

“Revival Through Commitment”
Nehemiah 10
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(Lord’s Day Service, February 11, 2018)

Nehemiah 10

¹ *“On the seals are the names of Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, Zedekiah, ² Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, ³ Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, ⁴ Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, ⁵ Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, ⁶ Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, ⁷ Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, ⁸ Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah; these are the priests. ⁹ And the Levites: Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel; ¹⁰ and their brothers, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, ¹¹ Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, ¹² Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, ¹³ Hodiah, Bani, Beninu. ¹⁴ The chiefs of the people: Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, ¹⁵ Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, ¹⁶ Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, ¹⁷ Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, ¹⁸ Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, ¹⁹ Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, ²⁰ Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, ²¹ Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, ²² Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, ²³ Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, ²⁴ Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, ²⁵ Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, ²⁶ Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, ²⁷ Malluch, Harim, Baanah.*

²⁸ *“The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, ²⁹ join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and 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 and his rules and his statutes. ³⁰ We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. ³¹ And if the peoples 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 we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.*

³² *“We also take on ourselves the obligation to give yearly a third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: ³³ for the showbread, the regular grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the Sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed feasts, the holy things, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God. ³⁴ We, the priests, the Levites, and the people, have likewise cast lots for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, according to our fathers’ houses, at times appointed, year by year, to burn on the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the Law. ³⁵ We obligate ourselves to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the Lord; ³⁶ also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, as it is written in the Law, and the firstborn of our herds and of our flocks; ³⁷ and to bring the first of our dough, and our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil, to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and to bring to the Levites the tithes from our ground, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all our towns where we labor. ³⁸ And the priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive the tithes. And the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse. ³⁹ For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the chambers, where the vessels of the sanctuary are, as well as the priests who minister, and the gatekeepers and the singers. We will not neglect the house of our God.”*

Introduction

When the Word of God is preached there is a reaction to God's Word: we respond in repentance. When there's true repentance, there will be revival through commitment. Revival sounds abstract, but true revival will lead to a restructuring of your life. Commitment comes after true repentance. Repentance is not just discovering how one ought to live but discovering how God has been pursuing after us. We were running away then we turn around and see that it is not us who have been seeking but God has been seeking after us. We receive His forgiveness, grace, and mercy so that now we walk with God. This is why repentance is constant. Throughout our life, this will happen. We do not repent so that there are absolutely no sin left, but because we are in love with God, we want to please Him as we see our sin, which displeases Him. As we get closer to Him, we have a clearer view of sin in our lives thus we hate sin and love Christ more. Because we want to please Him more, we want to commit ourselves.

What is the basis of commitment as we look at Nehemiah 9? Verse thirty-eight ends with the basis of our commit "*because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing.*" "Firm covenant" is one word in Hebrew. Usually the word *berith* is used for covenant, but this one uses the word *amana*. This is where we get the word, "amen", which means "I agree." This is how I am going to live or at least I will try. Our congregation ought to learn how to say "Amen" and it should lead to our commitment.

Amana means "that is who God is." He is so faithful, so true. This is talking about His divine attributes: firmness, faithfulness, fidelity, trustworthiness. His qualities lead us to become like who He is so that the world could see Him through us. His faithfulness is the foundation for commitment in our lives. Though we fail, He is always faithful. You are always forgiven. You can always be revived. Therefore we must always re-commit. A growing Christian life is a series of new beginnings. We can always have new beginnings after we fall because the foundation for our commitment is Jesus Christ.

1. The commitment of the leaders [1-27]

This list of those who put their names to the covenant is meant to show how the entire community was wholeheartedly behind it. These were prominent people. Many of them had appeared before Nehemiah and even in Ezra. The total roster contains eighty-four names. Four different categories of people signed the document.

A. Nehemiah and Zedekiah [1]

Two of them are set apart as a special group representing the civil power, a governor and assistant, or probably Zedekiah was the chief secretary.

B. Israel's priests [2-8]

There are twenty-one names for the head of the priests' households. Ezra's name is not there because the head of his household was actually someone else, Zeriah.

C. Levites [9-13]

Seventeen names of Levitical households are mentioned.

