

ENEMIES WITHIN THE WALLS

Word

Scripture Reference

Nehemiah 5:1-19

Discussion Questions

1. What makes conflict with a fellow Christian more hurtful than conflict with a non-Christian?
2. Oftentimes, it is not external factors that adversely affect the church, but the internal ones--the people inside--that oppose the work of the Lord. Whether your church is currently dealing with this issue or have not yet faced this problem, the church should have a safeguard to protect it both from outside and inside elements that may negatively affect it. Discuss the possible problems created by some people within the church that could hurt the church as a body. How could a church be protected from these possible problems?
3. Read Nehemiah 5:1-19. We can derive principles from this passage on how to guard against enemies within the walls. Because of the Jews' disobedience to God, they were captured and exiled in Babylon. But God was gracious and so they were allowed to return to their own land. They began to rebuild the temple and re-establish their lives. But realistically, the city of Jerusalem was not a safe place to live in because the city walls had not been rebuilt. There were reports of people within the city who were living in fear. Nehemiah, an outstanding leader and cupbearer to the King of Persia, heard this sad news about his people. He requested the king to allow him to go back to Jerusalem to lead the people in rebuilding the walls, which the king graciously granted. The rebuilding began and they made great progress despite external opposition (chapters 1-4). However, internal issues challenged Nehemiah's leadership:

- a. **Internal Problem #1: Neglecting the most important things for the sake of "ministry" (v. 1-2).** The Israelites faced a shortage of food. Those working on the walls neglected the most basic need of feeding their families. How is it similar to those who are too busy in their church "ministry"? Discuss how relationships, both with the Lord and with your family, could be neglected when a person is too involved with church activities. Why is negligence of these two important relationships is wrong?
 - b. **Internal Problem #2: Self-centered actions, including taking advantage of others (v. 3-5).** The people of God had to mortgage their properties or borrow money to buy food and pay taxes. Because of the high interest rates that the Jewish lenders demanded, sons and daughters were forced into slavery. Discuss how taking advantage of each other could happen in the church. How would it affect the church if a person is only in the church to be served rather than to serve? How would self-centeredness destroy the church from within?
4. How Nehemiah handled these internal problems by employing safeguards should remind you of how you can handle similar problems in order to not allow Satan to destroy the church:
 - a. **Church Safeguard #1: Transparency and accountability (v. 6-8).** How did Nehemiah handle those who exploited their own brethren? Discuss why there is a need to bring out a problem done in public. Why are transparency and accountability important in running a church or Christian organizations?
 - b. **Church Safeguard #2: Fighting for and guarding God's reputation (v. 9-11).** For what reason did Nehemiah say that what the Jewish lenders were doing was not good? Discuss how and when your actions as a Christian could malign the Name of God? How should consciously thinking of God's reputation keep you from doing something that will discredit Him?

5. Response of the guilty and the people (v. 12-13). Talk is cheap unless it is followed by action. How did the people respond? If you are guilty of doing something wrong, how do you respond when you are being rebuked? Share and discuss.
6. Two personal safeguards for you to practice:
 - a. **Personal Safeguard #1: Desire no special treatment (v.14-15, 17-18).** Nehemiah, who led by example, never used his clout and position to get special treatment because he feared God. Describe circumstances in which a church member feels entitled to special treatment. Why is it wrong? How could it be avoided?
 - b. **Personal Safeguard #2: Avoid conflicts of interests, even perceived ones (v.16, 19).** Nehemiah devoted himself to the work on the wall. Neither he nor his men acquired any land or did anything to enrich themselves. Discuss why peddling or selling your products is not a good practice to be done in the church? What does verse 9 mean?

Walk

As a church, we should remember that there are many problems inside the church that could tear us apart. It is only by the grace of God that the church could continue in its work for the Lord. Our responsibility as followers of Christ is to be faithful to His Word and follow the biblical safeguards God already provided. We are to be transparent and there should always be an accountability. We need to fight for and guard God's reputation. As members of the local church, we should not seek special treatment and avoid conflicts of interests, even perceived ones. Ponder on these thoughts and ask the Lord to allow you to recognise if you need to change your ways and not to be a part of the "enemies within the walls."

Worship & Prayer

Heavenly Father, my heart is saddened that conflicts and problems do happen in the church. Forgive me if I am a part of it by entertaining attitudes that promote dissension instead of praying and finding ways to avoid and overcome this problem. Help me and my fellow church members to not allow the enemy to have a foothold in our church life, but to always think of Your reputation and our testimony as Your children, so that others who do not yet know You may have the right perspective of who You are and what it is to be a Christian. In Jesus' name. Amen.