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LOVE YOUR BRETHREN

Nehemiah 5 records a sad event in the history of God's people. As the wall was being built, and the people united against a common enemy, Nehemiah records that the "nobles and the rulers" (v. 7) were guilty of oppressing their countrymen. They did this by charging usury (KJV) or interest against their people. Think: Loan sharks! The affected people came to Nehemiah, crying out against this treatment. Why had they gotten out of the bondage of Xerxes only to trade it for bondage to their brethren? Sons and daughters were sold into servitude so landowners could pay the interest they had accrued (Neh. 5:5). This was wrong, and Nehemiah condemned the "nobles and the rulers" for their behavior (Neh. 5:7, 9). There had been a

famine (Neh 5:3), and though there were people who needed to buy grain or other things, those making the loans could have left off charging their brethren interest (v. 10). Can you imagine the decline in morale as the work of wall-building is taking place, and then those trying to build the wall cannot work because of how their brethren are treating them! In this chapter, we see that it was not what Sanballat, Tobiah, and the others had done that was killing them. This issue was internal! How are we treating our spiritual brethren? Christ says the world will know we are His disciples when they observe the love we show our brethren (Jn. 13:34-35). Loving the brethren is more than words. It is also action (I Jn. 3:18)! What does the world see in us? What do we see in each

other (Phil. 2:3)? Friend, how can a man love God whom he hasn't seen if he doesn't love the brethren he has seen (I Jn. 4:20)?

Have we noticed that often we treat strangers better than we treat those we know the best? Just observe and contrast how we treat a stranger in town with how we treat a family member at home. Why the difference? Similarly, some treat their brethren in harsh ways. Do we backbite? Gossip? Treat them cruelly? Why is this? Aren't we supposed to be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17)? Why then, do brethren treat those we are supposed to spend eternity with worse than the people who have rejected God? Please understand, our work is to love all men without partiality (Jas. 2:8). So, why are we not completing our work? Let's take a moment for some self-examination (II Cor. 13:5). How are you treating your brethren? Are you treating them with love (Matt. 22:39)? Are you treating them as you want to be treated (Matt. 7:12)? If not, why not? Why are you not willing to treat those whom God loves with respect? Don't act like the "nobles and the rulers" did. Instead, read Romans 12:9-21 and treat fellow-Christians in a

manner that respects them and God! I am thankful to see that when confronted by Nehemiah about their behavior, the "nobles and the rulers" repented (Neh. 5:11-12). What will we do if we examine ourselves (II Cor. 13:5; Jas. 1:22-25) and see that we are guilty? – Jarrod Jacobs

Philemon is a beautiful book of the Bible that belongs to the New Testament epistles. The epistles were letters written by the inspired apostles (Acts 2:3-4; Jn. 14:26) to churches and individuals (i.e. Romans, 1 and 2 Cor., Gal., Eph.). The letter to Philemon was penned by the inspired apostle Paul while he was in prison. It is among the four prison epistles that Paul wrote. Paul refers to himself as an aged man when he wrote this letter (vs. 9). This is a very personal letter that Paul writes to his friend Philemon. The main theme of this wonderful book is Paul imploring Philemon to receive his runaway slave, Onesimus, back.

Let's look at a couple of spiritual lessons we can learn from this book. Philemon 10-11 reads, *"I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to*

you and to me.” So, while Paul was in prison, he met Onesimus and taught him the truth and Onesimus became a Christian. This is what Paul means when he said: *“whom I have begotten in my imprisonment.”* Onesimus was born again. Let’s consider the context. Onesimus ran away from his master for some reason. A slave running away from his master was against civil law and Paul refers to Onesimus as formerly useless. Now that he became a Christian, he is useful; his entire identity and status changed spiritually. Paul says he is now useful to Philemon. I hope we can see how this has application to our lives. When you become a child of God, you become useful to your Master in Heaven. When you’re in sin, you are at enmity with God and you don’t have fellowship with him. When you become a child of God through belief, repentance, confession and baptism you have your sins washed away and you have fellowship with Him (Acts 2:38-47, 3:19; Mk. 16:16; Rom. 10:9). Verse 12 reads *“I have sent him back to you in person, that is sending my very heart.”* Paul is returning him to his master with the hope that Philemon will receive him back graciously since they’re now brothers. Part of Onesimus’ repentance was “facing the music.” He had broken the civil law by running away from Philemon, and he needed to return. Repentance is arguably one of the hardest

commandments to fulfill. It requires that we bear fruit worthy of repentance (Matt. 3:8). We must prove our repentance to be genuine. We need to be sorrowful for our sins, resolve to change, and then change. If we’ve wronged someone, we need to do everything in our power to make it right (i.e., returning a stolen item to the owner, etc.). Our souls depend upon the genuineness of our repentance. Jesus said repentance is *“for the forgiveness of sins.”* Without it there is no forgiveness. Paul understood this point which is why he sent Onesimus back to Philemon. The interesting part of this book is that it leaves us with a cliffhanger of sorts. We don’t know what Philemon’s reception of Onesimus was. It took a lot of courage on Onesimus’ part to return to his master. Yet, he had no clue what Philemon’s response was going to be. Onesimus went ahead and faced Philemon, though, because he was determined to do the right thing even when he didn’t know what kind of response he might get when he got back. This is the nature of being a Christian. We do what is right regardless of the consequences. Being a child of God involves a change in our identity and status, and it means we change our purpose through genuine repentance. Let’s follow the example of Onesimus and resolve to follow the Lord at all costs. — Jordan Lawson

BIBLE TRIVIA

C H A L L E N G E

DIRECTIONS: After searching through your Bible, circle which answer is correct.

1. Hearing of Cornelius' conversion, they rejoiced that God granted the Gentiles also the _____ that leads to life.

- a) Secret
- b) Repentance
- c) Milk
- d) Bread

2. Once in Antioch, Barnabas left for Tarsus to look for _____.

- a) Peter
- b) John
- c) James
- d) Saul

3. A prophet named, _____, indicated there would be a great famine.

- a) Agabus
- b) Rhoda
- c) Elymas
- d) Tim

4. When Peter knocked on Mary's door where disciples were praying for him, a servant-girl named _____ answered.

- a) Agabus
- b) Elymas
- c) Tim
- d) Rhoda

5. When Herod spoke, the people cried out, "The voice of a _____ and not of a man!"

- a) God
- b) Woman
- c) Child
- d) Warrior

6. Because he did not give God the glory, Herod was eaten by _____ and died.

- a) Lions
- b) Minstrels
- c) Giants
- d) Worms

7. Barnabas and Saul had _____ as their helper on their preaching journey.

- a) Peter
- b) Matthew
- c) John
- d) Agabus

8. Paul made _____ the magician blind, calling him "son of the devil."

- a) Agabus
- b) Elymas
- c) Simon
- d) Tim

9. At Lystra, the crowds thought Paul and Barnabas were gods, calling Barnabas, "Zeus," and Paul, "_____."

- a) Artemis
- b) Poseidon
- c) Hermes
- d) Dionysus

10. Paul and Barnabas encouraged disciples saying, "Through many _____ we must enter the Kingdom of God."

- a) Doors
- b) Accolades
- c) Cheers
- d) Tribulations

- 7) C, Acts 13:5
- 8) B, Acts 13:8-11
- 9) C, Acts 14:12
- 10) D, Acts 14:22
- 1) B, Reference: Acts 11:18
- 2) D, Reference: Acts 11:25
- 3) A, Reference: Acts 11:28
- 4) D, Reference: Acts 12:13
- 5) A, Reference: Acts 12:22
- 6) D, Reference: Acts 12:23