

The Danger of Compromise • Nehemiah 6:1-4

I. INTRODUCTION

A. A Russian Parable

1. A Russian Parable tells about the danger of compromise
2. One day, a hunter raised his rifle and took careful aim at a large bear
3. Just as he was about to pull the trigger, the bear spoke in a soft, soothing voice, "Isn't it better to talk than to shoot?"
 - a. "What do you want?"
 - b. "Let's negotiate the matter."
4. Lowering his rifle, the hunter replied, "I want a fur coat."
5. "Good," said the bear, "that's a start. I only want a full stomach, so let's negotiate a compromise."
6. So they sat down to negotiate, and after a time, the bear walked away alone.
7. The negotiations had been successful.
8. The bear had a full stomach, and the hunter had his fur coat.

B. The Danger of Compromise

1. While there are some areas in life where compromise is a necessity, as in marriage and politics
2. There are others where compromise is *deadly*
3. We're taking a look at the danger of compromise today

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-2

{1} Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and *that* there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates),

{2} that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono." But they thought to do me harm.

1. Under Nehemiah's dynamic leadership, the people completed the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in a mere 52 days!
2. Now all that remained to do was the restoration of the gates and the strengthening of the community *within* the walls.
 - a. we read in chapter 3 how the workers reframed the gates with new timber and prepared the jambs to hold the gates
 - b. the only thing left for them to do was to hang the doors
 - c. and once that was done, the building project would be finished
3. That means Sanballat, Tobiah, and their allies had been defeated
 - a. their desire to halt the work had not been realized
 - b. they knew the gates *would* be hung
 - c. they had lost this battle and they knew it
4. Do you think that because they lost this battle, they would surrender the war?
5. Well, verse 2 seems to suggest just that
6. They sent a message to Nehemiah that says, in effect,

- a. "Look, let's put the past behind us."
 - b. "Let's bury the hatchet and since we're neighbors, let's be neighborly."
 - c. the Plain of Ono was the half way point between Samaria where they lived, and Jerusalem
 - d. so they proposed a face to face get-together
7. This looks like a friendly invitation - but Nehemiah sees it for the thinly disguised trap it is
 8. Since Sanballat and his friends had failed miserably in their attempts to stop the *people* from working, they decided to concentrate their attacks on Nehemiah.
 9. If they could eliminate him, or even discredit him, they could mobilize their allies living in Jerusalem and take over the city.
 10. Up to this point in the building program, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem *opposed* everything that the Jews did;
 11. But now it seems they offered to enter in to a *truce* with the Jews
 12. Of course, the enemy's strategy was, "If you can't whip 'em, join 'em—and then take over!"
 - a. once the enemy gets a foothold in a ministry, he starts to weaken the work from within; and ultimately, the work will fail.
 - b. while cooperation in the Lord's work is a noble thing, leaders must take care that they cooperate with the right people at the right time for the right purpose;
 - c. otherwise they may end up cooperating with the enemy.
 - d. Satan is a master deceiver and has his servants ready to join hands with God's people so he can weaken their hands in the work
 - e. in 2 Cor 11:13-15 Paul warns of

" . . . false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."

- f. this is one of the reasons why we should be concerned about movements in the church which extend the bounds of fellowship to include groups which lie clearly outside the pall of orthodoxy
 - g. when we see national men's ministries that welcome Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses with open arms, it should be of concern to us
 - h. when we see national prayer movements that welcome mainline denominational churches which have embraced policies and doctrines which are downright blasphemous, we should be *gravely* concerned
13. Loving compromise and cooperation can be good and useful things *if there are no moral or spiritual issues involved*.
 - a. reasoned compromise is essential for a successful marriage
 - b. but this is compromise that takes place among people who love each other and have the *same purposes* in mind.
 - c. it's an entirely different thing to compromise with someone who is going in a completely different direction and who has nothing but ill will toward you

