

## God's people are different (2)

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to be looking at the passage in Nehemiah chapter 13 that we did last time. But before we do so I'd like to look again at the issue of why read the Old Testament.

You will find as we read this passage in Nehemiah that there are some things which are puzzling, perplexing and even upsetting. And really the Old Testament is quite like that on occasions.

There are parts of it that you wonder what is the profitability of reading this at all. And there would be some people who would say can't we just rely upon the New Testament?

After all that's much clearer and more straightforward. So why read the Old Testament? And I give you six reasons which we went through last week and I'll just go through the headings again.

The attitude of Jesus Christ, the apostles and the early Christian church. Interesting that Jesus himself said he had not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it.

[ 1 : 00 ] To fill it out. An example comes to mind. If you go around the city at this time you'll see a number of people having rooms built in their roof.

Roger and Julie have just had that done. And in some cases in order to protect the whole structure of the building it is necessary to erect a scaffold with sheeting around it. And you don't know what's going on behind the scaffold and the sheeting.

And it all looks a bit ugly. But actually something beautiful is being prepared. And one day the scaffold is going to come down. And what will be revealed will be something with clarity and proportion and beauty and functionality.

That you could only guess at before. And I think we ought to consider what happened to God's people in Old Testament times. A little bit like that. That God was erecting a scaffold.

The building blocks of the future kingdom were being put into place. And from time to time as it were the sheet was blown apart. And so you could see more deeply into what was going on.

[ 2 : 11 ] And God's people by grace were enabled to see beyond the scaffold. And to be able to see the coming Messiah. And the one who would fulfill the promises and the prophecies.

And Jesus himself saw himself very much as the fulfillment of the prophecies that had been made in Old Testament times. Inspired of course by the Holy Spirit.

Determined by God from all eternity. The Old Testament is foundational to our understanding of the New Testament. And the practice of the early church.

And they were surely founded upon that. And we can see from the early church accounts.

Especially in the book of Acts. How the apostles loved to quote from the Old Testament.

Seeing that as the foundation for what they were experiencing in their days. Now that the Holy Spirit had come in full measure. It is the fullness of God's story. But we can't understand properly what God is about.

[ 3 : 15 ] Without having the privilege of seeing Genesis to Revelation. Rather than Matthew to Revelation. It is a revelation of God's character over time.

And I reminded you of the occasions again and again and again. When God was so kind to his people. And again and again they fall away. King rises, kings fall. King rises, kings fall.

King rises, kings fall. King rises, kings fall. King rises, kings fall. King rises, kings fall. How patient God was with his people. As they went through the desert. How complaining they turned out to be. And yet he still looked after them. And he said of them. You didn't go hungry. And even the shoes on your feet didn't wear out. How good it is to be able to see the work of God over a lifetime.

How necessary it is for us to be aware of that. That God is a God from cradle to grave. That he looks after his people.

[ 4 : 15 ] And he knows how to do that in every season and every age. And then we see the outcomes of those who follow God and those who don't.

And I want to linger on that point. Because how important it is and how warned the early church was by the experiences of their forefathers.

So please turn with me to 1 Corinthians 10 verses 1 to 13. Now this is Paul.

What sort of teaching will he give to a young church? What can he provide for them at this time?

What do they need to know? Very interesting to see the way he draws their attention back to the experiences of God's people in previous generations.

I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact brothers. Remember there are Gentiles in this congregation. And they could be ignorant of the fact. So they needed to be told what had happened to God's people in the past.

[ 5 : 22 ] I don't want you to be ignorant of the fact that our forefathers were all under the cloud. And they all passed through the sea. That is the Red Sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them. And that rock was Christ.

Nevertheless God was not pleased with most of them. Their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now these things occurred as examples. To keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.

Do not be idolaters as some of them were. As it is written. The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry. We should not commit sexual immorality as some of them did.

And in one day 23,000 of them died. We should not test the Lord as some of them did. And were killed by snakes. And do not grumble as some of them did.

[ 6 : 23 ] And were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples. And were written down as warnings for us.

On whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So if you think you are standing firm. Be careful that you don't fall. No temptation has seized you.

Except what is common to man. God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted. He will also provide a way out. So that you can stand up under it.

Solemn words. Given to the church. Because that's exactly what they needed to be reminded of.

And this is part of the great prophet. It is ours by being able to have the Old Testament.

And the truth is told through life stories. So with that introduction. Let's pray. Before we turn to the passage in Nehemiah.

[ 7 : 28 ] Our Father. We are constantly grateful. That you have given to us your holy word. We thank you. That the Bible. Is not man-made.

But comes from you. We thank you. That you are the God who inspired it. And it inspired it. Without fault. Error. Or anything lacking at all.

We thank you. That you have preserved it for us. We thank you. For those who fought and died.

That we might have it. Available to us. In our own tongue. So that each one of us.

Can pick it up today. We thank you. We thank you. For the privilege. Of being able to hear from you.

We thank you. That the same Holy Spirit. Who inspired the truth.

Will be with us today. And we'll speak the truth. Into our hearts. We open ourselves up to you. We pray for soft and obedient spirits. We ask that you would cleanse us from our sin.

[ 8 : 26 ] We pray that you would take away from us. A spirit of hardness. And even rebellion. And help us to really want to receive. The engrafted word with meekness. Please grant us this grace.

This is supernatural work. And we're praying for this supernatural work. To be done this morning. In Jesus name. Amen. Nehemiah chapter 13.

We're not going to read it all again. Except as we go through different sections. We will read the appropriate section of that. So you'll find it on page 499.

Of a church bible. And let me remind you. That the context is. That Nehemiah. Lived in the days of the exile. Of God's people.

They had been taken out. Of their own land. They'd been banished. And this was no accident. It was God's judgment upon them.

[ 9 : 27 ] For their continual disobedience. He told them what would happen. And it did happen. And they had to go to Babylon. And then by God's providence. And kindness. He not only put it into the heart.

Of people like Ezra and Nehemiah. But also into the heart. Of the king at that time. To make it possible. For the city of Jerusalem. To be rebuilt. And the people to be re-established. And so Nehemiah. Was a well equipped. And extremely competent. And a spiritual man. Who had the responsibility. And charge of making. Of overseeing. The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. And of reforming the practices. Of the people. Remember they'd been in exile. They'd forgotten what to do. How to be a people. And Nehemiah was hugely responsible. For reminding them. Of their calling. Nehemiah chapter 13. It occurs at a point. When Nehemiah has been back in Babylon. [10:25] For about a year. And in his absence. Things have just slipped. Slid away. And Nehemiah 13. Is about the fact.

Of Nehemiah calling the people. It says Nehemiah's final reforms. We could put it this way. He was saying to them. You are to be a distinctive people. Why? Because that's what God wants you to be. A distinctive people. A different people. And there are five examples. In this chapter. Of the differences. That should exist. In God's people. People. I said last week. It's hard to be different. Because what we're reading here. Nehemiah 13. Is not about just past history. But it's about something. Which is in the DNA. Of God's people. And what he wants them to be like. Which is to be a different people. Not the same. As those around them. But different. And it's hard to be different. [11:19] If you have a school report. That says try harder. Be better. That's kind of okay. Because you know the route you're going down. But if you have a report that says.

Be different. There is something wrong here. You need to be a different sort of person. That's a challenge. It suggests that some change may be needed. Some sacrifice might be involved. What we've been doing may have been going in the wrong direction. Something more radical is needed. This is the calling for every Christian. And there does seem to be only one set of directions. That's given to everyone. Jesus said things in his days on earth. That people found hard to stomach. They said. These are hard sayings. And some. Because of that. Stopped following him. But others knew that the only way. [12:20] To follow Jesus properly. Was to follow him completely. And to do what he told them to do. And that's what's going on.

