

I. Introduction:

- A. The book I am currently reading is entitled, *“An Anthology of the Early Baptists in Rhode Island.”*
1. It is 600 pages of historical documents from 17th and 18th century.
 2. To say the least, it is difficult, but sometimes interesting, reading.
- B. As you should know, Rhode Island was founded on Baptist principles.
1. It was the first colony or state in the world to offer total religious liberty to anyone who chose to live there.
 2. And as a result, after the first few decades, Quakers, Anglicans, Antinomians, Arminians and others began to move in.
 3. And they lived peaceably among each other – totally unlike the colonies around them – Connecticut, Massachusetts and Plymouth.
 4. But – when it came to church membership, the Baptist church pastored by John Clarke, received only people who had been born again and immersed in water as a testimony of their faith in Christ.
 5. Religiously, the First Baptist Church had spiritual fellowship only with those who held to similar doctrines.
- C. Jerusalem, in Nehemiah’s day, was much like early Rhode Island.
1. It was typical of cities around the world – both then and today.
 2. Its residents included a wide variety of people – including different races and religions.
 3. But for the most part they got along well enough, until their religions got involved.
 4. There were occasions when Nehemiah and Ezra demanded that God’s people separate themselves from the unbelievers because they intended to take care of something spiritual.
 5. And on 24th of Tishri in about the year 445 BC they again made that demand of the people of Jerusalem.
 6. I would not be surprised to learn that the unbelievers had earlier been welcome to hear God’s Word.
 7. But not now.
- D. This chapter contains one of the longer prayers that we find in the Word of God.
1. It begins with praise & then summarizes the history of Israel in the light of God’s providence & judgments.
 2. That history should be fairly familiar to you, and perhaps you have memorized a verse or two.
 3. At this time, I don’t plan on going through this prayer as a single discourse, but we will probably look at some of its highlights.
 4. This evening however, before we get to the prayer, I want to point out the first half of **verse 2** – *“And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers.”*

II. I believe that it is God’s will that we live among the lost – at least for the time being.

- A. It was the will of the Lord that Israel go into captivity and to live among the heathen during that time.
1. And while they were away, God permitted the Canaanites to reenter Israel and to dwell in Jerusalem.
 2. When Judah returned they began to live among the unbelievers – just as it is in Israel today.
- B. More recently, when the Mayflower brought the Puritans to North America they had the hope of establishing a kingdom where only God’s people would live.
1. But because of the universality of sin, and because they could not establish the Millennium without the presence of the Saviour, their experiment was a total failure.
 2. Then a few years later, in Rhode Island, there was an experiment of a different kind, and it ultimately succeeded.
- C. You and I, today, are supposed to be witnesses of God’s grace to a world in sin.
1. We are not supposed to isolate ourselves; to hide away in our church building; to never tell others that we are children of God.
 2. Our neighbors need the Saviour, and the only way they are going to hear of Him is through our testimony.
 3. The only way they are going to catch a glimpse of Him today is through seeing Him in us.
 4. So they need to see our joy in Christ; they need to know that we live according to Heavenly standards.

5. When we get sick and die, our neighbors need to realize that we are only moving on into the presence of our Saviour.
6. The world needs to hear what it is that makes us different – why we are unique.
7. It is not our commission to idly mill about wasting our time, awaiting the return of the Lord.
8. Beginning at Jerusalem, and in our Judea, then throughout Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth we are to preach the gospel to every creature.

III. But at the same time we must maintain our uniqueness – some degree of separation.

- A. In my study of Nehemiah's use of the word "*separate*" a few simple points came to my attention.
 1. Almost every time the word is used in either Testament, there is a specific purpose for that separation.
 2. We are not simply to isolate ourselves from the unbeliever because we aren't like them – or we don't like them – but rather we are to separate for specific reasons and seasons.
 3. It is in order to properly worship or to accomplish some special work – as it was in this case.

- B. Let's read the rest of **verse 2** – "*And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.*"
 1. As Bro. Austin pointed out on Sunday, the gift of repentance is not given only to individuals whom the Lord intends to save.
 2. Christians need to live in a humble attitude of repentance – because sin is ever with us.
 3. And there are times when churches need to repent corporately.

- C. And what we see in this verse is an illustration of that.
 1. Sanballat and Tobiah were not a part of this surrender of God's people to the Lord.
 2. Even if they hadn't burst into open laughter, they would have at least smirked and later joked about it.
 3. Repentance, whether private or corporate is something only between the humble sinner and his God.
 4. Yes, there will usually be more public effects, changes in life-styles and changes in relationships, but the initial act should not necessarily be for the world to view.
 5. "*And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.*"

- D. The Bible which I use for study is a **Thompson Chain** edition of the King James Version.
 1. In margins are the editor's notes – linking the scripture under consideration to others in a sort of chain.
 2. And then in the back the entire chain printed out.
 3. Beside **verse 2** is the number **#289** followed by **Nehemiah 10:30** and toward the back of my Bible under **#289** are six verses under the heading, "*Examples of Israel's Separation from the Heathen.*"
 4. Somewhat of a surprise to me, five of those examples come from **Ezra** and **Nehemiah**.

