

# Take Up the Sword and the Trowel

*Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*

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**Bible Text:** Nehemiah 4  
**Preached on:** Sunday, June 14, 2020

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the fourth chapter of Nehemiah. Nehemiah 4. The title of the message this morning is "Take Up the Sword and the Trowel." Take up the sword and the trowel. Some of you will recognize that those words "the sword and the trowel," a familiar name for actually a number of Christian newsletters through the years but probably most famously the mail out or the newsletter of Charles Haddon Spurgeon and during his time of ministry at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The great Prince of Preachers, Charles Spurgeon, would send out edifying instruction in this letter called "The Sword and the Trowel," and so this, that phrase comes from the text we are looking at today. I mean, it's kind of a summary. The word "trowel" doesn't actually occur in the text but the concept is there and it really comes as we're gonna see as we read, look for this in verse 17. He talks about how Nehemiah as he's dealing with the challenges that God has put before them, remember they're trying to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, to restore that sense of separation of God's people, and to restore the protection of the worship and the sanctity of the true worship of the one true God. That the challenge of building the walls is enough of a difficulty in itself with untrained unskilled workers, but this challenge is exacerbated and intensified by the fact that they are under just the threat of attack, and so they're experiencing enemy opposition, great opposition to the work, and so the opposition is actually so intense that they're threatening to come and kill them. So to work, to build the walls of Jerusalem they have, as it were, to have a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other, and you see this in verse 17 when he talks about the workers, they went to the work with one hand and with the other they held a weapon and so this is where that idea of the sword and the trowel comes and what you see, in a sense, I think Spurgeon actually used that in a special way to refer to the work of ministry. You need to have a trowel and you need to have a sword to do the work of ministry but in reality the accurate interpretation is the work of every Christian is the sword and the trowel because Nehemiah is leading the people, the laymen of Jerusalem to this work of building and to be ready to fight.

So it's to build and to fight, that if you're going to build the kingdom of God, if you're going to pursue the glory of God, you will experience opposition. No other way around it. We talked about this last week. All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. No other way around. And as we build his kingdom in our lives and the lives of those around us, we build lives of holiness, we will find that we will be hated by those

who hate God. And we have to understand what it means, what does it mean for us now to hold the trowel and to hold the sword. We're not really talking about literal trowel, we're not really building a physical building, and we're not talking about a literal physical sword because we're not really fighting flesh and blood. So we hold a spiritual trowel and a spiritual sword and so the title of the message then is take up the sword and the trowel and let's read from the fourth chapter of Nehemiah. We'll read the entire chapter.

1 Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews.

Remember Sanballat is the governor of Samaria, a neighboring province to Judah and Jerusalem and so he is angry, he mocked the Jews.

2 He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men [or the army of Samaria would be a better translation] the army of Samaria and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?" 3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was near him and he said, "Even what they are building--if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall down!"

Now these words of Nehemiah,

4 Hear, O our God, how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity. 5 Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before You, for they have demoralized the builders. 6 So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. 7 Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, and that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry. 8 All of them conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it. 9 But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night. 10 Thus in Judah it was said, "The strength of the burden bearers is failing, Yet there is much rubbish; And we ourselves are unable To rebuild the wall." 11 Our enemies said, "They will not know or see until we come among them, kill them and put a stop to the work." 12 When the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times, "They will come up against us from every place where you may turn," 13 then I stationed men in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, the exposed places, and I stationed the people in families with their swords, spears and bows. 14 When I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people: "Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses." 15 When our

enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work. 16 From that day on, half of my servants carried on the work while half of them held the spears, the shields, the bows and the breastplates; and the captains were behind the whole house of Judah. 17 Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens took their load with one hand doing the work and the other holding a weapon. 18 As for the builders, each wore his sword girded at his side as he built, while the trumpeter stood near me. 19 I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "The work is great and extensive, and we are separated on the wall far from one another. 20 "At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us." 21 So we carried on the work with half of them holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared. 22 At that time I also said to the people, "Let each man with his servant spend the night within Jerusalem so that they may be a guard for us by night and a laborer by day." 23 So neither I, my brothers, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us removed our clothes, each took his weapon even to the water.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we are so grateful to You for Your word and we come today knowing, Lord, our great need. We are like the people of Judah, the strength of the burden-bearers is failing in our lives yet there is much rubbish to be cleared away, and we ourselves are unable to rebuild the wall. So Lord, we pray and ask that You might grant us strength, that You might grant us a clearer vision of what You are calling us to do on a daily basis in our lives, and that You might by Your Spirit empower us to walk in holiness. We rejoice that Jesus Christ and His sacrifice are sufficient to give us a standing before You, to give us access to Your throne room so that we can come boldly to seek grace and mercy and help in our time of need. Be pleased with what happens in our hearts, we pray today in Jesus' name. Amen.*