In this meeting this morning. For each one of us. We're all receiving a call. Are we going to be following. The Lord Jesus Christ. Wholeheartedly. Well maybe by God's grace. May we be pleased. May we be pleased. To do what he says. The call to be different. We are called to be. Both better than we are. And different. And I reminded you. Of. How it was. How it was in the book of Acts. There was a strange tension. In the early church. That on the one hand. There were people. Who received favor. People admired them. And then. On other occasions. There are moments. [13:17] When it says. That people. Dared not join them. There was a kind of fear. About joining this people. Favor. And fear. Favor. And fear. Think that's right.

I think that's something. About what the church. Should be about. It shouldn't be. A comfortable place. That anybody. Could come in. And feel. That's great. And just move away. And just live their lives. As they have been doing. It's a challenging. Place to be. If we are truly. Going to be God's. Distinctive people. That will create. Challenges for us. And challenges. For those around us. But it's good. And I draw your attention. To Deuteronomy. Chapter 4. Verses. 5 to 8. When the people. Were about to go. Into the promised land. God. Through Moses. [14:12] Gave them a series. Of reminders. Of what this process. Was to be about. Moses says. See I've taught you. Decrees and laws. As the Lord my God. Commanded me. So that you may. Follow them. In the land. You are entering. To take possession of it. Observe them carefully. For this will show. Your wisdom. And understanding. To the nations. Who will hear about. All these decrees. And say. Surely. This great nation. Is a wise. And understanding people. What other nation. Is so great. As to have their gods. Near them. The way the Lord our God. Is near us. Whenever we pray to him.

And what other nation. Is so great. As to have such. Righteous decrees. And laws. As this body of laws. I'm setting. Before you. Today. So.

[15:12] Fundamentally. Overwhelmingly. I want to be saying to you. Today. That to be. Part of the people of God. Is to be. In an absolutely. Wonderful. Wonderful. Good. Place.

The things that we're going to be looking at this morning. The differences. That God calls his people to be. Are not arbitrary hurdles. They're not God.

Making it hard for us. They're God saying. These are good things for you. And not only for you. But for the people around you as well. When they see this being practiced.

Christ. We have an innate. Fallen nature. Suspicion. About. How much God really cares about us. And it's because of that. That we rather doubt. That he actually does intend. Good for us. In every aspect of our lives. But I want to assure you.

[16:09] On the basis of God's word. And the testimony of thousands of people. Over generations. God means good for his people. For every single one of his people.

He wants good for every one of us. What a blessing that is today. To come in here. And to know that. Whatever situation you're in. God intends it for good.

Wasn't that what Joseph said to his brothers? You intended it for harm. God intended it for good. And it's turned out that way. We benefit from hindsight.

It's good to be able to look back. It's good to see how things have turned out. Things which were perplexing. Troubling at the time. How God performed good from it. Take that to heart.

If you're going through a hard patch at the moment. And you just don't know the way forward. And I look around this congregation. And I know a number of you. Are going through hard times. By faith.

[17:06] We stand upon the promise of God's word. That he intends good for us. All things work together for good. To those who love the Lord. Who are called according to his purpose.

We don't. And we cannot see the end. Of the processes of our lives now. But we have enough of a testimony. To be able to say.

I can see. That God is a good God. And he looks after us. Good for us.

And good for others. There should be a testimony. Coming from a church like this. That is something. That the watching world. Will be able to say. What a great God they have.

A God to whom they can pray. And he hears their prayers. A God who provides for them. A God who looks after them. I don't think we have gods like that.

[18:05] They might say. A God is pleased to display his glory. In this way. To show how great he is. A God that we can be very proud of.

A God that we exalt. A God who is not to be kept in a cupboard. But is to be proclaimed. Because he's the God of the whole earth. And a God who says to people.

Come and be my people. You're not there at the moment. Come and be my people. Come and join us. Last week we looked at three differences.

And the first is this. God's people are different. Because they get wisdom and guidance. In a different way to the world. Where do we get wisdom and guidance? Well you could say.

Well that's not a question for me. I don't sit down and think about my life. In that way. But in fact.

We're all making choices. And sometimes a series of very small choices.

