

Neh 08 – Helping or Hurting – Neh 5:1-13
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As Christians – we Really DO have a Spiritual Enemy
who desires to destroy US - AND
the Testimony God desires to BUILD in our lives

& he is RELENTLESS – in his SCHEMES
to come against us

But every once in a while - - - our enemy gets to take a break

There's a way for him to just sit back
& watch the damage occurring in the body of Christ

Our enemy gets a break – every time WE jump in to help him - -
& we help him – FAR TOO OFTEN

& what's even worse is - - the enemy watches us
HURTING instead of HELPING other Christians

& then he looks for a chance to CAPITALIZE on the damage
we've already started, in another Christian's life

In Neh Ch 4 – we saw Nehemiah deal with
Opposition from the OUTSIDE – &
Discouragement from the INSIDE

But today – Nehemiah is up against a new test

& the people of God are up against
what may be - their Biggest BATTLE yet

Because **Today** – God’s people are **HURTING** one another
instead of **HELPING** one another

& the entire time - **the enemy** is just **sitting back**
taking a break, and **planning** his next move

Let’s Pray

Today – we see real **INTERNAL STRIFE** among the people of God

& this **INTERNAL STRIFE** is going to receive **MUCH MORE**
focus & effort than Nehemiah has **ever** given
the **attacks** that come from the **OUTSIDE**

In fact – **we’ve already seen** how the **attacks** from the **outside**

actually serve to **strengthen & reinforce**
the building of the **Wall of Testimony** for God’s people

But this **INTERNAL STRIFE** is a whole **different** story

It creates a **much greater threat** to the **work** of God
& to the **people** of God

Now – I know that some of you **MUST be tired** of me
talking about **DISSENTION** & **DAMAGE**
from **INSIDE** the camp of God’s people

But . . . here’s **the PROBLEM**

a **whole bunch** of the book of **NEH**
Deals with the **STRUGGLES** & the **BATTLE** involved
in **Building** a Lasting **Wall of Testimony** for God

& we **KEEP** coming back to Warnings & Teachings
about **THIS** general subject

**& Generally, when the Holy Spirit repeats something
over & over again – it's because it's very important**

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over & over again – it's because it's very important**

So – we find ourselves – again – dealing with
Conflict & Strife from **WITHIN** the people of God

To me – that means - **this subject** is critically **important** to God

Here's **how it started** this time

There was actually **a FAMINE** in the Land
going on **BEFORE** Nehemiah **Got there** to build the WALL

There was a **Food SHORTAGE** – probably because of
the great influx of Jews Returning from **Babylon** to **Jerusalem**

Food had become very **expensive**, & **hard** to come by

so the **prices** were **skyrocketing** - & people had to
mortgage everything they owned – just to get **food**

Funny . . . that **doesn't** sound **too far** from where
some people think our culture is **headed** today

In ADDITION the same **King** who (on one hand)
allowed Nehemiah to go to **Jerusalem** to build the Wall

This **same King** had also placed
VERY HEAVY TAXES on the people

Again – that **doesn't** sound **too far** from where
some people think our culture is **AT** today

So - - **Food Shortage** – **High Inflation** - & **Ever Increasing Taxes**

These things . . . made the **United States** - - Oh, I mean **Jerusalem**,
a **very difficult** place to live

But **here's** the **Real POINT** for us today

Unfortunately – there were **some** of God's people

who, instead of **HELPING** their brethren
were **HURTING** them - - For their Own **SELF-INTEREST**

& **I Promise** you – there is **Excellent APPLICATION** here for us today

Neh 5:1-4 – NLT

1 About this time (during Opposition & Discouragement from Ch 4)
some of the men and their wives raised a cry of protest against
their fellow Jews.

