

# The Work of the Christian

*Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*

By Ty Blackburn

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**Providence Church**  
2146 Buford Hwy  
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

**Website:** [www.providenceduluth.org](http://www.providenceduluth.org)  
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We want to say happy Mother's Day as well to all of our mothers, and just take a moment to talk about that, how grateful I am also for my mom, given me a godly mother, and also my wife, a godly wife who is a great treasure, but all of us to be brought into the world, we owe a debt of great gratitude to our mothers. You know, the Lord has created the family to be a picture of his glory, made man male and female in his image to reflect and replicate the glory of his character, his relational character. "Let Us make man in Our image," there is the allusion to the Trinity even in that as he thinks about creating man. And so the family relationship is something that is made to show us the glory of God and we see that in our fathers and our mothers and their love for us, and especially when they follow the Lord we see it, but we should be grateful always.

One of the things I was thinking about this year just in sharing a few verses, I want to encourage us to really honor our parents. A lot of times I'll focus more on how wonderful and beautiful the picture is and forget to deal with this part of it which is, you know, the Lord's clear instruction is that we should always honor our father and our mother. In fact, it's the first commandment on the horizontal. If you think about the 10 Commandments, the 10 Commandments fall into two tables. The first table, the first four commandments relate to our relationship with God, "Have no other gods before Me. No idols. Don't take the Lord's name in vain. Remember the Sabbath day." Those are all vertical. And then when you start on the horizontal, you know, you might expect, you started with the most important at the beginning before, surely the most important would be, "Thou shalt not commit murder," but it's not. The first commandment on the horizontal is, "Honor your father and your mother." That's the first commandment that God puts there because of the importance the Lord places on our gratitude to him and our respect for authority, submission and just being grateful, honor as our parents grow old, as we grow up.

I want to read a few verses from Proverbs 23 before we move into the sermon in Nehemiah. Proverbs 23. The call is to young people to be wise and part of being wise is continuing to grant honor to our parents and to listen to their counsel, especially as we're in their household to obey them, to honor them, but even to honor their counsel afterwards. We still make our own decisions, of course, but to appreciate it. Proverbs 23:22 says, "Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old. Buy truth, and do not sell it, Get wisdom and instruction and understanding."

The idea is don't despise your mother when she's old, he's talking about still keep listening and valuing her counsel. "Buy truth, and do not sell it, Get wisdom and instruction and understanding. The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, And he who sires a wise son will be glad in him. Let your father and your mother be glad, And let her rejoice who gave birth to you." She gave birth to you, give her cause of rejoicing by being a wise man or a wise woman. Make your mother glad, your father glad by your wisdom and righteousness.

That's certainly an important thing for us to think about and I just want to ask and take a moment and ask those who are mothers to stand and expectant mothers count also. So please stand and let's express our appreciation and honor to them. [applause] You can be seated. Amen. Well, let's pray for them and pray for the word of God and God to bless us through the sermon today too.

*Father, we are so grateful to You for the way that You have made the world, everything about Your creation testifies to the majesty and wisdom and beauty of Your character, everything about You is delightful and good, and one of the ways we see that is in the way You've created the family. Father, thank You for giving us the family. Thank You for allowing us to be nurtured in the context of love. We pray, we know that some have not had good experiences and we pray for Your grace upon them to even help them honor parents who may not be godly, may not have been kind but still, Lord, now as followers of Christ we want to obey You and we want to honor those You tell us to honor and to respect and to care for and to love those who have blessed us even with just physical blessings. We are so grateful for the gift of motherhood and we pray for all the mothers that are in our church, all the ones that stood today, we pray for Your blessing upon them, those that are at home, that You would fill their hearts with joy in You, their relationship with You, that You would help them, Lord, to delight in their children, You would help us to honor them and to live in a way that would make them rejoice before You that You would be glorified, Lord. We pray that You would bless us now as we study Your word. Grant us the Holy Spirit in its fullness to open the eyes of our hearts that we might see and understand, that we might repent and believe that we might follow Jesus. We pray in His name. Amen.*

