

The Psychology and Methods of Sin ***-contrasted with-*** ***The Mindset and Fruits of the Spirit***

“The heart is deceitful above all things...who can know it?” (Jer 17:9)

“Dealing With the Abuser”

October 24, 2010

Sermon Text: Nehemiah 2

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 2

Introduction

The book of Nehemiah has a number of themes –

- God’s covenant faithfulness to His people
- The rebuilding of the earthly Jerusalem to which Christ would one day come
- The sovereignty of God over all the nations

It is also a book about the man of God serving the Lord in the face of persistent opposition. The opposition came from several sources, but primarily from one *abusive, controlling, entitled* individual named SANBALLAT. He hated that these Jews had returned from captivity in Babylon and were going to rebuild their capital. Sanballat is a type, a symbol, of Satan. If you want to learn

more about the tactics of our enemy, read this book!! Listen to another chapter and see what I mean –

Nehemiah 4:1-23 ESV

(1) Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, **he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews.**

(2) And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, **“What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?”**

(3) Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, **“Yes, what they are building--if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!”**

(4) Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. (5) Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders.

(6) So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.

(7) But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry.

(8) And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.

(9) And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night.

(10) In Judah it was said, "The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall."

(11) And our enemies said, "They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work."

(12) At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, "You must return to us."

(13) So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. (14) And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to

the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."

(15) When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work.

(16) From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah,

(17) who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other.

(18) And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me.

(19) And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another. (20) In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us." (21) So we labored at the work, and half of them held the

spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out.

(22) I also said to the people at that time, "Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day."

(23) So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand.

There are tremendous lessons for each of us individually and all of us as a church to learn from this. Fear, threats, mockery, rumors of attack – all of these are common tactics of Satan against the work of Christ. All designed to discourage, to make afraid, to cause Christ's people to give up and go home. But in it all, Nehemiah and his people experienced God's strength and victory. By the way, are YOU armored and ready with your Sword at your right hand? (Ephesians 6)

I love in particular this part of Nehemiah –

Nehemiah 6:1-13 ESV

(1) Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates),

(2) Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono." But they intended to do me harm.

(3) And I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?"

(4) And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner.

(5) In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand.

(6) In it was written, "It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king.

(7) And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, 'There is a king in Judah.' And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together."

(8) Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind."

(9) For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be

done." But now, O God, strengthen my hands.

(10) Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home, he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple. Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night."

(11) But I said, "Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in."

(12) And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.

(13) For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me.

Sanballat is a very good picture of the abusive, controlling, entitled man. You see his mindset. You see his tactics. Deception. Fear. Mockery. Slander of the victim to cause others to think the victim is the real problem.

And you see Nehemiah's wise and classic response –

(3) And I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?"

When we are dealing with an abusive person, the solution is not to just "sit down and talk, work things out, communicate and understand one another better." NO! Because as we have been learning, the abusive man or woman has no intent at all to work things out. He or she knows nothing of compromising, of empathizing, of kindness. He only knows power and control and entitlement. Therefore, any such meeting with an abuser will only result in giving the abusive man another opportunity to abuse his victim.

"This is a vital lesson to learn then in respect to dealing with an abusive person. Such a person, like Sanballat, has only one purpose – to destroy, to discourage, to instill fear, to mock and rob his victim of any sense of self-worth and confidence. Sanballat wants to control, to own, to exercise power, to be as God to his victims. Therefore, it is not wise to enter into mediation with an abuser. It is not wise to enter into couples' counseling with an abuser. Communication problems are NOT the problem. The abusive person's

mentality is the problem, and it is his problem alone.”

Further, mark this down very well –

“Like Nehemiah in his dealings with Sanballat, the Christian is NOT bound to meet with an abusive person. We are NOT obligated to maintain an abusive relationship, thereby permitting the abuser to continue in his power and control and abuse. ‘Beware of Alexander the Coppersmith, He has done me much harm’ (the Apostle Paul). Yet how many Christians would have told Nehemiah – “Hey, this guy just wants to talk to you. It is wrong for you not to go. Jesus always wants us to seek peace and reconciliation. Hey, maybe you can lead Sanballat to Christ!” Sound familiar?