So take up the sword and the trowel. It's really interesting to think about the fact that just the relevance of the word of God, I've just been so blessed as I've been studying through the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and preaching these last few months at how relevant God's word is. I was talking to someone the other day about the year 2020, actually a pastor friend of mine, and he was saying he'd kind of anticipated 2020 was going to be a great year. You know, what a great round number. I mean, how often do you get to have a 2020, 1919, 1818, it only comes around every 100 years where you have that kind of, you know, numerical thing going and, of course, I always thought it was cool too, 2020, 20/20 vision, you know, all that kind of stuff. So he was saying, though, isn't it amazing what a hard year it has been and we're not even halfway through. You know, the coronavirus and the fears that that brought on medically and still is out there, isn't it? Uncertainty. The impact that that had not only on people that we care about, that we love, I mean, not many, I don't know many people that have it so far but we do know we've lost a couple of people in the church or at least family members of church members, most

recently Frankie Gilmore's step-dad, Becky's father, so that we've seen that touch our church. We all have been more impacted even by the economic impact and the changing landscape of our nation. You may be experiencing difficulties in your businesses. We've all learned to work from home. There's been a lot and some good things about it but it's just really, it's so different and some of you are probably more concerned about some of the political impact. You know, a lot of folks speculating on kind of the push toward socialism and control of the government, and many of these things are legitimate concerns, at least to be aware of, right? I mean, certainly should be mindful of these things but it's a lot just in that. Then we add the social challenges that are facing us in recent months with Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd and just continuing situations that calls questions to be being asked and people are wrestling with these difficulties and fears, anxieties.

And so we live in very confusing times, tumultuous times, difficult times, and one of the things that this passage does for us is it encourages us because the people of God in Nehemiah's day were living in very tumultuous times. They were living in troubling times, amidst turbulent circumstances. They were experiencing threats that they had not expected to be experiencing, especially when you think about the joy with which they left, I mean, this would have been some of the older people that left Babylon in the first return, remember? We're looking at around 445 BC right now, 90 years before some of the oldest people maybe and grandparents or parents had come back with great expectation that God's gonna do great things in rebuilding Jerusalem and Israel and the temple, and so things have been very very up and down, though. Lots of challenges and we looked at Ezra and how his second return brought new expectations and hopes and yet those hopes were not realized and now Nehemiah comes back with a third return and here we have even a greater sense of encouragement because he's the cupbearer to the king. An incredibly high honored position in ancient society, one of the king's most trustworthy advisers now Nehemiah the Jew who had been at the right hand of the Persian king is now come back to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. And so there are these great expectations and yet it is not easy; even though he comes back with this kind of blessing, the opposition is incredibly intense. The people legitimately fear for their lives as we read. We see the plots of their enemies who are willing to risk even the wrath of the king of Persia to stop the work of God. So great is the hatred of those who hate God or the people of God.

So they are living in troubling times and what happens when you live in troubling times is you look at the passage, I mean, we see that they are, you know, they have reason, they have legitimate concerns, very legitimate concerns, don't they? I mean, they find out, for instance, about the mockery of these governors Tobiah, the governor of Ammon, Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, surrounding neighbors of theirs who want to stop the work in verses 1 to 3. Then when Sanballat, Tobiah hear about the success that they continue to have, they not only, they're reported to be again very angry and they conspire together in verse 8 to come and fight against Jerusalem and cause a disturbance in it. Cause a disturbance. Interesting word, it means to, actually the root word means "to wander; to be dazed." They want to come to Jerusalem and cause such a disturbance that

it completely distracts the people of God from the work God has called them to do so that they're dazed and confused.

In verse 11, their plot is spelled out even clearer, "Our enemies said, 'They will not know or see until we come among them, kill them and put a stop to the work.'" They want to murder Nehemiah and the people that are working on the wall and this outward trouble is having real inward impact on the people of God and you see this in the passage. Some of this we talked about last week, I just want to remind you of a couple of things to see this because it's encouraging because when you have, when your life, when chaos is on the outside of your life, it is hard, it is impossible really for turmoil not to start coming up on the inside and such is the challenge of the people of God in times of great turbulence and difficulty and you see it in the passage. We saw that the way the impact of these things in verse 5 when Nehemiah was praying to the Lord and he said, "for they have demoralized the builders." The builders, the people who are building the walls of Jerusalem are demoralized by the opposition. We saw that that root idea is actually the word "demoralized" translates to an interesting Hebrew word which means "to be angry; to burn." So the people are angry and they're so angry that they've lost the zeal for the work. They're so consumed with anger at what's going on out there that they've forgotten what they're called to do right here where God has them. They're demoralized. You see, the outward chaos is creating inner turmoil.