B. No Compromise

1. What we see here between Nehemiah and his enemies takes place in our lives as we face our enemy
2. The devil, through ridicule and threats cannot keep the Holy Spirit from

- rebuilding the walls of our personality by conforming us to the image of Christ
3. So he moves to his next tactic - *compromise*
 4. If he cannot keep us from discovering who we are in Christ and from using our authority as God's people, then he will propose a truce
 5. He suggests that we meet on the plain of Ono, some middle ground where we can negotiate a *new* relationship
 6. The problem is that we rarely recognize what is going on
 7. He usually coaches his offer with something like the need for *balance* in our lives
 - a. now don't get me wrong, balance is good
 - b. there are many things in which balance is a virtue
 - c. but the enemy would have us strike a balance somewhere between the love of God and the love of the world
 8. Just a few weeks ago, we saw in Ezra the call to holiness
 - a. to be holy means to be different
 - b. different from what? The world!
 9. The truce the enemy suggests to us is the very opposite of the call to holiness
 - a. he suggests that we moderate our separation from the world
 - b. he counsels that we mix our pursuit of God with a good dose of accommodation to the world
 - c. it's the old attraction of being a believer *and* being hip
 10. But truth be told, what he's inviting is that we compromise with evil
 11. And this invitation is usually private, just as Sanballat and Geshem invited *only* Nehemiah to meet with them in a small and inconspicuous village
 - a. the appeal the enemy makes is, go ahead and be different *publicly*, where others can see
 - b. but in private, in some way that no one will know, go ahead and give in to sin
 - c. it's fine that the walls of your life have been rebuilt and the gates have been re-hung -
 - d. but listen, now that you've come to such an advanced place and are such a great example, how about leaving open one of the side gates
 - e. after all, you've won!
 - f. why not go ahead and let us have access every once in a while, just for old time's sake
 - g. and besides, you can close that door any time you want!
 12. Really, this is what Sanballat is suggesting to Nehemiah
 13. Friend - If you compromise with the devil, or invite him to join your team, expect him to change the rules and the goals; and expect to be defeated.
 - a. he is not your friend, and he is never friendly
 - b. he wants nothing for you but ruin
 - c. he will negotiate for an opening till the very end
 - d. and if you leave it for him, he will enter, and slit your throat
 - e. the enemy does not come to us to negotiate peace; he comes to steal, kill, and destroy
 14. There is a fascinating insight into this truth in Daniel 8 which speaks about the career of that man called the antichrist
 - a. verse 25 says,

"Through his cunning He shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; And he shall exalt *himself* in his heart. And by peace shall destroy many.

- b. note that, "by peace, he shall destroy many."

- c. this word "peace" is a broad one that means being in a place where the peace is so far reaching that brings in prosperity
 - d. in other words, the antichrist will offer people a peace that not only brings an end to violence and hostility but it brings abundance
 - e. and in the desire to have what he holds forth, they will give in to his plans
 - f. but as soon as they take the bait, they will realize they've been doopt
15. What the antichrist will do at the end of history is the same tactic that the enemy uses in our lives today
16. So, how do we respond? Let's see how Nehemiah responded to their offer of compromise

C. Nehemiah's Response

{3} So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I *am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?"

{4} But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner.