So we are again in Nehemiah, Nehemiah 3 today though. Nehemiah 3. We've come to a very interesting chapter in the text of Scripture. It's not so interesting at first glance actually, it's kind of hard to work through as a person today reading this account. What we have is the account of the building of the wall, the beginning of the construction of the wall and we see really an astonishing level of detail that at first glance these are details that, you know, you didn't wake up this morning and want to know about the circumference of the city of Jerusalem at the time Nehemiah was ministering there, you didn't want to know necessarily, I don't think, if you did maybe there's something wrong with you, you know, but what Nehemiah is going to do is he's going to take us on a tour basically around the city of Jerusalem, and so a counter-clockwise trip around the city of Jerusalem. He's gonna start and he's gonna tell us as he's telling us who was building, who was helping, he starts and he takes us around the city beginning at the sheep gate all the way around back to the sheep gate. He's gonna give us lots of details, 75 names occur

in the third chapter. It's actually 39 people because so often the name is, you know, Hilkiah, son of, you know, Eliashim or something like that, so it's two names, one person. But still, 75 names. We have 10 different groups of people described and what they're doing. Each of the 10 gates of Jerusalem named specifically. All kinds of geographical detail that really doesn't mean anything to us today. Now it did mean something to the original audience and that's always important to remember. For us, I mean, it's hard when to read 75 names, you know, as we've gone through Ezra/Nehemiah, I've had to work just to read the chapter all the pronunciations. You know, you just wish it were Jim, Bill, Tom. Nothing like that, right?

So the names are unfamiliar, so there's a level of unfamiliarity that gives a little discomfort. Then the places, we don't know what we're talking about. The fish gate. The water gate, we do know about that but not this water gate. So it's completely unfamiliar and when you're reading that, it's good to take note of that, "Lord, why all these details?" And you ponder it, you ask the Lord for direction and wisdom, and one of the things I said, it helps to remember that it wasn't as difficult for the original audience. These names, you know, Meremoth, Uriah, Hakkoz, they were names that were familiar to them. They actually knew these people or had heard of them, and they knew the circumference of Jerusalem. When this is reported, you know, this section of the wall across from this person's house, they were people who went to Jerusalem regularly to worship the Lord. Every faithful Jew went three times a year at least, and many of the original audience lived in the environment of Jerusalem, in the environments of Jerusalem or in Jerusalem itself. So it would have been much more familiar.

It would be like me telling you, "Hey, when you drive around 285 and, you know, we went to Marietta and then we went on down to the south side and then we passed by where 85 breaks off going south toward Noonan and then we came around past the airport, and then we came up 675." You know, those of you who drive at all, you know what I'm talking about, right? You can see that. That's how they would have read this. They could see it. Maybe another image would be if I were to describe what we had a work day yesterday and I could tell you, "You know, Kim Pitts and Bill Maier, they were working on the education building, the wall in the kitchen. And then next to them there was Phil Bambrick and Karl Reilman were working on the wall in Miss Helen's room. And then..." You get the idea.

So it was familiar to them but still even though it's familiar to them, why so much detail? That's the question we should be asking and I want us to consider that today and what I want to suggest to you, the title of the message is "The Work of the Christian." The work of the Christian. This is the work that you and I are called to do. This passage is calling us to this work. The work of the Christian because what I want to suggest to you is what you've been with us in recent weeks online or you've seen the messages, we're saying that the building of the walls of Jerusalem typifies the holiness, the separation of the Christian from the world, like you build the walls to separate Jerusalem from the ungodly people around them so that the worship of God is protected, so there's this spiritual picture there for us that it's the holiness, pursuing personal holiness. I've mentioned there are several ways we can look at this, pursuing personal holiness, the holiness of our families,

protecting them spiritually, and the church, pursuing the holiness of the church, building the church up in holiness. And that's what I want to focus on particularly today. I think that's really the big picture of Nehemiah, that's how we apply it. We're called to the work of building one another up so that we become more like Christ and more, that means more holy, more different and distinct from the world, and that is the vocation to which you are called if you are a follower of Jesus Christ. That is your primary vocation. That is the one thing that you're doing that will matter in eternity. Now we are to do all of our work to the Lord and whatever vocation we have to make an income is important that you use that for this big purpose, though, but that's a means to the end, the end is building the kingdom of God, and we see what this work entails in this passage. The work of the Christian.

