

# Nehemiah 10

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[ 0 : 00 ] Do you be seated. And we're coming towards the back end of Nehemiah. and we're in chapter 10. And so, remember, in the book of Nehemiah,!

And it was their purpose that Jerusalem would really be a living example, a working example to the nations of the power and the grace and the salvation of God.

That people would look at Jerusalem and see Israel's God. And they would be drawn to it. That it would no longer be a reproach to God's name.

But there would be a community of God's people. There would be a light to nations. That was the purpose. And as we've seen, what happens in the book of Nehemiah is they rediscover God's word. And it comes to them with tremendous force and power.

And it changes them. And led by the Holy Spirit, they've confessed their disobedience to God. And they've earnestly prayed in chapter 9 for mercy. And so chapter 9, they recount what God has done.

[ 1 : 24 ] If you look at the pronouns, you know the pronouns, I, me, my, you. You look at the pronouns in chapter 9 and you can see it's you, isn't it? It's all about what God has done.

And so all the way through, just look at verse 6. You alone, you alone, you've made the heavens. You preserve. Verse 7, you are the Lord. 8, you found.

You've kept your promise. You are righteous. All the way through chapter 9, it is you, you, you. It is what God has done. But when you get into chapter 10, the pronoun is different.

On the basis of the use of chapter 9, we come to we. And what we will do. They've prayed for mercy. They've come to accept what God has done.

And now they are ready in chapter 10 to translate that devotion into daily living. And so chapter 9 and chapter 10, the you's and the we's will always be together.

[ 2 : 29 ] A mark of God's Holy Spirit working is that there will always be a response. Emotion is not enough. Words are not enough. Experience is not enough.

There will be a changed life. And there will be a practical outworking of God's word in both family and in the corporate people of God. And that's what we see today.

These people, they've been challenged by God's word. They've faced up to their sins and confessed it. They've sought God's mercy. And now in chapter 10, they say, as God's people, we are going to be different. We're going to act on what we've heard.

Chapter 10 gives us a list of leaders who signed the covenant renewal documents. And it's followed, isn't it, by various vows and promises.

And so we want to focus, I think, in chapter 10 on the response of these people. We'll call it the consecration of these people. It's not a word we often use, is it?

[ 3 : 29 ] But these people consecrate themselves. They devote themselves to God. And I think one of the greatest needs of our society is that Christian men and women, Christian families, Christian boys and girls, live differently.

They live on the basis of God's word. And so what I want to do is I want to kind of identify three features of what it means to live for the Lord.

Of what Christian consecration, of what it means to be devoted to God looks like. And so the first thing we notice is this, is consecration is Bible-based.

Holiness is Bible-based. And we're struck, I think, as we read these chapters, that the emphasis throughout is on the written word of God. The word is absolutely central in their experience in their life.

Do you remember how it was in chapter 8 when they rediscovered God's word? I suppose they hadn't lost the Bible, but to all intents and purposes, they had lost it.

[ 4 : 39 ] That's a possibility for all of us, isn't it? Most of us have got loads of Bibles in our home. We don't lose our Bibles. We may even continue to read our Bibles day after day. We listen to preaching, or at least we're in church.

And yet it's possible to lose the word of God. The Bible no longer shapes us, and the word of God no longer thrills us. And the word of God no longer exerts a life-transforming impact on our lives. Perhaps as you read, it's just routine, something that you do. Perhaps we've stopped opening God's word with a sense of anticipation and excitement or even fear.

That God is going to speak to me through this written word of God. God is going to deal with me. God has got something to say to me. And I think it's far easier to lose the Bible than we think. And these people in Nehemiah, they have rediscovered it as a powerful, life-transforming force. And I need that as well, don't you? And it begins with themselves. And this is what governed their obedience to the word of God.

[ 5 : 46 ] It wasn't obedience to Nehemiah. And their obedience wasn't to the leaders. Their obedience wasn't to the customs of their fathers, but to the word of God.

There's a useful summary, isn't there? In chapter 10 and verse 29. Look what it says. It says there. They enter into an oath to walk in God's law that was given by Moses, the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord, our Lord, his rule, and his statutes. And so, consecration, living for God, is believing and obeying God's word. And you may think that is really obvious.

He didn't come out on Sunday night to be told something so obvious. But I think there's a strange tendency, isn't there, in the hearts of men and women and boys and girls, to demonstrate consecration by taking on obligations, by taking on rules that are additional to the Bible and actually depart from the Bible.

To take on extra duties or extra commandments that are not in the Bible and are not commanded in the Bible. And we define godliness or define consecration in terms of those additional responsibilities.

[ 7 : 12 ] So, some of the vows in Roman Catholicism. Perpetual celibacy. Or monasticism. Or regular fasting.

