

Lessons from Nehemiah's Wall Builders #1

Why do people build walls or fences?

- To keep bad or unauthorized people or animals out
- To keep people or animals from escaping (jail, prison, Communist countries; yards and fields)
- To protect our privacy
- To hide what we don't want others to see
- To keep from being hurt by people we do not trust.

You can see that some walls are good, and some are bad, so depending on the circumstances, we might at one time need to tear down walls (of division, mistrust, erroneous teachings, demonic oppression, etc.), but in another situation we should be building a wall.

Perhaps we may later look at how to recognize and tear down the bad walls, but for now we will look at building or rebuilding good walls. An example is Prov. 25:28, which says "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls." If a person cannot control their anger, eating and drinking, shopping, gossip, vicious words, etc., they not only harm others, but they open themselves to various forms of demonic oppression. The "doors" of their lives are open to demons who encourage and thrive on destructive behaviors.

Most of us do not need lessons on building physical fences or walls, but we will take the example of Nehemiah and the physical walls of Jerusalem, and apply them to our spiritual walls.

As a historical refresher, the nation of Judah went into captivity to Babylon in three waves, culminating in the destruction of the city and temple in 586 BC. In 538 BC, Cyrus the Persian issued a decree allowing the Jews to return and rebuild the temple, which they did, but the city itself remained as it was until Nehemiah led the people in rebuilding the city wall as a defense. Until he came, the Jewish inhabitants of the area were defenseless against their local enemies. The book of Nehemiah describes events mostly around 444 BC, telling of how he organized and led the returned Jews in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem, despite intense opposition. In essence, they were doing a work of revival, building up that which had been destroyed.

Nehemiah's wall is a physical drama that can be compared to the Protestant Reformation, or the Pentecostal outpouring, or the spiritual conditions of local churches and individuals. We can learn about revival and reformation from the book of Nehemiah, although specific details will need to be at a later date.

First, why would we need a wall around the church, or our personal lives? What kind of wall?

1. To keep the church from being infiltrated by unbelievers, or polluted by openly sinning members.

This has happened in history, as when the emperor Constantine, back in the 300's, rewarded people for becoming Christians, instead of killing them. It caused the churches to be filled with people who were not really Christians by the new birth, and they brought all their heathen customs with them. The end result was a spiritual weakening of the church. Prior to that time, the threats of persecution had a purifying effect on the church – only those who were really serious about following Christ would dare to bear the name.

It also happens today when pastors water down the gospel and Biblical teachings and worship in the church so they don't offend all the non-Christian "members" of the church (especially if they are financial contributors). Or they let everyone know theirs is an inclusive, "rainbow coalition" kind of church where sexual perverts will not be made uncomfortable, but even celebrated. Their message is love, tolerance, and inclusivity, not sin, repentance, and redemption.

Other churches are more than happy to accept non-Christians into their church if they can help the church softball team, or if they are local bigwigs. Many of the doctor-and-lawyer class want church membership so they will be recognized in the community. They put in a weekly appearance.

Does this mean we do not welcome unbelievers into our services? Obviously not, but they should not be led to think they can be genuine members of the church if they are not converted. It is common for people to be in the gathering of the church, without being in the church itself. A church is not just a

building or its regular services, it is a local group of born-again believers. We are baptized into the church, and are set into it by the Holy Spirit, as it pleases him. So the real question is whether we really are members of the body of Christ, or just attendees at its meetings.

So how do we build this kind of wall?

- a. **By letting it be known that mere attendance doesn't mean a person is a part of the body of Christ, and encouraging all unsaved attendees to get serious with God, repent, and be baptized.** If unsaved people are comfortable in a church, we should ask ourselves what we are doing wrong! Is our message wishy-washy and mealy-mouthed, or uncompromising faithfulness to a holy God?
- b. **By exercising church discipline when necessary**, even to the extent of excommunication. Titus 3:10-11 – “A man that is an heretick [*factious and divisive, promoting error and schism*] after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.” Also 1 Cor. 5 (for fornication and gross immorality).

2. To keep from being infiltrated by errors, heretical doctrines, and factions.

This has occurred in the seminaries, where our future pastors and leaders are supposedly being trained. In almost all cases the historical trend of these colleges is from orthodox, scriptural principles, to modernist, liberal theology and every form of denial of truth. As unbelieving professors and teachers slipped in over time, their evil doctrines carried out to the supporting churches, through the graduating students.

This is also seen in the attempts by some (75%) US Catholic bishops to deny participation in the communion of the mass to politicians who openly flout the church's official stance against abortion. Regardless of how we feel about the Catholic church and its doctrines, even of the mass, it is refreshing to see that some of them still take the church's historical stance against abortion seriously.

So how do we build this kind of wall?

- a. **By actively and consistently preaching and teaching the whole Word of God without apology.** Jude 3-4 – “... and exhort you that ye should contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, ...”
- b. **By being discerning, and recognizing when people are not just “troubled”, but troublemakers.** Paul warned the Ephesian elders in Ac. 20:28-30 that after he left, grievous wolves would enter among them to destroy the flock. A shepherd doesn't counsel a wolf, he drives him away from the flock. There is a difference between weak and sickly sheep, and wolves that pretend to be sheep.
- c. **By warning the unruly** – 1 Thess. 5:14. This shows that we are to have patience with the weak and feeble-minded, but the unruly are to be warned, rebuked, and chastened. Admonish them once or twice, and if they persist, exclude them (Tit. 3:10-11). To allow troublemakers to remain in the body is to court disaster in the flock, and really is not even doing them any favor
- d. **By withdrawing from a larger association of churches that is heading the wrong direction.** This is difficult in a denomination, especially if the local building and property are owned by the denomination. Even Charles Spurgeon had to withdraw from the Baptist group he was a part of when they started straying significantly from the Word, back in the late 1800's.
- e. **As individuals, we must sometimes separate from a church that has degenerated in its teachings.** There is a time to stay-and-pray, and there is a time to leave, lest you also become corrupted. Caution is required though, because some people become church-hoppers, never satisfied until they find the “perfect” church. Wherever they go, they spread dissension and dissatisfaction.

3. To keep ourselves personally safe from demonic oppression and habitual sin (to be continued)