So let's read the text together, verse 1 to 32. "Then Eliashib the high priest," well, let me read from verse 17 into chapter 3. I think it's always helpful not to forget that, you know, chapters aren't so distinct as we sometimes see them. You read out of chapter 2 right into chapter 3 it sometimes helps. So chapter 2, verse 17, we're gonna pick up with Nehemiah calling the people to the work. Chapter 2, verse 17,

17 Then I said to them, "You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach." 18 I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us arise and build." So they put their hands to the good work. 19 But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, "What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" 20 So I answered them and said to them, "The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem."

1 Then Eliashib the high priest arose with his brothers the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They consecrated the wall to the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower of Hananel. 2 Next to him the men of Jericho built, and next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built. 3 Now the sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and bars. 4 Next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz made repairs. And next to him Meshullam the son of Berechiah the son of Meshezabel made repairs. And next to him Zadok the son of Baana also made repairs. 5 Moreover, next to him the Tekoites made repairs, but their nobles did not support the work of their masters. 6 Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars. 7 Next to them Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, also made repairs for the official seat of the governor of the province beyond the River. 8 Next to

him Uzziel the son of Harhaiah of the goldsmiths made repairs. And next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, made repairs, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. 9 Next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, the official of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs. 10 Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah made repairs. 11 Malchijah the son of Harim and Hasshub the son of Pahath-moab repaired another section and the Tower of Furnaces. 12 Next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh, the official of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs, he and his daughters. 13 Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They built it and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars, and a thousand cubits of the wall to the Refuse Gate. 14 Malchijah the son of Rechab, the official of the district of Beth-haccherem repaired the Refuse Gate. He built it and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars. 15 Shallum the son of Col-hozeh, the official of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate. He built it, covered it and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars, and the wall of the Pool of Shelah at the king's garden as far as the steps that descend from the city of David. 16 After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, official of half the district of Beth-zur, made repairs as far as a point opposite the tombs of David, and as far as the artificial pool and the house of the mighty men. 17 After him the Levites carried out repairs under Rehum the son of Bani. Next to him Hashabiah, the official of half the district of Keilah, carried out repairs for his district. 18 After him their brothers carried out repairs under Bavvai the son of Henadad, official of the other half of the district of Keilah. 19 Next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, the official of Mizpah, repaired another section in front of the ascent of the armory at the Angle. 20 After him Baruch the son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the Angle to the doorway of the house of Eliashib the high priest. 21 After him Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz repaired another section, from the doorway of Eliashib's house even as far as the end of his house. 22 After him the priests, the men of the valley, carried out repairs. 23 After them Benjamin and Hasshub carried out repairs in front of their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah, carried out repairs beside his house. 24 After him Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah as far as the Angle and as far as the corner. 25 Palal the son of Uzai made repairs in front of the Angle and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king, which is by the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh made repairs. 26 The temple servants living in Ophel made repairs as far as the front of the Water Gate toward the east and the projecting tower. 27 After them the Tekoites repaired another section in front of the great projecting tower and as far as the wall of Ophel. 28 Above the Horse Gate the priests carried out repairs, each in front of his house. 29 After them Zadok the son of Immer carried out repairs in front of his house. And after him Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, carried out repairs. 30

After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah carried out repairs in front of his own quarters. 31 After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, carried out repairs as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, in front of the Inspection Gate and as far as the upper room of the corner. 32 Between the upper room of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants carried out repairs.

You know, think about that. All of those names, 39 people, 39 individuals, 10 groups, 8 officials, 5 priests mentioned 3 times, what's up with that? I think one of the things is God is granting honor to all of these people who did the hard work of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem by recording their names in the annals of his holy word forever. That's how greatly God values the work of building his city. He counts it worthy of recounting so that we here in 2020 just read the names of people who really physically without any training set their hearts to do the work and started laying the rock and laying the mortar and building the wall. God said to them, "Well done." And that is the work you and I are called to do. For us it's not primarily a literal physical work as it was for them where they really had to slog it away, digging away rubble, picking up the rocks that were still valuable and putting them on the wall. It was grunt work. It was hard work. For us, the work is grunt work and it's hard work but it's more spiritually minded work in the sense that this typifies what you and I do when we build one another up. When you labor with another Christian to minister to them, when you speak the word of truth, when you get involved in their life, when you visit them in their suffering, in their pain, when you take some actual physical kindness to them, you're actually doing a spiritual work that is akin to what these guys were doing in building the city walls of Jerusalem and God honors that, he values that work way more than you or I would imagine.

