

10. THE WORD AND OUR LIVES

The book of Nehemiah can be divided into two distinct construction phases. Chapters 1-6 deal with the reconstruction of the wall for the Israelites' physical protection, and the chapters 7-13 deal with the reinstruction of the people for spiritual protection. Both needed rebuilding.

In the first six chapters, Nehemiah, the builder and governor is the prominent leader, but in the last seven chapters, Ezra, the scribe and priest is the main character. It even shows in the style of writing. It is no longer first person writing using "I, me, and my." From chapter 8 to the first portion of chapter 13, it is written in third person writing, "Nehemiah, he, him."

A. RECEIVING INSIGHT FROM THE WORD OF GOD

Tonight's study is continuing from the last week's about the Word of God. We learned that we can have strength from the Lord by receiving the joy of the Lord. And the joy of the Lord comes from knowing the Word of God. So the study continues.

Nehemiah 8:13 Now on the second day the heads of the fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law.

In New American Standard Version, it says, "insight" instead of "in order to understand." Actually, "Insight" is better rendering for this particular verse. In Hebrew the word for "Insight" means "to be prudent" or wise in the management of practical affairs.

In other words, insight without practicality is worthless. The Word of God is full of practicality. Sometimes it is obvious, sometimes it makes us to think a little. The Holy Spirit is always ready to help us with His readily available instructions to walk in His way. When we read Bibles, we must pray and ask Him to give us that precious practical instructions.

Leaders have a special need to understand and walk in God's Word, because their ignorance or disobedience affects far more than themselves. As a matter of fact, it affects everyone they have and influence on. I am sure that you had ungodly boss who could care less about God and treat you viciously. Then there were some godly people over you and I who showed us how to do with godly instruction and kindness. If you have a godly boss over you, you are blessed. Pray for that person. Speaking of praying for godly boss, please continue to pray for our godly president Bush. He needs our God's hands in every decision he makes.

B. DOING WHAT THE WORD OF GOD SAYS

Let's how the Israelites acted upon what they are learning.

Nehemiah 8:14-18 And they found written in the Law, which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written." Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity

made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner.

This is beautiful, simple obedience. "God says it, so we will do it!" Even though tradition did not tell them to keep the Feast of Tabernacles - it had not been done since the days of Joshua, but they relied on God's Word, not tradition.

This brings me to mention this: This is my personal opinion. Many people would disagree with me. In my view, the denominations are made because of human pride and immaturity. It is the same attitude of children stop playing, "If you don't let me do it, I am taking my ball and go home." In various denominations, they have their own rules and regulations over the Word of God. For example, baptismal regeneration which means you have to be baptized by that particular denomination to get saved. That is a border line cult; or you have to speak in tongue to be save. Another border line cultish attitude. The list goes on. You might say, "What about Calvary Chapel? You demand us to read Calvary Chapel Distinctives" to be volunteers. Isn't that denominational attitude?" I would answer, "No. If you don't agree with Calvary Chapel Distinctives, show me where in that book that goes against the Word of God." I can confidently say, "You won't find it." If I found it, I wouldn't be a Calvary Chapel pastor.

The celebration, known as the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. was one of Israel's three major feasts - "The Feast of Trumpets", "The Feast of Atonement", and "The Feast of Booths" according to the instructions given in Leviticus 23:40.

Lev. 23:40 And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days.

This is to be a reminder of the Lord's care and protection during their wilderness wanderings and His promise to protect them in the future. If we really understand that no matter what, God is going to protect us and care for us in this life and eternity, it is natural to be joyful in the Lord which becomes our strength.

You might say, "What is such a big deal living in a booth? I camp in a tent." What we must notice is that the Israelites did what they heard in the Scriptures.

The Bible without practical application into our lives is no different than the concepts of Pharisees whom were so much despised by Jesus. The 23rd chapter of Matthew contains seven woes from Jesus to the Pharisees who knew the Word of God, but they'd rather do what they want more than following the Word of God.

Matt. 23:27 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

God's Word gives clear instruction in both precepts and principles. Examples of a precept would be no sexual immorality, do not repay evil for evil, pray without ceasing, in all things give thanks, pretty much straight forward from the Word of God. Principles are judgement calls. The Bible doesn't mention playing cards, movies, or smoking. The more you know about God's Word, the better judgement calls or decisions you can make. Another example of a precept is a sign that says "35 MPH."

There's no give or take in that. "Drive carefully," however, is a principle since it can vary with road of traffic conditions.

Some of us come up with excuses to do what we want even though we know deep down it is wrong against the Word of God. St. Augustine said, "The Old Testaments is revealed in the New, and the New Testament is veiled in the Old." In other words, neither one of them can be ignored. We often would like to think that we are no longer under the law, so we don't have to obey what it says in the OT. If that is the case, they have to ignore what Jesus said too.

So we follow the precepts of the Word, since it is so clear. What about the principles of the Word? Some people say that we no longer live under the law of the OT. So should we ignore the OT? If we are so convinced that only the NT applies to our lives, I have this to tell you from the NT.

1Cor. 8:1-13 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him. Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live. However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

Apostle Paul would not eat meat for the sake of weak brothers. In the same reason, I would not drink beer or wine, or dance in a bar because of young believers in the church who might stumble due to my freedom in Christ. Should my liberty be limited for the sake of other immature believers? If that is what it takes for them to grow and become better Christians, I will gladly sacrifice my liberty for them. What about you? Can you give up what you'd like to do for the sake of others? Hope that you do.

We are to make ourselves as living sacrifices by applying the Word of God.

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

C. APPLICATIONS

1) By applying His Word into our lives, we can truly worship the Lord not only during the worship time of this church service with our praise and worship songs, but also we can worship Him in our daily lives.

In John chapter 4, Jesus was talking to the Samaritan woman who was not living in proper way. When she mentioned to Jesus that her people also worship the Lord in their own way, Jesus corrected her by saying that she was wrong and in fact we ought to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth.

John 4:24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

2) We must remember that obedience to God's Word bring great gladness to us and to our God.

We often are deceived into thinking the path of gladness is in doing our own thing. But gladness and freedom come only through obedience.

3) The Bible is not here to give us head knowledge, but to reside in our hearts.

By doing so, we may be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ to glorify Him by renewing our minds.