Or penance. None of those things are required in the word of God. In fact, we're warned, don't we, against celibacy for most people as something that's really unwise.

It is for those who are gifted and called to it alone. And yet, Roman Catholics teach that those who take those vows, well, they are especially holy.

In a way that ordinary folk are not. And as Protestants, we need to be really careful because we can put extra rules and regulations on congregation and on people.

Patterns of behavior. List of human do's and don'ts. And if you fit in with our list of do's, well, then you are a consecrated person. And if you don't, well, then you're a suspect.

[ 8 : 16 ] And, of course, if you know your Bible at all, that was a mark of the religious people of Jesus' day. And the Pharisees were, weren't they, the orthodox, confessional, reformed believers. They were the Bible believers.

But what was the problem? They had added their own interpretations and applications and rules. And so we must emphasize that consecration, living for God, is Bible-based.

But it's not to be gained by taking on additional duties, additional vows. Conforming to human standards. And the paradox is this, that commitment to Scripture, commitment to the Bible, is the charter of Christian freedom and liberty.

As long as you hold to that and you stand on the teaching of the Word of God, you can maintain your Christian liberty and freedom. And so I can't, I shouldn't, stand up here and bring out some little rule and regulation from my head and urge you to follow it.

Because rightly, you should open your Bible and say, well, where is that? You see, if we recognize that godliness and holiness and being consecrated and living for God means that we need to be Bible-based, then that frees you from the tyranny of authoritarian leadership.

[ 9 : 45 ] Or in eldership, that tyrannizes the people of God or dominates the people of God. Because it requires things then that are not taught in Scripture. But actually, following the Word of God keeps us from, particularly as leaders, overstepping the authority that God has given to us.

And we must maintain this. We're learning in Galatians, aren't we, in house schools, it's been so helpful. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. So stand firm and do not let yourselves be

bound again by a yoke of slavery.

The done thing is a terrible thing. We've talked about it before, you know the game Bop It. It's a great game, Bop It, isn't it?

But that is not the Christian life. The Christian life is not twist it, pull it, flick it, turn it, bop it. It's not that. And we must never turn the Christian life into that.

And so consecration is Bible-based. Secondly, we note in this passage that consecration is two-sided. Living for God is two-sided. I think it's really important. What I mean by that is we see that it's got a negative side and a positive side.

[10:59] And so with holiness and living for God in consecration, there is a negative element to this. And it means separation from sin.

Summed up in chapter 10 and verse 28. Can you look there with me? The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who separated themselves from the people of the lands to the law of God.

They separated themselves from the norms and values of society.

They separated themselves from the ways of the media. They separated themselves from the celebrities of the day. They separated themselves from the lifestyle of a society that was around them.

And they did it with a really strong and pronounced negative. I want to look at that negative as it's expressed in verse 30 and verse 31. Because there are two pressing issues in Nehemiah chapter 10 that are just as relevant today as they were 3,000 years ago.

[12:12] And so in verse 30, it's the subject of marriage, isn't it? And their living for God and their consecration expressed itself in a really strong negative.

Look what they promise in verse 30. It says this, We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.

Here's the negative. In their consecration to God, they said a firm and decided no to marriage with people that weren't part of the covenant people of God.

To marriage with heathens. It's nothing to do with mixed racial marriage at all. But they said a decided, firm no to marriage with people that weren't part of the people of God.

They say we will not give our daughters, we will not take their daughters for our sons. And if you know your testament at all, you will know that it was one of the great hindrances to Israel's spiritual progress.

[13:25] Throughout her history, again and again and again, what caused problems for the people of God was that they ended up caught up with unbelievers. Around them. They ended up linking themselves with the nations around them.

And they were meant to be the people of God. And it was devastating in its results. And so here is a firm commitment, isn't it? Verse 30. We're going to put this sin away.

We're done with this sin. We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us. And surely we need such a determination today. So Paul says, this is in 2 Corinthians 6 verse 14.

It's a different context, but it's the same application. He says to the Christians in Corinth, do not be yoked together. Do not be joined together with unbelievers.

Because what can fellowship, what fellowship can light have with darkness? And so every parent that's here and is listening should take this wholeheartedly on board and pray every day that you live, that none of your children will be led into marriage with an unbeliever.

[14:31] And you pray that, no matter how well educated that other person might be, no matter how respectable and glittering their prospects. And we know, don't we, that God does sometimes overrule it for good.

And you and I have known such cases, but those cases are very, very rare. And so you young people that are here and you children that are here and you're not yet married and you older folk that are here and you're not yet married, you make up your minds that marriage to somebody who is not a Christian is not an option.

And you make that decision in your mind before you're attracted to anyone. You don't wait until you're friendly with someone and attracted to someone who's not a Christian. And then you start kidding yourself.