Verse 8, that word "disturbance" I mentioned, that they want to cause a disturbance, they want the people to be distracted from the work so that they wander and they're like in a daze. They can't get their minds on what they're called to do. They forget. They're constantly distracted.

Verse 10. This is a quote of the people. This is what the people are saying and so you see in this verse that they're discouraged, "The strength of the burden bearers is failing, Yet there is much rubbish." They're trying to rebuild walls where the walls are broken down. It's like trying to clean something and you can't get the mess out. You know, you try to clean your kitchen, like you let things go for a little while and you've got the dishes are all stacked up in the sink. This doesn't ever happen at my house but I've heard this happens at other people's houses. No, it does happen. Whenever I'm in charge it happens. You know, so you've got a pile of stuff and you can't get to what you need to do because of the mess. You almost can't start cleaning because of the mess. You have to start to clean the mess so that you can get to the real mess. That's what they're saying. The rubbish is so great, we cannot even rebuild. We can't clear away all the stuff we need to clear away just to get to the building.

So they're discouraged. They're demoralized. They're disturbed. They're discouraged and they're afraid. Nehemiah, verse 14 says, "When I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles and said: 'Do not be afraid of them.'" The outward chaos is creating inner turmoil. They're demoralized. They're inwardly struggling with anger that causes them to be fretting and to be no good for God or anyone else. They're disturbed. They're confused. They're discouraged. They feel that it seems hopeless. What good does it do? There's too

much work, there's too much mess. We can't make it. And then they're genuinely afraid for their well-being.

And this passage gives us hope. If you're feeling like that today, if you've been feeling like that recently, if you find yourself feeling like that this week, the word of God has something to say to you and to me and essentially what we find here is God's purpose in his plans have not been sidetracked. He is still building his kingdom. He is still manifesting his glory in the lives of his people who will keep their hearts stayed upon him. Isaiah 26:2, "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You." You keep your mind on the Lord and his work, you will have peace in Christ and you will be of great value and benefit to others around, and it is God's delight to put his people in circumstances just like he did with Nehemiah. I mean, because you think about it, I always like things to be easy. I mean, most of you probably are like that too. Even if you have a task, isn't it neat when you have to do something, you know, and you go and you go to Home Depot, you get the essential tools that you think you need, and maybe you watch a video. That's one the things I've started doing. Isn't that great? YouTube videos to watch how to do stuff now? It doesn't make it fool-proof but it helps a whole lot more than it used to be. Sometimes those guys on YouTube videos are not really giving a realistic view. They don't really know people like me, I guess, when they're trying to explain it. But when you go and you get the materials, you have the right tool, and when you do it and it works, how awesome that is.

I think the way the people of God must have felt throughout history, the history of God's dealing with them, so often the Lord puts them in circumstances where they think, you know, like they come back with Nehemiah, we're gonna build, and they get all excited, "We're gonna build the wall!" Nehemiah comes and says, "Let's rebuild the wall. Look what kind of state we're in," in chapter 2. And they say, "Yes, let's arise and build!" And so they're thinking, "The Lord sent us the right man. Nehemiah is a great leader. The Lord has given us the blessing of the king of Persia. How awesome this is! Let's get to work! Look at how everybody around me is fired up about this. The Lord has put in our hearts to do the work." And you know, they're expecting now that things are gonna work out just like that video they watched of how to build a wall, and it's just gonna happen exactly like it's supposed to and then they run into reality.

God has a way of continually putting his people in circumstances where we see our inadequacy. This is the ways of God. He delights to show himself strong on behalf, in the hearts and lives of people who know how much they need his grace. This is what's happening. This is what happened with Abraham. This is what happened with David. It's what happened with everyone who loves God. You read the Bible carefully, there's always the sense in which things are so much harder than you would have expected. The Lord doesn't take you from Point A to Point B with a straight line. His ways are much more wonderful than that because he's not so concerned just with the outcome or the result. The true and living God is more concerned about a relationship with his people and his people get to know him as they need him and he's so kind and so good and so wise that he never misses an opportunity to bless those who are in Christ with the

maximum blessing which so often comes, most often, almost always comes in times where we see we're insufficient.

So that's what he's doing here with the people of Nehemiah's day and that's what he's doing in our lives and many of you feel that, the weight of that right now, and if you don't feel it right now, you probably won't have to wait long until you do. But the good news is our God is sufficient. And so he tells us how do you respond? What are you to do when you find yourselves in times of outward turmoil and inner confusion? What are you to do when you feel like you can't even get your thoughts straight, you can't bring your mind into focus? You feel like you're wandering continually away from what needs to be happening in your life, what is it that you're to do? And essentially it's to take up your trowel and take up your sword.