“Mediation, communication, reconciliation and peace-making requires goodwill from both parties. But as we have seen, the abuser has no goodwill – he is malevolent toward his victims. He will only use such sessions to exercise more of his abuse, to work more of his deceptions, and to make it appear to the foolish that he is the one who truly wants to set things ‘right.’ Beware of Sanballat!”

Another tactic in all of this as we see here in Nehemiah is that the enemy wants to take us away from doing the

work that Christ has called us to do. While we are all wrapped up in endless negotiations with Sanballat, the work of Christ stops.

Listen to Nehemiah again –

Nehemiah 6:10-13 ESV

(10) Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home, he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple. Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night."

(11) But I said, "Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in."

(12) And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.

(13) For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me.

ACTING OUT OF FEAR IS NOT HONORING TO CHRIST. WE ARE CHILDREN OF THE KING WITH ALL OF HIS AUTHORITY AND STRENGTH. ACTING OUT OF FEAR OF THE ABUSIVE MAN

WILL CAUSE US TO ACT IN A MANNER THAT IS DISHONORING TO THE LORD. IT WILL ENABLE THE ABUSIVE MAN EVEN MORE. WE NEED TO EXAMINE OUR OWN HEARTS AND SEARCH OUT ANY MOTIVE OF THE FEAR OF MAN THAT MIGHT BE WORKING IN US.

Now, *what was the outcome of all of this?* Nehemiah acted valiantly and wisely. He did not sit down at the peace table with Sanballat. What was the result? –

Nehemiah 6:14-16 ESV

(14) Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.

(15) So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.

(16) And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

By the way, notice the next few verses as well –

Nehemiah 6:17-19

(17) Moreover, in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters

to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them.

(18) For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as his wife.

(19) Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid.

See it? We have already studied and learned about the abusive man's tactic of *making allies*. That is, of deceiving people like relatives and friends of his victim into thinking that the VICTIM is really the problem. That the victim is crazy, or that it is the victim who is being unreasonable in not being willing to come to the negotiation table. That is what had happened in Nehemiah's people. The enemy had cultivated allies from among Nehemiah's own people! There was some kind of family connection by marriage. Tobiah, Sanballat's right hand man, had married into the family! As a result, these nobles of Judah functioned as the enemy's double agents! They reported in letters what Nehemiah was doing. In addition, they functioned as propaganda machines, speaking of how good and great Tobiah was! Their treachery is recorded here for all posterity to see!

How in the world did the wall EVER get built! By the power and strength of Christ. Even the most deceptive abuser is no match for the Lord. He sees everything. The Sanballats of this world are NO match for Him. They are as nothing – as chaff that the wind drives away and is thrown into the fire. He who sits in the heavens laughs at them and their boasting.

But the wall would never have been built if Nehemiah had entered into negotiations with his abuser. HUGE lessons for us to learn here! We can be quite sure that in many ways our thinking on these things is all turned around and needs to be corrected and transformed by God's Word.

Conclusion

Well, there is the introduction to dealing with the abusive man, and I wanted to handle this topic completely this morning! I am just going to end by reading the true story of an abuse victim named Joanna Hunter. She has written a book entitled But He'll Change – End the Thinking that Keeps You in an Abusive Relationship [Hazelden Foundation: 2010]. You will see how she set a boundary and refused to compromise it, just as Nehemiah refused to compromise with Sanballat – [the underlining is mine for emphasis] -

“I met my partner in a bookstore. [I am not sure why she uses the term partner here] The moment our eyes met, it felt as if a bolt of lightning shot through me (just like in romantic fiction). He introduced himself and kissed my hand. For a young woman who had been a nobody in high school to have this attractive, intense guy focus on me was heady and wonderful. I was hooked.

Most people think that only those raised in violent homes go on to abusive relationships. That isn't true. I didn't come from a home where my parents beat up each other...

My parents raised me to have a kind heart. Along the way, wanting to be a 'nice person,' I evolved into a people pleaser. Everyone else's needs and wants came before my own, even to my detriment.