Now what I want us to see as we look at this, I think there's at least six points here and I hope to get through three today, Lord willing, and three next week about the work that you and I are called to do because the reality is as a Christian you are called to work. We were created for work. Work was a part of creation before the fall. It wasn't an effect of sin. No, sin just made our work a lot harder and more futile but we were created for work. God put Adam and Eve in the garden to tend it and to keep it. God loves to see his people work and we need to recover that because the world doesn't believe work is good. Christians should believe work is good and this does make holy whatever your literal vocation is, it's now holy unto the Lord. That was the beauty of the Reformation, they saw that.

I remember reading about some kind of banner that was put up in London that after the Reformation, maybe the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, I mean late 16<sup>th</sup> century, early 17<sup>th</sup> century, where it said, it showed a picture of like a cobbler, a baker, I don't remember exactly the three professions but it was like, you know, a baker, a cobbler, and a carpenter, and it said, "These three men preach the Gospel every day in London." That is, whatever you're doing, your calling is to take that and make it a platform for the Gospel, but it makes holy the work that you do.

What I want us to see is what does this text tell us about the nature of the work, the urgency of the work, the importance of the work, the way the work is to be done. I think that this is one of the reasons the Lord gave us so much detail is so that we can glean from it some things that we need to understand about the work he's called us to do. We're all called to work. Ephesians 2:10 says that you "were created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has foreordained that you should walk therein." You aren't saved by works, you're saved by grace, you're saved by faith alone, not works, but you are saved apart from works so that you can go to work.

You see this really clearly in the book of Titus, one of the pastoral epistles, those are the epistles that Paul wrote to pastors themselves, not the churches like Corinthians, Philippians, Ephesians. He's writing to the whole church, right? But he wrote to Timothy, he wrote to Titus, they're pastors and he wrote to Titus and one of his major themes is good works. He says in chapter 2, 11-14, he says, "the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly passions and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the Lord Christ Jesus," and then he says, Jesus "purified for Himself a people zealous for good works." That Jesus' desire was to purify for himself, to bring to himself people belonging to him and that they would be zealous for good works, they would be eager to work for him. And the good works that we're called to do really are the building up of people, ministering to the souls of people, the eternal souls of people. That's the work we're called to do.

So let's look at some of the things we see in the text. What is this work that you were called to do, the work of the Christian? The first point this morning and it is an urgent work. It is urgent work. So the first point is urgent work, this work is urgent work. I wanted to see that I wanted you to see as we read out of chapter 2 into chapter 3, the context is so important to see the emphasis of Scripture. When you read out of chapter 2 right into chapter 3, you see something, you see as the text is unfolding the narrative, you have Nehemiah talking to the people, the people determining, "Let us arise and build," in verse 18, so they put their hand to the good work. Then we have this, what you see is it's like they have the meeting and the people say that and it's like they're walking out of the meeting, this isn't exactly how it happened, I don't think, but it's the feeling that you get as you read the text, because listen, when you tell a story, you include, you omit some details that are extraneous, unimportant, you include details. I mean, if you're telling a truthful story you only tell the truth and the Bible only tells the truth, but God leaves out some things and he kept things side-by-side so that there's an impact to it. And so as you read from chapter 2 to chapter 3, this is what the feeling is, they have the meeting, they say, "Let us arise and build," they put their hand to the good work, they're walking out of the meeting, they run into these three guys, this is what the feeling is, Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem. That's not really how it happened. They heard it and they then come after they hear it so maybe take a few days or a few weeks but they come. But he doesn't tell us that. He doesn't say, "Three weeks later Geshem, Tobiah and Sanballat showed up." Do you see what I'm saying? It's like the feeling as you're reading it is they determine it, bam, there's opposition. Nehemiah deals with the opposition, bam, they start the work. I mean,

boom, boom, boom. They decide, they see the problem, Nehemiah calls them to the work, there's opposition but they start the work. That's the feeling of chapter 3 when he says, "Then Eliashib the high priest arose with his brothers the priests and built the Sheep Gate."

