

Introduction: Many Christians find it easy to criticize other people for breaking the moral commandments, such as: have no idols, do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal and do not lie. Except for the first and last of these, most Christians do not break these commandments. *** However, there is one commandment that many Christians do not take seriously. I admit that until about four years ago I broke it every week. It is: Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (Exodus 20:6), or: Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it (Deuteronomy 5:12). I now take this to mean that whatever I do, or watch, or read, from the time I wake up until the time I go to bed on Sunday, has to point to Jesus in some way. *** The final two parts of the book of Nehemiah have to do with keeping the Sabbath wholly to God, and being in a faithful covenant marriage where both the husband and wife are fully committed to obeying The Father, Son and Holy Spirit by grace through faith. *** The story from Mark's Gospel demonstrates how Jesus expects His followers to show compassion in His Name on the Sabbath. *** Let's now examine our texts in detail.

I. Nehemiah observes God's people breaking the Sabbath, confronts their profane behavior, and acts to promote proper Sabbath practices. (Nehemiah 13:15-22)

A. Nehemiah observes God's people breaking the Sabbath in two ways and confronts them for being more profane than their fathers. (Nehemiah 13: 15-18)

1. In those days, I saw in Judah, men treading winepresses on Sabbath, bringing in heaps and loading on donkeys; also wine, grapes and figs, and all kinds of burdens, bringing into Jerusalem on Sabbath day; and I testified when they sold food. (Verse 15)

Sabbath breakers: The people of Torah worked themselves and their animals, and brought goods to market, and sold for profit – all on Sabbath! Three-fold sin.

Testified: Nehemiah was so upset, especially about selling for profit on Sabbath, that he testified against their behavior. God's people had forgotten:

God's people who keep the Sabbath holy will keep themselves holy

2. Men of Tyre, who lived in (Jerusalem, were) bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise, and selling them on the Sabbath to (Jews); then I contended with the Jewish nobles and said: What (is) this evil you all are doing? profaning the Sabbath! (Verses 16-17)

Sabbath consumerism: Foreigners were exploiting Jews on the day of the week dedicated to God, and leaders of the Jews were complicit in this!

Contend with nobles: Nehemiah contended with Jewish leaders with a fifth century BC interrobang! They should have been modeling that:

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3. Did not your fathers act this way, and did not our God bring on us and this city all this evil? and, you all are adding more wrath on Israel by profaning Sabbath. (Verse 18)

Question and accusation: This was a Q & A: question and accusation!

Wrath incurred: As if the Babylonian exile was not enough punishment, this profaning of the Sabbath by the remnant would incur more wrath. In this first episode, Sabbath occurs five times.

B. Then he takes strong action to insure the proper practice of the Sabbath. (Nehemiah 13:19-22)

1. When began to be dark before the Sabbath, the gates of Jerusalem and the doors, I said to shut; then I said they will not be opened until after Sabbath; and I stood my servants over the gates; no one will bring in a burden on Sabbath. (Verse 19)

Commands and actions: Nehemiah assured all entrances were locked down on Sabbath. He stationed his own guards to enforce this.

2. Then they lodged, merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares, once and twice. (Verse 20)

Camp out: The outside exploiters of the Jews set up next to the closed gates in hope of quickly accessing the Jews for profit.

3. Then I testified to them and said: Why you all lodging before the wall? If you all repeat, (fist) I will send on you all; from that time, they did not come on Sabbath. (Verse 21)

Testifies with threat: Nehemiah confronted the camping merchants, threatening to inflict violence on them, unless they stayed away on Sabbath. It worked!

4. Then I said to the Levites that they will purify themselves, coming and guarding the gates, to keep holy the Sabbath. (Verses 22a-b)

Command: Now, Nehemiah exhorts Levites to perform one of their three duties.

Sanctify: After they made offerings to sanctify themselves they were to guard the gates to insure the Sabbath would be kept holy. Again, in this episode, Sabbath occurs five times. So:

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Application: May we be moved to seriously examine our Sabbath practices, so that we give one day in seven totally to God, through Jesus in The Holy Spirit

5. Remember me, my God, have compassion on me according to Thy great steadfast LOVE. (Verse 22c)

Petition: Although Nehemiah did a 'good work', his petition is based on God's great LOVE, not anything he did.

This is humility. May we too, act to promote good practices by humbly petitioning The Lord in prayer.

II. Nehemiah confronts Jewish men living with pagan women as he prays two more times; and, Jesus compassionately heals in a synagogue on Sabbath. (Nehemiah 13:23-31; Mark 3:1-5)

A. Nehemiah acts to prevent Jewish men from taking pagan women, praying two times in two ways. (Nehemiah 13:23-31)

1. Also in those days I saw the Jews had dwelt with women of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. (Verse 23)

Living in sin: Jews were living with women from a Philistine city and women descended from the sons born to Lot by his daughters (Genesis 19:30-38). 'Living in sin' has been going on a long time!

2. Half their children spoke speech of Ashdod; none knew the Jew's speech. (Verse 24)

Loss of cultural purity: Not only were these half-Jewish children losing the language of their culture, they were losing their distinct relationship to God.

