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HIS PART AND OUR PART

After 70 years of exile in Babylon, the Jews had miraculously been permitted to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild their Temple, just as the Prophet Jeremiah had prophesied would happen. But the people still did not have a secure city with rebuilt walls and gates. Many enemies opposed their presence in Jerusalem. They needed a strong leader to help them rebuild the wall and then to govern them through their difficult situation.

Nehemiah was a godly Jew who was serving the king of Persia as his cup-bearer, a very responsible position. Nehemiah learned about the troubles of his people in Israel and started praying for God to do something about it. God said, to paraphrase, "Good idea, Dude. I am going to do something about it, I am going to send you back to lead them in a rebuilding project and then to be their governor." (Be careful what you pray about!)

Of course, that was an impossible assignment and there was no way that Nehemiah could have done any of it if God had not prepared the heart of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, to release him from his royal job, and not only to release him but to send him back to Israel with a military escort and money to pay for the rebuilding project. But note that God did not wave His hand and send a score of angels to do the job, He called a man to do it. Nehemiah had to act in faith and then use all his intelligence, skill and courage to accomplish this assignment. God had a part, the big part, and a man had a part - to act in faith and obedience.

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he found that things were worse than he had imagined. The walls that had protected Jerusalem were just a pile of rubble. And their city was surrounded by enemies with strong armies who were not going to let them rebuild their walls no matter what the distant king of Persia said about it. The Jews in Jerusalem were intimidated and depressed.

Nehemiah was able to motivate the people to trust God and get this huge project started, but then the enemies all around them started a constant barrage of threats to make them stop their work.

(By some strange coincidence, can you see any correlation between this story and your story? Did God call you to do something that you felt was impossible, but after you nervously stepped out in obedience you were immediately confronted by opposition that threatened and intimidated you and made you consider giving up? Perhaps your story centered around stopping some addiction that was destroying your life; or your

loving spouse gradually turned into a demonized stranger; or a child was born with a terrible physical or mental disability; or a secure and happy family was suddenly devastated by an unexpected death; or a worldwide plague that started in China upended your financial stability; or your awakening to God's call on your life didn't lead to peace but to unexpected conflict and confusion. If you will study the book of Nehemiah, you will find a timeless pattern.)

In spite of the opposition, the people obeyed God and started rebuilding the wall. Then, according to the fourth chapter of Nehemiah, note what happened:

Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion.

Nevertheless, we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night. (Note: they prayed for God's protection, and they also set a watch. God's part and their part.)

.....Then Nehemiah addressed the people and said, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and daughters and wives and houses." So it was from that time on that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, shields, bows, and wore armor. Those who carried burdens loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon.

There was a popular song during World War 2, *Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition*. It sounds simplistic, but perhaps there is more truth to it than I used to think.

The following chapters describe the desperate attempts by the enemies of God to stop the work of God by evil plots, extortion, compromise, lies, words/words/words.....but in spite of all the opposition: *The wall was finished on the 25th day of Elul, in fifty-two days. And when our enemies heard of it and all the nations around us saw these things, they were very disheartened and perceived that this work was done by our God.*

What a glorious picture of faith, spiritual warfare, the hidden hand of God, and His certain victory. The little book of Nehemiah is a treasure. If you will read and meditate on it, God will show you many things about your own spiritual journey.

POWER STEERING

Power steering is a helpful analogy to explain how the Christian life mysteriously combines our working and God's working in and through us.

Think of a big, heavy car where the power steering is not working. We have been given free will, we are not robots, and God will not take over the steering wheel. But our arms will get mighty tired without the power steering, and eventually we won't be able to keep our car on the road and out of the ditch.

Consider Philippians 2:12-13:

.....**(you) work out your salvation.....for it is God who is working in you, giving you the desire and power to do His will.**

HOW CAN AN IMPERFECT PERSON BE ACCEPTABLE TO A PERFECT GOD?

This is a question people have always struggled to answer because most of us recognize how messed up we are. The history of mankind is a history of terrible wars where we slaughter each other. What is wrong with us?

Our tendency toward crime is so universal that we have to build big warehouses (jails and prisons) to lock up the most dangerous folks. And the rest of us have so little self-control that we pay policemen to arrest us when we get drunk or high and start shooting or stabbing our neighbors. We also pay policemen to arrest us when we drive way too fast or when we drive drunk or run over pedestrians while we are texting our friends.

Mankind dreamed up a multitude of different gods over the ages and a multitude of ways to satisfy or pacify him or them or it, such as religious rituals and rules and sacrifices, even human sacrifice.

Man cannot find God by his intellect, so the God of heaven, our Creator, initiated the process of revealing Himself to the world through a man, a tribe, a nation - the Jews. He also gave people certain rituals and sacrifices....and a multitude of laws. (The Old Testament lists 613 laws. See the book of Leviticus.) Men have not been able to keep even Ten of those laws, much less the 603 others. God wanted to show men that keeping laws was not the way to be acceptable to a perfect God.

