

A Call to Purity of Life¹

Nehemiah 13

INTRODUCTION:

1. Nehemiah had left Jerusalem and gone back to the royal court of Babylon (v. 6), perhaps in fulfillment of the promise made to the king before he was sent to build the wall (2:6).
2. How long he had been away is difficult to say, but on returning he found things in a very grievous condition.
 - a. Backsliding had set in with a powerful tendency to compromise with evil.
 - b. People had become lovers of money more than lovers of God.
3. At once, the single-eyed man of God raised his voice against them and their unseemly doings and sought to bring the people back to a life of conformity to the word and will of God.
4. What their hindrances were to a life of purity and power are very much the hindrances with which we have to do.

DISCUSSION: Notice their relationship...

I. To the mixed multitude.

- A. "When they heard the law, they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude" (v. 3, KJV).
- B. So they would not lose their identity, the Law forbade the mixing of the people of God with the people who did not know God.
- C. When the mixed multitude went up out of Egypt with Israel, this did not mar their character as the people of God; but it was different when God's people went with the mixed multitude.
- D. Our relationship to the world should be the same as that of Christ, i.e. in it, but not of it.
- E. The world is indeed a "mixed multitude." One of the dangers for the followers of Christ is to get too closely associated with the world and its ways and lose their distinctive nature (cf. 2 Cor. 6:17).

II. To false professors.

- A. Eliashib was somehow allied with Tobiah (vv. 4-9).
- B. Tobiah may have had the name of a saint ("goodness of Jehovah"), but he had the nature of a godless sinner.
- C. It was a startling discovery Nehemiah made in coming back to Jerusalem to find that his old enemy who had mocked them while building (4:3) was now comfortably quartered in one of the large chambers that should have been used as a storeroom for the house of God (v. 5).

¹ James Smith, *Handfuls on Purpose* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947), VI:152-155. Adapted by Andy Kizer.

- D. Tobiah had neither portion nor right in Jerusalem (2:20), but there are men who are mean enough to take all the personal comfort they can get out of the house of God while denying God in their hearts and sneering at His servants.
- E. The unholy relationship between Eliashib and Tobiah was an alliance that often leads the overseers of the house of God into God-dishonoring compromises with the worldly-minded.
- F. Nehemiah would tolerate nothing that disgraced the name of God so he “threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber” and occupied it with the things of God (vv. 8, 9).
- G. Tobiah’s household effects may have been beautiful and expensive, but they were as filthiness in the holy place, because they were still Tobiah’s and not God’s (cf. 2 Chron. 29:5).

III. To the house of God.

- A. Another source of danger to the purity and power of the life of a child of God is to allow self-interest to overrule the claims of God’s house.
- B. “Why is the house of God forsaken?” asked Nehemiah (v. 11).
- C. It is a reproach to God that His house should be forsaken (vv. 10, 11).
- D. The Levites and singers “had fled each to his field,” because their portions had not been give to them.
- E. To withhold the offerings needed to maintain the work of the Lord is equivalent to robbing God (cf. Mal. 3:8).
- F. The laborer, not the ornamental loiterer, is worthy of his hire.
- G. Malachi 3:10 seems to suggest that there is a connection between giving and spiritual blessings, but the church in Laodicea had plenty while in a state of spiritual destitution (cf. Rev. 3:14-22).
- H. More than the gifts, there must be a purity of motives in giving.

IV. To the Lord’s day.

- A. Nehemiah contended with the nobles for permitting buying, selling and transferring goods on the Sabbath day (vv. 15-22).
- B. Such practices were an infringement of the Law of God (Lev. 23:32).
- C. During the Mosaical Dispensation, Saturdays belonged to God.
- D. God gave them to Israel to be “as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them” (Ezek. 20:12).
- E. Indifference to God’s day could only be interpreted as an expression of disregard for the God Who gave it.
- F. The Lord’s day now (the first day of the week) is regarded in many different ways.
- G. Sunday is the Lord’s day, and is a gift of God, sanctified by Him in the raising of His Son from the dead.

V. To one's spouse.

- A. "In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah..." (vv. 23, 24).
- B. The fruit of such marriages was a marred example of God's people.
- C. The children were not to blame.
- D. Getting unequally yoked with unbelievers has marred the lives of many of God's children. Even Solomon was led into sin through this course (v. 26).
- E. Those who would marry "only in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39) must court "only in the Lord."
- F. The Christian man who sets his affections on a "foreign woman" ("outlandish," KJV; v. 26), or the Christian woman who allows her affections to be captivated by an outlandish man are proving the outlandishness of their own hearts to the Lord.
- G. A godly man (or woman) may suffer the persecution of a godless mate (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12).
- H. Christian fathers and mothers are not to give their children to unbelievers, no matter what their social standing might be (v. 25).
- I. Light and darkness have no fellowship (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14-18).

CONCLUSION:

1. Nehemiah 13 is a call to purity of life.
2. There is much to learn concerning our relationships.
3. Relationships may determine our happiness and eternity.
4. The most important of all relationships is the one we are privileged to have with Jesus Christ (cf. 1 John 1:7).