

Statutes of Limitation – Nehemiah 13:1-31

I. Introduction:

- A. I confess that from the moment we started this study of **Nehemiah** I have been dreading this chapter.
1. I read this book several times before we started, and I knew it concluded with an unpopular and controversial subject. Now, here we are.
 2. But as is most often the case – the problems we imagine aren't as awful as they really are.
 3. The more I studied this chapter and subject, and the more I prepared for this message, the more excited I became.
- B. Nehemiah tells us that he was pained and grieved by something he saw when he returned to Jerusalem.
1. Well, I was at first pained and grieved by something I saw in this chapter.
 2. Nehemiah says in **verse 7** – *“And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. And it **GRIEVED** me sore...”*
 - a. That may have been painful to him, but to me **verses 23 & 25** are far more painful – *“In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab...”*
 - b. *“And I **CONTENDED** with them, and **CURSED** them, and **SMOTE** certain of them, and **PLUCKED** off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves.”*
 3. That may be the approach some men use in their ministries, but it is contrary to my nature.
 4. Separation from awful, ugly, deadly sin is one thing – and it may be easy – but attacking brethren, or limiting our association with neighbors, family members and friends is something more difficult.
- C. One of my early concerns was over the outline I might use. I didn't have one.
1. How can I teach this chapter in a respectful, godly fashion?
 2. But again, like most of our worries, we don't need a solution until we actually face the challenge.
 3. There is no sense losing sleep over a problem which is months in the future.
 4. We should learn to let the black and gloomy day arrive before trying to deal with it.
 5. And, as is often the case, the Lord will supply a solution at the appropriate time. Be patient.
 6. In this case, the Lord has given me not one, but two, outlines to follow in our study of this chapter.
- D. It seems to me that the theme of **Nehemiah's last words** is *“separation.”*
1. In fact beyond **restoration**, *“separation”* might be one of the themes of the entire book.
 2. I've entitled this particular message *“Statutes of Limitation.”*
 3. We see here Nehemiah's separation from **the mixed multitude** – and from **Tobiah**, the Moabite.
 - a. There were limitations placed on the relationships between God's people and the Devil's people.
 - b. And there is separation from the effects of **the world**, and from **ungodly practices**.
 - c. Then it concludes with separation from within the **unequal yoke**.
 4. That is the first outline the Lord gave to me – five points. Relatively easy to preach.
 5. But then along came another – the one I'm going to use.
 6. I'd like us to look at **four** areas of **proper separation**, followed by several areas of **extreme** or **excessive separation**.
- E. Our first step is to recognize that it is **our God who** has **created these boundaries** around our fellowship.
1. **Jehovah** has established these *“statutes of limitation.”*
 2. Last week we considered **Deut. 23:3** – *“An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever.”*
 3. This, of course is from the Old Testament, and so some might consider separation to be an Old Testament doctrine, but there really isn't such a thing as *“Old Testament doctrine.”*
 - a. Old Testament doctrine is Bible doctrine – and this is Biblical doctrine – New Testament doctrine.
 - b. I hope to show you that it is God, our Saviour, who has created these *“Statutes of Limitation.”*

- F. In addition to scriptures which we will come to later, notice how this chapter begins.
1. *“On that day **they READ** in the **book of MOSES** in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever... Now it came to pass, when **they had heard the LAW**, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.”*
 2. It needs to be fully understood that even though **Nehemiah** is the **point of the wedge** between Israel and these Ammonites, Moabites and the mixed multitude, it was not Nehemiah who came up with the idea.
 3. **The LAW** demanded separation from the children of Lot, and each of the other areas of limitation highlighted in this chapter.
 4. When we understand that point, we can successfully move forward.
- G. Furthermore, **v. 18** shows us that when we ignore God’s **“statutes of limitation”** His judgment may be the result.
1. Part of the separation instruction of this chapter was the limitation of activity on the Sabbath.
 2. *“Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath.”*
 3. God commands certain kinds of separation, and He judges its neglect.

