

NEH 06 – Will You Continue To Build? - Neh 4:1-9

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Today's msg is about Criticism & Opposition that we ALL face when we set out to build a Testimony for God

J. Oswald Sanders Says
in his great book called Spiritual Leadership

J. Oswald Sanders
No leader lives a day without criticism, and humility will never be more on trial than when criticism comes

I can tell you right now – I am still *“in the process”*
of learning how to handle the criticism
that comes with Spiritual Leadership

& honestly I Fail at it - as much - as I Succeed

So – I figure One of Two things is occurring
as I teach thru Nehemiah

Either 1) God is having me teach what I really need to still learn,
& when I really need to learn it, (*which is often the case*)

or 2) God is allowing circumstances in my life, & in this church,
that illustrate in Living Color - exactly what we're studying

& If that's the case then I should probably be teaching
about the rapture

Opposition is inevitable - & it is inevitably used by God for good,
in the building of Every Testimony

God **didn't allow** the wall in Nehemiah
to be built **WITHOUT** Opposition

Because (in a way we can't understand)

The Opposition **was actually PART** of what God **used**

to **make sure** a Strong **Wall of testimony** - was **built** by His people

We're headed into **our 6th Msg** in Neh –
& I really **wanted** to **PAUSE** here

& teach a **POSITIVE** msg about **HOW** to go about
Building the **Wall of Testimony** in our Lives
you know, the *Practical, Positive Steps*

But - Have you ever had **someone** start **telling** you
the **meaning** of a **great movie** - just **half way** thru the movie?

Nobody likes that – so I've got to **hold back** on the **HOW**
until we get **further** into the movie – *does that make sense ?*

Let's Pray

OK - Our "*Real Life*" Nehemiah **movie**
began with **character development** – back in **Ch 1**

& then, in **CH 2** God opened the **Door of Opportunity**
& **we felt** like – Ok here we go, **the plot** is really taking off

& then, still in **Ch 2**, Nehemiah **arrived** in Jerusalem,
& right **there**, we meet **The Bad Guys** for the 1st time

& it looked like they we're going to create
some real trouble for God's people

But Nehemiah goes to work Quietly
& when everything is finally in order

We had this "Mini Crescendo" 2 weeks ago

where Nehemiah Calls the people to join him
in Re-Building the Wall of God's Testimony

& the people all respond enthusiastically – ***YES – We Will Build***

but then, again – the Critics show their faces
they SCOFF at Nehemiah & at God's people

& they insinuate their first threat – like some street-gang hoods

& again, we get that sinking feeling
that these guys - are just not going away (2 wks ago)

But then last week - (Cue the Triumphant music) - in Ch 3
we see the Great Rebuilding Project begin

& we're feeling victory as we relate to God's people
as we see them tackle what seemed to be – an Impossible task

& we're like; "***Yeah, the good guys are winning***"

but then - we realize . . . wait a minute
the movie isn't even half over yet

it seems like God's People are winning
BUT - - there's GOT TO BE more to the plot, right?

& there certainly is

Just when we're celebrating with the good guys
the music changes

the camera pans just to The Side
& there – we see (again) the bad guys

& we realize; ***“Man, I knew that victory (last week) was too easy,
I knew there was more to it than that”***

That's WHY I can't stop & tell you the moral of the story yet

We just reached our first victorious crescendo
but there is TROUBLE still looming around the corner

& if we were to stop here we might think;
“Hey, that was easy – Mission Accomplished – Roll the credits”

EEEhhhh – sorry – way too unrealistic

No Victory for God – is EVER achieved - without facing
the Criticism & Opposition that always comes against it

There is no True, Mature, Bible Teacher
who would ever say to you

that Building a testimony for God
in your life, in your family, or in your church

could EVER be accomplished - without conflict, without difficulty,
& without battle against the enemies of God

It is only the **FALSE Teachers**, who want to **Tickle your ears**
(to get you to follow them) – who would **ever tell you** otherwise

Difficulty, Struggle, & Battle with the enemy
Are a very **REAL part** of the Christian life

Especially when you Determine – to build a **Testimony for God**

So - **Last week** – we left **everybody** hard at work
rebuilding the walls - in the **excitement** of their initial **success**

& the **people** must have been **thrilled**
to really **begin** to **Rebuild the Wall** for God

But - - There's **just one** little **problem**

1Pet 5:8 – NLT

***8 Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls
around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.***

Now – **Do you think** your spiritual enemy is **PROWLING** around
LOOKING for some **Professing Christian**

who's so **caught up in sin**
that his **testimony** is already in total **ruins** – or . . .