There are two points this morning. We'll continue to unpack this passage with those two points: take up your trowel, take up your sword. And what we're trying to do is remember and to see the clarion call of God to his people. He has a very clear call upon the life of everyone who belongs to him through Jesus Christ and essentially there's two main tasks. And the first point, then, is take up your trowel. Take up your trowel. You could also in parenthesis say the imperative is not just take up your trowel, build. In a word, build. That's what they needed to do. They had all of this opposition, they saw all of this turmoil around them. They were discouraged. They were disheartened. They were demoralized. They were afraid. But what were they to do? Not to let their fear paralyze them, they were to take up the trowel and build because God would defend them, God would help them. It's just like God to put us in circumstances like this. So don't be discouraged by the outward trouble. Be focused on the Lord and his work.

So take up your trowel, build. Build what? The walls of Jerusalem. In fact, two subpoints here on take up your trowel and build. That's the first point, right? So the subpoints are going to be two questions to ask and the first question is: what are we to build? You say, "Build? What are we to build?" Well, they're building the walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day. That was this point of redemptive history, God is revealing his glory in the way he deals with these people and dealing the people of Israel and the city of Jerusalem and the temple of the living God, the way he's dealing with that is picturing for us, it's typical, it's a type, it's telling the church, you and me today in 2020 what we're supposed to be doing. This is not a text that tells you how to have a building project for a church building, or this is not a text for a church work day. Work days are great, church buildings are important, but that's not what this passage is about. This passage is about building the walls of Jerusalem and we've talked about this before, Jerusalem in the Scriptures is a type of the true eternal church, the true church, the people who belong to Jesus Christ, and you see this because in Revelation 21 of the new Jerusalem comes down out of heaven, the new Jerusalem is the people of God. It's the bride of Christ. So Jerusalem is typical of the antitype, the true reality, the church, and this is a type that anticipates this reality, the people of God. So build the walls of Jerusalem means to build the walls in a sense of the spiritual city of God which is the people of God.

What does it mean to build the walls of the spiritual Jerusalem, the church? It means to promote separation and holiness. The walls of Jerusalem in their day would give them a separateness, a distinctness, a separation from the nations around them. We've seen how when you read Ezra and Nehemiah, separation is a key theme throughout, that they would be separate from the peoples around them, that they would be different and distinct and not ungodly and wicked like the people around them, but that God has called his people to holiness, purity. So separation from the world, that's what we're supposed to be building. It doesn't mean that we isolate ourselves and we become monks. No, not at all but it means, remember we talked about separated from the world in our sense is not to be taken out of the world. I mean, Jesus said that in his prayer, his high priestly prayer. Remember when he prays for his own in John 17? He says, "Father, I pray not that You would take them out of the world but that You would while they're in the world make them one. You build them in the world." They're in the world. They can't be taken out of the world. Christians aren't supposed to go live away from unbelievers and be completely separate in that sense. No, spiritually separate. To be holy.

So really we said that in separation and holiness doesn't just mean separate from, to be separated from, it means separated unto, it means separated unto God. If you're truly a Christian, you've been born again, you have the Holy Spirit inside of you. You have placed your faith in Christ. You've become one with him and he has separated you unto himself already and the call of the Christian life is to continue to live a life that is separated unto Christ where his Lordship is the primary reality that I'm pursuing; that likeness to Christ is my calling; that I want to be more like Jesus today than I was yesterday.

So then what does it mean to build the walls of Jerusalem? It means to pursue those things. What are we to build? We're to build spiritually. You know, you just look at the passage for how important this building is, the key words in the passage. The word "work" occurs seven times in Nehemiah 4. First in verse 6 when he says, "So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work." Verse 11, they want, the enemies want to stop the work. Verse 15, "When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work." Verse 16, they carried on the work while half of them held the spears. Verse 17, one hand carrying the burdens, one hand doing the work. The word "build" occurs eight times in the passage. "Wall," 10 times. They're building the wall, they're working. You see, even though they're surrounded by all this turmoil and chaos, they are building, they are working. That's what God has called us to.

So the question is: are you? Are you building? Are you working? Have you forgotten your calling? You build by helping others and yourself first, yourself become more like Christ, become holy. Now that's the question what are we to build, we're to build the spiritual body, the church, and that means separating from the world, in our lives to be more like Christ. It means that we're always looking for opportunities to share and to shine the light around unbelievers, to have relationships with them, to be able to share the Gospel with them, of course, but the separateness, the primary focus of our lives is to be holy and so we're mainly pursuing relationships with believers to build one another up to



be like Jesus so that when we are around unbelievers we're really a benefit to them, not becoming more like them.