D. The noble families of Israel [14-27]

Forty-four names of the heads of the leading families are mentioned.

These signers represent the entire people. The personal application of God's truth must begin with the leadership. Leaders must be committed to the Lord. This is true of all kinds of organizations (ex: companies, schools, sports teams, families, small groups, ministry, church). Those in leadership set the example for other people. As Christians, we are leaders in this world to lead people to Christ. All of us are leaders of some sort in our lives. These leaders wrote their names on the dotted line and committed themselves to do what they expected the people under them to do. The most important about being a leader is that they set the standard, the norm, for high the commitment is. Sometimes, it is about doing things but more so than that it is about who they are.

We do things because and out of who we are. We who are in Jesus Christ need to develop the character of Him, through this we lead people. Character is developed because we have the sin nature and the Spirit's nature in us, through the daily battle of our heart by the grace of God that we received in Jesus Christ. There is the self-love nature and the Christ-love nature in us. As we battle, it becomes our habit. We choose to live for Christ and deny ourselves. As it becomes habitual, it becomes our character, part of who we are.

Leaders set the standard of how much we love Jesus Christ. This sounds difficult with the bar set really high. Here is an encouraging verse, 1 Timothy 4:15 "*Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.*" Paul the apostle is speaking to a young pastor, Timothy. He says, keep doing the right things. Become great at a few things. The essence of leadership is so that all may see your *progress*. Notice how this does not say "so that all may see your *perfection*." If the verse had said *perfection*, none of us would be leaders or want to be leaders. It is about progression. As long as people see progression in us, as much as we get closer to Christ, we can lead others. Progression means that today you need to love Jesus more today than yesterday, tomorrow more than today; so that the day we die, we love Jesus the most. (This is when you say, "amen.")

2. **The commitment of the rest of the people [28-29]**

A. Who should be committed? [28]

The rest of the people should be committed. Commitment is not just for pastors or leaders, but for all the believers in Jesus Christ. All Christians must be committed to the Lord together. He wants every one of you to be committed. He wants to use you. He wants you to live a maximum life with the greatest happiness you can achieve. It may not come on this Earth, but eternally, He wants you to receive maximum happiness in Christ.

B. What does it mean to commit? [28]

There are two words mentioned here: *from* and *to*. Commitment is going away *from* something in order to go *towards* something. This is just like in marriage. When you make a marriage commitment, you are saying, “I will be away *from* anyone else in this special relationship, so that I can exclusively be in relation *to* the one person that I am going to marry.” Similarly, the Israelites were committing themselves away *from* any other love so that they would be committed *to* God and God alone. They are to be away from the world - not like the other nations - away from sin, disobedience and pleasure, but to the pleasures of God and His Word.

We need to be balanced. In one sense, we need to be away from the world, but we need to be in it. We need to live in this world in terms of neutral cultural customs. People should not think we are weird. We need to be relevant but distinct because of what we know, so that we can be obedient to the Word in our character and motives. We need to be a different kind of people, people like Christ.

There are “no”s in commitment. We have to say “no” to neutral things so that we can say “yes” to more of Christ. This is what the Lenten season is like, this way we can be separated for the glory of God.

C. How much should we commit ourselves? [29]

This is more drastic: the rest of the people joined their leaders in taking on themselves a curse. In other words, if they did not live in accordance to their commitment, they would be willing to take on a curse. In terms of a curse, the Israelites were probably thinking along the lines of Deuteronomy 28, which calls down the numerous curses that would come on Israel if they forsook the covenant. Out of sixty eight verses in the chapter, verses one through fifteen are blessings then sixteen thru sixty eight, for fifty-two verses are a variety of curses in every sphere of their lives.

From God’s perspective, the people of God’s curses are lifted up because of Jesus Christ. We know this through Galatians 3:13, “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’-*” He took all of our failures, disobedience, sin and curse on Himself so we do not have a curse in terms of eternal life. However in this life, although we are forgiven, because He wants us not to destroy ourselves with sin and wants us to grow, there are consequences of sin left on this Earth. Galatians 6:7 says, “*Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.*” The natural consequences of sin are nothing compared to what we really deserve, an eternal curse. Just like a parent disciplining their children, God disciplines the people He loves.

