

# Commitment

## Nehemiah 10-13

**ILLUSTRATION:** You probably haven't noticed it, but Florida nights are quieter than they used to be. The deep elongated croak of frogs have grown quieter and quieter progressively since the 1960s.

Zoologists consider certain types of **frogs** and other amphibians an ***indicator species***. These are typically small animals that respond faster than most to small changes in the ecosystem.

**Canaries** were used in a similar way. For years they were carried into coal mines by the miners. If there was a build up of Carbon Monoxide the canary would die which was a signal to the miners that they better get out.

When it comes to our spiritual health, there are also INDICATORS that will notify us that things are getting better or worse.

Spirituality is by nature a subjective experience, but as such it can be easy to be spiritually sick, but totally unaware.

I've counseled people on the verge of making some of the worst decisions of their life - decisions that would cost them their family. But who were convinced they are making the decision from a place of spiritual health.

A strong christian leader, identifies and regularly monitors a few **SPIRITUAL INDICATORS** that will serve as a gauge to how they and the people they serve are really doing. They will also let you know how YOU are doing spiritually.

**CONTEXT:** Thus far we have followed Nehemiah's experience from a Persian Palace to leading a band of Amateurs to rebuild Jerusalem's city walls in a staggering 52 days. This admits the onslaught of attacks and interruptions from men like Sanballat and Tobiah.

Last week we saw Nehemiah begin the process of re-establishing Israel's cultural norms. He reminded them who they were as a particular and peculiar people of God with the help of Ezra the Priest.

It was no doubt a great spiritual awakening. We saw them weep aloud. Then the priest exhorting them to rejoice for it was a Holy day.

But Nehemiah knew what all great leaders know - organizations are not built on a moment of **ecstatic emotion**, but rather on **commitment**.

**Vince Lombardi, the Former Coach of the Green Bay Packers once said,**  
“Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.”

Nehemiah knew this to be true. If the work of the moment was to be sustained, he had to get a commitment.

**TEXT: Nehemiah 10:28–13:31 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> “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, <sup>29</sup> 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.

The commitments they made fell into three categories - ***Family, Faith and Financial***

**ILLUSTRATION:** In my years of ministry, here is something I have observed. There are **CHURCHES** that have the touch of God on them, then there are **PREACHERS** that have the touch of God on them. Sometimes you go to a church and you can tell that the pulpit is anointed, but not the church. I’ve yet to find an anointed church without an anointed pulpit. BUT WE WANT BOTH.

I have found that for a church to be blessed, individuals family units have to make the same three commitments mentioned in our text today - ***Family, Faith and Financial***

## **1. FAMILY COMMITMENT**

<sup>30</sup> We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.

God through Moses warned the people of intermarriage - **Deuteronomy 7:3–4 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, <sup>4</sup> for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.

So this wasn’t primarily a warning against ETHNIC intermarriage but against SPIRITUAL intermarriage.

It is the same command **Paul** gave us in **2 Corinthians 6:14–15 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? <sup>15</sup> What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?

Singles and Parents of singles, please listen carefully. The Spiritual walk of the person that you are interested in is the single most important factor in deciding who to date and ultimately marry.

Have you ever considered the fact that Scripture doesn't give you a long list of things you have to find in a marriage partner? They have to be the opposite gender, they can't be a close relative (*that's for those listening from MS*)... **AND** You better be willing to bet your last penny on the fact that he or she is saved. And if you are not certain - **Swipe LEFT!** Move on...

- **EZRA'S LIST** - If you turn back to the book just before Nehemiah - you will find the final chapter of Ezra. **Ezra 10:18-44** lists the men who violated this commitment and married foreign women. This is the only time in all of History that the Leaders of Israel sanctioned a MASS DIVORCE.
- **MOSES** didn't go so easy on those who intermarried - In Numbers 25 Moses gathered all of those who married foreign women and stoned them to death.
  - The only time Jews were blessed for marrying foreign women were when those women converted into Judaism. This was the case with **RUTH** and her marriage to Boaz - she was woven into Messiah's lineage.
  - **Zipporah**, Moses wife was an Ethiopian but angrily agreed to circumsize her sons on during the time of the Exodus.
- **PAUL** tells us in the NT if you married an unbeliever stay married if they are willing, you may win them to Christ. But if they refuse to stay, let them leave. This is one of only a small number of times divorce is allowed in the NT.

All throughout the OT you will find that practically every major problem that Israel struggled with began with a misplaced marriage.

- **Samson**, lost his hair and his power, but he first lost his commitment to marry a woman of God. He started dating **Delilah** a Philistine worshiper of the idol Dagon.
- **Solomon** despite his vast wisdom married foreign women beginning the slow decline of Israel's sovereignty.

***Do you see the importance of finding a godly Christian husband or wife?***

**ILLUSTRATION:** I can't tell you how many young couple never even talked about it until they were in my office asking me to officiate their wedding.

- Well he had a cross on his instagram.
- She has a tattoo of bible verse on her leg.

LISTEN - ASK THEM TO TELL YOU WHY THEY BELIEVE THEY ARE GOING TO HEAVEN? And watch them... if you hang out with them for a couple of months as friends and you still are sure... SWIPE LEFT!!!!

And this is **JUST THE BEGINNING - NOT THE END**. Men you are the Pastor's of your home. You are to lead you family to know, worship and serve the Living God throughout your life.

**ILLUSTRATION: 5 GENERATION RULE** - It was said of **Jonathon Edwards** the leader of the largest revival to ever his these united States that he prayed for 5 generations of his family every day.