Do you think he might be **PROWLING** around
LOOKING for someone who is **on the verge**
of **Building** a **True Testimony** for God ??

I **promise** you – Your **spiritual enemy** WILL **go to work**
when you set out – to **Build a Testimony** for God

& **today** - In Neh Ch 4 – we’re going to look
at one of the **most discouraging tactics** the **enemy uses**
to **Devour** Christians

AND - We’re also going to **see some STEPS**
to **overcoming** this tactic
so that we can **CONTINUE** to **Rebuild the Wall** in our lives

We’ve kind of **settled into** using the **NLT** in Nehemiah
So **let’s continue** with that today

Neh 4:1-2 – NLT

1 Sanballat was very angry when he learned that we were rebuilding the wall. He flew into a rage and mocked the Jews, 2 saying in front of his friends and the Samaritan army officers, “What does this bunch of poor, feeble Jews think they’re doing? Do they think they can build the wall in a single day by just offering a few sacrifices? Do they actually think they can make something of stones from a rubbish heap—and charred ones at that?”

Sanballat’s Role in our movie – as Bad Guy #1

is to create constant **Opposition** & **Criticism** of God’s People
While they are **trying** to do **the work** of God

& so - like any good “**COP**” movie – first,
we’ve got to look at what his **MOTIVE** might be

We know that somehow - the **spiritual enemy**
has “**Captured**” Sanballat & Tobiah

to be his **mouth-pieces** - to do his work of **opposing** God’s People

& we see here in V.1– Sanballat was VERY ANGRY
that the work of God was moving forward

& it was his ANGER that caused him
to fly into this “Rage of Criticism”

But I think it's important to point out

God's Word never really says specifically
WHY Sanballat & Tobiah were so ANGRY
to see good things happening for God's people

& that's important
because when the Critic (opponent) comes against us

often what is behind their Criticism - is actually ANGER
over some other issue that cannot even be seen

Often their critical spirit often comes
from some completely unrelated incident

We see this all the time in church

Especially when someone gets angry
because we don't do what they want
or give them what they want

& sometimes (not always) – they become our biggest critics

but that critical spirit had been “BIRTHED”
in their anger over some other unrelated matter

it doesn't mean their attacks don't hurt

but at least we can try to **understand** - How it is
that they've been "**Captured**" by the enemy - **to do his will**

A **great illustration** of this
is in that great **Robin Williams** movie – **HOOK**

there's a **classic scene** where **Captain Hook**
has **done** all these **terrible** things to **Peter Pan** & his **kids**

& **finally** – after a **huge battle**
Peter Pan has **Hook** where he could easily **KILL him**

but **before he does**, Peter Pan's **daughter** comes up next to him,
& **she says** – "**Oh Daddy - He just needs a mommy**"

& so **Peter Pan** backs down & **doesn't kill** him

but **then** - **Hook** attacks again - & this time – the **Huge Alligator**
EATS him - & in the end, everything **works out fine**

So **know this** – when **Critics** rise up to **Derail** Your work for God
Try to remember – "**They probably just need a mommy**"

However – God **MAY STILL** have a **Huge Alligator**
EAT THEM in the end

& **we'll see** that's **basically** what Nehemiah **prays** for
when he **addresses God** about his Critics

So Sanballat is **very anger** – about **whatever** he's **angry** about
& he "**Flies into a Rage**" & starts **Mocking** (criticizing) God's People

