

Teaching Sound Doctrine

Fear God Pt:4

A Study Of Nehemiah

The story of Nehemiah is that of rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem following their return from captivity. In this book we see a people who feared God. Nehemiah described the people to God as those who "desire to fear Your name" (Neh. 1:11). Later in the book he rebuked some for not walking in the fear of God (Neh. 5:9). He also cited the fear of God as the cause for his own behavior (Neh. 5:15). Nehemiah describes Hanani (who was given charge of the city after the walls were completed) as "a faithful man and feared God more than many" (Neh. 7:2).

Remember, as we have studied in an earlier lesson, that fear involves: (1) awe and respect, and (2) being afraid of displeasing God. We shall see both of these concepts as we look at the book of Nehemiah.

With the above references as a backdrop, let's consider what the fear of God would prompt these people to do. Likewise, if we are walking in the fear of God, we will do the same.

1. Concerned about the things of God. When Nehemiah learned that the walls were torn down and burned, he "wept and mourned for many days". He said, "I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven" (Neh. 1:4). Nehemiah was so bothered that the city of God was in total ruins that he cried. His concern was so great that he couldn't eat.

Our concern about spiritual things (the church, a soul in danger, what is being taught, development of an apostasy and our worship) should cause us to be greatly disturbed when we see that things are not as they should be. Too often apathy allows the problems to go unchallenged (cf. 1 Cor. 5:2).

2. View God as great and awesome. As Nehemiah prayed, he addressed God as, "O great and awesome God..." (Neh. 1:5). Later, when urging the people to resist their opposition, he reminded them that the "great and awesome God" would fight for them (Neh. 4:14).

3. See a need and act upon it. After Nehemiah was informed of the situation in Jerusalem, he went to see for himself (Neh. 2:1-10). He went out by night and surveyed the damage the city had suffered. It is interesting to note what Nehemiah didn't do. He didn't think, "Somebody ought to do something about this." Rather, he immediately made a plea for the people of God to rise up and build (Neh. 2:17-18). His plea included himself in the plan.

When we see a need in the Lord's work (someone to be visited, someone to be

taught, a problem to be handled or encouragement to be offered), the fear of God will cause us to jump in and do what we can.

4. Diligently work. Chapter three shows who worked and where in the reconstruction of the wall. In this chapter we also see the attitude and manner with which they worked. Baruch "diligently repaired the other section" (Neh. 3:20). There was no time for workers who didn't get with it (Neh. 3:5). Those who fear God will put their whole heart into their work.

5. Have a mind to work. The reason they finished the wall in such a short time (52 days, Neh: 6:15) was that the "people had a mind to work" (Neh. 4:6). They were willing to work. They responded to Nehemiah's pleas by saying, "Let us rise up and build" (Neh. 2:18). This is a far cry from those who have to be begged and coached and still don't carry their load.

6. Press on in spite of trouble, opposition or the fear of man. Sanballat (from the north) and Tobiah (from the south) did all they could to hinder the work on the wall (Neh. 4). They ridiculed their work and tried to confuse the workers besides planning an attack. However, that didn't stop those who feared God. They returned to their work (v. 15) while some stood guard with spears (v. 21). They didn't buckle under pressure.

7. Work long and hard for the Lord's cause. Under Nehemiah's leadership the people worked on the wall "from daybreak until the stars appeared" (Neh. 4:21). They literally worked from sun-up to sun-down. What could explain their drive and motivation to give so much to their work? It must be their desire to fear God (1:11). Churches that have members that fear God, will have members who work long and hard for the cause of the Lord.

8. Treat one another right. When Nehemiah learned that some of the people were exacting usury (charging unreasonable interest) from their brethren, he rebuked them saying, "What you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God...?" (Neh. 5:9).

The fear of God will cause us to treat others fair and right. That is the very motive cited by Nehemiah for his own conduct being different from the former governors (v. 15).

9. Respect for the word. In the eighth chapter Ezra reads the law before the people. Because of their respect for God (fear) they a) listened with the intent of understanding (vv. 2,3,7,8). b) They took time for the hearing of the word (v. 3; 9:3). c) When Ezra opened the book the people stood (v. 5). d) They were willing to do what they found lacking in their own lives (vv. 13-18). e) As they listened, they viewed the speaker as a spokesman from God (9:26, 29).

10. Make great changes. After reading the law, the people confessed their sins (Neh. 9). The feast of the tabernacles was not being observed as the law

commanded. So, they changed! They also separated themselves from the mixed multitude (13:1-3).

After all, that is the purpose of the preaching of God's word (Neh. 9:26,29). Those who fear God will make any changes necessary (no matter how painful) to fit their lives to the plan of God.

11. Recognize that God's wrath is just. The confession that is recorded in Neh. 9 said to God, "You are just in all that has befallen us; for You have dealt faithfully, but we have done wickedly" (v. 33). This is a recognition that God's wrath, rebuke and punishment is fair.

12. Promise to be faithful. Once the people confessed their sins, they make a covenant that they would "walk in God's law...and do all the commandments of the Lord..." (10:29). Those who fear God make a promise to the Lord by their confession and baptism that they will serve the Lord faithfully. Those who would think of doing otherwise do not fear God.

13. Exercise righteous indignation. There is such a thing as righteous indignation. There is a time to be upset and angry. While we must control ourselves properly at all times, there is a time and place to demonstrate our displeasure over things that do not harmonize with the fear of God. Nehemiah did.

While Nehemiah had left Jerusalem to return to the king, Eliashib, the priest, had compromised with Tobiah "preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God" (Neh. 13:7). Nehemiah said, "it grieved me bitterly; therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room" (v. 8).

Later, when Nehemiah learned that some of the people had married people of the land, he said, "So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves"" (Neh. 13:25).

When we fear God we will be upset when we see God's will being transgressed.

14. Aware of danger. As Nehemiah dealt with the matter of their marriage to the strangers of the land, he cited Solomon as an example of what could happen. He said, "Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin" (Neh. 13:26). If that happened to Solomon, it could and would happen to those of Nehemiah's day. The point is that those who fear God have their eyes open to the danger of things that could lead them away from the Lord.

It is my prayer that this study will challenge you to do more thinking and study on the concept of the fear of God.