3. Then I contended with them and cursed them, then I beat some men and plucked their beard; then I made them take an oath by God: Not you all will give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you all take their daughters for your sons or yourselves. (*Verse 25*)

Contend: Nehemiah confronted their disobedience to Torah (Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:1-4) because they lived with non-Israelite women.

Swear to God: He made them swear before God they would stop this disobedience.

4. Was it not because of these (women) Solomon sinned? in many nations there was not a king like him, beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, yet these foreign women made him sin. (*Verse 26*)

Sin of idolatry: Because he loved many foreign women, Solomon worshiped many false gods and idols (1 Kings 11:1-10).

Solomon's bad example: In his lusting after women, despite God's warning through Moses (Deuteronomy 17:14-20), Solomon became an example of what a godly king should NOT be!

5. To you all will we listen to do all this great evil? and to trespass against our God to dwell with foreign women? (*Verse 27*)

Evil UN-faithfulness: Disobedience to God's Word reveals an evil un-faithful heart.

6. A son of Jehoiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, (was) the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; then I chased him from me. (*Verse 28*)

Sanballat: Sanballat was the man of Moab who had opposed Nehemiah earlier. Caleb's concubine bore him Haran (1 Chronicles 2:46) after whom Sanballat's city was named.

New Testament application: Christians must not marry someone who is not also fully committed to God in Jesus (2 Corinthians 6:14f).

7. Remember them my God, because defiling the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. (*Verse 29*)

Imprecatory prayer: Because the grandson of the high priest was son-in-law of a Moabite, Nehemiah prays an imprecatory prayer that God must punish the grandson, the woman and her father!

8. I cleansed them from every foreign (influence), and made them to stand the duties of the priests and Levites, each to his work; and, for the offering of wood at the appointed times, and for the first-fruits. (*Verses 30-31b*)

Purification: Nehemiah oversaw the purification of the priests and Levites. The fire on the altar needed wood so it would never go out (Leviticus 6:13).

Feast of First Fruits: The Feast of First-Fruits was fulfilled when Jesus rose from the dead on that day (1 Corinthians 15:20).

So, the book of Nehemiah ends on a Messianic note! We must realize that 'living in sin' is nothing new;

and, it must be confronted with a pure and loving heart, and faith in Christ's resurrection.

9. Remember me my God for good. (*Verse 31c*)

Prayer for reward: When his mission in Jerusalem was fully accomplished, Nehemiah prayed to be rewarded for his faithful service to his God.

B. Jesus is grieved by a lack of compassion in the synagogue on the Sabbath and compassionately heals a man on the spot. (*Mark 3:1-5*)

1. And He entered again into the synagogue, and was being there, man having been withered (his) hand. (*Verse 1*)

Longstanding infirmity: The man worshipping in the synagogue had been disabled with a withered hand for a long time.

2. They were watching Him, if on the Sabbath He will heal him, that they might bring charges on Him. (*Verse 2*)

Hostility: At the start His ministry, some Jewish leaders were hostile to Jesus.

Sabbath 'test': They were 'testing' Him to see if He would violate their interpretation of the Sabbath commandment.

3. He is saying to the man with the withered hand having: Thou must get up to the middle. (*Verse 3*)

Man in 'spotlight': Jesus calls the man 'into the spotlight' by commanding him to move to the middle of the worshipping assembly.

4. He is saying to them: Is it permitted on Sabbath to do good or to do evil? Life to save or to kill? (*Verse 4a*)

Good question: Jesus is subtly asking an important question. Nehemiah's question to obvious Sabbath breakers was an accusation. With His question, Jesus is trying to guide them to the correct answer.

5. But they were being silent. (*Verse 4b*)

Silence: They wanted to be right that what Jesus intended was wrong; but, they knew it is wrong to choose evil over good and killing over life, so they were silent in their guilt.

6. Having looked round about at them with anger, [He] was being deeply moved with grief at the hardness of their hearts. (*Verse 5a*)

Anger from grief: First, Jesus is angry that they do not want a fellow Israelite healed; but, He also grieves that their hard hearts keep them from loving their neighbor. This is the paradox of a heart of compassion for all people.

7. He is saying to the man: Thou must stretch out thy hand; he stretched it out and it was restored – his hand. (*Verse 5b*)

Command: Jesus commanded the man to stretch out his hand in faith that if he obeyed Jesus' command, his hand would be healed.

God restored: God is not explicitly mentioned, but He obviously did the healing. With this, Jesus made it clear that healing on the Sabbath does NOT violate the Sabbath command. Indeed, Sabbath was made for people to be healed in body, soul and spirit (Mark 2:27). Let us understand that proper Sabbath practice includes compassionate action to bring healing to those in need.

The Sabbath is for healing. And IF we practice it properly our hearts will be healed!

Conclusion: Nehemiah observes both Jews and foreigners breaking the Sabbath. He confronts the profane behavior of the Jews, and acts to promote proper practice of the Sabbath. Then, he confronts Jewish men living with pagan women. In all this he prayed. Years later, Jesus compassionately heals a man in a synagogue on the Sabbath.

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