Well, if they go to church and they're a nicer person, in fact, they're a much nicer person than many of the people in our church. And perhaps I'll be able to influence them after they get married and they seem so kind. Of course, some of that is true.

But the people of God, in Nehemiah 10, said we're not going to do it. We're not going to do it because it's wrong. It's something not to be done and it causes great pain and great heartache.

[15:50] Second issue is now in verse 31. And if the people of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day. And so what they decide in verse 31 is actually an expensive economic commitment.

And it was something that cost the people of Israel a great deal. And by making this decision that there was a day which they were going to remember the Sabbath day to keep holy, it harmed them financially.

And it was something that would affect their economy and commerce. But they were willing to separate themselves from the surrounding culture and the surrounding customs. And they were able to say that is what everyone else is doing and that is what the world is doing but we are God's people so we're not going to do it.

We're not going to do it. We will not buy from them on the Sabbath. Or on any holy day. And I want to say we really need to think about this.

I mean some people will say well it's not the Sabbath day the Sabbath has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ and so we don't need to have to keep the Sabbath day anymore. I really struggle with that position.

[17:10] I struggle with that because in the book of Exodus we have to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy because the Sabbath day the day of rest was something that is built into creation. It's a creation ordinance.

It's there before the law. When Moses comes he says remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. It was a day given of great blessing to the people of God. There was a day when they didn't have to work.

There was a day when they didn't have to feel guilty about not having to revise. Isn't that a great blessing? And some people say well what was the Sabbath pointing forward? It was pointing forward to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well that's right of course. And the Sabbath is fulfilled in Jesus Christ but you and I are not fully at rest. And so Hebrews says there is still a Sabbath day to come. And so are you telling me that we're actually in a worse position in the New Testament than they were in the Old Testament?

that they had a day to enjoy rest from their work and looking forward to rest in Christ but we don't have a day? It's madness. And so there is still a Sabbath day.

[18:14] And of course we live in a different culture in a different time and yet you remember that the Sabbath day was built into creation. And so we should be characterized by the Lord's people that the Sabbath has changed to the day that Christ has risen again we look forward to the rest that is still to come and we have a greater love for the Lord's day and some of the scaffolding in the Old Testament has been removed but the day itself remains.

But there should be in our family homes and in our households a consistent application of the Lord's day. That conflicts with pleasure or with business or with holidays.

Let's just go to Isaiah chapter 58. Come with me to Isaiah 58. It's a couple of hundred pages on. Isaiah 58 and verses 13 and 14.

Look what it says. Isaiah chapter 58 and verse 13. If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath from doing your pleasure whatever you want on my holy day and you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honourable if you honour it not going your own ways or seeking your own pleasure or talking idly then you shall take delight in the Lord and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

So can you see it again? Holiness living for the Lord consecration is shown in practice not in fine words not in pious prayers. There's great concern today for us to be positive all the time but in every Christian in every believer there must be a determined no.

[20:16] there must be a willingness to take an unpopular position there must be a willingness in us as a church family to appear odd and cranky and strange there must in our day be a willingness to face ridicule to be called a fanatic to be called a legalist because godliness involves saying no but then there's a positive side isn't there?

It's not only separation it's not just separation from but it's separation too so look with me I'm at verses 32 to 39 and so a life that is built on negatives what would that be like? Don't do this don't do this don't do this it would be harsh and it would be negative and it would be narrow and it would be unattractive that's not Christianity but can you see that there are really generous strong positives here and can you see as I read it do you see there was a tremendous commitment to the worship of the living God they provided for it they paid for it they gave to it they participated in it they delighted in it and so we see the people they're bringing their offerings and their wood and their fresh fruit and provision for the priests and the Levites and that's the whole purpose for which they live they recognise the man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God and they lived to worship God to glorify and enjoy him and that is the whole reason for the book of Nehemiah the walls had to be rebuilt so that they could worship God and they recognised that they as the people of God they had a part to play and they assumed responsibility it's summed up in verse 39 isn't it it's a lovely little phrase we will not neglect the house of our God that's not just that's not just a building we are the people of God the people are the house of God so these consecrated people they said no to certain things and they said yes to certain things they were generous they were enthusiastic they were transforming they said yes to giving yes to contributing yes to participating yes to worship and so Sundays isn't it for our families that are here we want to say there are certain things that we don't do and yet there are certain things on Sundays that we get to do and there are certain things that we do so make it the best day of the week let your children very occasionally pick the food or something like that make it the day that they enjoy most because living for God includes saying no and saying yes there are things that we have to be against and we must be against but there are things that we are very much for and so each one of us in our lives has to have a proper balance between the no's and the yes the negatives and the positives and most of us are inclined by our temperament by our upbringing by our nature some of us are inclined to one extreme or the other some of us here watching or listening may be a little bit too negative and legalistic some of us may be a little bit too lax and too easy going

