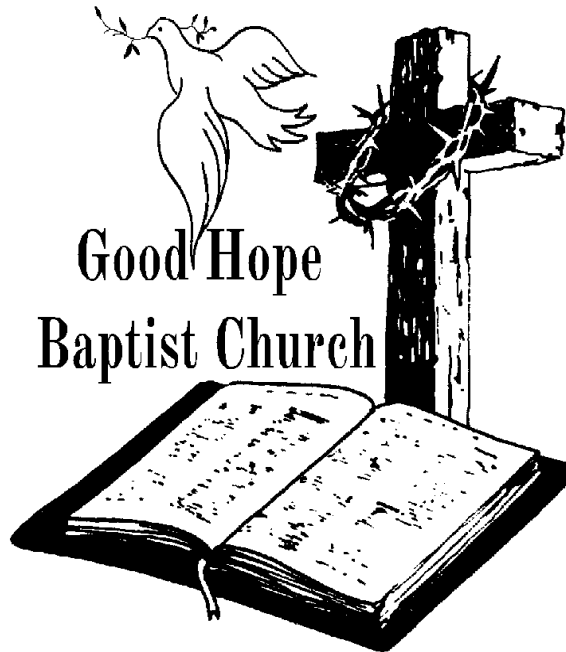


United In Love, We Build

Nehemiah 5



Good Hope
Baptist Church

Living Together In The Love Of God

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Read Together Psalms 133:1-3 ^(KJV) ... Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! 2 It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; 3 As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

Though I began with a reading from Psalm 133, we're using this text as an introduction to Nehemiah Chapter Five. God has always had a people. In the **Old Testament** His people gathered together as **Israel**, and in the **New Testament** His people gather together as the **Church**. Whether Old or New Testament the Lord God established one overwhelming Law for His people. What is that Law?

One day Jesus was asked “**Master, what is the great commandment in the Law?**” The one who asked the question, a lawyer, asked not because he wanted to know, but because he wanted to somehow trip the Master. Without hesitation Jesus said:

Matthew 22:37-40 ^(KJV) ... Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second [is] like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Love God with everything you have. Love your neighbor – the person near you – with the same love you have for yourself. Jesus said **“These two commandments are the basis for ALL the law and ALL the prophets”**. Putting it another way, if you had absolutely no access to the Bible you could still walk in a way that is pleasing to God by just following these *two commandments*. Love God, love one another.

When God's people bind together loving the God Who saved us and loving others, there is nothing that we cannot do. **Good will always overcome evil, and love will always overcome hate, for good and love are in God's heart!**

Illustrate The walls of Jerusalem are fallen because Israel put love of self over loving God. The walls of America are fallen today because God's people have done the same thing. I heard a story about a man who loved gold, and one day his dream came true – he inherited a fortune! He put pressed gold leaf wallpaper on his walls, golden doors and fixtures in his house, had gold woven into yellow curtains on his windows and on the yellow fabric on his furniture. He even bought expensive pajamas that was – yes – gold in color. One day he got sick, and ironically came down with *yellow jaundice*. His wife called the doctor who, coming to their house, headed to the bedroom to examine the man. After a long while the doctor came down. The wife asked, **“How is he?”** The doctor said, **“I don't know - I can't find him!”** The man was lost in his world of materialism and greed.

The walls of Jerusalem were fallen because of greed and selfishness. When the capital city is destroyed, the nation is in disarray. But what if Israel doesn't get back on its feet? What if the walls aren't built around Jerusalem?

God promised and prophesied that He was going to reach out in love to the whole world *through Israel*. God told the father of Israel, a man named **Abraham**, that

Genesis 12:3 (KJV) ... in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

God was going to come to the earth and, in one of the most fantastic acts of love, call a people to Himself. Many years later the Lord Jesus would come to the earth and lay down His life for us all. Before He could do that Israel had to be rebuilt. The wasteland had to be restored. God did this through Nehemiah and a crew of men and women that followed him, loving God and loving one another. The people worked together in one accord. The Bible says:

Context Nehemiah 4:6 (KJV) So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.