II. It appears to me that the Bible outlines **FOUR** major **AREAS** of **SEPARATION**.

- A. The first is called **“the world,”** and with that word we mean the **society** in which we live.
1. The Bible tells us that there is a false god who rules over **“the world.”**
 2. Satan is the god of this world & the prince of the power of the air – **II Corinthians 4:4** & **Ephesians 2:2**.
 3. Thus, to worship & follow the secular aspects of society are acts of idolatry – spiritual treason against God.
- B. 1 John 2:15-17** – *“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”*
1. When people love something or someone, they usually want to spend as much time as they can with that person or thing.
 2. So **John** exhorts us to control our hearts, turning them away from the world – and that ultimately leads to separation from the world.
 3. **James** adds, *“Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God”* – **James 4:4**. Friendship with the world will bring God’s chastisement.
 4. **Titus** tells us that the grace of God that bringeth salvation teaches us to **deny** ungodliness & worldly lusts.
 5. And **Paul** beseeches us by the mercies of God to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God and **“be not conformed to this world”** – **Romans 12:1-2**.
- C. The world is one of Satan’s greatest tools in keeping God’s people from worshiping & serving the Lord properly
1. So if television keeps us from serving the Lord, then we need to separate ourselves from television.
 2. If video games, sports, rap music, alcohol or drugs draw us into the world – & that is what they usually do – then we need to separate ourselves from such things.
 3. Just about anything can become idolatry to us. The world is a cesspool of idolatry.
- D. A second arena of separation involves a particular segment of that world – **UNBELIEVERS**.
1. For instance, some of God’s people in Jerusalem were involved in political and economic alliances with Samaritans, Moabites and others who worshiped false Gods.
 2. **II Corinthians 6:14-18** – *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?
a. And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?
b. And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

- c. *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,*
- d. *And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."*
- E. We have to be careful at this point, because in our zeal it is easy to step beyond God's "*statutes of Limitation.*"
1. The key word here is "*yoked,*" which speaks of using an implement which ties two or more parties together
 - a. When one person who is a Christian is tied to another who is an unbeliever, the yoke between them will never be balanced – it will always be "*unequal.*"
 - b. So this scripture forbids, among other things, **partnerships & unions** between **saved & lost** people.
 2. Sadly, some Christians push this principle too far, **denying any kind of relationship** with the unsaved.
 3. But to buy sea bass or tuna from the fishmonger from Tyre on Tuesday's market day did not involve any kind of yoke, and the eating of fish was not worldly or worshiping the god of the world – **verse 16.**
 - a. There is no sin in working beside a lost man or even being employed by a lost man.
 - b. God does not forbid a Christian from employing a lost man, or inviting a worldly neighbor over for BBQ.
 - c. If we had no contact with the unbeliever, it would destroy any possibility for evangelism.
 4. Let's say that God graciously saves a 12-year-old boy out of the home of an atheist or a Muslim.
 - a. That child is yoked to his parents and can do nothing about it. The yoke remains.
 - b. But when he turns 20 & chooses to marry, God commands he not yoke himself to an unbelieving wife.
 5. **Verse 23 & 25** – *"In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab ... And I contended with them and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves."*
- F. It really isn't important, but in my study I found an interesting word.
1. Look at the separation of **verse 3** – *"Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the **mixed multitude.**"*
 2. First, I was surprised to learn that "*mixed multitudes*" are mentioned in only one other scripture beside this.
 3. And then I looked up the Hebrew word.
 4. It is translated "*mixed*" and "*mixed multitude*" only twice, but **nine** times it is rendered "*woof*" – not the word which the dog speaks, but the term used by weavers.
 5. In cloth, "*warp*" are threads running in one direction, and the "*woof*" are the contrary threads.
 6. The mixed multitude were people running contrary to God and His people.
- G. A third area of Biblical separation deals specifically with **false teachers** and **corrupt religious leaders.**
1. Throughout his ministry Paul felt the sting of men who undermined the gospel and the truth of God.
 2. So he wrote to the **Romans** – *"I beseech you, brethren, **MARK** them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and **AVOID** them."*
 3. Inherent in the word "*avoid*" is the idea of "*separation.*"
 4. Notice that Paul specified that this separation was to be based on **doctrine** which they had been taught.
 5. In this verse the separation was over the difference between Bible truth & error – not any lesser differences
 6. To **Titus** he said, *"A man that is an **HERETICK** after the first and second admonition **REJECT.**"*
 7. "*Heretick*" implies someone who is schismatic and factious – a teacher and proponent of false doctrine.
- H. The fourth area of separation is the most difficult – **the disorderly brother.**
1. One difficulty is that this **IS** a **brother** – someone who we are supposed to love in Christ.
 2. The other difficulty shows itself in our definition of "*disorderly,*" because the love which we have may encourage us toward leniency when it would be inappropriate.
 3. Paul was thinking of a couple of specifics when he addressed Christian separation in **II Thessalonians 3.**
 - a. *"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.*
 - b. *For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you;*