From Israel’s perspective, what are they saying when they take on a curse? These Israelites knew what was in Deuteronomy 28, yet they say, “Lord, we are committing

ourselves to you. Please give us these curses *if* we disobey you because we want to obey you so much.” With *that much* they wanted to hate sin so that they can obey and live for the glory of God. Even if they lose everything, they said we don’t want to lose You, Lord. They committed themselves out of love for God. They joined this covenant curse with their kinsman, family and friends. How much do you want to hate sin and love Christ?

One of the pastors I knew, he told me that he had a temper problem. He wanted to change it, so he committed so that every time he would express his anger, he would fast one day. Every time he wanted to express his anger, he had to weigh the pleasure of expressing it versus the pain of fasting. It helped him so much. He was willing to go through pain because he wanted to hate sin and love Christ more.

I apply the same principle for my counseling. People tell me all kinds of sins, and I give advice. A lot of guys struggle with pornography. They have accountability with their friends, but they are all struggling together, so when we confess our sins it is encouraging. So I suggested adding fasting to that accountability. Whoever fails has to fast a meal or two a day. So whenever you want to experience the pleasure of pornography, there is the pain of fasting. I think it helps a lot of people like that.

But the question is, how much do you want to overcome your sin? How much do you want to grow, glorify, and live for Christ?

3. **The commitment in family [30]**

Notice these three spheres of callings: family, work, church. Verse thirty is about family. A personal application of God’s truth must extend to home. It says, “*we will not give our daughters to the people of the land or take their daughters for our sons.*” This is a commitment of the parents in relation to marriage of their children. This is not a prohibition against interracial marriage but against interreligious marriage, because those people did not know the God of Israel. Interreligious marriage was such a problem in Israel’s history. Many times, when Israel fell into sin, it had to do with marrying unbelievers and this led to sin in their lives.

Parents are committing themselves to their marriage, family and how they raise their children. So we need to look at some verses about what parents should do. You need to love God if you are a parent.

Deuteronomy 6:5-7 says, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.*”

As your hearts are burning, make sure the Word of God is in you. What you teach, your children should have a burning in their hearts as well. When you have the Word of God

in you, everything in your day to day life is an illustration to teach the will of God. Surround your children with the Word of God. Do that in the family and make sure they are in the environment of learning God's Word.

Your primary job as parents is to train them with God's Word. It is not to make them believers, but to make sure they are in the vicinity of God's Word. This way they can have individual faith in the Lord. Often, their children or their children's children will fall when you fall away from that. Then, in their personal lives, they would make wrong decisions and would go away from the Lord.

They were in a culture where parents decided who the children should marry, but most of us decide who we should marry in American culture. The question for us is how can we decide who to marry? (This is not in the text, but it might be helpful to you.) 1 Corinthians 7:39 has a special context where a woman becomes a widow and needs to marry someone since economically she cannot live on her own. It says, "*A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.*"

She is free but only in the Lord. What does that mean? You have freedom to choose. A lot of us think there is one right person to marry, and in God's sovereignty, He knows and there is one person. But in terms of our decision-making process, we prayerfully choose with wisdom. If you think there is one right person to marry, you will never know if you married the right person. Think about the logic. If you did not marry the right person, that means you married the wrong person. You married someone that someone else should have married. This means one wrong marriage begins a chain reaction in which everyone marries the wrong person. So this is not a wise way to think. There is one condition - only in the Lord. This means they have to be a believer, a Christian.

Among believers, we decide through standards. We have sin nature standards (good-looking, cute, tall, money, good job), and there are Spirit's nature standards (godly, loves God). When we decide, we often have to settle and usually we settle in our spiritual standards. But the Scripture says we need to settle in our sinful standards and not give up on spiritual standards. Pick someone you can be compatible with so that together you can maximally live for the glory of God.