In fact, there's interesting repetition that's important to note in chapter 2, verse 18, they said, "Let us arise and build." Chapter 2, verse 20, when Nehemiah's responding to the three, remember these are three governors that surround Jerusalem basically and Judea, Sanballat the governor of Samaria, Tobiah the governor of Ammon, Geshem the governor of Arabia. So anyway but, "Let us arise and build," they say that. These guys come and Nehemiah in response to them says, "The God of heaven will give us success therefore we as His servants will arise and build but you have no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem. Then Eliashib the high priest arose with his brothers the priests and built. Let us arise and build. We're gonna arise and build. They arise and build." That's the flow of the passage and what that does, there's no reference to the passage of time and the decision is made, listen, think about this, remember the secrecy of Nehemiah? Nobody knows what's in his heart. He hasn't told them what he's doing when he goes out and inspects the walls. He basically unveils his intentions at this meeting when he says, "Look at the situation we're in. Hey, we need to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem." And they say, "Let us arise and build." But what I'm saying is there's not a big pile of wood outside that's been delivered.

In chapter 2 when he talked to the king, he got letters from the king for Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, so that he could have timber to rebuild the gates. It's gonna take a lot of lumber to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, to rebuild all of those gates there's got to be heavy-duty lumber, "So please, king, give me a letter for Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, so I can get timber." What I'm saying is there's no timber in Jerusalem right now because if there was timber in Jerusalem his plan would not be secret. So we don't know, maybe three weeks passes, four weeks, however long it takes to say, "Hey, send the timber." But there's no reference to that because the effect that the Spirit of God wanted us to see was the urgency of getting to the work. He omits that because that's extraneous. The point is when you see that there's work to be done, even though there's opposition get to work. The work is too important. Get right to work.

So in context chapter 2, verse 17, when he had told them as we looked at last week to acknowledge the depth of your need, to see the bad situation you're in, the evil that's going on in your life, you see that Jerusalem is desolate, it is a desolation, it's a wasteland, it is a dry barren place, there is no fruit, you see now the evil that you're in, you see in your life the desolation, the fruitlessness that is evident in your life, you see the gates are burned, the walls are down, you see that you're a reproach, the message is don't beat around the bush, get to work. Get right to work. It's too important not to get right to work. In fact, there's a danger of lingering after you know what you need to do and you don't do it. That's sin. You're adding sin upon sin and light rejected, the light of God in convicting you and exposing your need, the light rejected often leads to greater darkness.

So we look at our lives, God exposes areas of need, he shows us this evil area in my life, this place where the walls are broken down, where there is no separation from the world, he shows me an area of desolation, fruitlessness, no love, no joy, no peace in this area, he shows me that this area is a reproach to his name, it's a cause of dishonor to God because I name the name of Christ. So you, you name the name of Christ, you see an area in your life where there is no fruit, where there is desolation and you understand that your sin in this area is a source of ongoing reproach to the holy Son of God. You see how urgent that is to deal with that? If you have repented and placed your faith in Christ, you've been born again, you've been bought by the Lord, then the call is to be holy for I am holy, like Ephesians 4:1 says, walk in a manner worthy of the calling which you have received. So when you find that area that's not worthy of the calling, all that God has done for us in Christ, the glory of the Gospel, that he did not withhold, he did not spare his own Son but delivered him up for us all, that he delivered up his Son to pay for my sins, that he gave me this extravagant love, that he bought me for himself, that he redeemed me from the curse of sin and now I'm living like I'm still under that? No, walk in a manner worthy.

It's urgent to deal with it. The time is now. It is urgent work. The building up of people's lives, the building up of our lives is the most urgent thing. Holiness is the most urgent issue in your life. It is the greatest work that you are doing is to pursue your own holiness and when you are helping someone else pursue their holiness, their personal holiness, you are doing that which is of the most infinite eternal value and it is of the greatest urgency. So when you recognize sin in another brother's life, what does this say? When you see an area that you think there doesn't seem to be any fruit, you know you don't have perfect knowledge but you look and you see instead of the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness etc., you see the deeds of the flesh, the works of the flesh, immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, you see those things in someone's life that you care about, you see they need to pursue holiness and so you see that, you see the desolation, you see that their, it appears that their character in this area is hurting their witness, then what are you supposed to do? It's an urgent issue. You go to them, and of course you go tentatively, you go humbly. Listen, I don't know exactly what's going on but I have some concern that I want to ask you about.

