



## **"Walking In A Healthy Fear of God" (Nehemiah 5)**

### **I. INTRO**

- A. Today we are going to be talking about "Walking In a Healthy Fear of God" from Nehemiah 5.
1. I used to think that walking in "the fear of the Lord" was like driving down the street while watching the police car in your rearview mirror.
  2. But actually I think there is a better picture for the fear of the Lord...
    - a. It's like a teenage couple out for a drive and the boy suddenly spots her dad in the rear-view mirror.
    - b. Seeing him back there puts the fear of God in him.
    - c. Let's watch this video of a recent Hyundai commercial to see what I mean: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-R\\_483zeVF8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-R_483zeVF8)
    - d. (Kevin Hart gives new meaning to the idea of the helicopter parent...)
    - e. In the end "daddy's little girl" will appreciate that her father cares enough to keep an eye on her.
  3. So it is for the people of God. Walking in a healthy fear of the Lord means we live our lives with our heavenly Father always in our rearview mirror. When we glance up and see God's brilliant majesty and holiness, as well as His care and love; our response is a healthy mix of reverence, trust, joy, and love.
- B. There are nineteen verses in chapter five. We see the key, or thesis, verse of the chapter in v. 9 (about half-way through): *"Again I said, 'The thing which 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?'"* --Nehemiah 5:9
- C. With this in mind, I will read Nehemiah 5, pray, and then we'll jump in: *"Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. <sup>2</sup>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.' <sup>3</sup>There were others who said, 'We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our houses that we might*

get grain because of the famine.' <sup>4</sup> Also there were those who said, 'We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards. <sup>5</sup> Now our flesh is like the flesh of our brothers, our children like their children. Yet behold, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are forced into bondage already, and we are helpless because our fields and vineyards belong to others.' <sup>6</sup> Then I was very angry when I had heard their outcry and these words. <sup>7</sup> I consulted with myself and contended with the nobles and the rulers and said to them, 'You are exacting usury, each from his brother!' Therefore, I held a great assembly against them. <sup>8</sup> I said to them, 'We according to our ability have redeemed our Jewish brothers who were sold to the nations; now would you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us?' Then they were silent and could not find a word to say. <sup>9</sup> Again I said, 'The thing which 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? <sup>10</sup> And likewise I, my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Please, let us leave off this usury. <sup>11</sup> Please, give back to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money and of the grain, the new wine and the oil that you are exacting from them.' <sup>12</sup> Then they said, 'We will give it back and will require nothing from them; we will do exactly as you say.' So I called the priests and took an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. <sup>13</sup> I also shook out the front of my garment and said, 'Thus may God shake out every man from his house and from his possessions who does not fulfill this promise; even thus may he be shaken out and emptied.' And all the assembly said, 'Amen!' And they praised the Lord. Then the people did according to this promise. <sup>14</sup> Moreover, from the day that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, for twelve years, neither I nor my kinsmen have eaten the governor's food allowance. <sup>15</sup> But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people and took from them bread and wine besides forty shekels of silver; even their servants domineered the people. But I did not do so because of the fear of God. <sup>16</sup> I also applied myself to the work on this wall; we did not buy any land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work. <sup>17</sup> Moreover, there were at my table one hundred and fifty Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us. <sup>18</sup> Now that which was prepared for each day was one ox and six choice sheep, also birds were prepared for me; and once in ten days all sorts of wine were furnished in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the governor's food allowance, because the servitude was heavy on this people. <sup>19</sup> Remember me, O my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people." --Nehemiah 5 [pray]

## II. BODY

- A. We see from these verses that Nehemiah has his hands full. So far, he's been dealing with opposition OUTSIDE the walls and now, here in chapter five, he's dealing with some significant opposition INSIDE the walls.
- B. Here are **six insights** that will help us understand what's going on here in chapter five:
1. V. 3 tells us there is a famine in the land so the crops were failing and the livestock were severely undernourished.
  2. V. 4 tells us that that there was a tax payable to the king –
  3. There were upper class Jewish people who were offering what amounts to second mortgages at high interest rates.
  4. V. 5 tells us the upper class was forcing their own countrymen to sell their children into debt slavery, and they were (apparently) selling Hebrews to Gentiles.
  5. So, in addition to trying to get the wall built, the people were suffering because of the famine as well as the tax. Many had to mortgage their homes, fields, and in some cases, their children to get by.
    - a. The implication (in the middle of v. 5) is that some of their daughters became sex slaves.
    - b. The upper class were exploiting the circumstances of the rebuilding of the walls, the famine, and the king's tax to gouge their Jewish brethren (cf. v. 7).
    - c. This was a VERY serious problem. When Neh saw what was going on he became VERY angry (v. 6). [CHARA, which means to be kindled or burn with anger.]
  6. Nehemiah was a wealthy man.
    - a. "He was a man of wealth, lived in ease and luxury, and had great influence at court. For him to go to Jerusalem and lose caste was like Moses turning his back on the palace of Pharaoh and identifying himself with the Hebrew slaves." --D.L. Moody <sup>1</sup>
    - b. We see in v. 10 that Neh lent the people money and grain.

