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## NEHEMIAH 10:31

Series: Life Lessons from Nehemiah

[PRAYER] Lord, we know that you've called the church to be a place where you pass your grace onto the world. Lord, we're honored to be the church and we want to be used by you in an effective and powerful way. So we ask, Lord, that you would give us insight to know how best to do that. How best to know how to care for each other, but also to care for the poor and care for those who are not yet believers. We want to care for people and love them as you loved them, and love them continually. Lord, I ask that this time that we spend together on Sunday morning would be a time where we're provoking each other to love and to think about our own hearts and to grow together and individually. Lord, I pray for marriages that you'd strengthen them. I pray for parents that you'd give them the wisdom to know how to work with their children. Pray for young people that you'd guide them as they face real challenges every week in classes where people are teaching that don't love you. Pray for those that are homeschooled that you would bless them in their homes and that you would help them to learn effectively. So Lord, we all come together from different walks of life now and we do so under the banner of your Holy Spirit. So we ask that your Holy Spirit would change us today and convict us. Remind us of who we are today. Use the teaching, the Bible study that we do now to honor you and to give us insight about how we can live this week. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

What does it mean to be committed to the Lord? That's the question we're looking at. The reason we're looking at that question is because in Nehemiah 10 the people have read the word for about a month. And in reading the Bible for a month...that is they had to have it read to them. We can read it ourselves. But having the Bible read to them for a month they realize we got to make some changes here. We're going to commit ourselves to God. They were just so overwhelmed by that sense that they made four commitments at the end of Nehemiah 10.

We talked about the first commitment and that was the commitment to obey God's commands. Now you have to realize as it says in verse 28 that the young people were there. They're part of making these decisions. Everybody who could understand. So if you're a young person today and you're sitting in here, you're here because you can understand. You need to realize that the words that we're reading, the words that we're talking about were words that young people could grasp and implement. I would encourage you young people to implement the words of God into your life now. Don't wait till you're an adult. Don't say, "I'm going to be a Christian when I get older." Now is a very important time.

There's a normal thing that's considered in adolescence which is rebellion, but I just want you to know that it isn't a necessary part of adolescence. There are three things that come together in adolescence that move a person toward rebellion. They are curiosity, belonging, and

independence. When those three things come together developmentally in a young person they often believe that oh I need to separate from my parents, I need to rebel against them. But the reality is you can have those three things and not rebel and God can do some amazing things in your life. You can prevent a lot of the challenges that some people experience by not rebelling, by following the Lord even in your youth. So I would encourage you to listen to what we have to say today, what God has to say in His word and apply it to your own heart and your life.

The first commitment that they made was to obey God or commit themselves to God in obedience to His commands. We looked at that two days ago. Last week we looked at the value of marriage because they committed themselves to marriage itself. If you didn't get to hear that message, I'd encourage you to go back and listen to it and understand the value of marriage and how important that is. This week we're going to talk about how we want to make a commitment to God in our business practices, in our financial life. I'm not just talking about money. I'm talking about the way we live our lives that have to do with money. But just in those ways they committed themselves to God in some ways.

Now what's interesting about this particular passage is that they reflect back on the law that they read and so they're going to call upon the law of Moses in order to make their three commitments in this area of business finance and living their lives that way. So we have a challenge today. We're going to go into the law, but we have to recognize we're not under the law. So I'm going to show you how I'm going to take a passage from the Old Testament that's in the law or we're talking about the law and we're taking it through this membrane of this law of grace membrane into the New Testament.

I don't know how many of you have read *The Chronicles of Narnia* but it's a story about these children who go into the wardrobe, the closet in this home and when they get to the back of the closet they go further in and there's a whole world there that they see. That's what it's like when you get to the New Testament and you've come from the Old Testament. You open the door and everything looks different. When you get into the New Testament all the ways that the Old Testament was applied are different now in the New Testament. I want to take you through that membrane and I want to show you how to apply Old Testament law to our lives today without becoming legalistic and coming under the law. The Old Testament has some valuable truths for us that we need to understand.

So when I first read the verse with you today you may go whoa that's all Old Testament stuff. But I'm going to show you how we take Old Testament principles and we apply them in a New Testament world where we live now.

