

Rebuilding Jerusalem

by F.G. Allen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of rebuilding the spiritual Jerusalem by restoring the Church to its original purity and perfection as revealed in the New Testament.

Scripture: Nehemiah 4:17-20, Nehemiah 6:3, Psalm 127:1, 1 Corinthians 3:11, Ephesians 6:11, 2 Timothy 2:15, Jude 1:3

Topics: "Restoration Movement", "Faithfulness To God"

Description

F.G. Allen preaches about the importance of remaining steadfast in the work of God, drawing parallels between Nehemiah's dedication to rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and the need for unwavering commitment to restoring New Testament Christianity. He emphasizes the history of Nehemiah's rebuilding efforts and the opposition he faced, highlighting the necessity of prayer, vigilance, and reliance on God's strength in the face of challenges. Allen stresses the significance of the Restoration movement in returning to the divine model of the early Church, promoting undenominational unity based on the Bible as the sole authority in religion, and resisting compromise with worldly influences.

Transcript

"I am doing a great work, so that I can not come down; why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"--Nehemiah vi:3.

HIS is the language of Nehemiah, the servant of God, to the delegation sent to him by Sanballat and Geshem, asking him to meet them in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono, to hold a council together with reference to the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. In order that we may understand the force and significance of this language, it is necessary that we understand something of the circumstances under which it is spoken. It has an interesting and important history underlying it; and to this your attention is first directed. It is the history of the

REBUILDING OF JERUSALEM BY NEHEMIAH.

Those of you who are Bible readers, and I presume that most of this intelligent audience are, remember that when the Jews were carried away into Babylonian captivity, some of the poorest of the land were left for vine dressers and husbandmen. These continued, with their posterity, in the land of their [82] fathers. During the whole of the captivity, therefore, there were some Jews in and around Jerusalem.

It will be also remembered that during the captivity, a Jew might, by the special favor and providence of God, obtain a high position of trust and honor in the Persian government, such as we find in the case of Daniel, and that of Nehemiah.

Now it came to pass that during the latter part of the captivity, Nehemiah, a man of whose previous history we know nothing, obtained great favor in the eyes of the king, Artaxerxes; so that he enjoyed one of the positions of confidence and honor in his government--that of cup-bearer to the King. While occupying this position, he came into the presence of the King on one occasion with a sad countenance. This was both unbecoming in the King's court, and dangerous; hence we infer that his grief was too intense to be hid. The King saw at once that he had some great sorrow at heart, and immediately asked him the cause. Nehemiah told him that one of his brothers and other Jews had come down from Jerusalem, and he had inquired of them the condition of the Jews that had escaped, who were left of the captivity, and of the condition of the city of Jerusalem.

From these he had learned that the remnant that were left of the captivity were in great affliction and reproach, and that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, and her gates consumed with fire. Consequently he said: "Let the King live forever; why [83] should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchers, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" In the kindness of his heart, the King asked Nehemiah what he could do to alleviate his distress. Then Nehemiah, forgetting all selfish considerations, and prompted by the holy patriotism of his heart, having previously taken the whole matter to God in prayer, in answer to which this favor was granted, asked permission to go over into the land of Judea and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. This was granted, and Nehemiah had placed under his command a small force for the accomplishment of the work. With this little band, he came over to the city of Jerusalem. Nehemiah kept his own counsel. He told no man of the purpose that God had put into his heart. He selected a few reliable men, and with these he went by night and took a survey of the city. The moon must have been riding high in the heavens, and pouring the light of her full-orbed splendor upon the ruins of the "City of the great King," as Nehemiah beheld and described them. The city was in silent slumber; fit emblem of the slumber of the glory of Israel. As an indication of the utter ruin of the city, when Nehemiah came to the gate of the fountain, and to the King's pool, the beast on which he rode could not pass for the debris that filled the way. Having thus made himself thoroughly acquainted with the condition of the city, he matured his plans, and immediately set to work to rebuild the walls, and restore the [84] place of his fathers' sepulchers to its former grandeur and glory. He then revealed to his men the purpose of his heart, and how, through the Divine favor, he had obtained a commission from the King to accomplish the work. The grand ideal of restoring from ruin the city of their fathers, and wresting it from the reproach of their enemies, filled their souls with a holy enthusiasm, so that with one voice they said: "Let us rise up and build the walls."