WE were working together. WE were loving God. WE will always make progress for the Lord as long as we love Him with all our heart, and love one another.

It didn't take long for Satan to send opposition to Nehemiah and his people. The ringleaders - **Sanballet and Tobiah** - led the attack. But Nehemiah reminded the

people that they had to work together. They would take turns both working and watching, watching and working. They were in one accord. Then it happened.

The **greatest enemy of God's Church – Old or New Testament - reared it's head.** The greatest enemy of the Church is not Satan, nor is it the world.

Context Nehemiah 5:1 ^(KJV) **And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews.**

The great enemy of the Church is when love goes out the door and selfishness comes in. **When the WE turns to ME the result will always be OH MY!**

1 When we gather together under the authority of the Word of God, then God the Son walks with us. Jesus said:

Matthew 18:20 ^(HCSB) **For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there among them."**

Illustrate We must be **gathered together in Christ's name.** This means that we unite together under the authority of Jesus Christ following His agenda, His Word, His Commission.



Do me a favor - hold up three fingers. When three fingers are pointed heavenward they look like the

letter W - as in WE. But when these fingers are pointed away from God and are pointed to the earth they look like the letter M as in ME. When WE turns to ME the organization falls apart. The great Patriot **Patrick Henry** said in his last speech before he died:

"Let us trust God, and our better judgment to set us right hereafter. United we stand, divided we fall. Let us not split into factions which must destroy that union upon which our existence hangs."

a Each of us has an old sin nature that whispers to us saying "put ME first" - and the unbelieving world encourages that type of behavior. This happened with the early Apostles. While they sat listening to Jesus teaching one day the Bible says ...

Luke 9:46 ^(HCSB) **Then an argument started among them about who would be the greatest of them.**

they started a "Me fight". Jesus called a little child to His side and said "They way to greatness in God's eyes is to be like this little child. Whoever is *least* among you - a *little me* - is the greatest."

The last ritual that Jesus gave us before going to the Cross is called **The Lord's Table.** At this Table the Lord used Bread and the Cup to emphasize the greatness of love. Jesus took the bread and breaking it, and said "**This is My Body, given for you**" (Luke 22:19). He took the Cup and said "**This Cup is the New Covenant established by My blood; it is shed for you**" (Luke 22:20).

God the Son gave Himself for US on the Cross of Calvary. In agony Love stretched out His hands and took the nails. In agony Love would be raised high above the heads of the mocking crowd. In agony Love would take the full punishment for your sins and my sins.

The Bible says that it is **the blood of the Messiah, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleansing us from dead works to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14)**

As Jesus explained what He was getting ready to do the Bible says ...

Luke 22:24 (HCSB) Then a dispute also arose among them about who should be considered the greatest.

b When my purpose in life becomes satisfying ME rather than loving as God has commanded, I'm part of the problem. There was progress in rebuilding the wall up to this point, but now work stops. Some of the richer brethren have not used their goods in loving their brothers and sisters, but they are **making merchandise of God's people**. The people are starving! They say:

Context Nehemiah 5:3-4 (KJV) We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth. 4 There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, [and that upon] our lands and vineyards.

Borrowing money to buy food from the richer believers, they mortgage and eventually lose their properties. Soon they have to sell their children into slavery ...

Context Nehemiah 5:5 (KJV) we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and [some] of our daughters are brought unto bondage

The walls are not being built, and each person is now asking "Why should we rebuild the walls? How will this benefit ME". **Selfishness** like a communicable disease grows, expands, and eventually consumes the nation. God will not aid selfishness!

James 4:1-3 (HCSB) What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don't they come from the cravings that are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your evil desires.

2 When you see God's people turning from WE to ME and selfishness rather than love ruling, follow Nehemiah's example. When this godly man heard what was being done the Bible says ...

Nehemiah 5:6 (KJV) And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words.

Nehemiah got very angry. There is a time to be angry.

The reason why many things are as they are in our country is because we are **apathetic** and not **angry**. We see babies aborted by the millions and think, ah well, at least I didn't do it. We no longer have to tell our children about the birds and the bees. All we need to do is turn on the television during prime time and sit our kids in front of the set, and the media will do it for us. We hear about widespread drug abuse among kids and don't get upset.