When I met the bookstore guy, a guy who believed the only way he could keep a partner was by holding all the power and control in the relationship, our sicknesses melded perfectly. I gladly turned over control of my life to him because it made him happy. He gladly accepted it. We became a couple. His passion and desire for justice captivated me. I saw his anger focused on others. I never thought it would come around and land on me.

The first time he hit me was less than a year after we were married. He slapped me, I was stunned. Over the next few days, I convinced myself that it was a fluke and it wouldn't happen again. It did. During the 4th incident, he hit me so hard on the side of my head that he popped my eardrum.

This was back in the 1970s when people didn't talk about this kind of thing. Ashamed, I didn't want to tell anyone, but my ears were ringing and I had trouble hearing. After 3 days, I knew I had to get medical help. I didn't tell the doctor that my husband hit me. I said I got hit in the head with a ball but asked him to check both ears....

After that incident, my mother's words came back to me: It is never OK for a man to hit a woman – never. On a calm evening, I sat beside my partner and said, 'Look, I love you with all my heart. But if you continue to hit me, I will have to leave.' He stood up and went into the bedroom, shutting the door. I could hear him crying. This was way out of character for him. He believed men don't cry. My people-pleasing heart said, 'What have you done? You're a horrible person.' [See the abuser's strategy working here?]

When he came out of the bedroom, he said, 'I never thought you'd hurt me like this.'

I remained silent, my heart aching.

He said, 'I thought you loved me.'

'I do love you.'

'You said you would leave me.'

'Yes, if you hit me, I will have to leave.'

'Then you don't love me.'

[This is what happens in "negotiations" with an abuser]

"My people-pleasing heart was screaming. 'Tell him you love him. Tell him you'll never leave –no matter what.' [By the way, this is exactly what many pastors and Christians tell the victim to say. NEVER leave him! God hates divorce!]

"But my gut shouted, 'Shut up! Don't retract the statement!' I didn't take back the ultimatum. I set a boundary that day; I didn't know I set it until much later.

After that evening, he did abstain from hitting me; the physical violence in our relationship was limited to him shoving, grabbing, and pinning me up against the wall with his arm across my throat. He ratcheted up emotional abuse. At that time I didn't recognize the red flags. I believed abuse only involved hitting and punching: now I know that abuse can be verbal and psychological.

He used constant criticism and name-calling, telling me that I was a stupid, worthless woman who couldn't do anything right, repeatedly. Over time, the Stockholm Syndrome (ie, Traumatic Bonding – being bound to one's abuser when the abuser alternates abuse and 'kindness') – set in.

Through humiliation and ridicule my partner taught me that to express my own feelings and needs was selfish. He made it clear that it was not safe for me to disagree with him.

If I said I wanted or needed something, he would withhold it. He was generous with other things, but not with what I wanted most – he deliberately withheld his love and acceptance.

Ignoring my feelings was common.

Another red flag behavior in our relationship is called messing with your mind, or crazy – making. If you have ever seen the classic 1944 movie Gaslight with Ingrid Bergman and Charles Boyer, you know exactly what messing with your mind is. Boyer would move Bergman's things around or hide them so Bergman thought she had misplaced them. He dimmed the gaslights and implied to her that she was imagining things. Systematically, he attempted to make her and those around her believe she was going

crazy. His goal: put her in an asylum so he could control her wealth.

Though my partner's motives were different (I didn't have any wealth), he told me I had said and done things I hadn't. He'd change his rules without telling me and expect me to know what he wanted. [The abusive man often uses the tactic of appearing to be without explanation, of being entirely unpredictable and inconsistent, just to keep his victim guessing]. What was OK one day was not necessarily OK the next. He played many different mind games with me to destroy my self-trust and self-esteem. [And remember, his goal in all of this is to have control and power over his victim].

Through ignoring my feelings and messing with my mind, he taught me that I couldn't trust him. In addition, I couldn't trust myself – I was going crazy. I felt helpless and trapped.