- c. *Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:*
 - d. *Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.*
 - e. *For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.*
 - f. *Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed."*
4. Notice that Paul was talking **TO** brethren **ABOUT** brethren who did not follow his instruction about living like Christians.
 - a. God's people should have employment in order to feed themselves and to have the wherewithal to be a blessing to others.
 - b. Christians must not be gossips and busybodies, but willing helpers to the needs of others.
 5. Those who do not live the way Christians should, but who wilfully and obstinately disobey the Apostles' instructions should be shunned and ignored – in order to bring them to shame and to proper behavior.

I. Nehemiah 13:28 – *“And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me.”*

1. One of the grandsons of Eliashib apparently defended his marriage to the daughter of Sanballat.
2. He showed no regret or repentance; he may have reacted violently toward those who pointed out how he transgressed God's law.
3. Nehemiah may have had little choice – he drove the man from his presence.

III. The Bible teaches separation in four areas, but there is such a thing as *EXCESSIVE SEPARATION*.

- A. I've been serving in God's churches for over 50 years now, and I have learned that no two Christians are going to agree on everything.
 1. For example, there may be slight differences in doctrine and the interpretation of certain difficult scriptures.
 - a. Who will make up the Bride of Christ? Will the Anti-Christ be a Jew or Gentile?
 - b. Is there a difference between demons and unclean spirits? Was King Saul a child of God or not?
 - c. How should *“Easter”* be understood in **Acts 12:4**? Should we celebrate the birth of Christ?
 - d. Is it sin to use a Bible which prints the words of Christ in red ink?
 2. We may have strong opinions on things like these, but they have nothing to do with the state of a man's soul or how the work of evangelism should be carried out. None are clearly defined in the scriptures.
 3. Splitting churches, and refusing to fellowship with someone, over such things is disgusting and sinful.
 4. You might even disagree with my last statement, but I will not disfellowship you for your disagreement.
 5. Some people advocate separation over every little theological disagreement, but I think that is evil.
- B. Sadly, far more divisive are matters of *“disorderly” behavior* – when very often they shouldn't be divisive at all.
 1. People are more apt to disown their brethren over what they do or how they look, than over their doctrine.
 2. In days gone by, there have been Christian men who insisted that **facial hair** was a necessity for the ministry, while there have been others who were disgusted by beards.
 3. I have a good friend who believes that **long neck ties** are sensual and worldly and therefore sinful, but thankfully he has never made that a test of fellowship between us.
 4. What is the proper **length of women's “long hair”**? **Men's long hair**?
 5. How much **make-up** should a Christian woman wear? How much **jewelry** should **any** Christian wear?
 6. Are Birkenstocks acceptable attire for church? What about t-shirts?
 7. And what about **politics** or **socialized medicine**? Should we disavow people over the **use of masks**?
 8. Since Paul doesn't define any of these as *“orderly”* or *“disorderly”* we have no business disfellowshipping one another because they disagree with us.