So everything has to be given to the Lord. As parents, pray for the faith of your children and their marriage. Even when you are single, you should pray (if you want to get married). Some of you may remain single and do a lot of things for the Lord. If you take on a calling of marriage, you need to pray. I know many instances where God has used a believing mate to lead an unbelieving spouse to salvation. It does not mean when you marry an unbeliever God's grace is not with you. But when you are about to make the decision, a clear command is that you need to marry a believer. You will have a godly marriage picturing the Gospel. And when you will have children, you need to raise them together in the Lord. Together, it is already tough to raise children. To do so on your own with an unbelieving spouse, it is not impossible but will be a lot harder than you think.

One of the best ways to live for this generation is to have strong family, a gospel-centered marriage, and raise godly children. Doing these things means you are contributing to expanding God's kingdom and raising up the next generation. The defense of godly families comes first in the list of concerns because the family is the basic unit of society and the church. When you marry in the Lord, there is the anointing of God.

Malachi 2:14-15 says, *"But you say, 'Why does he not?' Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth."*

This is talking about how much God hates divorce. You are not supposed to divorce when you are married. God was there when you got married, in every wedding. It is God who put two believers in marriage. There is the anointing of God in two believers getting married. This is so God can use them to raise godly offspring.

Even as you marry a believer, try to marry someone who is strong in the Lord. I have seen many people who marry someone of less commitment to the Lord. Two things happens. Either you fall lower in your faith *or* you grow distant in your relationship with the Lord because your two purposes are different. Choose a spouse so that together you can maximally live for the Lord.

4. **The commitment to rest and work [31]**

This talks about the Sabbath. There are five observations about the Sabbath here.

A. We are separated from the world and separated for God

The people of the land were not Israelites. The only ones who kept the Sabbath holy to the Lord, resting and not working, were the Israelites. So this is one of the characteristics that distinguished them from any other nation. Through this principle, we are to be separate from the world to be separate for God.

B. God is our provider

On the seventh day, you do not work. If you do not work, how will you get income? The Israelites were refugees. They had just come in with low economic status. Everybody else was working every day. But the Israelites needed to rest, trusting that God would provide for them on that day. They were tempted to work, but they needed to trust in the Lord, just as He provided manna through in the desert. Not only were they commanded to rest the seventh day, but also the seventh year (the whole year). They needed to really trust God to provide.

C. Our strength comes from God

What did they do on the Sabbath day when they rested? They rested from work and also in the Lord. They worshiped. On that day, they will receive God's strength and power so that for the rest of the days, they could serve God. All the time they had was from the Lord. Their strength came from the Lord for His glory.

D. Jesus Christ is the center of history and our lives

The Sabbath was Saturday, the seventh day from the Old Testament perspective. Worship was changed to Sunday, the first day in the New Testament. What does that show? Old Testament had the creation cycle. For six days, they would work and the seventh day, they rested. Hebrews 4 says Jesus Christ is the rest. We work and fight against our sin nature, but when Jesus comes He will give us rest. The creation cycle was looking forward to the coming of Jesus. When Jesus came, died, resurrected, and cleansed us of our sin, people started to worship on the Sunday, the Lord's day, celebrating His resurrection. Through receiving the resurrection power, they would live every day for the Lord. That change came when Jesus Christ came. He is the center of history (BC and AD) of our lives as we live every day by His grace in His resurrection power.

E. We are to give to others what we have received from Jesus

Our debt is cancelled because Jesus paid for our debt. So we ought to cancel other people's debt. If there is a loan, we can forgive that to show how God was generous to us. It does not mean that we should cancel debts all the time, but sometimes we need to do that to show what God has done for us spiritually by His generous hand in Jesus Christ.

The purpose of rest is to rest in the Lord so that we can continue to work. We have two directions in life to Egypt - living for ourselves, the world, and our self glory. In this, vacation is for us to have pleasure. But if we go into the direction of the Promised Land - following Jesus Christ - then we are always to serve the Lord. We rest to be rested physically and spiritually so that we can serve God and work for the Lord. You need to rest physically. As you rest, build relationships with people but especially you need to build your relationship with the Lord to be refueled, strengthened, motivated to go back to your calling and work. Our rest is not in a day but the person of Jesus Christ.