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<sup>1</sup> *Men of the Bible*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform 2014: chap 4.

c. In vs. 14-19 we see Neh's example:

- 1) V. 14: He did not take the governor's food allowance, which would have come from the people.
- 2) V. 16 He did not buy any land, which means he did not take advantage of those who struggled because of the famine and the king's tax.
- 3) Vs. 17-18: Neh apparently had a minimum of 150 people over for dinner every night for several years, which he paid for out of his own pocket.

C. Again, the main point of the chapter is v. 9, *"Again I said, 'The thing which 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?'"* --Nehemiah 5:9

**D. We need a good definition of the fear of God.**

1. One pastor theologian constructed an excellent definition using several verses from Proverbs: "According to the book of Proverbs, 'the fear of the Lord' is a continual (Prov. 23:17), humble, and faithful submission to [God], which compels one to hate evil (Prov. 8:13) and turn away from it (Prov. 16:6) and brings with it rewards better than all earthly treasures (Prov. 15:16)—the rewards of a love for and a knowledge of God (Prov. 1:29; 2:5; 9:10; 15:33), and long life (Prov. 10:27; 14:27a; 19:23a), confidence (Prov. 14:26), satisfaction, and protection (Prov. 19:23)." —Douglas Sean O'Donnell <sup>2</sup>
2. Well regarded author Jerry Bridges wrote a book entitled *The Joy of Fearing God*.<sup>3</sup> In the book he attempts to unpack the paradox<sup>4</sup> that having a healthy and holy fear of God is not something to avoid but embrace. Bridges says that A healthy and holy fear of God is an important key to a joyful, fulfilling, and genuine intimacy with God.

E. Neh 5 identifies (at least) two ways to actively walk in a healthy and holy fear of God:

1. **The fear of the Lord means to practice biblical social justice.**
2. **The fear of the Lord means to practice biblical conflict resolution.**

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<sup>2</sup> *The Beginning and End of Wisdom*, Crossway 2011: 37.

<sup>3</sup> WaterBrook Press, new edition 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Remember, a paradox is a seeming contradiction, meaning at first glance it appears to be contradictory, yet upon further consideration it is not.

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F. We will look at each one individually:

1. **The fear of the Lord means to practice biblical social justice.**

- a. One of the most often quoted verses in the Bible related to social justice is Micah 6:8: *"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"* --Micah 6:8
- b. We must ask, "What does it mean to 'do justice'?"
  - 1) My definition of justice: Seeking the highest good in every situation.
  - 2) To "do justice" means giving people what they are due, whether it is protection, or care, or punishment -- regardless of social, racial, gender, or economic status.<sup>5</sup>
  - 3) In his Montgomery Bus Boycott speech in 1955 Dr. Martin Luther King said: *"Justice is love correcting that which revolts against love."* --Dr. Martin Luther King<sup>6</sup>
- c. In my studies, I have found that the epitome of social justice is found in Luke 4:18-19 [Liberal (emergent) churches have substituted social justice for the gospel. Luke 4:18-19 ties social justice to the gospel.]
  - 1) Jesus is coming out of His forty days of fasting having been severely tempted by the Devil.
  - 2) Jesus, in His hometown of Nazareth, launches His public ministry by reading a quote from Isaiah 61, identifying Himself as the Messiah, AND specifically describes how He intends to fulfill it: [It's Jesus' job description]
  - 3) *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon ME, because HE anointed ME to preach the gospel to the poor. HE has sent ME to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, TO set free those who are oppressed, <sup>19</sup> TO proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.."* --Luke 4:18-19 [Upon the release of the Holy Spirit and the ascension of Jesus into heaven, this passage becomes the calling of the Church.]

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Tim Keller, *Generous Justice*.

<sup>6</sup> Montgomery Bus Boycott speech, delivered at Holt Street Baptist Church on Dec. 5, 1955.