2 They were saying, “We have such large families. We need more food to survive.”

3 Others said, “We have mortgaged our fields, vineyards, and homes to get food during the famine.”

4 And others said, “We have had to borrow money on our fields and vineyards to pay our taxes.

God's People had **Mortgaged everything** they owned
just to get **FOOD**

WHILE they were **building the wall** around Jerusalem

& **not only** had they **mortgaged** everything just to survive

But the **same King** who allowed **Nehemiah** to come in the first place – was placing **heavier & heavier taxes** on the people

& on top of ALL that;

#1) Those who were making the loans were charging “**Loan Shark**” Rates

#2) Those Loan Sharks were actually **FELLOW JEWS** who were **taking advantage** of their own brethren

HURTING them – instead of **HELPING** them

Look again at Neh 5:1 – NLT

1 About this time some of the men and their wives raised a cry of protest against their fellow Jews.

& then let's continue down at Neh 5:5 – NLT

5 We belong to the same family as those who are wealthy, and our children are just like theirs. Yet we must sell our children into slavery just to get enough money to live. We have already sold some of our daughters, and we are helpless to do anything about it, for our fields and vineyards are already mortgaged to others.

God's People were already Fighting **Opposition** from the **OUTSIDE** - & **Discouragement** from the **INSIDE** (both in Ch 4)

& **NOW**, on top of that – they're **OWN PEOPLE** are **taking advantage** of them - for their own **SELF-Interest**

The people of God are in Serious, **Serious TROUBLE**

& the **Building** of the *Wall of Testimony*
had **COMPLETELY CEASED**

Now - **the basis** for this text is obviously **Financial**

& it certainly **can be** applied **Financially** in our **culture**,
& in our **churches** today

But there is **also** a **BROADER APPLICATION** here,
almost *like a Parable*

The people are trying to build a Wall of Testimony for God

They're facing **Opposition** from the **OUTSIDE**

Discouragement from the **INSIDE**

& **NOW** – **Some** among God's People

were **ONLY** concerned with *their own* **SELF-Interest**
at the expense of others **IN** the family of God

& **remember** – the **enemy** is sitting on **the sidelines** right now
just **rubbing his hands** together . . .

Yes, Yes, *That's right*, **TURN** on each other,
take advantage of one another, only **look out** for yourself,
Yeah, **that's** what you want to do . . . **good job**

& so often guys – **We Play**
RIGHT INTO the enemy's **HAND**, Don't we ??

Why is that ??

Well, **Often**, just *like here* in Neh Ch 5 . . .

The people of God are ONLY looking out for their SELF INTEREST,
instead of the INTEREST of OTHERS

In other words →

we tend to say – “This is what’s BEST for ME,
this is what I want, this is what I think”

& often, we don’t really CONSIDER
the IMPACT that will have – on the people of God around us

Last week – we used Phil Ch 3
as the NT truth that our OT text was illustrating

Today – we use Phil Ch 2
as the NT truth that our OT text is illustrating

& allow me to read Phil 2:3-4
from the Paraphrase – **THE MESSAGE**

& I promise you – if you will listen to Phil 2
you will HEAR the teaching in Neh Ch 5 today

Phil 2:3-4 – THE MESSAGE (Paraphrase)

3 Don’t push your way to the front; don’t sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead.

4 Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.

THAT is the Exact Truth Neh Ch 5 is teaching us

Don’t PUSH, or sweet-talk your way to the top

Put your SELF aside, and help others get ahead

Don’t be OBSESSED with getting your own advantage

Forget about your SELF - long enough to lend a helping hand

THAT is what it takes - for us to **build** a **Wall of Testimony**
in the midst of Difficult times

We've **GOT** to set our **SELF-Interest** aside,
and **ESTEEM** (regard) **others** higher than **ourselves**

Because – **IF** we are Obsessed
with our **SELF-Interest** - **INSIDE** the church

Then we are **doing** the **Enemy's** work **FOR HIM**
& he is simply **sitting** on the sideline **rooting** us on

THAT – is what was **happening** in **Neh Ch 5**

Some were **Obsessed** with **SELF-Interest**
& it was **HURTING**, instead of **HELPING** God's People