Nehemiah got angry, but he controlled that anger. The Bible says

Ephesians 4:26 ^(HCSB) **Be angry and do not sin. Don't let the sun go down on your anger,**

When we as believers see anger we must *keep it in check* and control it for the glory of God. Nehemiah didn't just fly off the handle when he got angry. He wanted to do something that would get the people united in love once more. What did Nehemiah do?

Context **Nehemiah 5:6-7** ^(KJV) ... **I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words. 7 Then I consulted with myself ...**

a **To restore order, consult with yourself *first*.**

Husbands if you're mad at your wife, don't say the first thing that comes to you in anger. Mothers, don't lash out at your children without thinking about what you're going to say. If a friend or a colleague upsets you, **control your tongue before you speak.** Too often when angered we speak without thinking and then live to regret it. You can burn your own house down. The great

prophet Moses spoke hastily saying "**hear now, you rebels, must we bring water out of this rock?**" (**Numbers 20:10**), and ended up being barred from entering the Promised Land (**Numbers 20:12**).

Fighting Christians are an oxymoron! No, I didn't say MORON, I said OXYMORON – **a contradiction in terms**. Christians are commanded to love as Jesus loved.

John 13:34-35 ^(HCSB) **I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.**

We who are saved represent the Lord to the unsaved populace. The **quickest way to curse our grandchildren and hold them in unbelief is to injudiciously use our tongues**. The Bible says that the misused tongue grieves the Lord Who saved you and I. **The Servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle to all (2 Timothy 2:24)**. We are all sinners, and are all liable to fall into wrong if we're not careful. We should be gracious even in our anger.

b **Nehemiah consulted with *himself*. He took inventory of his own life, asking “am I guilty of doing the same thing?”** Had Nehemiah made merchandise of his brothers and sisters as these rich men had? If so, he needed to repent himself before he tore into these rich people. The answer was, No, Nehemiah had not done the same evil – though he could have! He said

Context Nehemiah 5:15 (KJV) ... the former governors that [had been] before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God.

Nehemiah was not guilty of hypocrisy. Though he was in a position as the governor of the people and as governor he could have taxed them he did not do it. Nehemiah set a good example for others to see. He said ...

Context Nehemiah 5:16 (KJV) Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land: and all my servants [were] gathered thither unto the work.

Nehemiah worked side by side with his brothers and sisters. He loved the Lord and loved the people. He knew that **the bondage was heavy upon the people (verse 18)**, so he was careful not to add to their burdens.

C Nehemiah judged the situation as to who was right and who was wrong based *not on personal opinion or feelings, but what the Scripture said*. Dear friends, it doesn't matter what I think or what you think, but what matters is what **God has said**. These richer believers were doing wrong according to God's Word. The Lord told His people ...

Leviticus 25:35-38 (HCSB) If **your brother becomes**

destitute and cannot sustain himself among you, you are to support him as a foreigner or temporary resident, so that he can continue to live among you. 36 Do not profit or take interest from him, but fear your God and let your brother live among you. 37 You are not to lend him your silver with interest or sell him your food for profit. 38 I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God.

None of us earn nor deserve the Grace that God has given us, but as we have received Grace we are to give Grace.

What these richer believers were doing was evil! Nehemiah rebuked them, saying

Context Nehemiah 5:7 (KJV) Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them.

He also pointed out that these poorer believers were their brothers in the Lord. They were selling family members into slavery!

Context Nehemiah 5:8 (KJV) will ye even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing [to answer].

Notice that last line: "**they held their peace, and found nothing to answer**". God's Word was a witness against them, and they had nothing they could say to defend their actions.

3 Nehemiah called the offenders to repentance, reminding them that the work they were doing was being done for God. He said

Nehemiah 5:9 ^(KJV) Also I said, It [is] not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?

We must always remember that as God's people we have *three witnesses* to everything we do.

a We witness to the *unbeliever* by what we do and say in our daily lives. The love we show to God and to others validates what we believe as true. The Bible says ...