So you ask questions but you don't just leave it alone and just think, "Well, the Lord will take care of it." It's one of the things that we can really fall into is folks that believe in the sovereignty of God. You know, Reformed Christians. We can have this mindset that says, "Well, if God wanted it dealt with, I guess He would deal with it," which is really a very unbiblical way to think because we say that as an excuse for us not doing it. "I guess if the Lord wanted that person to know, He would deal with that." And the Lord is saying to me or you if we're thinking at that time, "You are the one that sees it. You are the one I've appointed to go tell them about it, to talk to."

It's urgent work. The work of building and pursuing holiness in our lives and the lives of those around us is the most urgent work. It is urgent work. Secondly, it is everyone's work. The work of building up the church and building up other believers and pursuing holiness is everyone's work. It's not just for the spiritual Christians. You know, I'm a Christian but I'm just not that spiritual as that guy and I'm just not that into holiness. I

just, you know, it's just not my thing. No, if you're a follower of Jesus Christ, it is your work to pursue your holiness for the glory of God. That's what you're called to do, your most important work.

And not only that, you and I are also called to help every other believer pursue their holiness. It is our work. This thing of everyone's work, I mentioned 39 individuals, 75 names, the high priest, the priests, all the different groups that are mentioned in the passage. It's quite impressive when you look at the listing of the names and the listing of the groups. You have eight officials I mentioned. There's eight different leaders. So it's not just for, this work is for everybody from the top of society to the bottom. It's not just for, you know, the powerful people are called to this work in exactly the same way everyone else is called to this work. I mean, the half-district of Jerusalem, he goes one after another. He mentions the men of Jericho, the Tekoites which basically is the men of Tekoa, the men of Gibeon, the men of Mizpah, the inhabitants of Zerao, so five different geographical locations, these groups come in. He mentions the priests three different times, three different groups of priests are involved in building. Verse 1, verse 22, priests from the valley, verse 28, priests again. The Levites are building, verse 17. The temple servants, they're building and that made repairs, made repairs. In fact, actually in the Hebrew it's the same word. I wish that the New American Standard was like the ESV here at this point. The ESV translates all 35 times the word "repaired" occurs as "repaired." That's actually normally what the NASB does, not the ESV. The thing I like about the New American Standard is it tends to be more literal than some of the other translations and this is one of the times where the ESV beats it out because the NASB uses "made repairs, repaired and repairs," three different ways of saying exactly the same Hebrew word. But the ESV says it "repaired" every time. I think it helps when you hear it that way. I know it was kind of laborious reading it and I'm sure it was laborious listening to it, but you hear it clearer if it's "repaired, repaired, repaired." 35 times "repaired." All of these people are in the work of repairing the wall, strengthening the wall, building the wall.

He mentions goldsmiths, perfumers. He mentions a man building with his daughters, verse 12, "Next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh, the official of the half district of Jerusalem, made repairs, he and his daughters." That had to be an interesting thing for Jews to see that. I mean, it wasn't something that normally the women would have been doing but here they were, they were building as well, showing that this particular work and the spiritual work is everyone's work.

I mentioned he said goldsmiths, perfumers, he says priests, he says Levites, he says temple servants. You know what's interesting is he doesn't ever say carpenters, masons, stone-cutters. He doesn't ever speak of skilled craftsmen. Now God could have appointed skilled craftsmen, you know, he anointed and empowered gentlemen in the day of the building of the tabernacle with particular skill, the text tells us: weavers of fabric, men who could fashion metal. But here there's nothing about that. Why did the Lord not do that here? Well, I think one of the things he's saying basically is there's no mention of carpenters, masons or stone-cutters because the idea is inexperience is no excuse to not be involved in the work. Lack of training no excuse not to be involved in the work. Learn

on the job. You will learn how to operate a trowel by slinging some mortar on the wall and flattening it out, watching somebody doing it and doing it. Laying the rocks. I'm sure there were people helping and instructing but the idea is everyone's called to this. This is everyone's work.