& I want you to notice **VERY CAREFULLY** to WHOM
he's **doing** his criticizing

Neh 4:2 – NLT [\[video whole vs\]](#)

2 saying in front of his friends and the Samaritan army officers,
“What does this bunch of poor, feeble Jews think they’re doing? .
. . stop there

It's important to say - **NOT ALL Criticism** is *bad* – or *from the enemy*
we've **talked about this** before in this series

But the **first line of V.2** – *shows us*
if Criticism is **Positive** or **Negative**

Positive Criticism is when someone **comes to you** (& only you)
in Love, shows you **an error** in your life

& **then says** – **I’m here** to stand **with** you,
to **help** you, to **support** you

THAT is **good** criticism - & that is the **criticism I get**
from our **Elder board** - & I **respect** it & **appreciate** it

But the first SIGN of **NEGATIVE** Criticism
is when **the Critic** is talking Primarily to **OTHER** people
which always turns their criticism into **Gossip** & **Slander**

& **THAT** is what we see here in **V.2**
saying in front of his friends and the Samaritan army officers . . .

Next - NEGATIVE Criticism

is almost always **General** & **Ambiguous**;

[Cont V.2] - “What does this bunch of poor, feeble Jews think they’re doing? Do they think they can build the wall in a single day by just offering a few sacrifices? Do they actually think they can make something of stones from a rubbish heap—and charred ones at that?”

These are **Pointless Criticisms** thrown out to see

if **the critic** can get **the people** around them to **BITE** - *to join them*

& **what happens** far too often is – **they** are **successful**

I’m **not sure why** – but **human nature**
is very **easily lead** into *Negative Criticism*

which is why these people are **so dangerous** in the church

& **SO** - guess who’s standing **NEXT** to Sanballat - -
TOBIAH – *Bad Guy #2* - in our real life movie

Imagine the school yard **Bully** – standing around the monkey bars
with all his **pals** – who all **think** the bully’s so **cool**

& then **the bully** starts abusing some **poor nerdy kid** walking by
on the school yard - - - & then what happens ??

the **bully’s friend** jumps in right? . . .

YEAH, that Nerdy kid can’t even TIE his SHOES

& **that’s exactly** what we see in **V.3**

Neh 4:3 – NLT

3 Tobiah the Ammonite, who was standing beside him, remarked, “That stone wall would collapse if even a fox walked along the top of it!”

Isn't that a perfect picture - of a couple of school yard bullies standing around picking on the good guys ??

But **here's the thing** we've got to see

Critics **NEVER** Criticize **ALONE**

They **MUST** have someone to **Criticize TO** & **Criticize WITH**

They have a **some need** - to *draw people* into their **Negativity** – & they **work very hard** at doing that

& Guys we have **GOT to be** so careful **because** it is so **easy** to get **sucked** into this TRAP

& **really**, to end up being **used by the enemy** to **damage** God's people, & **God's work**

In **the first church** we started **I got** totally sucked into this very trap

I had **become critical** of the **Pastor** that **myself & 2 other guys** hired for that position

& man – I'm **Pretty Sure** I became . . . **The Greatest Armchair Quarterback** the game had ever seen

I believe I was being **considered** for **The Armchair Quarterback** *Hall of Fame*

There was Just One Problem

Like ALMOST ALL Critics

I had never actually done the job I was criticizing

I had never ACTUALLY walked - in that man's shoes

& you know when I stopped forever – criticizing that man ??? . . .
about a year after God PUT ME in HIS shoes

& as soon as people started doing to me
what I had been doing to him

it totally HEALED me of my Critical Spirit towards him

So – Let's be careful guys

A Critical Spirit can be used by the enemy
to do as much damage – as any other sin in the book

& so it seems strange – that we, as Christians
are SO SUSCEPTIBLE to it

When we KNOW – we are COMMANDED by God;

To Build One Another up – To Edify One Another

To Carry One Another's Burdens

Even to Lay Down our Lives for one another

So - Let's be very, very careful

that we don't fall victim to a Critical Spirit

& become "captured" by the enemy, to do his will

OK - so now (finally) – we get to see

How Nehemiah handles these school yard Bullies

at least in this instance

These **Trouble Makers** show up - **ALL thru-out** the book

They **never go away** - - **HOWEVER** . . .

