

Community Builders 10

Giving God the Best



Sunday 19 June 2005

01. Making a Wholehearted Commitment to God

¹ Those who sealed it were:

Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah. 10.1

²⁸ "The rest of the people—priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand- ²⁹ all these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord.

This was an amazing commitment to God. One which embraced the whole of their community life. It hadn't happened overnight but as God's Spirit had been moving among them, arising from their worship, prayer and retelling of their history, having witnessed God's dealings with them they now recommit themselves to be obedient to God, to be his covenant people.

We as Christians are members of the new covenant brought into being by Jesus. Baptism is an expression of our confession as Jesus as lord of our lives. Communion is a continual reminder of that new agreement and a fresh meeting with the risen Jesus with the opportunity to recommit our lives to him

Romans 10.9, 1 Cor 10.11-14.

02. Dedicating our relationships to God

³⁰ "We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons.

Apart from our relationship with God, there are also human relationships; marriage being of great importance. In Israel's history, marriages between those who were Israelites and who worshipped God (Yahweh) with those who worshipped other gods, had proved incredibly destructive 13.26.

Here was a promise not only to honour marriage but to ensure that there was spiritual compatibility. 2 Cor 6.14. This presents a huge challenge for us in present day society, to model Christian marriage and demonstrate its uniqueness and value.

Whilst these verses speak of marriage, seeking to dedicate to the whole of our relationships to God is important.

03. Dedicating our Time to God

³¹ "When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day.

This verse applied primarily to the keeping of the Sabbath the Jewish holy day.

It had significant overtones for their lives

- Observing the God given rhythms of life, work, rest, worship.
- Reverence for God, setting aside one day a week for worship to God.
- Rightful business/trading practices/care of the environment. God's word was practical and prescribed helpful ways to work.
- Recognition that the whole of our lives are god's gift including time.

For us today those 4 areas still apply, but we are set free from the law of the Old Testament but acting upon their principles is of immense benefit.

04. Dedicating our Gifts to God.

These gifts include:

- giving the land a rest v31,
- releasing debts v31, the giving of silver to the Temple, to pay for the sacrifices and offerings v32,
- the giving of firewood v34 (wood was not in abundance).
- The first fruits of the harvest – grain and fruit v35,
- The firstborn v36
- Offerings of bread, grain, fruit, wine v37
- A tithe of grain v37

This act of dedication was marked by generous giving. God deserves our best and here we see it in action. These gifts, embraced time use of abilities and gifts as well as the gifts themselves. Jesus encourages us to make the kingdom of God our highest priority – he assures us that as we do so we too shall receive all that we need.

Small Group Study – Nehemiah 10.

Take time to allow the magnitude of the people's commitment to sink in.

01. What do you perceive to be the central thrust of this passage of scripture?

02. What was it that brought the Israelites to this place of commitment? What moves us in our discipleship to commit to God?

03. What does it mean for us to commit our relationships to God (v30).

04. Honouring the Sabbath meant dedicating that day to God v31. What role does the Sabbath or Sunday have in our lives? See Ex 20.8-11, Rev 1.10, Col 2.16.

05. V31 Also points us to honouring God with our time and also with our business practices. Reflect upon this, share any insights you may have?

06. Nehemiah 10 has a lot to say about giving; share insights that this gives.

07. This chapter could be understood as laying our treasures before God. Consider what are your treasures and how willing you are to offer them to God?