1 Peter 2:12 ^(NASB) **Keep your behavior excellent among the {unbelievers}, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God ...**

Love is the standard by which the believer lives his or her life. Saved by love, we love. When the world sees us loving one another as Christ loved us, then the world believes that **Jesus is truly the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6)**. Selfishness and lovelessness is what is destroying our country, our communities, and our families. We have some Good News to tell! God loves us, and has made a way by which we can walk with Him and build His Kingdom on this earth. The walls that have fallen will not be rebuilt until we do it, sharing love to all

one person at a time.

b We witness to the *believer* by what we do and say in our daily lives. Nehemiah

Nehemiah 5:7 ^(KJV) ... I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, And I set a great assembly against them.

Other believers see our actions. Love in action is what validates our faith. The Bible says:

1 John 4:20-21 ^(KJV) **If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? 21 And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.**

If you do not love your brother, and do not help your neighbor when he is in need:

1 John 3:16-18 ^(KJV) **Hereby perceive we the love [of God], because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down [our] lives for the brethren. 17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels [of compassion] from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? 18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.**

By making merchandise of their brothers and sisters these richer believers were telling the Church *I'm not*

really saved, I'm just playing saved.

C We witness to the Lord our God by what we do and say in our daily lives. You cannot fool God. Nehemiah commanded the fallen believers to repent and make restitution – and as you can read they readily did so.

Context Nehemiah 5:11-12 ^(KJV) **Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundredth [part] of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them. 12 Then said they, We will restore [them], and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise.**

As Nehemiah ended that chapter he looked heavenward and said:

Focal Nehemiah 5:19 ^(KJV) **Think upon me, my God, for good, [according] to all that I have done for this people.**

God our Father watches us and watches over us.

Saved or unsaved, we will all one day stand before the Lord and be judged. Those who are saved by faith in Christ will have their works judged, and rewards will be given or lost based on how well we loved and served in love. Those who reject Christ as Savior and Lord shall stand before God naked and undone. As you have cast Him off, He will cast you off. Repent, and come to Christ

without delay! For

John 3:36 ^(KJV) He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Read Together Psalms 133:1-3 ^(KJV) ... Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! 2 It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; 3 As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

Matthew 22:37-40; Genesis 12:3; Nehemiah 4:6; Nehemiah 5:1

The great enemy of the Church is when love goes out the door and selfishness comes in. **When the WE turns to ME the result will always be OH MY!**

1 When we gather together under the authority of the _____ **Matthew 18:20**

a Each of us has an _____ that whispers to us saying "put ME first" - and the unbelieving world encourages that type of behavior. (Luke 9:46; Luke 22:19; Luke 22:20; Hebrews 9:14; Luke 22:24)

b When my purpose in life becomes satisfying _____ rather than loving as God has commanded, I'm part of the problem. (Nehemiah 5:3-4; Nehemiah 5:5; James 4:1-3)

2 When you see God's people turning from WE to ME

and selfishness rather than _____ ruling, follow Nehemiah's example. (Nehemiah 5:6; Ephesians 4:26; Nehemiah 5:7)

a To restore order, consult with _____ *first*. (Numbers 20:10; Numbers 20:12; John 13:34-35; 2 Timothy 2:24)

Fighting Christians are an *oxymoron* - a contradiction in terms. Christians are commanded to love as Jesus loved.

b Nehemiah consulted with *himself*. He took inventory of his own life, asking _____? (Nehemiah 5:15; Nehemiah 5:16)

c Nehemiah judged the situation as to who was right and who was wrong based *not on personal opinion or feelings, but* _____ (Leviticus 25:35-38; Nehemiah 5:7; Nehemiah 5:8)

3 Nehemiah called the offenders to repentance, reminding them that the work they were doing was being done for _____. (Nehemiah 5:9)

a We witness to the _____ by what we do and say in our daily lives. (1 Peter 2:12; John 14:6)

b We witness to the _____ by what we do and say in our daily lives. (Nehemiah 5:7; 1 John 4:20-

21; 1 John 3:16-18)

C We witness to the _____ by what we do and say in our daily lives. (**Nehemiah 5:11-12; Nehemiah 5:19; John 3:36**)