- E. The first of those references is **Ezra 4:3** in which "*Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto (the adversaries of God), Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us.*"
 1. Might we teach from this verse that when it comes to the Lord's church, the children of God should separate themselves from world and from the lost?
 2. We might apply this to seeking the world's support for building a church and even its building.
 3. We could apply it to some people's attempt at building church memberships on unsaved people.
 4. I think verses liked these condemn those churches which seek to incorporate the things of the world into their buildings and philosophy.
 5. I have heard of Baptist churches which have built bowling alleys and swimming pools in their facilities in order to attract the lost and keep their young people.
 6. I'm not sure churches like this are worthy of the "*Baptist*" name.

- F. The second reference in Thompson's chain is **Ezra 6:19-22** – *“And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month.*
1. *For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.*
 - a. *And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel, did eat,*
 - b. *And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful...”*
 2. Wasn't it at a much later Passover that the Lord Jesus established the ordinance of Communion?
 3. I'm not implying that the Passover and the Lord's Supper are the same thing, but there is a relationship between them.
 4. And I am convinced that when it comes to the Table of the Lord, not only should the lost be excluded from that table, but also all those who are not members of the church.
- G. The fourth scripture in Thompson's chain is found in **Nehemiah 10:30** where God's people admit they should not give their daughters to heathen husbands, and they should not take unsaved women as their wives.
1. This is so blatantly obvious that should hardly be mentioned.
 2. Unfortunately it must not only be mentioned in our day – but even emphasized.
 3. When a child of God marries a child of the devil, 99% of the time it will be the devil's family that wins.
 4. That Christian will not be able to serve the Lord as God commands.
 5. There should be a separation made between the saved and the lost at the wedding ceremony.
- H. The next reference in that chain is found in **Nehemiah 13:3** – *“Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel the mixed multitude.”*
1. As we shall see when we get to that chapter, some of the people with mixed marriages – heathen and Jewish couples – had become relatively powerful – financially and politically.
 2. Many of those marriages took place in order to establish alliances which were to be used against the Jews.
 3. Israel simply could not move forward until those people and families were set on a shelf – separated and stripped of their power.
 4. Like all the others, this separation was for a specific purpose.
- I. The sixth, and last, reference in the notes of my Bible is **Psalms 119:115** – *“Depart from me, ye evildoers, for I will keep the commandments of my God.”*
1. In this case, notice the relationship between keeping God's commandments and separation.
 2. Mark it down – without separation from sin and the world, there will be very little obedience to God.
- J. The point which immediately follows **#289** in my Thompson Chain Bible – is **#290** under the heading *“Separation from Evil Associations.”*
1. Again, most of them were given in specific situations.
 2. For example, **Isaiah 52:11** – *“Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD.”*
 - a. In the Old Testament those that carried the vessels of the Lord were the priests and Levites.
 - b. In the New Testament they include you and me – people who profess to be children of God, who carry Bibles to church, who occasionally bow their heads in public prayer.
 - c. The professed sons of Aaron, the Levites, the sons of God and brothers of Christ, must separate themselves from the unclean – the sinful, the morally disgusting and the politically ungodly – in order to carry the holy tools and vessels of the Lord.
 - d. If you need a reason to live holy, remember that your God is holy, and you represent His name.

- K. Thompson's next reference is **John 15:19** where Jesus said, *"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."* Perhaps this verse isn't as sharp in its point as others.
1. But the implication is this: the world hates our Saviour, therefore separate yourself from the world.
 2. The Lord has **chosen us out** of the world, **to live outside** the world, **so love not** the world.
 3. While still maintaining a testimony of Christ in the midst of a world that hates Christ, remember who you are and to what the Lord has chosen you.
 4. To be a close friend of the world is to be a traitor to Christ.
- L. **Ephesians 5:11** teaches us to live separate from the unsaved, because we must be able to honestly point to their sins and their needs of Christ.
1. *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."*
 2. We live in the midst of a world full of unfruitful and deadly works of darkness; there is nothing we can do to correct that, except wait for the Lord to deliver us.
 3. But we must not have fellowship with those things, because we have a responsibility to shine the light of the Lord into that darkness.
 4. *"If the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."*
- M. **II Thess. 3:6** – *"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us."*
1. Most people wouldn't deliberately stick their hand into the den of a wolverine or a wolf.
 2. When we know that the snake is poisonous, we know better than to fellowship with it.
 3. But when that wolf is dressed like a sheep – the situation is more dangerous.
 4. When the true identity of the wolf is known immediately withdraw yourself.
 5. That was one of the problems with the mixed multitude in Nehemiah's day.
- N. Nearly everyone is familiar with **II Cor. 6:14-18** – *"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers."*
1. Young, immature Christians – may not like the idea of limiting fellowship with their former friends.
 - a. They may have become entangled and yoked with unbelievers, and they can't see the problems.
 - b. But even this well-known scripture ends in a context and with a reason.
 2. *"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?*
 - a. *And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?*
 - b. *And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*
 - c. *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,*
 - d. *And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."*
- O. Ezra, with the help of others, had been publically reading God's word to the people, and the Holy Spirit was driving it home to people's hearts.
1. Ezra and Nehemiah were trying to tell the people of Jerusalem that they had a choice –
 - a. They could fellowship with the world and all of its pleasures and promises.
 - b. Or they could fellowship with the Lord who had redeemed them.
 2. With the first choice, they might have had pleasure and happiness for a season.
 3. But in the second was joy of the Lord for ever more.
 4. *"As God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people... And I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."*
 5. A proper kind of separation from the world – and from the unsaved people of the world – is a part of path towards the enjoyment of the Lord's blessings – and towards usefulness to the Lord.