So that's what are we to build. Take up your trowel, that's the first point, build. What are we to build, 1A. 1B now, the second question: how are we to build? How are we to build? There's really two things I think in the passage in applying this passage that we need to see to answer the question how are we to build, to take up the trowel and build, how do you do it? First of all, the first thing we need to do is pray. Nehemiah, one of the really interesting things about the book is how much Nehemiah prays and how much we're told about that. I mean, clearly all the people of God who really love him, one of the things that marks a true saint is they pray but Nehemiah lets us in on his prayers more than is common as you read through the Old Testament and we have two prayers recorded, or at least the fact of two prayers in this passage that we read today. In verses 4 and 5 he prays, "Hear, O our God, how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads." He cries out to God in the face of that opposition. Verse 9 after he hears about the conspiracy to come and fight against him and cause a disturbance, "we prayed to our God."

So the first thing is to pray and prayer makes a difference in the building. I mean, the prayer that they offered in verse 4 and 5, when they hear about the despising and reproach of their enemies around them, Sanballat and Tobiah, the two governors of surrounding provinces, how they've mocked them publicly. Nehemiah gets the word of exactly what they said and records it for us here and the people are obviously discouraged he says, and as he prays they're demoralized by it, yet what does he do? He prays and though they're demoralized look at what happens after he prays. Verse 4 and 5 are his prayer. Look what he says in verse 6, "So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work." So prayer actually picks them up off the mat, as it were, and they work.

So the first thing we always need to do is pray. Too often we focus too much on what we need to do and we try to do it without praying. Now you have to work, you have to do the work but it's much more important to do the praying. I remember hearing a story about Luther, Martin Luther who was the great German Reformer and when you study his life, he certainly was not perfect. I mean, like no one is. And he was the first guy with the recovery of the Gospel so I think he made more mistakes in a lot of areas than others because he had to answer questions on every area. But he was continually studying, he was writing. I mean, you look, he wrote thousands of letters, he preached thousands of sermons, he taught thousands of classes, seminary classes. I mean, this guy was just a continually laboring, hard working person. Great energy that God gave him in the years that he ministered. Sometimes it was reported that Luther was talking to his friend, Melancthon, and they were talking about the challenges of the next days, the next days and weeks to come and how much harder it was gonna be and they were taking more things on and especially the next day was going to be especially challenging and Luther said to Melancthon, "I don't think I can get it done. I don't know how I can get it done. I know I'm gonna get up three hours early tomorrow." And Melancthon said, "Yeah, that makes sense, that's more time to work." And he said, "No, I need those three hours for

more time in prayer. It was like three more hours of prayer then I have a chance of getting the work done." I know that seem so counter-intuitive to us, doesn't it? But that's really, prayer is dependence upon God and like Charles Spurgeon said, prayer is like the slender nerve, the slender nerve that moves the hand of omnipotence. Prayer seems so unproductive especially when you're thinking about the list of things that have to be done, but the reality is if you don't pray, God will not support you in the work. You have not because you ask not, James 4:2. So we need to pray.

So Nehemiah is an example of that. He led the people in praying. When they heard that the conspiracy was happening, they prayed and God gave them direction to set up a guard and to make this plan of action and to get the weapons together and then suddenly they're defending themselves, they're ready to defend themselves and they're able to continue the work. So how are we to build? The first thing to build is to pray. We need to be praying for our holiness and for the holiness of those around us. "Lord, help us be about Your work today." Praying throughout the day, "Lord, help me be about Your work right now." When you find yourself in a difficult conversation, you stop to pray. "Lord, I want to advance Your kingdom right now rather than just reacting in my own energy, just clearly in my own thoughts. I want to lay hold of the throne of God. I want to go boldly to the throne of grace to receive mercy and help in my time of need." Men ought always to pray and not to faint, not to lose heart, Luke 18:1.

So the first thing we do, how we're to build? We pray. So this is 1B, that was number 1, 1B1. 1B2, what's the second thing you do from this passage as we try to apply this passage in today in our lives? We need to pray and, secondly, we need to speak the truth. Now where do you get that? Well, we're applying this spiritually, right? We're not talking about a physical trowel and a physical building, we're talking about a spiritual trowel and a spiritual building.