[19:09] Can lead to a very big outcome. Mostly perhaps we're following the drift. Of other people's choices and priorities. Pushed in that direction by conversation.

Example and imagery. Where do we as God's people get our guidance? Nehemiah chapter 13 verses 1 to 3.

On that day the book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people. There it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be admitted into the assembly of God.

Because they had not met the Israelites with food and water. But had hired Balaam to call a curse down on them. Our God however turned the curse into a blessing. Our God is good. When the people heard this law they excluded from Israel all who were of foreign descent.

We don't need at this point to go into the mechanics of what was actually going on. Simply to say that on a day the book of the law was read aloud. And as was their tradition everybody was gathered.

[20:19] And they learnt something out of the Bible. Their Bible at the time which consisted of the first five books of the Bible. And they learnt something from that. And as a result of that they took action.

They did something. They heard God saying something to them. They recognised that something in their lives was wrong. And they put it right. Sin was uncovered.

There was practical obedience when the people heard. And the challenge for us last week and the challenge for us this week remains. Are we hearing and responding to God's word?

And Colossians 3.16 says. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. As you admonish and encourage one another. And we have plenty of opportunity for doing that.

It isn't just something that's done from the front. But it is something that can be done and should be done regularly. As we allow the word of God to get into our hearts. And we're able to encourage and bless one another.

[ 21 : 19 ] I hope Martin that when you had that six weeks away. Not only did you have the text conversations that said. Hope you had a good night. But also maybe you had some encouraging words from scripture.

Given to you. Because we feed on the scriptures. We are blessed by the scriptures. And when our outward man is decaying. It's good to have our inward man being strengthened.

By the promises of God's word. Don't be ashamed of that. Don't be nervous about doing that. We need it actually as a body. We need to be encouraged. I'd be delighted to receive a load of scriptures from people.

Saying God's really asked to encourage me to say this to you today. Just to encourage you. Please feel free that that is the kind of normal Christian life. And how it can be.

And we need to build one another up. And we're set in the body so that we might be doing just that. This is where we get wisdom and guidance. Proverbs has a lot to say about timely words.

[ 22 : 19 ] And if you're walking in the spirit. You can bring timely words into another person's life. And we are so built up in that way. You're needing a timely word today.

I think every day we're needing a timely word. And God has a wonderful way of taking the words that. In his word here. And making them very appropriate to you today.

We are people who get our wisdom and guidance from the Bible. Not from Facebook. We're people who call to be different.

There's a rather in your face sign there saying stop hypocrisy. Listen to any news bulletin. There's often at least one example of somebody. Who has said or done something which seems quite out of character.

And that's what we know about. When hackers broke into the website of the company. Who connected people who wanted to have illicit love affairs. Thousands of people were suddenly in danger of having their private lives exposed.

[ 23 : 24 ] It's estimated that the so-called black economy. People doing work but avoiding paying tax. Cost this country 62 billion pounds a year.

Which is equivalent to a thousand pounds per person. Per annum. Man, woman and child. How do we measure up?

How consistent are our lives? Nehemiah chapter 13 verses 4 to 5.

And then 7 to 9. Before this. Before the word of God was read. Eliashib the priest had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God. He was closely associated with Tobiah.

Tobiah, if you recall. Was one of the arch enemies of the rebuilding process. He'd done everything possible to try to cause it to fail. He's there in the house of God now.

[ 24 : 26 ] Unreformed. And he had provided him with a large room. Formerly used to store the grain offerings and incense and temple articles. And also the tithes of grain, new wine and oil. Prescribed for the Levites.

Singers and gatekeepers. As well as the contributions for the priests. So that's the picture. What should have been used for God's purposes. Was now being used to accommodate one of the enemies of God.

Room was being made. For something which was really inconsistent. With the calling that God's people had received. So when Nehemiah comes back to Jerusalem.

He says in verse 7. I learned about the evil thing. Eliashib had done. In providing Tobiah a room. In the courts of the house of God. I was greatly displeased. And threw all Tobiah's household goods out of the room.

