

The Path to Restoration Living God's Way Nehemiah 10:1-39

Introduction

"We need not fear shipwreck when God is the pilot." –Henry Ward Beecher

"The heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of his hands." – Psalm 19: 1

When God's truth starts getting specific, it usually means that we have to make some changes in our life. Unfortunately, some people are just not prepared to do that! Spiritual renewal is a wonderful concept until it requires us to change the way we think and live. Living God's way changes the way you relate to your spouse and your kids. It changes the way you spend your time and your money, and even how we do business. Unfortunately, some people talk about change and restoration, but that's as far as it goes with them. That's what makes these lessons in Nehemiah so awesome and profound!

The people in Nehemiah's day really wanted to change. They were willing to do whatever God asked of them. In Nehemiah 8, a revival began as the people gathered together and listened to God's Word. In chapter 9, the people repented and confessed their sins. In chapter 10, they make a covenant to put God's truth into practice.

Today we'll examine how spiritual renewal causes us to apply God's truth to our lives personally and to walk in His ways. Up to this point, there has been a lot of spiritual fervor. Emotion can be an important motivator, but you can't live on an emotional high's. After you come down from the mountaintop, you still must face the daily grind.

Nehemiah lays out a specific plan to put the truth of God's Word back into daily practice. The text reveals five principles for personally applying God's truth. The first requires the leaders themselves need to set an example.

I. Leaders must set an example.

The list begins with Nehemiah and Zedekiah, his assistant. In verses 2-8, twenty-one priestly households sign the covenant. The priests were followed by the heads of seventeen Levitical leaders in verses 9-13. In verses 14-27, forty-four civic leaders and leading families sign the covenant. The point is that those in leadership set an example for others.

The leaders were the first to put their names on the dotted line and commit themselves to do what they expected the people to do. The people had come to a decision, and collectively as a nation were ready to enter into a new covenant with God. Nehemiah 9:38 says, "In view of all this, we are making a binding

agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites, and our priests are affixing their seals to it." (Neh 9:38 NIV)

Making a covenant will always cost you something. They knew it was all meaningless unless they stepped forward and said, "Ok, count me in!" Eighty-four leaders in all put their name on the line for the glory of God.

II. Restoration Requires Commitment

The people in Nehemiah's day understood the importance of covenants and the effect they had on those who made them. They remembered how God made a covenant with Abraham, promising that both a nation and the Messiah would descend from him. They remember how God made a covenant with Moses and the nation of Israel when He gave them the Law at Mount Sinai. They remember how God made a covenant with King David, promising the final King, the Messiah, would come from his family. They understood that committing to God meant the blessings of the covenant would come upon them if they honored God by living His way.

All the people joined the leaders in making a commitment to God. Deuteronomy 27:15-26 & 28:15-68, outlined what would happen to Israel if they forsook the covenant. Verses 28 and 29 reveal the terms of the covenant, "The rest of the people—priests, Levites, gatekeepers, musicians, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand— all these now join their fellow Israelites the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord." (Neh 10:28-29 NIV)

Everyone understood the importance of the covenant they were making with God. They accepted the consequences if they failed to walk in God's Law, and they took an oath to obey the Lord. They made this covenant publicly before their wives, their sons, and their daughters. But its most significant meaning was between each individual and God.

All the people witnessed the covenant. Committing publicly meant they would hold each other accountable. The people "separated themselves from the peoples of the lands."

According to John 17, we are to be in this world but not of it! We are to be distinctly different because we know and obey God's Word (Neh. 10:28). That is true in our relationships, goals, and values.

III. Revival Begins at Home

The people also agreed not to give their children to marry the unbelieving people of the land. In verse 30, they said, "We would not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons;" (Neh 10:30 NKJV)

God had warned Israel about this danger when they first entered the land of Canaan in Deuteronomy 7. 2 Corinthians 6:14 clearly says we are not to enter into a relationship or be unequally yoked with non-believers. The temptation to marry outside the faith was a snare to God's people and an avenue that Satan has used for centuries to cause believers' problems.

If you are single, I cannot emphasize strongly enough that marriage to a non-believer can negatively impact your own faith! Non-Christians do not encourage you to follow Christ. They will not share your commitment to teaching the faith to your children. Their values will be at odds with your values, causing conflict and stress for you.

Parents, I encourage you to teach God's standards for marriage to your children before their teen years. And above all, pray for and help guide your children into God-honoring marriages.

As a follower of Christ, you should marry another committed follower of Christ. It's evident by experience and observation that it is essential to carefully and prayerfully choose your spouse. God wants to make your marriage something special for you. He desires to draw you closer to each other as you draw closer to Him.