So if you would stand with me now as I read this next commitment that the people made. This is about their business practices, how they live. It's found in Nehemiah 10:31. *When the people of the land bring merchandise or any kind of grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we will not buy from them on a Sabbath or holy day.* First of all the Sabbath. They're going to honor the Sabbath. Secondly – *Every seventh year we will let the fields lie fallow* (that's the second commitment they make). And the third one is that every seventh year we *will cancel every debt*. Three things all taken out of the Old Testament law because they just read it for over a month and they find these things. We're going to commit ourselves to these things.

Now I think there are principles there that apply to our lives. We're going to look at those today and we're going to see how we can take God's word from the Old Testament and apply it in each one of our hearts.

You may be seated.

The first thing I want to do is I want to ask the question about the Sabbath day. I want to answer the question for you why we don't celebrate the Sabbath. I want you to know the answer to the question, I want you to see it and understand it from God's word. It's a theological question we need to really address, but I want you to have an answer to that question. Once we do that then we can understand the ideas presented in this verse and apply them. In order to understand the Sabbath and when it's celebrated, we must understand the idea of covenants. The Bible has several different covenants that were laid out and each one has a sign.

In the Old Testament we have the covenant to Noah. God says to Noah I will not destroy the world by a flood again. He created a sign and that sign is the rainbow. A sign that demonstrates God's promise. When you see a rainbow you should be reminded of God's promises to us. That is the meaning of the rainbow that God has put out there. That's the sign of the Noahic Covenant.

Another covenant that God made was with Abraham. He said I'm going to allow all the nations of the world be blessed through you and your family. God chose a family, Abraham, and it's through that family that the Christ line is going to come through and eventually Jesus Christ will be born out of that Jewish heritage. God wanted this family to be known as a group of people that were special and separate, so He designed a sign for them and the sign was circumcision. So all the men and boys would be able to look at themselves and say we are different than the other people around. God has a special relationship with us. Circumcision is the sign of the covenant with Abraham.

Now we get to Moses. When we get to Moses, God chooses the Israelite people as the chosen people. When He does so, He creates a sign for them. So in this passage in Exodus 31 God says this: *Then the Lord said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy.'"* So the Sabbath day was a sign, a commitment that we are going to honor God on this special day. We are going to rest on the seventh day and we are going to honor God as a sign of our close relationship that we enjoy. That is the purpose of the Sabbath.

But now even in the Old Testament we have a new covenant or a new agreement that's being talked about and that's the one in Jeremiah. Let me read this to you so you understand that we now today are under a different covenant. That covenant is described in Jeremiah 31:33-34. *"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. (Instead of being on tablets of stone now, it's written inside of our hearts.) I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest."*

Several things happen when we go in to the new covenant, when we pass through that membrane from law into the time of Christ and what Christ ordained we see all kinds of things that are different. No longer do we offer sacrifices for our sins because Jesus has fulfilled the law of Moses and now we have this relationship with God that allows us to have close relationship and forgiveness just by asking. No longer do we go to a temple or a tabernacle to worship because now we, our bodies, are the temple of the Holy Spirit. So that this holy of holies place is right inside of our own hearts. It's looked at completely differently now.

Now as we go forward we have to ask the question about the Sabbath and the Sabbath-rest. Because even now the way you look at rest is different than you looked at it in the Old Testament time. Now this rest is something that we have in Christ. It's something that Christ provides for us, the rest that we need. So there was this understanding in the New Testament, wow, everything is different now.

But some of the Jews had a problem with that. They didn't know exactly how to handle this. We're Jews, we must obey the law. Some said you've got to celebrate the Sabbath every week because you're Jewish. And some of the other people said, "No, we don't do that anymore because now we're Christians." Now we've got Jewish Christians and they don't know what to do about all of that. So Paul says to them in the New Testament, "Alright you guys. Listen. *One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind.*" So what Paul is saying is you need to evaluate. If you want to set aside a day, that's fine. As long as you're not making it a legalistic thing that happens and you're not forcing others to abide by your conviction. That's what he's saying.

There's this idea of rest that's different in the New Testament than in the Old Testament because now when we're in the New Testament he says – *There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest (that is by trusting Him as their Lord and Savior, by coming into this personal relationship with God) also rests from their works (that is trying to do works in order to earn their presence before God), just as God did from his.* So now we rely on the works of God.