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- a) Preach the gospel to the poor: [Gk. ptōssō] Literally meaning to crouch, cower. It refers to the beggarly poor. (“Give to everyone who asks of you...” --Luke 6:30 It doesn't mean that we have to give them what they ask for.)
- b) Proclaim release to the captives: [Gk. aichmalōtos] Literally meaning to be taken or conquered by a spear. The idea is that their captivity has been thrust (or imposed) upon them.
- c) Recovery of site to the blind: [Gk. tuphlos] Derived from a word (tuphlóo), which means to envelop with smoke, so as not to be able to see clearly. It can refer to literal blindness but is more often is used in the Bible to describe spiritual blindness. It is also used to describe those who are emotionally, socially, and mentally challenged.
- d) Set free those who are oppressed: [Gk. thrauo] Literally means to break in pieces.
- e) Proclaim the favorable year of the Lord: Year of Jubilee -- The name of the semi-centennial festival of the Jewish people, which lasted for a year. During this year all debts were canceled and all who were slaves were set free (Leviticus 25:39-54). What Luke 4:19 is saying that upon acceptance of Jesus Christ and His message, our (sin) debt is cancelled and we are freed from enslavement to our sinful nature (Rom. 6:6).

## 2. The fear of the Lord means to practice biblical conflict resolution.

- a. Several commentators compare how Neh handled the confrontation in chapter 5 as being similar to the church discipline process in Matt. 18.
  - 1) Nehemiah confronted the “nobles and rulers” in private first. The text doesn't tell us exactly how the group responded...
  - 2) Then he held a “great assembly” (v. 7)
  - 3) BTW – commentators are about 50:50 as to whether or not Neh sinned in vs. 6-7a: *“Then I was very angry when I had heard their outcry and these words. <sup>7</sup> I consulted with myself...”* --Nehemiah 5:6-7
    - a) There's no doubt that Neh was a fiery guy.

- b) We'll see in the last chapter (13) that Neh beat-up some guys and pulled out their hair.
- b. A review of the Matthew 18 church discipline process:
- 1) When we talk about the Matt 18 church discipline process we usually just pull out vs. 15-17: *"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. <sup>16</sup> But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. <sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."* --Matthew 18:15-17
  - 2) It is important to see that what ties the whole chapter together is God's concern for the spiritually needy, which includes: The powerless, those victimized by sin, and people who have sinned against others and not repented.
  - 3) With that being said, the **four stages of church discipline** in Matt 18:15-17 are pretty straightforward. There is:
    - a) Loving confrontation one-on-one (v. 15). This should almost always start with a question – like, "Help me understand...?"
    - b) Loving confrontation by 2 or 3 witnesses – *"that every word (RHEMA) may be confirmed"* (v. 16).
      - i. We must never forget Gal 6:1 in these moments: *"Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted."* --Galatians 6:1
      - ii. The elders have been willing to implement this a couple of times in the last few months.
      - iii. I heard one of them correctly state at one of the Family Gatherings last week that church discipline is never done TO someone; it is always done FOR someone.
    - c) Loving communication to the church body (v. 17a).
      - i. Every church needs to decide what this means and how it would best be accomplished.

- ii. My guideline is that the repentance should be roughly as broad as the effect of the sin.
- iii. Another way to say it is: public sin or a public consequence of sin is going to need public confession and repentance.

d) Disassociation (v. 17b).

### III. CONCLUSION

- A. Someone has said that in a church conflict, Satan tends to remain neutral and supply ammunition to both sides. Our adversary, the devil, likes to divide God's people by getting them to wrong one another and then not to deal biblically with problems. We must be committed to resolve conflicts God's way.
- B. I want to close by telling you about what I have observed about our elders so far... I have seen them humbly labor to go the extra mile with people. I have experienced their willingness to do the hard good thing. I have been with them when they have prayed for you. I believe that we are in good hands.

## **P.A.S.S. Questions For KHC Life Group Leaders (or personal study)**

**Sermon Dates:** Feb 20-21, 2016

**Sermon Title:** Walking In A Healthy Fear of God

**Sermon Passage:** Nehemiah 5

**P** - Participation (get everyone involved in the dialog)

1. If your father was present in your home, what were his most admirable qualities?  
(If he was not present, who was the strongest male influence in your life?)

**A** - Application (makes it personal)

2. Read Luke 4:18-19. How could your LG (or KHC in general) meet some of these needs in the South Bay?
3. Read Matthew 18:15-17. When does "sharing a concern" with someone cross the line into gossip? How can we avoid this?

**S** - Scripture (thinking biblically is a learned behavior! :-)

4. When is it right to leave a church? When is it wrong?

**S** – Sharing (aim for a time of honest reflection, authenticity, and transparency in a safe atmosphere modeled by you)

5. "*Obey your leaders and submit to them*" (Heb. 13:17) frightens most of us. What limits apply to both leaders and people?