- C. Unfortunately, there are people who believe that **someone CANNOT be too separated** from the world and the people with whom they disagree.
1. And as a result, eventually they become religious hermits, having fellowship with no one but themselves.
 2. Some people treat Christians with whom they disagree as if they were dead.
 3. And as a result some have no evangelistic outreach at all, trying to avoid the contamination of the world.
 4. In other words, some believe that **separation ALWAYS glorifies God**, but **“always”** is a very big word.
- D. There are also cases when separation is implemented at some point, which after several years is forgotten, but the broken fellowship is maintained forever – even through successive generations.
1. Christianity is filled with offsetting Hatfields and McCoys. It is shameful, disgusting and sinful.
 2. And the truth is – sometimes even God’s **“statutes of limitation”** are meant to be temporary, or sometimes God is glorified when the rules are broken.
 3. Have you ever heard of a woman named **“Ruth,”** the wife of Boaz and an grand-mother of David?
 4. Ruth was a Moabitess, just like Tobiah. She was also in the lineage of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 5. Truly, in Ruth’s case, **“God turned the curse into a blessing.”**
- E. Let me point out a couple of things from **Nehemiah** which some of the ultra-separatists miss.
1. **Verse 4** – **“Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, was allied unto Tobiah: And he had prepared for him a great chamber....”** there in the Temple.
 2. **Verse 7** – **“And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God.**
 - a. **And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber.**
 - b. **Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers: and thither brought I again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat offering and the frankincense.”**
 3. Nehemiah was justified in kicking the Moabite out of the temple. The Bible gave him that responsibility.
 4. He was also justified in being grieved and angry at Eliashib, for making room for Tobiah in the temple.
 5. But what does the Bible say that Nehemiah did to punish Eliashib?
 - a. Did he loose his position as High Priest? Was he kicked out of the temple?
 - b. Was he censured in any way? Was he defrocked? Did he lose his retirement pension?
 6. Obviously I can’t tell you what Nehemiah did to Eliashib because the Bible doesn’t tell me.
 7. Personally, I am going to assume that since Nehemiah doesn’t tell us what he did – he didn’t do anything.
- F. What is the likelihood that Nehemiah applied **Ephesians 5** to the case?
1. **“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;**
 - a. **And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.”**
 - b. **Verse 7** – **“Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:**
 - c. **Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.**
 - d. **And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.”**
 2. What if Nehemiah took Eliashib aside and reprovved him for giving Tobiah a room in the Temple?
 3. Is it possible that Eliashib confessed ignorance – or his foolishness – and repented of his transgression?
 4. Wouldn’t the matter then have been settled in that case?
 5. I’m not saying that is what happened, but it’s just as much a possibility as Eliashib’s exclusion from the Temple or some other punishment.
- G. There is a non-Biblical word which I used to hear quite frequently – **“SECONDARY separation.”**
1. It may be **non-Biblical**, but it’s **not completely un-Biblical**.
 2. I think there are cases when we should separate from those who refuse to separate from others who refuse to separate from sin and sinners.
 3. But I don’t see Nehemiah separating himself from Eliashib because he didn’t separate himself from Tobiah.

4. And there is no indication that he separated himself from those who had intermarried with the heathen.
 5. There may be a place for “*secondary separation*” once in a while, but not as often as some people want to practice it.
 6. “*Secondary separation*” should be implemented very cautiously.
- H. We’ve already noticed that Nehemiah got really, really angry with those Jews who had married heathen wives.
1. *“In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: And I **CONTENDED** with them, and **CURSED** them, and **SMOTE** certain of them, and **PLUCKED** off their **HAIR**, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves.”*
 2. **Do you see** what **I do NOT see** here?
 3. Do you see Nehemiah demanding that these mixed marriages be dissolved by divorce?
 4. Perhaps other scriptures might teach separation from lost spouses, but we don’t see it in this scripture.
 5. And when it came to the mixed marriages in Corinth, Paul didn’t flatly advocate Christian women leaving their unsaved husbands.
 6. Those marriages were what they were – the yokes had been put on and couldn’t be removed without adding a number of new problems to the old problems.
 7. And one old problem is that once we lose traction and start sliding down hill, it is difficult to stop.
 8. One of the effects of such mixed marriages, was the likelihood that their children would end up yoking themselves to unbelievers as their parents had done.
 9. So Nehemiah made the Israelite partners in these marriages *“swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves.”*

IV. Conclusion:

- A. When we see behavior with which we disagree, we may be initially offended.
 1. But we need to be careful where we go from there.
 2. Rather than casting that person to the curb, lovingly teaching them the truth would be more beneficial.
 3. And I know that it is hard to imagine, but it may be that we are the party which is out of step with the Lord.
 4. Even if we are right, our reaction to the situation may be wrong – it may be ungodly.
- B. Without a doubt the Bible teaches separation.
 1. Yes, God has established some “*statutes of limitation.*”
 2. But we need to stay within those statutes and not create new statutes of our own.