Nehemiah **handles** them a **Number of Different Ways**

I counted 7 different ways Nehemiah handles his Opponents

#1 - **FIRST** - & **FOREMOST** – HE **PRAYS** to God about them

#2 - He **continued the Work** God called him to

#3 - He **Ignored** them whenever he could

#4 - He **responded** to them directly only when they confronted him

#5 - He set a **guard** against them to protect God's people

#6 - He **refused** to get sucked into their traps

#7 - As a **Last Resort** - He responds aggressively to them,
by **throwing Tobiah's stuff out of the Temple store room**
& by **chasing Sanballat's son-in-law away**

The difficult part – is knowing **which one** of those steps
you **need to be at**, with your **critics**

Which is why **First & Foremost** – We **MUST PRAY**

But here's the M.I.P.

Nehemiah response to his opponents - is in **direct proportion**
to **the danger** they pose - to the **people of God** – [REPEAT]

& we'll **see that** here today

These **Opponents** have already shown up twice

Once Nehemiah **Ignored** them

Once he **Responded** to them with a One-Line answer of Faith

But now – they’ve **stepped up** their attack

they’re **trying hard** - to **discourage**

those who are **working for God**

& so **Nehemiah** is going to **step up** his **response** to them

Guys – it’s always best – if we can;

Pray for our critics

Politely **Ignore** them - &

Continue the work God has called us to

That is always the **best response**

& **most of the time** that is **ALL** that is needed

But when those Critics **become a THREAT** to the people of God

especially from **within** the body - that **raises** the **stakes**

& that is **what we see** here in **Neh Ch 4**

So - **FIRST** - & **FOREMOST** – Nehemiah **PRAYS**

But **watch closely** how he prays – because it might **surprise** you

Neh 4:4-5 – NLT

4 Then I prayed, “Hear us, our God, for we are being mocked. May their scoffing fall back on their own heads, and may they themselves become captives in a foreign land!

5 Do not ignore their guilt. Do not blot out their sins, for they have provoked you to anger here in front of the builders.”

Pretty intense prayer

I believe Nehemiah prays at this level of intensity
because the CRITICS are now - right in front of the builders

they're speaking directly to those who are Building the Wall

They're not in the shadows any more – *they're right out in public*

& Nehemiah knows the damage they can do
to the Morale & the Faith of God's people

& so he prays accordingly

HOWEVER - - - what Nehemiah, & the people of God do next
is much, much MORE important

in FACT – it is the MOST Important

Neh 4:6 – NLT

6 So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.

MAN – that is such a GREAT Vs

In RESPONSE to the Critics Attacks

AND in response - to Nehemiah's Prayer – We read . . .
So we built the wall . . . for the people had a mind to work

Guys – If we Focus *only* on RESPONDING to our Critics

We will **NEVER, EVER**, get around
to actually building the Wall of Testimony for God

We must **PRAY** for them always
We must **IGNORE** them when we can
We must **RESPOND** to them when we have to
We must **GUARD** the people of God from them

But we must **Remember** - **NONE** of that is **BUILDING** the Wall
It's **ALL** Defensive

It **has** to be **done** – but we can **never allow it**
to **overtake** the **purpose** of God

which is to **Build** the **Wall of Testimony** for *HIS Glory*
around our **Lives**, around our **Families**, and around our **Church**

The **Critics** and the **Troubles** will come & go
But we **MUST** *Always Continue* to build the wall

The **BEST RESPONSE** to *Criticism & Opposition*
is to **continue building** the WALL

& SO – *We Built the WALL – For the People had a mind to work*

PRAISE THE LORD !!!