I gave orders to purify the rooms. And then I put back into them. The equipment of the house of God. With grain offerings and incense. So there's compromise at the heart of God's work.

[ 25 : 26 ] And there's a domino effect. Of refusing God's lordship over the whole of our lives. As we see here. As a result of this. Allowance. Of inconsistency.

Many many things. In the work of God. Suffered. In particular. I drew attention to. The fact that the Levites. Were not in Jerusalem. Doing their job. But they were out in the fields.

Earning their money. If it were. That way. Because the money was not being brought in. By the tithes. That should have been brought in. To that particular room. The whole work of God.

Was suffering. As a result of the inconsistency. Of one of the leaders. And so it is in church life. That when one suffers. All suffer. When one sins.

There is sin in the camp. As we remember. From the story of Achan. In the book of Joshua. Chapter 6 and 7. It's very serious. Nothing you do.

[ 26 : 25 ] Is done. In an isolated way. It affects everybody else. And it certainly affects you. So the question. Of the challenge. Is are we wholehearted? Again and again.

In the New Testament. In the New Testament. The age of the Holy Spirit. There is constant encouragement. For the people of God. To put off wrong things. Don't lie.

If you've been stealing. Don't continue to steal. You put it off. You've been brought into a new way.

And the new way. Involves you having to live. According to God's rules.

God's requirements. That's the calling. That's the challenge. And it is a challenge. We all know what it is. To have inconsistency in our lives.

And compromise. As I say these words. I know my areas. You know your areas. Areas that you really wouldn't.

[ 27 : 22 ] Wish others to know about. How important it is. That we are cleaning this place. David.

The psalmist says. Search me oh God. And try me. And see if there is any. Wicked way in me. Show me it. Show me. I need to know it.

You don't pray a prayer like that. Unless you really want to be. Clean with God. And have any. Unconfessed sin. Dealt with. He also says.

In another place. If I had cherished. Iniquity. In my heart. The Lord would not have heard me. And then he goes on.

But the Lord has heard me. If I had nurtured. Cosseted. Stroked. Iniquity. In my heart.

[ 28 : 23 ] Said. It's just my little thing. It's just my. It's just my thing. The Lord who sees.

All our hearts. Will not hear your prayers. Well. I caution that point. To say that God's very gracious. And he still is kind to us. Even when there's inconsistency. But don't rely upon that. Don't test the patience of God. Do what he says.

Give your whole self to him. The use of money. God's people are certainly different in that.

Someone once said that the last thing to be touched in a Christian's life is his pocket book or his bank balance.

The country's economy is so finely balanced now. That to live with food and shelter leaves many people with not much left beside. And there's no shortage of encouragements for us to spend our money as soon as we get it.

[ 29 : 35 ] There are not many advertisers who are charitable bodies. They're after what you've got. Perversely we live in a society and an economy which is built upon consuming.

Get your head around that. Do we need the things that are manufactured and put in front of us constantly? We only need it because we're all on the treadmill in this society.

And the Western economy of needing to have this constant upping of output. More and more and more things being produced.

There are some astonishing things that are put in front of you that suggest that you actually need these things. It's a fair question.

But it's the way the world works. and it's quite hard to escape it. It's right for us to ask the questions and it certainly was the case that in Nehemiah's day the people needed to be faced with that question verses 10 to 13.

[ 30 : 49 ] I also learned that the portions assigned to the Levites had not been given to them and that all the Levites and singers responsible for the service had gone back to their own fields. So I rebuked the officials and asked them, why is the house of God neglected?

And I called them together and stationed them at their posts. The tithing had stopped. The house of God had been neglected.

The maintenance and extension of God's kingdom needs the sacrificial giving of God's people. Such it has always been, such it continues to be. Have we faced this issue?

