

It Is Written

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How Are You Treating Your Brethren?

By Jarrod Jacobs

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 who 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 who 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?

The Thomas Effect: If I Cannot See Or Touch It, It's Not Happening

By Doy Moyer

The working of God in our lives is not something that we can touch or see in a materialistic sense. Yet we sometimes act like Thomas when he missed Jesus: "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" (John 20:25). If we cannot see it, we cannot believe it. Consequently, our view of God is greatly diminished as we think that He does little to nothing in our lives today because we are unable to understand or explain it fully.

Rationalism says that reason is the supreme source and test of all knowledge. For us to believe something, we have to be able to make perfect sense of it. Consequently, if we do not fully understand something, we tend to disbelieve or discount it. Do we do this with God? We don't understand how God does

something, so we discount it? We don't fully understand the workings of the Holy Spirit, so we rationalize it away to material processes alone? Before long, all we have is a materialistic view of reality, even when we say we believe there is a God. Deism is the result, if not outright atheism.

If we buy into the rationalistic view that our reason essentially overrides all else (and we may do this subtly while saying we are believers), then we will become Thomas before seeing the risen Jesus. It doesn't make sense to us that God would work "this" or "that" way, so we won't believe it unless we can touch, see, or have it make total sense to our rational minds. Yet Jesus said, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29) The proof has been given (vv. 30-31). The question is whether we will actually take God at His word when He tells us He is working (e.g. Phil 2:12-13; Heb 13:20-21; cf. Acts 27:25).

Let's clarify something here. We are not saying that we shouldn't use our reasoning abilities. Of course we should! Believing in the working of God is not contrary to reason at all. There is a difference between "unreasonable" and "beyond reason." His working is neither rubber-stamped nor negated by our rationalization process. If we can believe that God is (which is reasonable), then, to borrow from Paul, why should it be thought incredible that God can work however He wills? I don't have to understand something that is beyond my ability to think (cf. Eph 3:20), but if I am not willing to accept it because my reason won't let me, then I have far more faith in myself and my own thinking than I do God.

God gave us minds to think, but not to out-think Him or rationalize out of His power. Let us use our minds wisely, in coordination with God's revealed will, and in submission to the sovereignty of the One who is able to do far more abundantly beyond what we can ask or think.

How Are You Different?

By Greg Gwin

As the children of God, we are to be different from people of this world (Romans 12:2). We'd like to challenge you to do a little personal evaluation and see if YOU are really different. For example, are you different in the way you:

Dress—Too many Christians allow the fashion trends of a godless society to dictate how they dress. When God's children can be seen wearing swimming suits, shorts, halters and the like, how can we say that we are different from the world?

Talk—We've heard Christians using swear words, telling dirty jokes, and using other forms of coarse speech. Usually those who do so are seldom found speaking the precious "word of truth". How are we different?

Act—When the people of God go to all the same places and do all the same things that the people of the world do, how can they claim to be different? Many, if not most, of the movies shown today are unfit for viewing by the faithful child of God. Television is full of all sorts of ungodliness. Yet Christians are watching it all and imitating the sinful things they see. It ought not to be so. Smoking, social drinking, dancing, sexual immorality and a host of other sinful deeds are all too prevalent among those who call themselves Christians.

Serve God—All of this really boils down to a lack of willingness to humbly submit to God. The majority of people in the world like to give lip service to God, yet they proceed to do as they please. Some Christians are not far behind. They serve God only when it pleases them and only when it serves their purpose - not God's purpose.

Christian, how are you different? If you are living like God expects you to live, it will become obvious. Others will "think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot" (1 Peter 4:4).