So what I'm trying to do is answer the question about why we don't set aside the Sabbath day as a day of rest. But there are some principles that we do draw from this idea of the Sabbath and I want to talk about those principles for a moment. In order to do that, we have to ask the question why. We go back into the law, we say why did God set this up for the people in the first place. Once we find out why, oh that makes sense, and then we take the what across this membrane. The what is the principle that we apply to ourselves. And then we ask the question how. How are we going to apply this to our lives. So I want to take you into the idea and I want you to understand the Sabbath for just a moment and why the Sabbath existed.

The reason God created the Sabbath other than just a sign of a commitment is because He wanted the people to rest. He did not want them to be consumed with work. Now we're starting to get very personal here because some of us get consumed with work. He didn't want them to be consumed with work; He wanted them to take a day and rest. That rest was a statement of faith, really, that says okay, I'm going to rest and not plow my ground, I'm going to get the seed in the

ground today, recognizing that God is ultimately in control of my livelihood. It doesn't just depend on me. It's an act of faith to rest. We recognize that it's not all about me that some important things happen.

So in this principle about the Sabbath, the people would take a day and they wouldn't work on that day. It was a way for them to say to God, "God, I'm going to trust you. I'm going to recognize that you're the one ultimately responsible for my livelihood and I'm going to trust you. I'm not going to be consumed with work." So if you find yourself being consumed with work, you want to apply the principle of the Sabbath to your life.

Notice there's some applications from this passage when it says they would not buy and sell on the seventh day. In order they're going to organize their finances in a way and their business practices in a way that honors God. Here are some things I would suggest we glean from this. That we don't let work consume us. That rest is important and an act of faith. Rest acknowledges that your livelihood isn't just about you and your work, but is about God and His work that has provided rest for you. Your rest and your relationship with God must impact your financial life. This is very important. Don't get so consumed with making money or buying or selling that you neglect God.

In your bulletins today you were given a white piece of paper that contains biblical principles of finance. I don't have time today to go into all kinds of biblical principles of finance, but I found this document and I think you'll find it helpful. If you'll just read through these verses and these principles, you will find them very encouraging and guide you in your understanding of how to work with your business side of life.

But one of the main principles here I think in the Sabbath is that we want to not get consumed with work, we want to trust God for physical rest, spiritual rest so that we can remember that it's not just all about me. There's some who would say we've switched over from Saturday to Sunday. But the whole purpose of what we do on Sunday is different than Saturday. The whole Sunday worship experience started with Jesus visiting the disciples on Sunday, the first day of the week when they were up in the upper room. It seems right after that they all kept meeting on the first day of the week for worship to learn more about God. The whole purpose is a little bit different in what we do on Sundays. But we have to be careful not to take any twenty-four-hour period of time and make that the law in our lives because we don't live under the law anymore.

There are some...like I appreciate what Chick-fil-A does. They close on Sundays as a principle that we're going to honor God. I think it's a great principle that they have, that they want to honor God in their business practices. That is the kind of thing that we need to do. It doesn't have to be a day. Somehow you're going to honor God in the way that you apply the business principles of your life.

When I was in Dubai, their worship day is on Friday. It was a little unusual for me to be worshiping on Friday and then touring around on Sunday. But that's just how they experience it because that's what fits into the Dubai culture. To understand that means that you're able to allow God to work in your life on any day, really, and to experience Him in a very particular way.

But the Sabbath had a purpose of rest. That was the idea. So as you apply this passage to your business practices, keep in mind these ideas. Don't be consumed by work and allow God to be a priority in your life that work does not crowd out. Very important principles about rest and about the Sabbath.

Well let's go to the second statement that's made in this passage. The second promise they're making to God in this commitment about their financial principles and business principles. They're saying *every seventh year we will let the fields lie fallow*. Now if you're a farmer you know what this means. Because it's even practiced today. Here's the problem. Let's understand why this exists there and then what we can do about it in our own lives. Understanding why you allow the field to grow be fallow and plowed for a year is important. Let me take you to the Bible first and then I'll explain why it's important.

In Exodus 23:11 this is the passage that these Nehemiah believers had read and this impacted their life, so they're making this commitment. So they say – *During the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what is left. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove*. So the way they lived in the Old Testament under God's law was that every seventh year they would not plow, they would not plant, they would live off what they had accumulated the other years so that seventh year the land was able to be replenished. When agriculture is applied to a lot of land it leeches out of the soil nutrients.