& **IN FACT** – it **brought** the work of God – to a **HALT**

Here's what **Alan Redpath** says about this text

Alan Redpath

*One of the things that does most harm in God's work is
dissent among His people. If you want a Work of God ruined,
just let misunderstanding, discouragement, and mistrust arise.
Though the people may be united in objective (goal), they will be
divided in the affection (care for one another) and the work cannot
survive.*

This is how **churches** are **DIVIDED** all the time

people may have the same general **objective** (goal)
but are **divided** in their **affection** (care for one another)

& they systematically **TEAR DOWN** the Wall of Testimony
IN order to benefit - their own **SELF-Interest**

& **if he could**, the **enemy** would **send** each one who **does** this work
a nice **thank you card** & a box of **chocolates**,

to **let us know** just how much
he **appreciates** us doing **his work** for him

Alright – Now - let's **see** how Nehemiah **deals**
with the people of God who are **HURTING**, instead of **HELPING**

Neh 5:6 – NLT

6 When I heard their complaints, I was very angry.

MAN – **I LOVE** Nehemiah !!!

When I heard their complaints – I was Very Angry !!!

We can **assume** – this was the **Righteous** “Kind” of **Anger**

But **then** – in **V.7(A)** – Nehemiah **does** something

that **EACH** of us **MUST DO**
when we first **see injustice** in the church

Neh 5:7(A) – NLT

7 After thinking it over, . . . [stop]

Nehemiah's already dealing with a **TON** of issues

Now he **gets angry** at his fellow Jews
for being **Obsessed** with their own **SELF-Interest**

But - the first thing he does is STOP - & Think it over

The **ESV** says *“I took counsel with myself . . .”*

The **NKJ** says *“After serious thought . . .”*

There’s a **Great Lesson** RIGHT THERE !!

One of Thomas Jefferson’s PERSONAL 10 Commandments was;

When **angry** count to **10**

When **very angry** count to **100**

Mark Twain – took a Different Approach – He said;

When **angry** - count to **4**

When **very angry** – just **SWEAR**

Mark Twain was **WRONG**

Thomas Jefferson was **RIGHT**

Man – Count to **10** – Count to **100**

GO – be by yourself - & **deal** with God - - really, really **THINK it over**
& **ask God HOW** you should **Respond**

That is a **Very Biblical thing** to do

Nehemiah **got ANGRY** – because of the **SELF INTEREST**
he **saw** in the people of God

But **then** – He **took a walk** with it – He **addressed God** alone
He took the time to **“Think it Over”**

And **Then** – Nehemiah **ACTS**

He **CAN’T allow** this to continue **within** God’s People
or he’s going to have **huge DAMAGE** on his hands

& so – **Nehemiah** goes **DIRECTLY** to those who are **Causing** the Problem

- He Got **ANGRY**
- He **Backed off** – Counted to 100, *thought it thru*
- Then he **goes DIRECTLY** to those Causing the Problem

Neh 5:7 (again) - NLT

7 After thinking it over, I spoke out against these nobles and officials. I told them, “You are hurting your own relatives by charging interest when they borrow money!” Then I called a public meeting (LIT – a great assembly, mtg) to deal with the problem.

There is actually a **COMMAND** in **God’s Law**

that **says** God’s people are **NOT ALLOWED** to charge interest when **lending** to a Fellow JEW **Who was In Need**

It was a **law** against **profiting** off a fellow Jew’s **misfortune** & **that** was **exactly** what was happening here

WHILE the people of God were **REBUILDING** the Wall *already against* very **difficult** odds

WHILE they were doing this - ***there*** were people *“In Their Own Ranks”* Who were ***Obsessed*** – with their ***SELF-Interest***

& Because of their ***SELF-Interest***

they were **HURTING** their own people, **when** they should have been **HELPING** them

They were **tearing down** the Wall of Testimony From the **INSIDE**

Guys - we have to be **SO CAREFUL**, Don't We ??