Turn with me to Ephesians, the book of Ephesians 2. The Apostle Paul in laying out the book of Ephesians, he basically in the first three chapters he reminds this Ephesian church where he had spent three years ministering, the longest ministry that Paul had in any church that he ministered in that we have in the New Testament was three years in Ephesus, and he writes them back this letter to re-anchor them in the things that he had taught them and he gives them just this full explication of the Gospel, reminding them in chapters 1, 2 and 3 the way of salvation, what God has done. The first three chapters in a sense are like the indicative mood. You know, the indicative is where you state facts. Chapters 1 to 3 are mostly the indicative statement of what God has done for us in Christ. And then chapters 4 to 6 are like the imperative. It's like the mood changes. I'm not saying that everything's imperative and everything's indicative. No, I'm saying that essentially the flow of the book is the first three chapters, look at what God has done for us in Christ, the last three chapters, now what are we to do in our lives. And so chapters 4, 5 and 6 are kind of what we're supposed to be doing and I think a really helpful, I think it applies really well and you see it as you look at this, it's to build, and you see this kind of set up if you understand chapters 2:19-22, part of that indicative part he tells us that as Christians now Jew and Gentile have come together in one body. Chapter 2, verses 11 to 22, he's made peace through the blood of his cross and we who used to be far off, every

Gentile was far off, the only people close to God in the Old Testament in the old covenant were the Jewish people who had the Torah, who had the temple sacrificial system, who could really meet with God at that time, and everyone else and most everyone in this room would have been in the group of the Gentiles. Our ancestors were far away from the things of God. And so Paul is telling this group of believers in Ephesus who were mostly Gentiles though there's a number of Jews there too, "You now have been brought together in one." This dividing wall that kept Jew and Gentile separate has been abolished in the cross. When God abolished the dividing wall between us and him, our sin, by bringing us to God through Christ, we become in Christ when we believe the Gospel and now we are able to go, we have access to the Father. That means everyone who has access to the Father is now one in Christ. That's the only way we can really have peace with our brothers and sisters, with people in this world. Christ is our peace.

Well, he says that and he lays that out and then he says, "Listen, what you need to think of yourselves," in verses 19 to 22. "So then you were no longer," this is Ephesians 2:19, "you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household," and here's the metaphor, "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." So he says basically the church is a temple. It's going right along with this building metaphor and we see this in other places. 1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Peter 2:1-5. The church is a building, a spiritual building and so we, then, are building this building. We're called, we're now part of this building and we're called to build this building.

Now that's in the indicative part and he changes metaphors but the same idea is in view when he comes to what are you supposed to be doing. Remember, I said that's in chapters 4 to 6 of Ephesians. And in chapters 4, basically 1 to 16, he says this: what you're supposed to be doing is building one another up. You're supposed to be building one another. Now he uses a different metaphor, he says the body now. This is one of the second major metaphors that Scripture uses for the church. You're not only the temple of the living God, you are the body of Christ. Another one, you're the bride of Christ, right? But the body, the body works together to edify itself and to build itself up. Think about this, the hand works to reach for the food, I started to say the hamburger. Yeah, hamburger is fine food. There's nothing wrong with that. It's beef. You know, beef eats cattle, therefore I've eaten vegetables when I eat a hamburger, right? Anyway, sorry about that. The hand is involved in the edification of the body. It has to bring the food to the mouth. The mouth chews the food, swallow the food, the digestive system works to get the nutrients to the cells, right? It's a team effort. The feet have to get you to walk to the table or to go to the store.

So every part of the body's at work in just the natural physical edification of the body, so it's true in the spiritual body. We're all to be a part of edifying each other. We're all to be building one another up. We're supposed to be and we all have different roles in the body. Paul uses the same image of a body in 1 Corinthians 12. It's really a beautiful picture there where he talks about how much each part of the body needs every other part of the

body. He basically says how can one part of the body look to another part of the body and say, "I don't need you"? I mean, can the eye because the eye is so proud because, hey, the eye, that's a pretty good place in the body if you think about it, right? I mean, that's impressive. You're an eye but what are you without an eye socket? You're something gross on the floor. No, what are you without the optic nerve? What are you without the brain? What are you without the rest of the body? What are you without a heart beating blood to get through into your eye? What are you without lungs to bring oxygen to your eye?

You are nothing without everything else in the body and therefore we should have the same concern and care for every member of the body and so we should be looking to nourish and seek the help of every other member of the body. That is only just logic. Anything less than that is insanity and that's why it's so crazy for us as believers to harbor grudges with one another, to be unkind to one another, not to be willing to help one another, not to be willing to lovingly confront one another when we see a brother in need. When you do it out of a desire to really promote the health, the spiritual well-being of another Christian, that's love.