1. Nehemiah rejected their offer because of *three convictions*.
 - a. **first**, he knew that they were lying and wanted to kill him.
 - b. **second**, he was convinced of the *greatness* of the work God had given him to do.
 - 1) he knew he was called to *build*
 - 2) he was *not* called to *compromise*
 - 3) you know what - there was a subtle temptation in this for Nehemiah
 - a) after all, while Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem were enemies, they were nevertheless *important* people
 - b) they had contacts and influence all over
 - c) the temptation to meet with these powerful and influential men must have exerted at least *some* kind of pull on Nehemiah
 - 4) It's been interesting to watch over the last 15 years that when certain leaders become well-known,
 - a) they face the temptation to neglect their God-given work and join the "evangelical jet set"
 - b) they take speaking engagements all over the country or the world
 - c) before long, their work at home starts to languish,
 - d) their marriage and family begin to suffer;
 - e) and the enemy gets a foothold.
 - f) unless radical changes are made in their priorities, the result is tragic for both God's people and God's work.
 - g) now, this is not to say that Christian leaders must *never* leave home to minister elsewhere, for they are a gift to *the whole church* and not just to one work
 - h) but when "the wider ministry" is more exciting than the work at home, leaders must beware; for the enemy is at work.
 - i) Dr. Oswald J. Smith used to say, "The light that shines the farthest will shine the brightest at home."
- 5) this is one of the reasons I admire and respect Chuck Smith so much
 - a) there are few men who are as gifted as teachers and leaders in the Body of Christ today
 - b) yet Pastor Chuck has never, ever forgotten his first call - to Pastor his

- church in Costa Mesa
- c) he could be gone every single day of the year, pulling down huge fees as a guest speaker
- d) but that is not his calling
- e) God called him to build the wall in Costa Mesa - and that is where Chuck wants Jesus to find him when he comes again
- c. Nehemiah's **third** conviction was this: The Jews had nothing in common with Sanballat and his crowd, so there could be no basis for cooperation.
- d. for all their fair speech, they were still enemies!
- 2. Not once, but 4 times Sanballat and Geshem made this offer
- 3. And four times, Nehemiah gave precisely the same reply - "NO!"
- 4. If their offer was wrong the first time, it would be wrong the fourth time or the fiftieth time; and there was no reason for him to reconsider.
 - a. decisions based only on *opinions* might be reconsidered,
 - b. but decisions based on *convictions* must stand unless those convictions are changed.
 - c. otherwise, decision becomes indecision; and the person of God who ought to be a *guidepost* becomes a *weather vane*.
- 5. Verse 4 reminds us that the enemy is persistent
 - a. do not think that there will ever come a time in your life where the devil is going to steer a wide course around you because you've arrived at the place of perfection
 - b. no, he is unrelenting in his opposition of you and God's work in your life
 - c. sure he may let up for a season - but not because you're so special
 - d. no, he lets up for a time so that you will be lulled into thinking everything is great, will drop your guard, and then he can deliver a knock out!
 - e. even peace he uses as a weapon!
- 6. One area the devil will be persistent in is the appeal to compromise with the world
- 7. But you know what, God can use the devil's persistence in this area to help reveal our hearts
 - a. if there is a part of our hearts that loves the world, the devil's persistence will wear us down
 - b. but if our hearts belong only to God, the devil's persistence will strengthen our resolve to be holy
 - c. the same sun that hardens clay, melts wax
 - d. the heat is the same on both, but it reveals the fundamental nature of each
 - e. in the same way, the persistent challenge to compromise will reveal our hearts
 - f. and in this we can rejoice, because it means we can see where we need to grow, what place on the wall of our lives the Holy Spirit wants to work

III. CONCLUSION

A. Your Heart

1. Does your heart belong only to God?
2. Does every corner of your heart love Him?
3. Or is there some part of your heart that cleaves to the world?
4. Does compromise mark your life?

5. What a miserable place to be
 - a. there are many today who have too much of the world to be content in God
 - b. but they have too much of God to be happy in the world
6. We were never meant to live with a divided heart
7. James says it in his characteristically blunt manner when he writes in 4:4

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

- a. there is no safe compromise with sin
 - b. compromise is a slippery slope, and the one who sets their foot on it is destined for ruin
8. We must pray as David did in Psalm 139:23-24

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if *there is any wicked way in me*, And lead me in the way everlasting.

9. Once we've asked God to search our hearts, and he's shown us any points of compromise, we need to pray the words of Psalm 86:11

Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; *Unite* my heart to fear Your name.