I really encourage you to face it sooner rather than later, particularly if you're a young person because you will find that if you get into the right habits of dedicating a portion of your income regularly to God in that way, God will enable you and give you confidence to carry on that system going forward.

please don't leave it to the moment when you need a mortgage. Because if you haven't started doing it, you won't be factoring that into your consideration when you come to multiply your salary. [ 32 : 10 ] And certainly, the person on the other side of the fence won't be thinking about that either, will they? If they're going to offer you a mortgage in the first place. They'll say, what's your salary? Put a multiplier against it.

I can give you so much. But actually, your first priority, your first priority as a first fruits of what the Lord has given you is to say, what should I be giving to God for the purposes of his kingdom and the extension of it?

And those of us who have been blessed with the opportunity of being able to prove that into practice have been able to say again and again how good God is.

How he provides. How he looks after us in that way. Because people just put their hands up if that has been your experience. If you've really found the goodness of God in being able to look after your finances.

There's a beautiful passage in 2 Corinthians, I think it's 8 or 9, where Paul says to the Corinthians that if we get into this grace of giving, God is able to make all grace to abound to us so that we will always on every occasion have enough.

[ 33 : 23 ] And he will enlarge the opportunity. And it's been my constant prayer through my life. Father, I would love to give as much as I possibly can.

Please give me more that I might be able to give more. I'm just telling you my ambition. God's been very kind in that way.

Give generously. The Lord gives generously. You're like your heavenly father. Don't hold back. Don't restrain. We've been reading the life of James Hudson Taylor and it's fantastic to see the way in which God provided for the China Inland Mission, provided for people individually, personally. And the way God so moved in his kingdom that he inspired people in a very timely way to give, in some cases, quite substantial sums of money. That's another topic and we'll get on to that on another occasion.

But that's a great topic. 1 Corinthians 16 verse 2 talks about the people. On the first day of the week, when you come together, already have what you've set aside in accordance with your income.

[ 34 : 40 ] Straightforward, regular, committed giving. God's people are different in this way. God's people are different also in the use of time. The Christian heritage in our country provided Sunday as a day when factories and shops were closed and whilst a number of people still had to work as servants, Sunday was a different day.

Rhythms of life also provided a difference between night and day, summer and winter. New technology and economic pressures have transformed everything.

We can do anything we want at almost any time of day or night. 24-7 living gives us constant opportunity. The lights need never go out.

So we read Nehemiah 13 verses 15 to 22.

In those days I saw men in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads.

[ 35 : 50 ] And they were doing, bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore I warned them against selling food on that day. Men from Ty who lived in Jerusalem were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to the people of Judah.

I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, what is this wicked thing you are doing desecrating the Sabbath day? Didn't your forefathers do the same things so that our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city?

Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath. When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath I ordered the doors to be shut and not opened until the Sabbath was over.

I stationed some of my own men at the gates so that no load could be brought in on the Sabbath day. Once or twice the merchants and sellers of all kinds of goods spent the night outside Jerusalem.

They couldn't wait to get in. But I warned them and said, why do you spend the night by the wall? If you do this again I'll lay hands on you. From that time on they no longer came on the Sabbath. Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves and go and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy.

[ 37 : 07 ] So I remind you the Sabbath day that was for them that was the Saturday and they were given constant encouragement and command the fourth commandment keep holy the Sabbath day not just for themselves but also for their men servants and maid servants and their ox and ass and so forth everything had to cease so that it should be rest on the Sabbath day.

This is what Nehemiah is referring to at that point. The Sabbath day had been neglected and abused. It was a constant problem for the people of God. They constantly were slipping away from that and in reality there were people knocking at the doors constantly trying to invade their day selling them stuff trying to get them involved in business on their special day and Nehemiah saying no, no, no you've got to stop that.

This is a long area of debate for Christian people but I would go this to this length and say that God encourages us to set aside one day in seven to focus on him and do so on the basis of the book of Genesis which tells us that God rested on the seventh day and that day became holy and it was like an example and the fourth commandment found in Exodus is only lifting out a creation ordinance which is not specific only to the people of Israel but it is an encouragement in fact for the whole world to enjoy this one day in seven because we need to rest and to rest before our God.