The Jews, however, felt that the laws given to them through Moses were insufficient, they were not detailed enough to answer every question, so they came up with the **Talmud**. Some very smart Rabbis, scholars, got together in periodic conferences over a period of several hundred years and edited, interpreted and added to the laws given in the Torah. They then added these laws, their laws, to the 613 others, and the Pharisees became the religious police to punish anyone who broke this impossibly vast collection of rules and laws.

That is why, by the way, the Pharisees kept accusing Jesus of breaking God's laws. He wasn't breaking God's laws, He was breaking their laws - - - which they were also unable to keep.

Since you may be an especially holy person who would like to earn your way to heaven by keeping rules and laws, I am going to share a few with you. First, a few of the laws from the first five books of the Bible, called the **Torah**. Read through Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy to find the details:

- Laws of Purity: Kosher laws concerning foods: no pork, only fish with scales, etc. This is why, Peter was so dumbfounded when a sheet came down from heaven with all kinds of "unclean" foods and he was told to "kill and eat."
- Laws concerning leprosy and other sicknesses. You have read how lepers were required to live outside the camp and to shout "unclean" so they would not defile anyone.
- Laws concerning sexual purity. Anyone guilty of adultery was to be stoned to death, etc.
- Laws concerning planting and flocks. They had to let each field lie fallow every 7th year, etc.
- The Seven Festivals. Every Jewish man was required to come to Jerusalem to the Temple every year for three of the festivals, etc.

Now let's look at a few of the laws that the Rabbis added via the **Talmud**:

The 4th Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) says, *Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy* (you are to rest and not do any work on the Sabbath). The Rabbis felt that there were many unanswered questions regarding this commandment, so they came up with: "**Thirty-Nine Categories of Sabbath Work Prohibited by the Law.**" These 39 categories included:

- 1-Carrying, 2-Burning, 3-Extinguishing, 4-Finishing, 5-Writing, 6-Erasing, 7-Cooking, 8-Washing, 9-Sewing..... 38-Smoothing, 39-Marking.
- 1-Carrying. When you leave home, you can only walk 1/4th of a mile; you can't carry a key, handkerchief, purse; and you may not use a pencil, candle or money.
- 2-Burning. You can't strike a match or light a stove, or in an auto (the laws were updated as human inventiveness advanced) you may not turn the key in the ignition or push on the accelerator. (On one trip to Israel, our tour group stayed one night on the Sabbath in the King David hotel. The elevator was programmed to stop at each floor because the Orthodox Jews could not push an elevator button on the Sabbath.)
- 4-Finishing. You can't tear paper; therefore, you can't tear toilet paper, so the Orthodox used only pre-cut pieces of toilet paper on the Sabbath.
- 7-Cooking. You can't cook or heat up food or boil water, so foods for the Sabbath were prepared on Thursday.

- 20-Selecting. You can't pick the bones out of fish or comb your hair.
- 37-Building. You can't drive a nail or open an umbrella.
- 34-Shearing. You can't shear wool; therefore, you can't cut hair or shave or cut your fingernails.
- 35-Slaughtering. You can't kill a living creature, swat a fly or a mosquito on the Sabbath.

How would you like to live under these laws? This is why they accused Jesus of breaking the law when He healed a man on the Sabbath. It is also why Jesus accused the Pharisees of putting a heavy burden on people that no one could bear, and He told them it was a matter of the heart rather than trying to keep all these extreme religious laws.

Jesus fulfilled the laws of God, and when He died on the cross the Bible says that our sins were nailed to the cross, but also that the Law was nailed to the cross.

(Col. 2:14) Hallelujah! God's law is good and true, but it can only bring condemnation to us because we all fall short of living up to it. But God's grace, extended to each of us on the cross, is accompanied by His power to live in obedience to Him. *For God is working in you, giving you the desire and power to live in a way pleasing to Him.* (I Phil. 2:13 NLT)

And God tells us through the writing of Paul in Romans 13:8 - *If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law.* (NLT)

And in Romans 13:9-10 - *All the commandments are summed up in this one commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God's law.* (NLT)

HOPE = EXPECTATION

"Many Christians have misunderstood the word *hope* when it is used in the Bible, believing that it denotes wishful thinking. Nothing could be farther from the truth! As soon as I became your Savior, heaven became your ultimate destination. It is a promise, a covenant, sealed by the blood of My Son on the Cross.

My desire is that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Romans 8:23-25; Hebrews 6:18-19; Romans 15:13
from "Jesus Calling"

PS from Glenn:

I have always misunderstood the Biblical word *hope*. The modern definition of hope is wishful thinking, as in: "I hope it doesn't rain this weekend." "I hope you get to feeling better." Etc. But the word *hope* in the Bible might be defined as: "A confident expectation; an absolute certainty, as sure as the sunrise." The Bible calls it, "*A sure and certain hope.*" This is a wonderful truth. Spend some time thinking about it.

WHY DON'T CHRISTIANS FORGIVE?

All Christians know that we must forgive others.