Interesting thing, actually Nehemiah, there is one Nehemiah mentioned but it's not the Nehemiah of the book it's named for. The one name that's not in the list is the name Nehemiah. He's not talking about anything he's doing. Now he's clearly there. He's clearly directing. He's clearly leading but he's pointing out that the Lord is giving all the honor to all of the workers and Nehemiah inspired by the Spirit didn't mention, "I went to see what was happening here. I made sure this was happening." He didn't say any of that. He said a lot in other places but here he just mentions all the different workers underscoring this is every single Christian's work.

You know, I mentioned Ephesians 4:1 a little bit ago in the first point, walk in a manner worthy of the calling which you've been called. It's interesting, turn with me to Ephesians 4 because this makes really clear how the work is we're all called to. You have Ephesians 4:1, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit," etc. Then he goes on down to verse 11 and he's talking about the gifts that the Lord has given to the church and he says, "He gave some as apostles," Ephesians 4:11, "He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service," that really could say the work of ministry, "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." That is the picture actually. The metaphor changes but the command is the same, we are all to be involved in the work of ministry and God gives these offices to the church to equip the saints to do the work. Everyone is to do the work. What is the work? It is the building up of the body of Christ. The metaphor changes, the building up of the body versus the building up of the temple. He uses that metaphor other places.

We're to work to build up the body. We do that as we go on down to verse 15, we do it by "speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ." We help as we build one another, what happens is the church, we help people become more and more holy, more and more like Jesus. There is a sense in which corporately, according to this image here, corporately we together look more like Jesus, and as we're building one another up, we're doing the work God's called us to do, that's the goal. But the point here is it's everybody's work.

We're all called to it and the work is building up, edification. In the next chapter he elaborates a little bit and he says in verse 29, next chapter, next page for me, Ephesians 4:29, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to

those who hear." He's dealing with the problem of anger and sinning in anger but he says, "Listen, when you speak you should only speak words that edify," that is, literally build up. The purpose that we should, every word we say should be intended to give grace to those who hear and to build them up to be more like Christ. That's the calling that we have.

It's everybody's work. We can't say it belongs to others. It's the pastor's work. It's the elder's work. It's the deacon's work. Well, it is their work but it's my work too. It's your work too if you're a Christian, and so when the work is there in front of you, the issue is do the work.

The third point, we're gonna touch on this very briefly and we'll probably finish it up a little more next time, it's not just urgent work, it is urgent work and it is also everyone's work, thirdly, it is holy work. It is holy work. Back to Nehemiah 3, we see in verse 1, he starts, look who he starts off telling us about, "Then Eliashib the high priest arose with his brothers the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They consecrated the wall to the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower of Hananel." When he starts recounting, he starts with here's the people that work, he starts with the high priest, Eliashib the high priest, and his brothers the priests. Everyone was doing the work, yes, but the work they were doing was holy work, and the fact that he starts with them I think is exactly that reason, because he repeats a key word here in this verse twice, the word "consecrated." The NASB and ESV translate it "consecrated." They consecrated it and hung its doors. They consecrated the wall. The NIV says "dedicated." The King James, interestingly enough, comes, I think is very helpful in its translation. Here it says, "they sanctified it and hung its door, they sanctified the wall." The word actually here translated "consecrated" is the word "kadosh" which means "holy." It's kadosh, the verb form of kadosh, holiness or holy, and this mean they set it apart from that which is common to belong to God. That's what holy is, to be set apart unto God. We talked about this last week, to be set apart from the world unto God.

So what they're doing is they're setting apart the building project. The author starts with them to show us as they started building, they're working first on the Sheep Gate which is important because the Sheep Gate is where the sheep were brought in to be taken to the temple. The Sheep Gate, it's right above the temple. They were right at the temple in this part of the wall. So they consecrated the Sheep Gate, they made it holy, they sanctified it, they hung its door. Then they made holy the wall, the section of the wall they started building. So the first gate to be built is holy and the first section of wall is holy, implication the whole project is holy.

