethiopian wife. Boaz, you'll remember, married a Moabitess. So it's a matter of whether it's okay for a believer to marry an unbeliever, and the answer to that question in the Bible is, of course, no. Bad company will corrupt good character every time. Missionary marriages are forbidden. They seldom work. So what does light have to do with darkness? What does Christ have to do with Belial? What happened, you'll remember, when Solomon took a lot of foreign wives. Solomon, you'll remember, excelled in wisdom. He's the wisest man around, the richest man around, but he wasn't very wise when it came to women. And so he took a lot of foreign wives, and they led his heart astray, didn't they? They led his heart away from the Lord, and that's always the path that that takes. That is what God is trying to protect them from. and the kingdom suffered greatly for it. You'll remember that Ahab marries the pagan Jezebel, and when he does, she not only led his heart astray, but she plunged the whole kingdom into bell worship and disaster. So God is protecting them from the syncretism, from the watering down of their faith that pagan marriages would bring into the community. The second area they pledged themselves to was Sabbath observance. The rule was no commerce on the Sabbath. It was for the worship of God and it was for the rest of God's people. God himself setting the example for them by resting on the seventh day. Now again, if you were a smart aleck and you wanted to find a loophole, you could still try to find a way to transact some business on the Sabbath by saying, well, I can't buy from a fellow Jew, but what if I go outside of the community and I meet a pagan vendor, can I transact some business with them? But no, again, there was a sense of bending over backwards to make sure that they were obedient to God in the details. And part of Christian Sabbath observance, according to our Westminster standards again, is not just refraining from our own work as if our own lives were all that mattered, but also doing our very best, by God's

grace, to not put other people in a situation in which they need to do needless work. So, they went outside the letter of the law, again, to the spirit of the law, applying it very, very widely. What does our observance of the Lord's day look like? Are we tempted to get our church in as quickly as possible so that we can get back to doing what we want to on the Sabbath, on Sunday? Or are we remembering that it's not really our day, it's the Lord's day, and it is for the Lord's worship, setting all other things aside and focusing on Him, and in the process, having our souls wonderfully restored and refreshed? I have a friend who's an ARP minister who's sometimes criticized by his parishioners for preaching a little bit too long, and they'll tap their watches as they're going out of worship on Sunday and say, preacher, you know, it's 1230, and he is quick to remind them gently but firmly, it is the Lord's day. It's not your day, and it's not my day. It's the Lord's day, and it's for worship. Thirdly, they focused on caring for the poor. Verse 31 shows us that they forego the crops on the seventh year, they let the ground lie fallow, and then they observe the jubilee year so that all debts are forgiven every seventh year. So no one stayed helplessly poor. in perpetuity in their community.

No one stayed in debt forever. No matter how deep the financial hole that you'd fallen into, there was hope by God's grace to come out of it every seventh year. So you got a fresh start. Reminds us of the beauty of what Christ has done for us. Whereby he who was rich for our sakes became wonderfully poor so that we through his poverty might be eternally rich. The rest of their areas of recommitment had to do with the worship in the temple and all the menial jobs that that required and all the funding that that required and all the devotion of people's talents and time and resources that that required. The temple tax was levied on everyone, and burnt offerings need to be provided for, so a constant supply of good firewood was needed. Those offerings needed to be given generously, as each person remembered how God had richly provided for them, and remember the privilege of giving back to him in gratitude. The first fruits of the firstborn offering, and the tithes of the tithes, and the temple maintenance all had to be done in a regular fashion. So all of this can really be summed up by the final verse here. In short, these people purposed in their hearts, again in response to the goodness and the grace of God, out of a sense of gratitude to what God has done for them, that they would not neglect the house of their God. Notice there's a constant use in this passage of that phrase, our God, our God. That is beautiful covenant language.

Yahweh is not a regional deity just over one geographical area who has to be appeased so that he can show his love and grace to that particular group of people. This is the God of the universe,



the sovereign God who has loved them with an everlasting love and who has claimed them to be his very own and has devoted himself to be theirs. So they'll no longer live in paneled houses, neglecting the house of their God, but they will richly give because they have first been richly given to. So they'll give out of their sense of gratitude to what God had done for them. They'll prioritize worship in the Lord's house and treat that as the preeminent thing that that is. It's not just one thing in life, it is the thing in life to devote ourselves to. To sum it up in just a few thoughts,

we might be tempted to look at Ezra and Nehemiah and to think that they're a little bit exclusivist for our taste. Maybe not as winsome as we might like them to be. But it's important to remember why it was important for Judah to come out from the pagan peoples around them and to be separate from the peoples around them. Why was that? Well, it was ultimately a part of God's plan to bless the entire world. We remember that the Lord Jesus would come from this renewed group of people, this community of Jews, and he would be the one who would finally bring salvation, not just to the Jews, his own people, but also to all the nations. So it's a reminder to us that we have to be out in the world, but we must never be of the world. We need to love the world to

be out in it among our unbelieving neighbors and friends, but we must never become like them in our ultimate heart loyalties. As Jesus said, salt has to retain its saltiness if it's to be benefit to meat that it flavors and preserves. Light can't illumine the darkness by becoming the darkness. So we have to remain distinct from the world in order to ultimately benefit the world. The moment the church becomes like the world in its thinking is the moment we cease to do any good for the world. And that's the trap that Judah fell into. It's why they ended up ultimately in exile. It's why God had to discipline them. And he calls them to be holy as he is holy. And that's what we see them doing in this passage. Not in order to earn his grace, but because his grace has been shown to them, they devote themselves to renewing the covenant and pursuing holiness out of reverence for God. It's a great example to follow and it's a wonderful example of biblical revival and true repentance. So with that in mind, let's look at our prayer sheets. Let's start for a few moments by praising God for who He is. We think of the Westminster answer to the wonderful question, what is God? God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. Let's praise God for his attributes and for his grace and love and mercy to us. And let's pray out loud for the benefit of all for a few moments.