Right? Christian preachers preach about it, Christians teachers teach about it, because it is emphasized so much in the New Testament. Jesus even made it a part of the Lord's Prayer: *Forgive us our trespasses (our sins), as we forgive others for their trespasses (their sins against us).* (Matt. 6:12)

Then Jesus doubles down on this particular phrase in the Lord's prayer by immediately adding a warning:

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matt. 6:14-15)

Whoa! That is an extremely heavy word!

I have heard some Christian preachers who seemed to de-emphasize this warning by saying that when we receive Christ as Savior all our sins are forgiven, period. In other words, forgiveness is important, but it is optional. But I think they are leaving out repentance. Aren't we supposed to "repent of our sins and believe the Gospel?"

(Mark 1:15, 6:12; Matt. 5:2; Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Romans 2:4; Rev. 2:16)

Our lack of repentance is exactly why Christianity doesn't seem to work for so many of us. Don't be deceived, dear friends, Jesus meant exactly what he said.

So, why don't Christians forgive others? Following is a list of some of the excuses Christians make for not obeying the clear teaching of Jesus and the Apostles on this subject:

- (1) First and foremost, as stated above, Christians don't forgive because they don't think they have to obey Christ, they don't have to repent of their sins including bitterness, hatred, and unforgiveness. This is a serious matter.
- (2) They think that forgiving someone is a sign of weakness. So who is your model of a "real man"? Dirty Harry? James Bond? Or Jesus? We need to get our minds renewed.
- (3) Some folks think, "I am only required to forgive those who apologize and ask for my forgiveness." Not true. Jesus forgave us from the cross while we were yet sinners and in rebellion against God.
- (4) Unforgiveness, bitterness, resentment and self pity feed the flesh. It feels good to our lower nature to feel like a victim and to nourish fantasies of revenge. Why else are there so many movies with the theme of vengeance?
- (5) The idea: "If I give up my anger and bitterness I will be vulnerable and in danger of being hurt again." That is true, but as long as you hold onto your anger you continue to be hurt and victimized by the person who wounded you. You never move on. Unforgiveness locks the pain in and locks God out.
- (6) Some people don't know they haven't forgiven because their memories are repressed and

hidden from their conscious mind - but those repressed memories still continue to adversely affect their lives because *“Out of the heart come the issues of life.”*

- While ministering to a young man, he told me he never knew his father who had impregnated and then abandoned his mother. I asked him to forgive his father, but he felt he didn't need to do that since he had never thought much about him. He finally let me lead him in a prayer of forgiveness. As he said the words, tears came to his eyes and he said, “When I said those words something happened inside. Maybe I did have some feelings about my father that I didn't realize.”
 - Likewise, when someone has lost a father or mother by death or divorce, have them express forgiveness to the parent who left them (when a parent dies, it feels like abandonment to the child) and to God if they have blamed Him.
- (7) I think a big reason Christians don't forgive is pride, rebellion and stubbornness. Many people are sick, spiritually, emotionally, and even physically because of unforgiveness. We need to humble ourselves and obey God. He wants to heal our hearts, minds, and bodies. Yield your heart to him today.
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to retaliate against them, he would have destroyed the patriarchs of the nation of Israel.

Doug told the story related to him by a dear friend, Charles Howard, an older man since gone to be with the Lord. Charles was a college professor who enabled over 1,200 kids to go to school. He told Doug about one of his former students, a Methodist preacher, who called him in desperation and told him, “My wife has left me for another man. She is in a motel in another town. I've got to go to her. Will you go with me?”

They drove to the town, to the motel. The other man was gone to work. The preacher's wife opened the door in her bathrobe. When she saw her husband she screamed at him, “Go away! I don't want anything to do with you!”

Charles said he thought that was the end of the situation and turned to leave. But he heard a noise and looked back to see that the husband had fallen on the porch weeping. He was saying, “You're my wife. I love you. Where have I failed?”

Then the wife fell on her knees. Crying, she said, “I didn't think you could forgive me. I hated what I did. I was so grieved by how I had hurt you. Can you take me back?”

That husband and wife went on to have a great life and ministry together.

Have you forgiven those who have rejected you, betrayed you, wounded you or someone in your family - totally?

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TOTAL FORGIVENESS

(from my Ancient Files)

Doug White, a retired pastor, recently spoke here in Grand Junction about total forgiveness. From my notes.

The whole world is full of bitterness. There is hardly a family where someone doesn't hate someone else. Hatred and revenge are fueling the wars and potential total destruction that we read about every day. Jews and Arabs, Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, etc. Many husbands and wives love their kids but hate each other.

The story of Joseph and his brothers is an example of total forgiveness. He not only forgave his brothers for selling him into slavery, he wanted them to forgive themselves, and he asked God to let them off the hook! He said, *It wasn't you who sent me here to Egypt, but God.* Jesus said, *Bless those who curse you!* Total forgiveness.

The Holy Spirit is like a dove. Gentle, not aggressive. (Coo, Coo) Easily frightened away by loud, abrasive words and attitudes.

Are you bringing up something to your spouse that happened 10, 20 years ago? *Love keeps no record of wrongs.*

The whole future of the plans and purposes of God rested on the shoulders of one young man who had been treated brutally by his brothers. If he had chosen

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