Because we can so easily **Justify** & **Rationalize**
anything, and **everything** we do

But the Real Question is;

Are we **HELPING** the People of God? (**Building** them up)
Or Are we **HURTING** the People of God? (**Tearing** them down)

& **if** we are **HURTING** them . . . **are we** doing it
to feed some **SELF-Interest**

So – the **END of V.7** says – Nehemiah - ***called a*** (great assembly)
public meeting to deal with the problem.

& then Neh 5:8 says – NLT

8 At the meeting I said to them, “We are doing all we can to redeem our Jewish relatives who have had to sell themselves to pagan foreigners, but you are selling them back into slavery again. How often must we redeem them?” (& notice carefully the response) ***And they had nothing to say in their defense.***

Nehemiah says - **LOOK**, We are **doing everything** we can
to get God's people **OUT** of this hole,
& **you** are putting them **RIGHT BACK** into it

We are trying to **REDEEM** them **OUT** of Slavery
& **you** are **ENSLAVING** them again – **from the inside**

AND the conviction - ***leaves them speechless***

They had **nothing** to say - **Because** they knew they were

HURTING God's people – to serve their **SELF-Interest**
instead of **HELPING** them

& then – **V.9** – Explains the **TESTIMONY PROBLEM**

Neh 5:9 – NLT

9 Then I pressed further, What you are doing is not right! Should you not walk in the fear of our God in order to avoid being mocked by enemy nations?

If we are **treating** each other **INSIDE** the church
the **same** (or worse) than **non-believers** treat each other
OUTSIDE the church

What kind of a **Testimony** is that ??
IT'S A VERY BAD TESTIMONY !!

In fact – I **know People** (& you probably do too)
Who **WON'T** EVEN **ATTEND** Church – for this VERY **REASON**

We've got to **LOOK OUT** for each other
We've got to *treat* each other **BETTER** than the world *treats* ea other

If we don't – then we begin to **tear down** the testimony
that **God** has called us to **build**

& **So** – Nehemiah "**Lays it on the Line**"

He **addresses** those who are **focused** on their **SELF-Interest**
at the EXPENSE of others in *God's Family*
in **V.8** – they are **CONVICTED** - & **SPEECHLESS**

But it **CAN'T END there**, Right ?

It's **not enough** to simply **RECOGNIZE** the **WRONG**
we've **GOT TO - STOP IT !!**

Neh 5:10 – NLT

10 I myself, as well as my brothers and my workers, have been lending the people money and grain, but now let us stop this business of charging interest.

Nehemiah says – *I and my household*
have been **lending** the people **money** & grain

But it **never says** whether he was **charging interest** or not,
or to what level

We know from V.8 that Nehemiah was “**Redeeming**”
his fellow Jews – which means **BUYING** them back

& **we'll see** next week that he **handled** his leadership
with **Extreme Integrity**

So **there's a chance** that – when he says **US** – It's as in **US JEWS** –
Let's ALL stop doing this

But **the point** is – What they were doing to **HURT** God's People
they **HAD TO STOP** - & they had to **STOP IT Immediately**

& not only **STOP it** – They had to try to “**Make it Right**” Immediately

Neh 5:11 – NLT

11 You must restore their fields, vineyards, olive groves, and homes to them this very day. And repay the interest you charged when you lent them money, grain, new wine, and olive oil.

It's not JUST:

Recognizing when we're HURTING instead of HELPING

It's not JUST:

Stopping doing the DAMAGE

But – it is ALSO – Doing what we can – to “Make it Right”
& “Make it Right” as quickly as possible

Nehemiah says;

restore . . . to them this very day. And repay the interest you charged . . .