I think I'm probably the only person in this congregation who hits a perfect balance more or less between positive or negative and let's be honest let's be honest all of us think that we strike the right balance between negative and positive and none of us do none of us do that's why the church is such a great thing because we need each other and I want to say to you we need to be glad for other people in the congregation who don't see things in detail in the same way that we do that's why we need to listen to each other and we need to respect each other and we need to be helped by each other so if some of you are thinking well there are some people in this congregation that aren't just quite as strict and down the line as I think they should be you thank God for those people and you make a point of being with those people and listening to those people and learning from them and if some of you on the other hand are thinking well in this congregation there are people that are a bit too dogmatic and they're a bit too decided in their views and they're a little bit towards legalism you thank God for those people and you listen to those people and you learn from them and we need each other we do not want to be a church family of like-minded clones that look like each other and sound like each other we have to minister to each other to keep each other balanced it's where congregations go wrong isn't it because those two tendencies in a congregation instead of loving each other and helping each other they can polarize each other and set each other off against each other and instead of saying these are my brothers and sisters these are my friends from whom I need to learn we say well they're a little bit left wing or they're a little bit right wing whatever that means and I need to oppose them and they forget the biblical doctrine of the body of Christ and all the parts of the body and the different roles of the body so when there are minor disagreements and there will be and there must be don't collapse don't go to pieces over minor disagreements say to yourself that person may well be right and I'm not always right and I need to listen to that there's beautiful harmony there's a beautiful balance in Christian holiness and consecration there is a firm dogmatic no and yet there's a generous positive yes and we all need to have both we need each other consecration is two-sided lastly and briefly consecration is wholehearted it's obviously so in this case isn't it they sign the document in public they make their commitment clear they see where people stand they burn their bridges there's no turning back and it's most strikingly shown by the way in which these people in these chapters they're eager not just to follow the letter of the law they want to follow the spirit of the law

I've not got time to expand it but they're eager to observe the spirit of the law not just the letter of the law what do I mean so for example they were forbidden in God's word to marry certain types of people certain the Amorites they were told because they weren't the people of God and the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites but most of those people no longer existed in Hebrews 10 so if you want to be picky you could have said well God hasn't told us that we couldn't marry the surrounding nations today there's this nice girl I'm dating she's not an Amorite she's not a Canaanite she's not a Hittite she's not a Perizzite she's not a Hivite she's not a Jebusite so there's no specific instruction I can't marry why can't I marry it but the people correctly interpret the Bible in verse 30 they interpret it as the people around us and so you see in Nehemiah 10 the beginnings of kind of biblical interpretation they adapt it it's flexible again the law didn't prohibit buying on the Sabbath and the legalists might have argued because all I'm doing is buying it's the seller is the problem all the guilt applies to the seller as long as I don't sell on the Sabbath

[ 28 : 32 ] I can buy on the Sabbath just not allowed to sell but the people don't say that they don't try and evade it again there's debate in the Old Testament how much did the Israelites have to give what was their tithes and offerings how much did they have to give of their income but in Nehemiah 10 nobody's working out the percentage nobody's saying gross or net it's immense overflowing generosity they bring and they bring and they give and they give and they seem to add all the tithes and the offerings together and they leave out nothing they bring the maximum and the overall picture in Nehemiah 10 is the people that don't have to be coaxed and they don't have to be jagooned they don't have to be pushed or pressurised into obedience they want to obey and they want to give and they want to support the work of God and they're enthusiastic so they give as much as they possibly can and they want to consecrate themselves with all their hearts and souls and that is the spirit which delights God

I don't really like the word consecration we don't use it do we it's a cold word it's a clinical word it's an abstract word and I recognise that there's a sense in which I've spoken of it tonight in a kind of theoretical way or as a subject but actually it's a warm and a personal and a living and a loving thing isn't it what is it it is somebody who stands at the cross of Jesus Christ and says love so amazing so divine demands my soul my life my all it is somebody who says with CT instead if Jesus Christ be God die for me they're no sacrifice it's too great for me to make for him and so what is consecration it is falling in love with God it is going down your knees and saying

Lord you've done so much for me let me give all that I am to you that is the Christian life and so Paul in Romans 12 says I appeal to you therefore brothers by the mercies of God to present your bodies as living sacrifices holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship and so it's not a subject it's not even a doctrine it's not a theory it is the commitment of heart and life that if God has been so gracious to us in Jesus Christ and if God has given so much to us he gave his only son that you might live and these people aren't counting pennies these people come and they lay down everything before God and they say take it all have it all and so Lord Jesus you have given everything for us help us to give everything for you let's pray God God God!  
! God!