Our **Spiritual Enemy's** Goal – is to **use those Critics**
to **DERAIL** the work of God

& **Unfortunately, if at first** he **doesn't succeed**
the **enemy** doesn't just **pack up & go home**

he **generally** just **STIRS UP** the Trouble Makers
to a **Higher Level**

Neh 4:7-8 – NLT

7 But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry.

8 And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.

& so – the **once relatively harmless Critics**
are now **PLOTTING** with the **Real Enemies** of God
to **Join Forces** to come against God's People

& **remember** – the Critics started at just **TWO** – **Sanballat** & **Tobiah**
Then - they added **Geshem**

Now - they add **THREE GROUPS**

who are all **enemies** of **God's people**
& are usually **enemies** of **One another**
Arabs, Ammonites, & Ashdodites (Philistines)

& **so remember** what we've **said**
about our **response** to the opposition

Our Response must be **in Proportion**
to the danger of the attack, **right?**

Well **now** – the enemy is **gaining** more & more **Opponents**
& they are **ALL very angry**

& they are **PLOTTING together**
to **come & fight** against Jerusalem

& So – **Again** . . .

Critics just being Critics - - **Pray** for them - & **Ignore** them
Critics address you directly - - **Respond** to them in Faith & Love
Critics plotting together, to **Damage** God's people & God's Work . . .

Then you - Put up a **GUARD** Day & Night
to **protect** the people of God
from what the **NT** calls – **Wolves** among the **Sheep**

Which is exactly what Nehemiah does in our **last Vs** today

Neh 4:9 – NLT

9 But we prayed to our God and guarded the city day and night to protect ourselves.

Intensified Opposition to the Work of God

Calls for an **Intensified Response**

At this level – there is **more needed** than just
PRAY for them & **IGNORE** them

There **comes a time** when we must **set up a Guard**
to **protect the people** from the **Wolves** among the **Sheep**
Not at first – but in **direct proportion**
to the **increasing danger** to the people of God

Prov 21:31 – NLT

31 The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord.

We know **the Victory** belongs to **the Lord**

But we **still need to protect one another** from the Wolves

It's like they used to **say** in the **Civil War** days
"Trust in the Lord boys - & Keep your Powder Dry"

Let's close with a Review of the **FOUR steps** we seen today
to **deal** with **Critics & Opponents** to the **Work of God** in your life

- 1) We must **PRAY** for them always
- 2) We must **IGNORE** them whenever we can
- 3) We must **RESPOND** to them only when we have to
- 4) We must **GUARD** the people of God from them

& **please remember** this – **no matter** what

Once the **Building** of the **Testimony of God** has **started** in your life
Make certain of one thing . . .

NEVER, NEVER – Let anyone **STOP** that building

Never let your **Critics** or **Opponents** **Demoralize** you
or **Derail** you from **Building a Testimony** in your life

& **Remember Also**

The **Ultimate Response** to those **Critics** & **Opponents**

is that you **Continue** to **Serve God** - & **Build the Wall**
No MATTER What

Let's Pray

Let me say – as you **sit alone** with God

If you are **developed** a **Critical Spirit** today,
you have a **real problem** in your life

Some of your **criticism** may even be **RIGHT**

But that's **not the question**

The question is – **has your criticism**

Built up the people around you – or

Torn down the people around you

God commands us, to **build** one another up,
to **strengthen** & **support** one another,
to **carry** one another's burdens

Has your Critical Spirit – Done **ANY** of those things?

Negative Criticism is a very, very **dark** place to live

Some **wives** here today have such a Critical Spirit
that you are *systematically tearing down* your home

Some **husbands** here today – Are so Negative & Critical
that you are *destroying* both your *spouse & your children*

Some **people** here – with Critical Spirits – are *systematically damaging*
the *body of Christ* - & the *work of God*

Please, **let's allow God** to reveal to us – our own **Critical Spirit**
& Let's **Repent** to Him - & ask Him to **heal** us

Rom 3 says **ALL** have sinned & fall short of the Glory of God
We each can speak to God on this matter today

& Heavenly Father – I especially Pray for those here –
who have not yet made you their Savior & their Lord . . .