If you're single, it's important to make this kind of covenant. Malachi 2:14 says this about a wife (which is also true about a husband). "*She is your companion and your wife by covenant.*" Marriage is a covenant that binds us together. It is stronger than society's expectations, more constant than romantic love, and more fulfilling than having a good time.

Marriage is about commitment and covenant relationship!

IV. Honest In Business Dealings

The people also realized their commitment also extended into the workplace. In verse 31, they committed themselves to be faithful to God in doing business. "*If the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day; and we would forego the seventh year's produce and the exacting of every debt.*" (Neh 10:31 NKJV)

The Law of Moses prohibited them from working on the Sabbath, but it didn't say anything about buying from foreigners on the Sabbath, so they used it as a loophole. But the people knew in their hearts that what they were doing was wrong. So they agreed to stop doing it. They also realized that selling goods seven days a week to make more money to compete with foreigners was directly disobedient to God's way.

So they also agreed to only make money in ways that were obedient and glorifying to God. This is a great challenge for us today. There are very few businesses left in our culture who choose to remain closed on Sundays like Hobby Lobby. It's easy to slip into dishonoring practices. It happens so subtly. We don't wake up in the morning saying we're going to cut corners, cheat others, or defraud the system. Most do it because they think they need to - bills need to be paid, the kids need things, the car needs to be fixed, and on and on it goes. At first, we do it because it works. Then we do it because it's convenient, and then we're in the habit of doing it that way. But do we really need to if we believe that God will take care of us?

Their repentant hearts even agreed to let the land lay fallow every seventh year and to forgive all debts against their fellow Jews on that year in obedience to the law of God. They had to trust that God would make up for the crops that they lost and that He would provide the money that they let go by forgiving debts.

Their failure to keep this part of the covenant caused them to be carried away to Babylon in the first place. Thankfully, their spiritual commitment led to some practical changes in how they did business; now, they agreed to transact business God's way.

They also agreed to keep the Sabbath as a holy day! They acknowledged God designed us to need a day of rest and worship. According to Revelation 1:10, the early Christians designated Sunday as "the Lord's day." It is the day believers gather together to worship and honor God.

Often when you obey God in the business world, you pay a price in the short run. But, God, who sees everything we do, will take care of us and reward us for obeying Him.

V. They Provided For Temple Worship

In verses 32-39, they also agreed to be faithful to God in supporting God's work. Verse 32 says, "Also we made ordinances for ourselves, to exact from ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God:" (Neh 10:32 NKJV)

They agreed to support the temple. They committed themselves to bring their firstborn, the firstfruits, and their tithe into the house of God. This would be hard to do unless you really believed God's promise to bless you for doing this in faith. Proverbs 3:9-10 says, "Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine."

Simply put, the Bible teaches us to be faith givers. Not so much for the sake of those we give to, but because giving to God keeps us focused. It reminds us that God Himself is the most generous giver of all! Be wise with your money but don't be greedy! It's not the size of your gift that is important to God; it's your

faithfulness in giving and the proportion of your giving to what you have. And by the way, in the New Testament, church buildings are not considered God's house. This building is not the temple; your heart is the temple!

Giving the firstfruits means that we give the Lord our very best, not the leftovers. Why, because we believe God has blessed us to be a blessing! In faith, we thank God for the resources he has already blessed us with and pray for even greater resources and blessing! God owns everything, but He allows us to use His resources and the talents and gifts he's given to us to prosper and be blessed.

Remember this, in the end, you brought nothing into this world, and you will take nothing with you when we leave it. We are only managers and stewards of God's resources. So, manage well the resources entrusted to you.

Conclusion

To experience spiritual renewal and restoration, you must be willing to practically and personally apply God's Word. The Holy Spirit will help you make some specific applications of the scriptures to your life. For example, you may think, "I need to be more faithful in reading my bible or in giving to the Lord's work." That's good, but it's too general. Make it more specific: "This week, I will find a bible reading plan and begin to read the bible every day, or this week I will work on my budget and commit to a regular amount each week." That's specific, and it's in your schedule, and when it gets into your daily schedule, it gets done.

Secondly, write down what you plan to do. The people put their agreement in writing and spelled out the details. What can you do? Make it a pop-up on your smartphone to remind you to do it! Or write down your plan in your journal. Evaluate your priorities, especially your spiritual goals, and the steps you need to take to reach those goals. Take time periodically to evaluate how you're doing and to modify your goals as needed.

Talk to God daily about your life and His purpose for you and have the courage to put into practice in your own life the ways of God. The path to restoration puts Christ first in your life and makes everything else revolve around that commitment. When you make a covenant with God and yield to the work of His Holy Spirit, your life can only change for the better.