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Nehemiah 13 Continued Needed Reforms

“A person who manifests a self-reliant recognition of wrong assigns to himself the power to do better and then gives himself to spiritual-looking acts of penance that makes him feel good about himself and his potential ability to do better.”

The people of God had just done two things, two big things
They had publicly rededicated themselves to keeping the Law of Moses
They had corporately worshipped God in ways they had previously never done

But...the outward actions did not necessarily change their inner condition

Behavior modification by itself is no substitute for heart transformation
Why?

The kingdom of self is very skilled at wearing the clothing of the kingdom of God.
So:

- A focus on material things can masquerade as good stewardship of your possessions
- Loving personal control can masquerade as using God-given leadership gifts
- Anger can masquerade as having a heart for what is right
- Self-righteous legalism can masquerade as loving God's law
- Building your own ministry empire can masquerade as a commitment to the expansion of God's kingdom
- Fear of man can masquerade as a sensitive heart toward the needs of others
- Selfish attention-seeking can masquerade as being candid about your needs
- Judgment and criticism can masquerade as a commitment to honesty
- Theological pride can masquerade as a commitment to God's truth
- A craving to be known and respected can masquerade as a commitment to ministry
- Bondage to the opinions of others can masquerade as a commitment to community
- Lust can masquerade as a celebration of the beauty of God's creation
- Gossip can masquerade as a prayerful concern for others

The whole story of the gospel in our Bibles is a story of people who are desperately trapped in sin and have no hope except the rescuing grace of Jesus the Redeemer.

The main idea of Chapter 13 is this: **When you are confronted in your sin, convicted, and brought to repentance, it is because God has shown His merciful love to you**

So how do you respond to confrontation?

Do you respond with humility and repentance, or do you react in anger?

Does the issue suddenly become the person confronting you?

Do you tell him or her never to talk that way to you again, and then avoid that person from that day forward?

In Nehemiah Chapters 1-6 the returnees rebuilt the city wall

In Nehemiah Chapters 7-13 both Ezra and Nehemiah work to rebuild the people

In Chapter 13, we are going to see the people of God being confronted for their sins, multiple sins against God and His Word

Nehemiah 13:1-3 *On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people. And in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, for they did not meet the people of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them - yet our God turned the curse into a blessing. As soon as the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent.*

They had quickly ignored what they promised in 10:30 “We will not give our daughters in marriage to foreigners, and we will not take their daughters in marriage for our sons”

The Ammonites and Moabites were both descendants of Lot, Abraham’s nephew
Ruth was originally from Moab, but she renounced her people’s idolatry,
separated herself from them and devoted herself to God

Again, not a racial issue, but an idol-worshipper issue

This next episode actually happened before any of the public repentance, recommitment to the Law, and corporate worship had yet taken place beginning in Chapter 8

Nehemiah 13:4-5 *Now before this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was related to Tobiah, prepared for Tobiah a large chamber where they had previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests.*

The things necessary for worship were removed from this room, and the room was given to Tobiah, inside the Temple, and he was an outspoken enemy of God

Eliashib and Tobiah were related by marriage. Sometimes our fierce loyalty to relatives can result in our being blind to, or at least justifying what otherwise is sin

Tobiah was a thug. Like dealing with any thug, you give the thug what he wants, in return for what the thug can provide you

All this had happened while Nehemiah was away from Jerusalem for 12 years

Nehemiah 13:6-9 *While this was taking place, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went to the king. And after some time I asked leave of the king and came to Jerusalem, and I discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber. Then I gave orders, and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back there the vessels of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.*

In this way, Nehemiah foreshadows what Jesus Himself would do in cleansing the Temple

Now we see how the people ignored their promises (made in 10:32-39) for upkeep of the Temple, and provisions for the priests and Levites, who worked in the Temple

Nehemiah 13:10-12 *I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field. So I confronted the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their stations. Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses.*

Worship had again stopped, because what the priests and Levites had expected for their care was controlled by that thug Tobiah

Nehemiah 13:13-14 *And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and as their assistant Hanan the son of Zaccur, son of Mattaniah, for they were considered reliable, and their duty was to distribute to their brothers. Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service.*

Now we will see how they had quickly violated their promises made in 10:31 "we will not buy the foreigners goods on a Sabbath day"

Nehemiah 13:15-18 *In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them on the day when they sold food. Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah, in Jerusalem itself! Then I confronted the nobles of Judah*

and said to them, “What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Now you are bringing more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath.”

Nehemiah 13:19 *As soon as it began to grow dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath. And I stationed some of my servants at the gates, that no load might be brought in on the Sabbath day.*

Besides calling them out for violating the Sabbath, knowing the foreign sellers of goods still wanted to make money even on a Sabbath day, Nehemiah also makes provision to stop that from happening

Kind of like taking the car keys away from your teenager who keeps taking the family car out when or where you told them not to

Nehemiah 13:20-22 *Then the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice. But I warned them and said to them, “Why do you lodge outside the wall? If you do it again, I will lay hands on you.” From that time on they did not come on the Sabbath. Then I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates, to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love.*

People who do not love and honor Jesus don't want you to love and honor Him
People who do not love and honor Jesus will convince you to look for salvation in anything other than in Him

There are times we ask creation to be our Savior:

- We attach our identity to the respect from another
- We draw too much of our sense of well-being from our physical appearance
- We think material possessions have the power to make us happy
- We attach our meaning and purpose to our achievements
- We ask our jobs to make us content
- We try to base our identity on our children
- We attach our sense of spiritual well-being to the “perfect” church
- We base our identity on our education
- We ask our spouses to make us happy
- We look to food and drink to satisfy and calm us
- We continually say, “If only I had _____, then my life would be _____
- We attach our identity to the luxury of our cars or the affluence of our neighborhoods

Nehemiah 13:23-27 *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, but only the language of each people. And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair. And I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?"*

If these children were not able to speak Hebrew, they were not hearing or being taught Scripture. The parents had abdicated their primary parental responsibility

Nehemiah's reaction is not him flying off the handle in a blind rage - he is simply bringing the prescribed punishments to bear

Nehemiah reminds them of King Solomon, who's marrying foreign women ultimately led first to civil war, and then to exile. All of that traced back to the "wisest man who ever lived"

Nehemiah 13:28-31 *And one of the sons of Jehoiada, son of Eliashib the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite. Therefore, I chased him from me. Remember them, O my God, because they have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. Thus, I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work; and I provided for the wood offering at appointed times, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.*

When Nehemiah did all this confronting, calling out the peoples' sin, it was God showing love to His people; that God does not give up on His people

Ultimately, Nehemiah summarizes his work, "So I cleansed them from everything foreign"

There will be a day when God's people no longer need to be confronted to repent, when we will no longer need correction

In the meantime, the only way we can love each other as the Church is to confront sin and respond in humility and repentance when confronted

Someday, we will finally be made like our Savior Jesus, to Whom we were created and now belong