Now you can do it in wrong ways. You can do it in harsh ways. You can do it in ways that hurt and destroy and tear down and that's why you're supposed to obey the exhortations of Scripture and Paul gives some clear guidance even in this letter of how to build. He says in Ephesians 4:29 after he talks in 4:1-16 about building the body, he says this is 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." A Christian who is building is one who's speaking for edification and, in fact, I said that, you know, we're to speak the truth, that's here so clearly as you look at this passage. We're not going to read through, we don't have time, but in verse 15 he's talking about the growth of the body and he says in Ephesians 4:15, "but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." Speaking the truth in love is what gets that going. That's what brings life. That's like the blood and the oxygen, taking oxygen to the cells. It's the truth. As we're loving each other and caring about each other and speaking truth to one another, God is building his body.

So you pray and you speak the truth. I mean, you're trying to apply it. It's interesting how he then continues to unfold this, the way Ephesians unfolds is really elegant and it's simple, straightforward but it's so rich. What he says after these first 16 verses of chapter 4, he's basically saying build the body which is build the temple, build the church, build one another, and then he says to build one another, he then gets really practical and from 4:17 to chapter 5, verse 14, he basically says the way you're gonna build the body is you're gonna pursue your own personal holiness. That's the first thing you do to build the body. That's the first thing you do to build the walls of Jerusalem.

So when things are going on and there is chaos around you, what is your first task? Pick up the trowel and pursue holiness yourself, myself. I need to pursue holiness. That's what I need to do in this moment. He gets really practical. He shows that it means putting off the old man, putting on the new man. You go through life, he says you're tempted to anger, be angry, don't sin. Rather than speak unwholesome speech, put on words of edification. Don't tear down. Learn how to do this by trusting in Christ, in who you are in Christ. You're one with Jesus. If you truly know him, you are not just a Christian, you are in Christ. Everything that he is is now true of you. His righteousness is your righteousness before God and his righteousness is able to be manifest in your life by faith as you rest in him and trust in him and cling to him.

But that first part is put off all of these things. Put off lying, put on speaking truth. Put off stealing, put on working hard to give to others. Walk in love. Walk in holiness. He goes all the way through chapter 5, verse 14, and he's saying all of these things, "Be holy yourself. Work on your holiness." Then in 5:15 to 6:9 he says how do you keep building? You've been working on yourself, now work on others. Then he talks about relationships. After he introduces it by saying, "Yeah, be filled with the Holy Spirit and being full of the Holy Spirit means that you're going to be submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ," that is being full of the Holy Spirit, the evidence of being full of the Holy Spirit is that you're willing to put others' needs above your own. A person who's walking in the Spirit is putting other people's needs above their own because, you see, the Spirit of God manifests the Spirit of Christ and what was Christ always doing? He was not looking out for his own interests, he was looking out for the interest of others. Ephesians 2:3, "have this mind in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus who although He existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped but He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant." Literally, a slave. He took the form of a slave and he did good unto others and he became obedient, Paul continues, obedient to the point of death even the death of the cross. Christ made himself of no reputation, of nothing so that he might bless us and so if you're full of the Spirit, this is beginning to be evident in your life and so Paul says you're killing your sin, you're seeking by God's grace to walk in holiness in the first part of chapter 4 to chapter 5:14, now he says now in your relationships, pursue holiness and edify others. He talks about the marriage relationship in 5:22 to 5:33. He says, "Husbands, love your wives. Wives, submit to your husbands. Wives, respect your husbands. Husbands, care for your wives as you care for your own bodies." He says, "What I want you to do is edify the person closest to you. Don't be thinking so much about what's out there and what's wrong over here, do the work right where you are."

That's what God wants from us, so serve your spouse. Don't accommodate their sinful desires, don't cooperate with any kind of sinful agenda they have. No, love them and truly serve them by walking with God and seeking their best and that means sometimes you're gonna say hard words to them. And we ought to if we aren't fools. We can be fools a lot. If we aren't foolish, a wise man loves rebuke. A wise man invites disagreement and invites instruction. So that's gonna happen. The husband/wife relationship is to be this kind of precious place where he's saying basically, "If you want to know what to do when

things are going on, going crazy around you, build Jerusalem, build the church by being a godly husband or a godly wife."

Then he says, now let's talk about the parent/child relationship in chapter 6, verses 1 to 5 or 1 to 4. He says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord. Parents, don't exasperate your children. You know, don't provoke them to wrath." So he's saying, "Children, what are you to do to glorify God in the midst of this crazy world? Be an obedient son or be an obedient daughter for the glory of God. Obey your parents in the Lord for this is right." Parents, what are you supposed to be doing? You're supposed to be disciplining, bringing your children up in the discipline and admonition of the Lord, seeking their good, seeking their growth in grace. This, if you do that, you are building Jerusalem even though the world may be very confused and very troubled.