God encourages us to set aside one day in seven to focus on him and so I encourage us as a people to think about this again we don't keep Saturday under the new covenant the seventh day was changed into the first because of the rising from the dead of the Lord Jesus Christ and as a result the first day of the week known to the early Christians as the Lord's day definitely kept by the early Christians as far as they were able as the day when they particularly met together.

God encourages us to set aside one day in seven for him are we giving proper and quality time for God?

[ 39 : 40 ] Acts 20 verses 7 to 12 talks about that rather memorable occasion when Paul spoke on and on and on and on and one of the congregation fell out the window and actually went on into the night and into the next morning as well which you're not going to have to experience this morning but just to say that Paul was doing what the early Christians were doing which was they met on the first day of the week and as they met then they were celebrating the Lord's day.

I don't call it the Sabbath day I call it the Lord's day. One day in seven yes important very helpful for us. Is Sunday still a good day for us?

Not if I'm living in Saudi Arabia or I have to keep another day but you can still as a Christian obey the principle even in Saudi Arabia.

Here in the UK it remains the case that Sunday is still probably the best opportunity for us to get together so let's be practical and think about what that can mean and how we can as it were push back against those who are trying to invade this day.

This day let me remind you it's good for us we need it. It is not something which God has put upon us as a burden to as it were give us only six sevenths of a life.

[ 41 : 08 ] Students whether you're language students university students whatever you are I would encourage you strongly to keep one day in seven special for God.

not just a service but the day and you will immediately come up with loads of problems first one being that nasty lecturers want things on Monday mornings secondly Saturday nights is the time when people especially when they're young tend to go to bed late if you go to bed late on a Saturday and if you have a problem of delivering something on a Monday morning and you haven't finished it by Saturday then you can see that your one day in seven is going to get squeezed at both ends.

So what are you going to do about it? You could either just accept it and say tough that's life or you could say I'm going to have to rearrange my life so that I can enjoy with the other people of God the one day in seven because not only am I needing that but the rest of the members of the church are needing me to be there to be an encouragement to them.

So there are lots of practical applications for us to think through and maybe we should do something like a workshop to see how that might particularly work. How can we be ready? How can we be awake? How can we use the whole day well? What provisions do we need to make? How do we make it possible for people who are by themselves and are quite lonely to be able to have a successful Sunday?

[ 42 : 54 ] How do we make it work for families who are very busy and for whom Saturday has become like the rest of the week and it may appear to be the only day off? How do we tackle the issue of birthday parties on Sundays?

Football matches taking place because most of the sport seems to happen on a Sunday as well as any other day of the week. How do we make a stand? How are we gracious to our friends, relatives, neighbours, family so that all this becomes possible?

So that it is not the law that you know terrible, terrible if you can't be on one particular occasion sometimes but generally that's exactly where we are.

We're together on the Lord's Day. should we have breakfast here on a Sunday morning? I just throw the idea out.

What about somebody putting their hand up and saying let's have tea together at my house and go like the people of God up to Jerusalem afterwards. I always think that's a lovely picture in the Psalms how they went up to Jerusalem to celebrate together.

[ 44 : 03 ] Let's be adventurous. Let's do something a bit different. different. Let's do anything we can to encourage people to enjoy the good of the whole day. And I say that because I don't think it's enough for your spirit and mine to have just two hours on a Sunday.

If you're as whacked out and as preoccupied as I feel by the end of the week, I need a great deal more than a two hour meeting together in order to get myself into a better state with the Lord again and to be able to progress into the coming week.

to be effective, to be close to him, to do business with him. Relationship boundaries, this is our final point.

In the Western world, it would now be hard to think of any relationship boundaries. Everything is permissible and often even encouraged. Nehemiah 13 verses 23 to 28.

Moreover, in those days I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other peoples and did not know how to speak the language of Judah.

[ 45 : 19 ] I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in God's name and said, you're not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves.

Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon, king of Israel, sinned? Among the many nations, there was no king like him.

He was loved by his God. God made him king over all Israel. But even he was led into sin by foreign women. Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women.