5. **The commitment to church [32-39]**

In this context, they were committed to the people of God. In the New Testament context, we are committed to the church of Jesus Christ. Verse thirty-two to forty-nine is about their support and commitment to the house of God. The house of God is mentioned about nine times, referring to the restored temple. Their promised support was specific and involved four different areas of ministry.

A. The temple tax [32-33]

They offered a third part of the shekel. Why does it have a command to provide for the temple but not for the family? This is because we naturally provide for whoever is close to us, but some of us do not naturally provide for the temple or for other people. Just as you provide for your family, you need to have a serious concern for providing for the family of God.

From a kingdom perspective, family, work, and church are equally important. Different cultures can hold these things in different esteems. What is right? All are equally important but these are differently important. Foundationally, family is more important. When you have a problem in the family, it will affect everything. Functionally, the church of Jesus Christ is more important. All the families gather together and we strengthen one another and become a powerful force in our community and the world. You need to fit it together so that we can maximally live for the kingdom of God.

B. The wood offering [34]

This is similarly mentioned in Leviticus 6:12-13, *“The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not go out. The priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and he shall arrange the burnt offering on it and shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out.”* The perpetual fire on the altar represented uninterrupted offering to God on behalf of Israel. Endless worship has to go on. Prayer for the people has to go on in the body of Christ. Not everybody in Israel could be priests and Levites and donate lambs and oxen and sacrifices. But everyone could bring some wood to help keep the fire burning. The principle is that everybody can pray: for themselves and for each other. This way the people’s and families’ hearts would be burning on fire for the Lord. Through this, the Word of God can go out through their daily life.

C. The firstfruits [35-37]

Bringing the firstfruit of the offering is a symbolic way of saying, “everything is from You, God.” It is giving everything to God. It does not mean will be ours but that the rest will be used *for You*. Jesus Christ is the firstfruit of the resurrection. This means that the rest of the people who will be resurrected will be given to God just like Jesus Christ. Similarly, we believers are firstfruits of the nation. Just as we are given to the Lord, it also lifts up our nations. This is basically saying, “the rest of the nations will come to You and they will be devoted to You.”

D. The tithes [37-39]

Tithe means “a tenth.” The Jews were to bring a tenth of their produce to the Lord every year for the support of the Levites. The Levites gave their tithe to the priests. The eleven tribes had land and jobs that could generate income. Levites did not have land, so they could not generate income. Thus they received it from the people. The

principle is how they served each other - religiously and financially - as the body of Christ through their gifts and what they have. As they are serving each other they are strengthening one another for the purpose of God's kingdom expansion.

Tithing can be a great blessing but we can do it out of a wrong motive: out of obligation, sense of punishment, or that you could get more money from God if you give tithe. Just because you give tithe does not mean that the ninety percent left is to be used for yourself but for the glory of God, as you live with necessity. Some people give only their tithe but fail to give other love offerings to the Lord. The Israelites gave much more. They tithed like that and every third year they gave more. They gave probably close to twenty-five percent of their income to the Lord, so that God's work could be done.

Conclusion

All these things point forward to Jesus Christ, picturing how God has given us His Son. This is so we can be like Him and show who He is to the world. Commitment is everybody being committed in these spheres of our lives so that he would be seen and glorified and his kingdom would be expanded in our lives.

There was a pastor's kid. His family almost all of their income, around fifty percent to the Lord. The son got a job for the first time and was making a lot of money. He asked his father, "is it okay to give only like thirty percent to the Lord?" His dad told him, that is fine, but give ten percent to the church. Then, give ten percent to me. As for the other ten percent, pray throughout the year. Whenever you see it fit, give it away for God. The rest of the seventy percent, live with necessity. But if you have more, always give out more for the Lord.

I was thinking about that and I was so blessed. That is how believers ought to be: everything for the Lord. Give it away. Be ready to give it away. Be ready to show The Hand that has given it to you in the first place, so that we can picture Him to the world. It is a good picture of how committed the body of Christ ought to be. May we be so committed that it affects every sphere of our lives. Whatever happens, help us Lord to hate sin and love Christ more so that we can be revived for His glory.