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Compromise

Nehemiah 13:1-31

Compromise. Is compromise good or bad? Can anything be accomplished in the political world without compromise? Is it wrong to compromise?

This week we are going to skip chapter 12 and jump to Nehemiah 13. We will return next week to chapter 12 about celebrating as we celebrate the end of the 2017 session!

Chapter 1 began “**in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king.**” All the efforts Nehemiah made to get permission to travel to Jerusalem, deal with enemies, organize the people, rebuild the wall, set in place a government, and organize the great celebration that took place when the wall was finished all took place that year. Then Nehemiah ruled for twelve years as governor of the region before returning to the court of Artaxerxes in Persia.

6 But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king, 7 and I came to Jerusalem...

He returns to Jerusalem to a people who have compromised what they had promised to God in the preceding chapters.

Compromise Through Compartmental Sin

4 Now before this, Eliashib the priest, having authority over the storerooms of the house of our God, was allied with Tobiah. 5 And he had prepared for him a large room, where previously they had stored the grain offerings, the frankincense, the articles, the tithes of grain, the new wine and oil, which were commanded to be given to the Levites and singers and gatekeepers, and the offerings for the priests.

You probably recognize the name Tobiah. He was one of the two dedicated enemies of the purpose of God.

The other man mentioned in v. 28, Sanballat, was connected to all of this compromise and who had also been resolute in

his opposition to everything Nehemiah stood for and everything God intended.

28 And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; therefore I drove him from me.

Curiously, Eliashib the high priest, the spiritual leader of the nation, had made alliances with these two men who were most committed as enemies of God's purpose.

Of all things, Eliashib had made a place for Tobiah to live in the courts of the temple! Also Eliashib's grandson had become related to Sanballat by marriage.

Eliashib seems to be a practical man who knew he didn't have the clout that Nehemiah had. He didn't have the armies of the Persian empire at his disposal. He realized that he was going to have to be neighbor to the Horonites of Sanballat and the Ammonites of Tobiah for years to come.

“Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one--

Your affectionate uncle, Screwtape.”

— C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

It seemed much better to make an alliance with these enemies, to placate them, in order to go forward. "Let's get them on our side. Let's reduce the tensions."

He seemed to have had good intentions but compromised in the wrong areas...that of principles related to obedience to God.

Romans 13:13-14 says, **13 Let us walk properly, ...and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.**

This is saying, "Don't make an apartment in the temple for Tobiah. Don't make a room in the house of your life for the things that trip you up."

Compromise can be good unless it leads to disobedience to God and His principles.

If we fill our lives what pleases God (which includes what we think about and how we use our time) then there will be no room for the Tobiahs. If the temple storehouses were full, there would have been no room for Tobiah in the Temple. If our temples, our lives, are full of what they are supposed to be filled with, there will be no room for the patterns of sin that plague us.

Compromise in Their Giving to the Lord

A second problem Nehemiah discovered when he returned is found in **verses 10-14**:

10 I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given them; for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field. 11 So I contended with the rulers, and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their place.

In the previous chapter it says that Judah was so excited about the priests and the Levites and their work that they gave gladly and joyfully to God's work and the provisions for their spiritual leaders.

If our lives are full of what they are supposed to be filled with, there will be no room for the patterns of sin that plague us.

Now when Nehemiah returns, there is enough room for Tobiah to move into the storerooms and the Levites have to go to work outside of their called vocation because the people have forsaken their giving.

Giving and our seeking spiritual nourishment are both areas that normally don't cease abruptly. Usually it is a gradual process...the way compromise usually occurs.

Compromise in Commitment to Regular Worship of God

15 In those days I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions. 16 Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. 17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, "What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day?"

Again, it's easy to imagine how the Jews could make a small compromise once again.

They were basically saying, "We're living among people who are not Jews. They do business on the Sabbath day. In fact, it's the merchants of Tyre who are doing most of the selling. We aren't so much breaking the Sabbath, we're just buying what they have to sell. Most of what they're selling is food anyway, and food spoils quickly."

They couldn't see what they were doing until someone who hadn't been there came from a distance and spoke the difficult truth. It is important to have others in our lives who we trust and that are focused on God that can tell us if we are compromising in the wrong areas or not.

Compromise in Relationships

23 In those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. 24 And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people.

Marriages in that day were arranged by the parents. Children were told whom they would marry by their father. But fathers made decisions about whom their children should marry very often for reasons of security, economics, etc.

They probably thought, "It would be much better for my daughter to be married to this well-to-do young man from Ashdod. He'll provide better for her than some poor Israelite."

Nehemiah grabbed these fathers and said, "You're trying to provide security for your children by inviting the presence of idols.. This is crazy! What in the world were you thinking?"

APPLICATION

Let's look at Nehemiah's response here.

7 and I came to Jerusalem and discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, in preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. 8 And it grieved me bitterly; therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room. 9 Then I commanded them to cleanse the rooms; and I brought back into them the articles of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.

He threw Tobiah out, grabbed his things and tossed them out, and fumigated the place. He didn't even want the rooms of the temple to smell like Tobiah.

Now, why was Nehemiah so ruthless? Why did he fumigate the apartment? Why did he pluck the beards of fathers?

I think it's precisely to make a point. He wasn't just crotchety in his old age. He knew that compromise starts very small.

Is there an area of your life that you know is not pleasing to God but doesn't seem to be that big of a deal?

Ask God to reveal those areas where you are compromising (maybe through someone your trust). Acknowledge them. Ask for forgiveness. And don't make room for "Tobiah's" in your life.