Guys – When God Convicts us

that something we're doing – is HURTING, instead of HELPING

We've Got to STOP doing the Damage

& we've got to try to “Make it Right” – Immediately

It reminds me of Mat 5:23-24 – ESV

*23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,
24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

So Now – Nehemiah has Laid Down the Requirement From God

These Jews MIUST - STOP Hurting - & START Helping

But NOW . . . They've Got to MAKE – Their Own Choice

& I have SEEN people REFUSE to STOP doing damage to the people of God

Very Often – when someone is confronted with HURTING God's people instead of HELPING them

Very Often – they DENY, & JUSTIFY, & RATIONALIZE,
& Far Too Often, they CONTINUE doing the Damage

But not so for Nehemiah – Praise the Lord

Neh 5:12(A) - NLT

12 They replied, "We will give back everything and demand nothing more from the people. We will do as you say." . . . (stop)

Man – That is GREAT – WONDERFUL – Praise the Lord !!!

But there's just one more thing . . .

Nehemiah wants those who've been HURTING God's People
to take a PUBLIC OATH – in FRONT of the PREISTS

Nehemiah knew Human nature well, didn't he?

& he wanted to give these guys Motivation FROM GOD
to STOP HURTING God's People

& so the last half of Neh 5:12 says

Neh 5:12(B) - NLT

. . . Then I called the priests and made the nobles and officials swear to do what they had promised.

Man – that's good, isn't it?

A public OATH – Before the representatives of God (Preists)
that they would Change their ways - & STOP Hurting God's People

Man - that's Really GOOD . . .

there's just one more thing

Nehemiah also wants these folks to **KNOW**
that **making an OATH** to God – is a **Very Serious** Thing

& **Going Back** on an **Oath to God**
has very **Serious Consequences**

Neh 5:13(A) – NLT

13 I shook out the folds of my robe and said, “If you fail to keep your promise, may God shake you like this from your homes and from your property!” . . . (stop)

This was a **Common Gesture**
(*shaking out the folds of your robe*)

& Nehemiah was letting these people know;

GOD is **Watching**

GOD is **Involved** in this Oath you are taking

GOD will **Respond** – according to your actions

& Guys – **THAT** is **still true** for us – TODAY

& so we finish – with the last half of **V.13**

Neh 5:13(B) – NLT

. . . The whole assembly responded, “Amen,” and they praised the Lord. And the people did as they had promised.

And now that **this** is “**Handled**” -

NOW, the **Work of God**, would **BEGIN**, Again !!

Praise the Lord !!

Guys - If we are **HURTING** the body of Christ
for some of **SELF INTEREST** – We've got to **STOP IT**

& we've got to **make it right** - & we've got to do it **QUICK**

Because there was **NO Building** of the *Wall of Testimony*

While the people were **HURTING** One Another
to **feed** their own **SELF-Interest**

We **ALL** battle with **SELF-Interest**

& we ALL have the ability, if not the tendency,
to be **FOCUSED** on **SELF-Interest**
ABOVE the Interest of **others** in the Body of Christ

And our **Sin Nature** causes us to **DO** things, & to **SAY** things

to **FEED** our **SELF-Interest**
at the **EXPENSE** of **others** in the church

& **when** we do this – We are doing the Enemy's Work – **FOR HIM**

We need to **stop Rationalizing** & **Justifying** our actions
that **serve** our **SELF-Interest**

If we are **HURTING** – instead of **HELPING**

We need to **FACE** it head on

We need to **STOP** it - &

We need to **TRY** to Make Things Right

Prov 28:13 – ESV

13 Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

This is true for - **Unbelievers** AND **Believers**

For **Unbelievers** – Please know
there is **NO WAY** for you to **Conceal** your Sin

But if you will **confess & forsake** your sin
Trusting in **Jesus** Christ for forgiveness

You **WILL** obtain **Mercy**, & **Grace**, & a New Life

For the **Believer** – There is **no way**
you can **conceal** your sin from God

But – if we will **Confess** our sin & **Forsake** it
We **WILL** obtain **Mercy** from God

Let's Pray