Then he goes on to talk about the relationships between slave/master or the employer/employee relationship for us. So at work, how are you treating the people you work with? How are you treating your boss? How if you're a boss, if you're over people, how are you treating those under you? He basically says, "Listen, rather than get all preoccupied with things you can't control." Isn't it amazing how much time we waste thinking about things we can't control? He says get to work. Do the things that you can control because if you will pray and if you will labor in the power of God, you can really be building the kingdom of God. You do it by pursuing personal holiness and helping other people pursue their own holiness for the glory of God and it's the happiest place to be. To be holy is truly, to be truly holy in Christ, not in some kind of legalistic Pharisaical mirage but to be truly holy in Christ where you know that you are saved because Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for your sins and that you know that you would be under the wrath of God apart from him and you're clinging to Christ by faith, and that faith and love for him is expressing itself in a deepening repentance where you're turning from sin and you're walking in holiness, that is the happiest place in the universe. No place compares to that. Everything else is a lie. It's not true. Just like Satan when he lied to Eve and said, "Take this fruit, it will give you life," and it brought death.

So today there's so many lives that are being told this is life but the reality is it's death. The only place of life is at the feet of Jesus Christ, submitted to him, loving him, setting yourself apart unto him and helping others to know him and pursue him. That is life. That is joy. That is peace. And that is your calling and you have, because of the riches we have in Christ, you have everything necessary to pursue this tremendous life-changing, life-altering behavior and impact. You can do it because the Spirit of God is in you if you know Christ and the word of God is an all-sufficient tool. You know, we're not to get distracted, we're not to allow division in the body. All that happens around us. And even when things aren't as crazy as they are right now, life's always distracting. Isn't it easy, how easy to be engaged in everything else other than that which truly produces life. Isn't it amazing how easy it is to pick up your cellphone before you pick up your Bible? Some of you young people, you pick up your cellphone and you can pick up your Bible, I think that's dangerous, actually. Now I don't mean really. I do think, though, I have to, it's better for me to just leave my phone over here and pick up my Bible because when I pick up my cellphone, you know, you get those, if you're trying to read your Bible on your

phone, you get reminders and stuff. I think that's, I didn't intend to say that but just think about that.

Anyway but isn't it amazing how easy it is to be distracted and to be consumed in our thoughts with so many things that really we have no power to impact or very little. I don't mean you're supposed to be ignorant, we're supposed to be over here with our heads in the ground. No, we need to be informed. We need to be aware, yes, but that is, it needs to be in its appropriate place in our life. We're aware what's going on, we're concerned, we're praying, we're aware of how this might be impacting people we love and we care about, we're aware so that we can be a blessing to people that we come in contact with in our daily lives. Yes, we have to be aware but the main thing that we can be aware of those things but we need to be preoccupied with Jesus and if you're preoccupied with Jesus, then that's gonna create opportunities to shine him and to share him with others. The greatest blessing that we can give is to help people know Christ.

We're gonna have to spend next time looking at the second point, the second main point which is take up your sword. We'll look at that next week but, first of all, take up your trowel, build, build the temple by pursuing personal holiness and by building those around us to help them become more like Christ and that is work, that is work that will last for eternity. There's only two things that are eternal in this life. Think about that, that's true. There's only two things. The institutions, all of the accomplishments of people in this world as wonderful and noble as some of them are and as ugly and evil as other things are, the reality is only two things are eternal and that is the word of God and the souls of men. So invest, I need to invest, you need to invest, we need to invest in things that are eternal.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for the privilege of knowing You and having an anchor for our souls in Christ, that when the storms and the currents of our culture, the currents that sometimes just come into our personal lives and families of pressures and things that bring anxiety and fear or discouragement or anger, these things come around us, it's so good to have an anchor. Precious it is to know Jesus is even holding the storm, He's sovereign over everything and that He's allowed us to be in this moment so we can know how much we need Him and we can grow in our love for Him, our personal experience of fellowship with Him. Sometimes that's the fellowship of His sufferings, it's also, though, the fellowship of His resurrection. Lord, make Your people holy. Make us holy. Help us to see that all that matters is Christ. Help us to know that all that matters is the Gospel and even in saying that, help us then to become great sources of blessing to those around us as we move into their lives, as we connect with people who don't know You. May they see the joy that is within us, the hope that is within us, and may they ask the reason for that hope and may we be able to tell them it is Jesus Christ. Lord, in these difficult and trying times when people are asking so many questions, Lord, let the answer they see in us be Jesus. The answer to every question truly is if you really want the solution, it is Jesus. Let that be our testimony. Lord, make it so. Bring many people out of the darkness into light in these days and we will give You glory and praise and we will rejoice that*

*You have done as You always do, that which is perfect and right and best. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*