If you plant soy beans, for example, what soy beans do is they take certain nutrients and they put back into the ground nitrates, a lot of nitrates. So if you do that over and over again then what happens eventually is the quality of your soy beans decrease because there's so much nitrates in the ground. So leaving them alone or switching to another crop is something that helps the land to be sustainable and replenished. If you plant corn, corn takes nitrates out of the ground. If you keep doing that year after year after year, then you're robbing the land eventually of what it needs. But if you allow the fields to lie fallow what happens is that the land replenishes itself. That all the produce that just falls onto the ground and goes into the ground it brings the nutrients back into the ground, the phosphorous comes up more than the soil and something happens that allows the land to be sustainable.

Right away I think one of the principles we need to recognize in our business practice is we must consider that we live in an earth that we can't continually rob. We must consider our environment. We must allow it to be sustainable. Now they did it by allowing the ground to be fallow for a year. But we in our brilliance have discovered what those nutrients are. So we can see that the soil is lacking nitrogen and we can put nitrogen into the soil. We can keep going with this longer and longer because we have chemicals and even non-chemical fertilizers that we can do to bring nutrients into the soil. It's dangerous and over a period of time with always continually doing that because we're greedy, we want more and more out of the land, then our land lacks the nutrients necessary to provide us with the vitamins and minerals we need for the food we're eating. We have a responsibility in the way that we carry ourselves in a business practice and the way we live to consider our environment to help it to be sustainable. This is one of the principles that God set out in His word for them that you let the field lie fallow.

But notice it's not just so the land can be enriched again. It's also for the poor. So that the poor can go and they can just glean off of that land and get the food that they want. So, again, another principle that we have is that as we're managing our finances, as we're managing our business life, we must consider our responsibility to the poor. We have a responsibility. The way you organize your life you have a responsibility to the poor. That's part of what's being taught in this principle and we need to consider that.

So what does that mean? Does that mean when you see someone on the side of the road who's homeless that you give them money? Maybe. I'm not saying you shouldn't do that, but one of the reasons we don't is because there's no accountability there. One great way to care for the poor in Trenton if we're going to do that is to give to the ministry of Restoring Hearts Ministry that we support as a church that Erik Lydick. So when you give money to Calvary Chapel, part of that goes to restoring hearts to care for the homeless in Trenton. Then there's accountability, the ongoing care that exists in that environment.

Keep in mind that we have a responsibility to animals. I mean this is so important and relevant to our culture. I'm sure you can see it. Because in our greed many times we take and take and take without contributing to the environment. We have a responsibility as responsible Christians to be organizing our lives so that we are environmentally conscious and also conscious for the poor. How are you going to do that? Well it could be protecting the rainforest, it could be recycling, it could be a host of different things that you do in order to help our world be sustainable. We have a responsibility as we organize our finances to do that. That's why this law was there and that's what we can do in our own lives. Consider that as you organize your lives. You don't want to say it's someone else's job or leave that to the next generation. It's now that we want to be concerned about those things as well.

Well let's go back to our passage again because there's one more comment there that they're promising to God. It's that we're going to cancel our debts every seven years. Now that is going to be really different. This is hard to understand in a society that's consumed with debt. We are a consumer society. If you don't have enough money, that's fine just get a few credit cards and when you do you'll be able to spend more than you make, which is what most Americans do today. They spend more money than they make, so their credit card debt increase.

Now you're going to have a hard time with that in Old Testament thinking. Imagine this in the Old Testament: There is a law that says all the debts will be canceled. In fact let's just go to the passage they read in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 15:1-3 says this: *At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts. This is how it is to be done: Every creditor shall cancel any loan they have made to a fellow Israelite. They shall not require payment from anyone among their own people, because the Lord's time for canceling debts has been proclaimed. You may require payment from a foreigner, but you must cancel any debt your fellow Israelite owes you.*

So imagine how this would affect our lives. You go to the bank and you say, "I'd like to borrow \$10,000 for a car." Now the banker is going to say this, "Okay, when's the release year? We've got four more years till the release year. I'm going to have to check your ability to pay back because after four years I have to cancel your debt." That would really change how many people

are willing to loan money. What it's going to do is drastically reduce the creditors. Because they're not going to want to loan money to you. They're not going to want to loan money because they're going to have to cancel their debt whenever the seventh year comes and it's over. It's a really fascinating way to think.

