

Selfless Leadership

Text: Nehemiah 5:14-19

Introduction:

1. This chapter: The work of God is obstructed by internal problems. In the previous chapter there was opposition from without, now there is hindrance from within.
2. The work of the wall and its associated battles, did not create the problems. They simply revealed the problems that were already there below the surface. "When extra effort is put forth in the Lord's work, sin problems (such as this greed) will be revealed; for stress always reveals where weakness is. Many church people appear to be fine church members until extra commitment is required. Then we discover where sin problems exist that were hitherto not evident among the members. Of course, some prefer not to see the sin problem but rather prefer to blame the extra work for the Lord as the problem. The devil loves to get us to blame God for the devil's evil doing. So be careful that you do not become critical of the work at church and think that it is the problem when the real problem is the sin in the heart of the people who are causing problems in the church." John Butler
3. Like Paul, Nehemiah is placed in a position where he has to turn the spotlight on his own godly leadership credentials which stood in contrast to the selfish rulers of his day.
4. Review of previous lesson:

I. The Exploitation of the People (Vs. 1-5)

II. The Exposure of the Perpetrators (Vs. 6-13)

III. The Example of the Person in Charge (Vs. 15-19)

A. Selfless Leadership (Vs. 14-15)

1. He did not take advantage of his position (Vs. 14-15)
2. "bread of the governor" = the lawful food allowance allocated by Persian officials and financed through taxation of the local community
3. He didn't exact what was his rightful due (Vs. 14). Nehemiah did not put his personal rights ahead of the needs of others. Remember joy is Jesus first, others second, yourself last!
4. The work of God is such that we will need to learn to die to our rights
5. "A cross stands in the way of spiritual leadership, a cross upon which the leader must consent to be impaled." J. Oswald Sanders
6. This stood in contrast to former governors where even their servants ruled in a harsh and cruel manner (Vs. 15)

B. Servant Leadership (Vs. 16)

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1. Nehemiah and his men set a good example and worked alongside the common people. He did not require others to do what he wasn't willing to do himself.
2. Luke 22:24-26 *"And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."*
3. Nehemiah and his men did get distracted from the work by pursuing business opportunities.
4. Note: Pursuit of material gain by a man of God can cause terrible damage to the work of God. The call of God to ministry often means relinquishing the prospects of making significant sums of money.

C. Sacrificial Leadership (Vs. 17-18)

1. He was generous and hospitable to others (17-18a)
 - a. Some estimate this amount of food would feed over 500 guests. One very simple yet important part of our giving is to open our table to the brethren. 1 Peter 4:9 *"Use hospitality one to another without grudging."*
 - b. It is easy to be generous with other people's money but not our own!
 - c. 1 Timothy 6:17-19 *"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."*
2. He was compassionate towards God's people (18b)
 - a. Nehemiah was not detached from the sufferings and burdens of the people. He had a tender heart to the needs of those God had called him to lead.
 - b. 'compassion' = A suffering with another; painful sympathy; a sensation of sorrow excited by the distress or misfortunes of another; pity.

D. Spiritual Leadership (Vs. 19)

3. A reverence for God (15b)
 - a. Nehemiah's vertical attitude towards God regulated his horizontal actions towards men.
 - b. The fear of the Lord is a powerful antidote to sin. Prov. 16:6 *"By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil."*

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- c. “The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else.” (Oswald Chambers)
- 4. A desire for God’s approval (19)
 - a. Nehemiah’s close walk with God again highlighted. He was a truly spiritual leader.
 - b. Nehemiah’s first concern was to have the approval of God and that made him a good leader of men.

Conclusion: Are we living for self or for others? What is our attitude towards finances/temporal things? Is it one that reflects a biblical mindset and heart or that of the world?