One of the sons of Jehoiada, son of Eliashib, the high priest, was son-in-law to Sambalat, the Horonite, and I drove him away from me. What Nehemiah is tackling here is a question of intermarriage between Jewish people and non-Jewish people.

people. And I want to be very plain on this point and say that in New Testament times, there is no ethnic boundary.

[ 46 : 38 ] At that stage, it was necessary for it to be so. The distinctive people of God with ethnicity. Christianity. But now the gospel goes out into all the world.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, bond or free. The boundaries then were ethnic as well as religious.

The boundaries now are to do with a relationship with God, the God of Israel. what does this mean? Closest relationships must be in the Lord.

Closest relationships must be in the Lord. Do we recognize that this is an absolute boundary?

Please turn to 2 Corinthians 6, 14 to 18. Do not be yoked together with unbelievers, for what do righteousness and wickedness have in common?

[ 47 : 54 ] Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?

For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said, I will live with them and walk among them. I will be their God and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord.

Touch no unclean thing and I will receive you. I'll be a father to you. You'll be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty. There's two things in this passage.

I think it's much broader than the question of marriage. It's to do with relationships in general and making sure that when we get into the closest relationships with people that we understand where the boundaries are.

It's secondly an encouragement for us to know that if we make the sacrifices that may be involved in taking a stand, that God will make a provision.

[ 48 : 55 ] It says, touch no unclean thing and I will receive you. I'll be a father to you. You'll be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty. God will look after us.

Now in this subject matter, I know that people have often said something along these lines. You can read stories about people who have married a Christian who has married a non-Christian and later on, fairly soon after that, the non-Christian has become a Christian.

They said, well, God's allowed that to happen then. what I say to that is this, God is very kind, but do not confuse God's kindness with God's prescriptive will.

Those two things are quite separate and you really must not use the testimony of people who mercifully, mercifully enjoyed the blessing of being able to be one in Christ after they married as an excuse for going down that route.

That is really testing God's goodness. And I say, on the other hand, that there are a number of people in this fellowship who will say to you that to be in a situation where one is a Christian and one is not a Christian is a very testing experience, a very troubling, damaging experience, difficult experience, an experience that holds people back.

[ 50 : 38 ] I would love us on a practical basis to pray every day for those who are in these situations, not just that they should be given strength and courage to press on close to the Lord, but that their partners who are not Christians at the moment should become Christians because the wheels are clogged up.

At the very deepest level, if you as a Christian have married a non-Christian, then at fundamental levels, you will find it so hard to be fully obedient to God.

if you want to really prove God in this way and to follow him wholeheartedly, there will be points of clash.

The tendency is for those situations to end up in compromise because you don't share the same God.

You don't share the same values fundamentally. You don't share the same Bible. God's love. All the things that we've been looking at, where do you get your wisdom and guidance from?

[ 51 : 58 ] How do you use your time? What do you do with your money? When there is a fundamental disconnect, there's a problem.

God spay you need a this is saying nothing at all about those who are not Christians who marry people who are also not Christians may God bless you both and come to Christ I'm just giving this message and addressing those who are Christians already and saying please please please heed the warning of God's word on this point God will look after you I don't know how but God will look after you but if you're going to have a relationship with somebody else please make sure it's in the Lord 1 Corinthians 7.39 says a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives but if her husband dies she is free to marry anyone she wishes but he must belong to the Lord young women I know that's a problem I know it's a problem too many churches there are far too many you know the women outnumber the men and so the days go by and the clock ticks on and you think well how am I going to be sorted how is this going to work out come to the end of your tether and just say well I've just got to do this just pray for you that God will give you grace and courage and strength to do the right thing and on the basis of what we've read earlier that's exactly the sort of God he is exactly how he'll look after you how he'll provide for you nobody will suffer we're closing so let me lead you in a prayer and then we'll sing our closing song our father we thank you thank you for your

word and we ask that as we prayed at the beginning you by your holy spirit would apply the truth into our hearts and help us to put into practice the things that you're calling us to do may all this be to your praise and glory  
Amen