

**Let Us Arise and Build
Nehemiah 5
Brother against Brother—Overcoming Internal Conflicts**

Intro: The story of Nehemiah offers us many practical lessons on how to lead and how to solve problems. Already we have seen the blessings that occur when good leaders and good followers work together in harmony.

However there is one thing that will greatly hinder the good work God's people can do together—conflict. In our lesson this morning we discussed how internal conflicts threatened the success of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls.

Let's quickly review the story as Nehemiah relates it.

From the narrative we can see three important lessons:

The importance of unity

The need to be sensitive to the needs of others

The obligation to show love by lending (giving)

But in this text we also see some important principles in identifying and solving conflicts among brethren.

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Conflicts escalate when greed becomes the creed.

Let us all beware of what may happen when greed becomes the creed, when God's people are motivated by misplaced desires!

In Nehemiah 5, it was greed for money that led to the conflict between the wealthy nobles and the working class.

Sometimes conflicts are the result of "class warfare," of people angry with their own limited circumstances who resent someone else that has greater blessings.

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?

You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. (James 4:1-2)

And we should remember that the greed that leads to conflict may not involve money; It could be greed for attention or recognition or for influence, power or control

Paul gives the perfect antidote:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)

Having right attitude will keep many conflicts from arising. But if and when they arise there are principles that should govern our attempts to solve them!

Real grievances must be given a fair hearing.

Nehemiah apparently didn't know how much people were suffering under the abuse of the noble class. The people needed the opportunity to express the oppression they were experiencing. Nehemiah did not rebuke the people who were suffering under the burden of oppression for revealing how they were wronged. Instead he was angry with those who had oppressed their fellow-Jews (v. 1-6)

In solving problems it is important for those with real grievances to raise them so that they can be solved. Nothing productive comes from holding grudges or making unfair accusations from a distance. If a problem is placed out in the open it can be solved; when it is passed around maliciously it can only lead to distrust and division.

When we feel wronged by someone, we are taught to go to the brother who has wronged us, make known to him the point of wrong, and seek to be reconciled with him

“Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. “And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.” (Luke 17:3-4)

Response must be reasoned and not merely emotional.

Nehemiah was emotionally charged by the actions of his fellow-Jews. The nobles had clearly violated the teaching of the Law about how the needy should be treated. However, Nehemiah took a reasoned approach that prevented him from doing wrong things. *“He consulted with himself”* before he acted! Righteous indignation is acceptable as long as it does not lead us to carnal expressions!

Likewise, it is important to keep cool heads when differences and perceived wrongs arise.

Sometimes we are prone to do the wrong thing when there is rush to judgment. Instead if we take measured steps to solve problems, then the outcome is much more likely to be a good one!

Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. (Galatians 6:1)

Behavior should be judged by principles, not position.

The nobles were not exempt from rebuke because they were wealthy or powerful men. Nehemiah took a risk in correcting them, but in so doing he revealed to all the people that no one is above the Law!

It was wrong to loan money at interest (Ex. 22:25; Deut. 23:19-20).

It was wrong to enslave fellow-Jews (Lev. 25:35-40).

Consequently, Nehemiah acted on the basis of principle, not respect of persons. He did not allow the problem to be prolonged nor delay in solving it.

And so today there should not be double standards among God's people.

We cannot hold some people to one standard and ourselves to another. We cannot hold some people accountable for their actions but not others because of the fact they are friends or people of prominence.

Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality. (1 Timothy 5:20-21)

And we cannot allow a problem to go on for years and allow it to erode conviction in the truth.

A quote from Stanton See: "God wants us to deal with problems NOW. When we realize what we are doing is wrong, NOW is the time to stop it. Making long-range plans to correct a problem allows the sands of time to hone off the raw edges of God's reproof in our lives."

We must be motivated by the honor of God's name rather than personal desires.

Nehemiah did not appeal to his autocratic thinking and right to command. He appealed to the word and honor of God and his cause as the motivation to do right.

Nehemiah appealed to the nobles to "*walk in the fear of God.*"

Nehemiah appealed to the distinctive lifestyle of the Jewish people and the reproach that came upon the nation when they did not honor God's ways (v. 9).

What must be of utmost importance in conflict is the good of the cause of Christ.

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

In every case we need to ask, "What saith the Scriptures?"

True love leads to repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

If this text shows us the high cost of internal conflict, it also reveals the high value of internal love.

To the credit of the Jewish nobles--when confronted with the error of their ways, they were humble enough to admit their guilt and make things right (v. 12)

Every party in a conflict ought to have the love for others to make right any perceived wrong, forgive others, respect the consciences of others, and make efforts to reconcile with others.

Jesus incentivizes us by his remarks after the model prayer:

*For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. "But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."
(Matthew 6:14-15)*

Those who lead must exemplify the principles they call upon others to embrace.

Nehemiah as governor revealed integrity by living by the standards he expected of others.

He agreed to offer help to those in need with no interest (v. 10). He would not live in luxury while the people around him were suffering, even though he might have had a right to such things as the governor (v. 14-18).

He could talk about compassion with credibility because he "walked the walk."

And so we have the right to expect leaders to be an example of love and forgiveness.

nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:3)

Conclusion: It is always sad and difficult for everyone when brethren have conflicts; and it is a great hindrance to the Lord's work. But the good news is that problems can be solved when attitudes are right and when the honor of God is most important in our hearts. And what rejoicing comes to the people when love is expressed and unity is achieved!

Notice that expression, "Then they praised the Lord!" Whenever problems arise we can bring joy back to the congregation by respecting these principles taught in God's word.