

6. SELFISHNESS THAT KILLS THE UNITY

If we somehow delete greed and selfishness from human sinful desires, I wonder how many crimes could be stopped? Theft, robbery, murder, drug dealing, con job and so on, they all would stop doing these things.

Money, you can own it, but if you are not careful, it will own you. How many people are literally owned by these money that they would throw the entire lives into it?

As Christians, we need to realize that having money is not a problem. Some people think that the Bible says, "Money is the root of all evil." That is not true.

1Tim. 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

It says that the Love of Money is the root of all evil. The greed is the one that kills.

However, we are going to find out this economic matter turns into spiritual matter at no time. This is a sad chapter, for in it we see the Jews selfishly preying upon one another. No building is recorded in this chapter. There were great economic burdens upon the Jews, not only because of the famine, but also because of the taxes and tributes. The Jews were robbed by their own people through high mortgage interest rates and slavery.

Tonight, the study of Nehemiah turns to another practical avenue for our walk with God.

A. OUTCRY OF THE PEOPLE

Nehemiah 5:1 And there was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren.

As is, Nehemiah has a full day with the current wall construction. Now there is a great outcry among the Israelites.

Nehemiah 5:2 For there were those who said, "We, our sons, and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain, that we may eat and live."

Problem #1 HUNGER: Due to famine, there is not enough things to eat.

Nehemiah 5:3 There were also some who said, "We have mortgaged our lands and vineyards and houses, that we might buy grain because of the famine."

Problem #2 DEBT: Due to heavy taxes by King Artaxerxes, the Israelites are in the further holes.

Nehemiah 5:4-5 There were also those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our lands and vineyards. Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children; and indeed we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been brought into slavery. It is not in our power to redeem them, for other men have our lands and vineyards."

Problem #3 SLAVERY: For the first two problems, Nehemiah couldn't do much about them, but the third problem just ticks him off. Because it was implied by some of the wealthy Jews to another poor Jews with heavy interest rates. In other words, they were Jewish loan sharks.

What these rich Jewish rulers were doing to the poor was deliberate disobedience to God's Word. When we disobey the Word of God, our flesh is going to be the ruler in our hearts. They will starve our spirits from the Bread of Life, the Word. They will put our spirits in debt and they will turn our spirit in their slavery to satanic control.

Nehemiah 5:6 And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.

The people's complaints sparked an anger in Nehemiah that according to the Hebrew word, "charah", burned down inside him. He was sizzling with anger. Sometimes anger is the best response in this kind of case. God gets angry with us. That is what we call, "righteous indignation". When we do ungodly things, God has every right to be angry with us, because we are His children. But God is slow to get angry and full of mercy. Nehemiah again is following God's example.

B. TAKING A BULL BY THE HORN

Neh. 5:7a After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers, Nehemiah was not making a rash decision in anger, but he consults himself for how to handle the situation.

Now we have to understand why Nehemiah was all bent out of shape with these loan sharks. There are two reasons:

GOD'S PRINCIPLE OF LENDING: God clearly defined appropriate lending practices for His people in Deut 23:19-20

Deut. 23:19-20 You shall not charge interest to your brother--interest on money or food or anything that is lent out at interest. To a foreigner you may charge interest, but to your brother you shall not charge interest, that the Lord your God may bless you in all to which you set your hand in the land which you are entering to possess.

GOD'S PRINCIPLE OF SLAVERY: It was acceptable to give one's services to a lender in payment of a debt, but slavery is absolutely prohibited between Jews. And even if a person sold himself to someone as a hired worker, he must be released at Jubilee which is the fiftieth year as the "Year of liberty (Ezek 46:17) and it represents as one of freedom and grace for all suffering.

Lev. 25:35-40 'If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. Take no usury or interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you. You shall not lend him your money for usury, nor lend him your food at a profit. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God. 'And if one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave. As a hired servant and a sojourner he shall be with you, and shall serve you until the Year of Jubilee.

So what these Jewish loan sharks were doing was exactly against what God told them not to do. That is why Nehemiah was deeply angry with them. We are going to see how Nehemiah handles the situation.

Neh. 5:7b and said to them, "Each of you is exacting usury from his brother." So I called a great assembly against them.

Charge #1 against Loan sharking

Nehemiah 5:8 And I said to them, "According to our ability we have redeemed our Jewish brethren who were sold to the nations. Now indeed, will you even sell your brethren? Or should they be sold to us?" Then they were silenced and found nothing to say.

Charge #2 against Slavery By using God's Word, Nehemiah made it the end of case with airtight charges. No defense but surrender.

C. A PLAN TO CHANGE

Nehemiah 5:9-13 Then I said, "What you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? also, with my brethren and my servants, am lending them money and grain. Please, let us (1)stop this usury! (2)Restore now to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, also a hundredth of the money and the grain, the new wine and the oil, that you have charged them." So they said, "We will restore it, and will require nothing from them; we will do as you say." Then I called the priests, and (3)required an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. Then I shook out the fold of my garment and said, "So may God shake out each man from his house, and from his property, who does not perform this promise. Even thus may he be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said, "Amen!" and praised the Lord. Then the people did according to this promise.

Like all good leaders, Nehemiah doesn't simply hurl a few rebukes and then walk away, but he goes on with corrections.

- 1) Determine to stop the wrong
- 2) Make specific plans to correct the wrong immediately, regardless of the sacrifice involved.
- 3) Declare your plans for correction in a promise before God

D. APPLICATIONS

1) Essential to handling our money with the right heart before God is being a giver.

Being a giver to the work of the Lord helps us always remember that God and His kingdom come first. The New Testament tells us our giving should be regular, thoughtful, proportional, and private (1 Corinthians 16:1-4), that it must be generous, freely given, and cheerful (2 Corinthians 9).

2) Money problems are rarely only money problems, but it goes all the way to our spirits.

We often think if we just had more money, our money problems would go away. It isn't true - and that's a proven fact, just by looking at the lives of many of those who win a lottery or come into unexpected riches. If they had money problems before - if they didn't know how to handle their money, and glorify God with it - they won't know after. The same problems will soon show up again, often times bigger than ever.

3) Let's use God's money to bring glory to God, not just for fleeing pleasure onto ourselves.

As the Bible says, life is more than eating, drinking and being merry. It is about loving God and serving His people.