I think one of the reasons God did this is because He doesn't want anybody to have made a mistake in their lives financially they have to live with for the rest of their lives. That there's this freedom that God reinstates for them every seven years so they can enjoy financial freedom in their lives. It is a privilege to be financially free. How do we obtain that? Part of that is removing debt and getting debt out of the picture. I think that this is the basis for some of our bankruptcy laws that allow a person to start over in essence.

So what do we do with this idea of debt? I would just suggest that if you have this principle applied to the Old Testament, you're being really careful about debt. Is debt wrong? Now you see in this passage it's talking about allowing debt to take place, but there's a limit on the debt. I would suggest that what we need to do then if we're going to apply this idea in New Testament times is we need to be cautious of debt.

In Proverbs 22:7 it says: *The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender.* A good application is be really careful about loaning money to someone you love. When you loan money to a brother, you loan money to a child, it changes the relationship. Now they're not just your brother or your child, now they are your servant. It changes the relationship in a way that you don't want. You have to be really careful before you do something like that because it can change the relationship. So as we apply these words in our New Testament times, I would say we want to be cautious of debt, avoiding it as much as possible. Be careful about loaning money. If you really want to help someone, give them money. Give them something. So giving something to someone can increase that relationship. Loaning some money to someone you love is dangerous, so be careful of that.

So what we're seeing in this passage here (and let's go back to the passage itself) is that there's some principles about how we operate our business lives. These people now as they are reading God's word and understanding, they want to commit themselves to God 100%. God, we're going to let this affect every area of our lives, including our business practices. So they're saying, "Lord, we're going to honor the Sabbath because we want to not be consumed by work and we want to not allow work to push you out of the picture or cause us to neglect you. We want to by faith enter into this practice of rest with you." That these people are saying we are going to let the land lie fallow, but what they're saying is we are going to be environmentally conscious. We are going to take care of the poor. We're going to make that part of our business practices. They're saying we're going to be careful of debt. We're not just going to be loaned money. We're going to be considerate of the damage that debt can do in our lives. We're going to be conscious of debt. As they're making these principles, they're saying, "Lord, we want you to be involved in every area of our lives including in our business practices."

There are some people who would benefit from getting baptized and having their wallet with them when they go under the water. Because they somehow separate their business life from their spiritual life. When we understand who God is, we must understand that our business

practices are a way for us to demonstrate God and His principles in our own hearts and lives. That's what the people are doing. They're making a commitment that says we are going to do this in the way that we live. I'd encourage you to make some commitments about your own personal business practices and how you operate to make God a priority in everything you're doing in this area of finances and money.

Let me give you a preview of what we're going to talk about next week. Because if you read the rest of the passage, it's talking about not neglecting the house of the Lord. The house of the Lord is not the church in the New Testament times. The house of the Lord is in our own hearts. But I'm going to use some principles in this passage to apply them to Calvary Chapel Living Hope and how we're organized. Because we've grown. Obviously as you look around you can see (if you've been with us for a while) that we've grown in our size. Which means we move to another level of our development, which means I need to lead differently. I want to share with you what God is doing in my own heart about my own leadership at Calvary Chapel Living Hope next week. That means we're going to organize ourselves differently. Just in a way that God organically creates His body means we have to make some adjustments. I'm going to share all that with you. So it's going to be a rather personal message next week as I share with you this fourth commitment that they make and then how we can apply that in our own hearts at Calvary Chapel Living Hope. So I'd encourage you to read ahead and be thinking about this as you are preparing your heart for next Sunday's message here.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Father, it is our desire to commit ourselves to you in everything that we do. Lord, we don't want to say that lightly, but we want you to be first place in every area of our lives. As these people committed themselves to your commands, as they valued marriage, took it into their families, and now as they take it into their finances, Lord, I pray that you'd give us the ability to commit ourselves to you in the same kind of ways. We know there's a lot of flexibility here, there's a lot of choices that we make. We ask that you'd give conviction from your Holy Spirit to help us understand what's best and right for us in our current situation. Lord, use your word to inspire us and we thank you that you've given to us rules, regulations, commands, that are principles for success in our lives. Lord, we just trust in you in all of those things. In Jesus' name, amen.