The scholar Benjamin B. Warfield of Princeton has charted the 1,394 known descendants of Edwards. What he found was an incredible testament to Jonathan Edwards. Of his known descendants there were 13 college presidents, 65 college professors, 30 judges, 100 lawyers, 60 physicians, 75 army and navy officers, 100 pastors, 60 authors of prominence, 3 United States senators, 80 public servants in other capacities including governors and ministers to foreign countries, and one vice-president of the United States.

*Not only was it a family commitment...*

## **2. FAITH COMMITMENT**

<sup>31</sup> 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.

The Sabbath rest was something that God gave his people in the Old Testament to separate them from the surrounding nations.

These men were making a commitment - they were going to remember the sabbath day and keep it holy.

In the New Testament - the Early Church gathered on the LORD'S DAY to Worship, because Jesus was raised on the first day of the week.

If you are going to have a family that is BLESSED of GOD over the long haul - you are going to have to make a once and for all decision about WHAT YOU ARE YOUR FAMILY will do on the Lord's Day.

**LISTEN:** If every Saturday night you guys are trying to figure out what you are going to do Sunday morning... there's a problem. Father - you call it. God says you are the Leader - well my brother lead. Say with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord".

If you will get that decision right, 1,000 other decisions will seem to fall into place as well.

- The man who is committed to his local new testament church, wouldn't dream of moving to a new city until he has scoped out the church in that area.
- The woman who is committed to the local new testament church doesn't let petty arguments run her off. That's her church, that's her home!
- The teenager who is committed to the local new testament church goes to college with a list of churches they intended to visit until they find the right one. WHY? Well many reasons, but if you are faithful to point #1, you aren't going to find your future spouse down at the Peach Pit getting drunk on Saturday night, hung over Sunday morning. He or she will be in the Lord's house on the Lord's day, with the Lord's People, studying the Lord's Word.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I came to Christ in 1994, I met Julie in 1995 in Sunday School. We were married in 2000 in that same Church... since our wedding day we have had over 1040 Sunday Morning together. That's over 1000 times we have sat under the Word of God...and listen, she's come a long way. :)

Folks, there are times when I wish I could take off the preacher hat for a moment and speak to you as a satisfied customer. God has been faithful to me. My family is blessed of the Lord. There is not a soul on Earth I would trade places with.

That doesn't mean we haven't had hard times, that doesn't mean we haven't disappointed each other. That does mean that we know how to handle it when we do.

I want my children to have what I have and more. I want you to have it as well. But friend, God doesn't just ZAP you into blessing. You set up your home on blessing grounds, and the rest comes naturally.

So there was a Family Commitment, a Faith Commitment...

### **3. FINANCIAL COMMITMENT**

<sup>35</sup> 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; <sup>36</sup> 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; <sup>37</sup> 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. <sup>38</sup> 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. <sup>39</sup> 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."

### **These people understood the principle of Firsts.**

God had promised through Solomon - **Proverbs 3:9–10 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the **firstfruits** of all your produce; <sup>10</sup> then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.

The principle of first fruits is to say before you personally benefit from your income, before you pay anyone else - you give to God **first**.

All throughout God's Word - the people of God practiced first fruits giving.

### **THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT THE FIRST!**

Now in the OT they were an agrarian society - they had crops, they had herds. So it was easy to determine the first fruits... it was the first part of the harvest.

But as they developed into a Kingdom with a currency and began to buy and sell from other nations, God told them to bring the TITHE, the first 10th of their increase.

That has been the STANDARD and the ONLY STANDARD in scripture. Return a tenth of your increase to the house of God.

### **Malachi 3**

<sup>10</sup> "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. <sup>11</sup> "Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast *its grapes*," says the LORD of hosts. <sup>12</sup> "All the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land," says the LORD of hosts.

### **WHY IS FIRST FRUIT GIVING SO IMPORTANT? Because of who it point to.**

**Colossians 1:15–20 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the **firstborn** of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> **And he is before all things**, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the **firstborn** from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

### **YOUR TITHE POINTS TO YOUR SAVIOR**

**C.S. Lewis, "Put first things first and we get second things thrown in: put second things first and we lose both first and second things".**

## **Well in Chapter 11 - They decide who lives in the city**

**11:31** - they throw another party and put two mass choirs on the wall. Which by the way don't you think that was to communicate something to Sanballat and Tobiah who said a fox would knock down the wall?

**In Chapter 13 - Nehemiah Returns to Artaxerxes to complete his duty. But then, he gets permission to return to Jerusalem. NOTICE WHAT HE FINDS....**

### **1. Finances were Compromised**

<sup>10</sup> I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field.

### **2. Faith was Compromised**

<sup>15</sup> In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them on the day when they sold food.

### **3. Family was Compromised**

<sup>23</sup> In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. <sup>24</sup> And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people.

## **HOW DID NEHEMIAH RESPOND? He throws a HOLY FIT - Nehemiah 13:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber.

## **Nehemiah 13:25 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair....

**CONCLUSION/INVITATION:** It would be totally outrageous if a Pastor did that sort of thing, or even a Priest... there is no record in all of Scripture of a man of the cloth pulling his parishioners hair... but keep in mind, Nehemiah wasn't a preacher, he was a layman. I've always felt that the best teams are the ones that Police themselves. When a lineman looks at a running back and says, "hey, we get to practice on time". Or a brother looks at a sister and says, "we don't date people like that". Or a layman looks at a fellow church member, and says, "that's not how we talk around here".

May God give us more Nehemiah's who will stand and lead and change the world.  
How are your indicators? Finances? Faith? Family?