Those who know my story often ask why I stayed. First, I stayed because I truly loved him. Then, because I had sympathy for him; I knew he had pain in his life, and I wanted to saved him. [WRONG motives, as Hunter now realizes]. Also, we had children and I thought I was a stupid, worthless woman who couldn't do anything right. How was I going to take care of my children on my own? Besides, he told me if I tried to leave, he'd take the

children from me and I'd never see them again. I was brainwashed to the point where I believed he could. Then I stayed because I knew he had a .357 magnum – a big gun. He never threatened me with it, but I knew it was there, loaded in his desk drawer.

Let's go back to that boundary I set so many years before. Toward the end of our relationship, my partner slammed me against the wall and put his arm across my throat, pressing in until spots swam in my tear-filled eyes. He said, 'You gonna leave me now?' I had thought he refrained from (actually) hitting me because I hadn't made him angry enough. I believed it was only a matter of time before he would step over that line. After all, he'd swaggered over my boundaries in all areas of my life. Pinned against the wall that day, I realized he hadn't hit me because he didn't want me to leave him. So if I said I'm leaving, what would keep him from beating me or pulling out that gun? I didn't know. I stayed because he had bound me with ropes of fear and I felt suffocated.

I can't begin to find words to explain how painful it was to live with the man. I used to wake up in the morning before the alarm clock rang. I'd lie there and pray, 'Dear God, please don't let it be morning. Please give me just one more hour before I have to face my life today.' Then I would roll over and look at the clock. Some days

God granted that hour, others He didn't.

It all finally came to a head on one 4th of July when she and her abuser were at a party with some old friends. The abuser eventually ordered her to come with him as they were leaving. When she hesitated, he grabbed her by the arms and pulled her to his face, in front of everyone –

"...and began screaming at me. The stunned neighbors watched in silence as he berated me. They knew nothing of his violent temper. He was the first one to help dig a neighbor's garden, shove a driveway, or work on a car. He shoved me toward the bedroom and told me to pack – we were leaving. I did what he said. One of my friends followed me into the bedroom and asked, 'What is he doing? Is he really like this?' Shame burned into my face.

"...A voice said, 'If you don't leave now, the door will close and you will live in this darkness forever.' I looked at my partner. For the first time in our life together, I told him no.

'I'm not going with you,' I said.

His eyes narrowed. The purple-blue veins in his neck stood out, crimson spider-webbed across his face. He started batting around the chairs and hitting the table, bellowing threats.

The other men at the party gathered around him and walked him to the vehicle. I followed, pulled the suitcase from the back, opened it, drew out my clothing, and then quickly returned to the house. He left.

He called me from the gas station a block away. ‘Are you coming with me?’ he demanded to know.

‘No.’

‘If you don’t come with me now, you can never come back.’

‘OK,’ I said and hung up. I knew our relationship was over. I had committed the worst offense against him anyone could – I defied him. The reality of my leaving demolished the wall of protection. There was no longer a reason to restrain himself from harming me.

“The two most dangerous times for the abuse victim are when she reports the abuse and when she leaves her abuser.” [Apply this as well to the rage of the enemy when a sinner is coming to faith in Christ, about to confess Satan’s abuse and ready to leave His realm]

“I waited up all night. I figured it was two hours to where we lived – ten minutes for him to get the gun – two

hours back to kill me. I believed I’d be dead in less than 5 hours.

But he didn’t come back. The next day, I flew to my parents’ home and contacted a lawyer. It was over. I was divorced within 90 days of filing. A couple of months later, I realized I’d left him on Independence Day. God has a sense of humor.

“...I never thought I could be happy living without a partner. I was. Ironically, then I met a man. I fell in love – not madly with unabandoned passion as in my youth – but with quiet dignity. Hopeful, but terrified, I allowed the bud of love to open at its own pace. I revealed to my partner who I was and learned that I did not have to change for him to love me. Five years later we were married. My husband is my knight in shining armor, but he doesn’t fight my battles for me; he knows that I am capable of dealing with problems on my own. He supports me, listens to me, and encourages me.”

There came a time, you see, in Joanna’s life, when negotiating with Sanballat came to an end. It was time to set out on Christ’s work. Then deceptions of the enemy had been exposed. We must learn these things. We must be wise in them. These are the tactics and servants of the devil as he works to destroy Christ’s people, Christ’s purpose, and Christ’s plan.