This is a holy work. It's not just an urgent work, it's not just everyone's work, it is holy work. This is work set apart unto God. This is work that God looks at differently than he looks at everything else in the world. This is work that's set apart unto him and it is the particular focus of our Father's concern to watch what is happening in this area. This is his. It belongs to him, and so when you and I are involved in the work of pursuing holiness ourselves or helping others pursue holiness, we are involved in holy work, that

which belongs to God. We're remembering that we belong to the Lord. We're remembering how precious his church is to him.

You know, we saw in the passage Ted read earlier before the song "Beulah Land" from Isaiah, the way the Lord delights in Jerusalem and he delights in his people because his people belong to him and Jerusalem is a type of the church, and when we are ministering to the spiritual Jerusalem, when you're ministering to the souls of those who belong to Christ, you are building up Jerusalem, you are doing that which God absolutely delights in. You are gladdening the heart of your Father. That's why Jesus said, "He who does it unto the least of these my brethren does it also unto Me." When you minister to your brother or sister in their need, you are serving Jesus directly.

That is how he sees it. It is holy work which is set apart unto him and distinct from everything else. It is the most precious thing that we can be involved in and we need to cultivate a mindset that sees it this way so that when you're, and listen, we're gonna see this as we continue looking at it, it's hard work. It sometimes feels like you're just slogging away. I mean, if I were to go out and try to build a wall right now, I've actually entertained that idea in the back of my mind a little bit about trying to do that. Some areas we were thinking about doing some rock work, never done any though and it's intimidating. Now this passage is telling me go for it, right? It doesn't matter. If you don't have any experience, just go for it. Well, hey, I can watch a video, right, and learn how to do anything nowadays.

No, but if you're doing the work, you're laboring like that and some of you have done projects like that where it's slogging, it is laborious, it seems thankless, it seems like it's unending. "I'm never going to get there." There's no reward. Listen, how much more is it like that when you're trying to minister to one another when you are yourself trying to fight sin in your own life, that you've been fighting and slogging it against month after month, year after year. The idea is don't give up. This labor, whatever you're doing, is precious to God. The Lord is delighting in your effort to fight and to continue to seek holiness. Nothing gladdens his heart more and when you're doing that with someone else and it feels like, I've said this to you, a mother talking to her child and the child's not listening can be that way, but it can be Christian to Christian, can't it? You're helping the same person with the same problem that they're still struggling with, this message is don't give up, this is holy work. You may need to keep getting some training and some help from other people, you look at the people that are building over here, watch what they're doing and learn how to do it, yeah, that's good too. But don't give up. Don't despise the work. Don't look down upon it. Treasure it the way God treasures it. And if you and I have that attitude, it's amazing, if we'll have that attitude, that itself makes the work more productive. When a person you're trying to help doesn't feel like they're a burden to you but that you're delighted to be able to serve them, that itself has transforming power.

So let's think biblically. Let's put our hand to the good work. Let us arise and build. Let's do it this week. Let's do it today.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for the calling that You've given us as Christians, Lord, that You allow us who are so weak in and of ourselves, so unskilled in the things of holiness, in many ways inexperienced in the pursuit of real transformation, righteousness, You have ordained that the newest baby Christian can pursue holiness and do things of incredible eternal value, so give us more joy and humility but also boldness that goes with it, a humble boldness that trusts in the power of God's word that we can speak the truth in love and we really can edify, we really can build up my brother, my sister, though I don't even think I know what to say, moving toward them and starting to speak, looking to You and what You will do. And I may not see any evidence of anything that happened, it may seem like it was fruitless, there's no fruit, but I'm gonna keep doing it because Your word does not return void. You're doing something in this and if we don't grow weary and lose heart, we will reap the harvest. Father, thank You for being that way with us, that You Yourself are working continually on us, with us, and You don't despise the work. Lord, we look at ourselves and we think You ought to despise the work. We look at ourselves and we see our continued failures, we see our continued weakness, and we would think, Lord, You have better things to do than to mess with the problems in our lives and yet You tell us no, You delight in Your people and You delight in loving Your people and purifying Your people. Let us be like You in our own hearts and in those around us and may Jesus Christ, may He be exalted in an increasingly holy and pure church, in increasingly holy and pure families, in increasingly holy and pure lives. May He be praised. We pray in His name. Amen.*