But no sooner was the work of rebuilding the walls known to the Samaritans and other surrounding tribes, than it met with a united opposition. At first it was to them a source of merriment. They sharpened the shafts of their ridicule, and hurled them at it with fiendish delight. As a sample of their sarcasm, Tobiah, one of the leaders of the opposition, said: "They talk about rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem! The walls that they would build, even if a fox were to go up, he would break down their stone wall!" But Nehemiah was not to be turned from his purpose by this kind of warfare. His heart was set upon his work, and he was taking counsel with God, not with men.

But when the opposition saw that this kind of warfare was unavailing, like the farmer who could not bring the boy down from his apple-tree with tufts of grass, tried what virtue there was in stones, they resorted to

a severer kind of weapons. They now brought the force of their united armies to bear against the work. When they saw that the walls [85] were going to be built, and that a fox would not be likely to push them down, then the Arabians and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites, were exceedingly wroth, and conspired all of them together to fight against Jerusalem, and to prevent the accomplishment of the work.

When this emergency arose, Nehemiah placed some of his men on guard, fully armed and equipped, and every man of his working force had his sword girded by his side, and with one hand held a weapon while he wrought upon the wall with the other. The enthusiasm with which the nobility of their work inspired them was manifest in that they worked upon the walls from the "rising of the morning" till the stars appeared at evening, and then slept by their work at night, so as to be a perpetual guard to it; and none of them put off his clothing, save that every one put them off for washing. Catching the spirit of their leader, the unanimity of the entire force is thus expressed: "The people had a mind to work."

It was also the purpose of Nehemiah to bring up the walls in uniformity, not one part to the neglect of another. This being the case, and the walls being "great and large," his men were "separated upon the wall one far from another," consequently they were few and weak at any given point. Therefore Nehemiah, issued an order that at the sound of the trumpet, which was kept near him, they should all rally to the point of attack. Whenever an attack was made, the bugle sounded, the forces rallied, the [86] enemy was driven back, and never was there a breach made in the wall.

Now, that the walls are completed, and the ponderous gates are ready to be set up, there comes a change in the tactics of the opposition. Sanballat and Geshem, two of the principal leaders, send a delegation to Nehemiah, requesting that he meet them in some one of the villages of the plain of Ono, to hold a counsel together with reference to the rebuilding of Jerusalem. This is the coolest, specimen of impudence in the inspired record. The devil himself never surpassed it. They had opposed the work from its incipiency; first by ridicule, then by force of arms. But now that they see it is to be a grand success in spite of all their opposition, they want to hold a counsel about it, as if it was any of their business. But Nehemiah knew their purpose. He was too old a bird to be caught with chaff. He knew that they sought to do him mischief. And well might one less wise than he know that when such diplomacy follows the unsuccessful force of arms, mischief is always brewing. Nehemiah had no respect for such trickery; consequently he had no time for a council with such men in the plain of Ono, or anywhere else. He therefore responded in the language of the text "I am doing a great work, and can not come down; why should the work cease while I leave it and come down to you?"

But perhaps, some one is ready to say: "All this is a very interesting lesson in Jewish history, but [87] what is there in it for us? What bearing has it on the religion of Christ?" Much in several respects. I think it contains a very important lesson for us in our plea for the restoration of New Testament Christianity. For, be it remembered, much of Jewish history was typical of a diviner substance in the Church of Christ, and especially was this true of that part that pertained to the temple and to the Holy City. But even if we should waive the typical character of the lesson, we are enabled, by analogy, to get a clearer conception of our work as a religious people, than we could perhaps otherwise get. Hence, to this analogy your attention is now invited. It is found in the

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH.

When Christ established His Church on the earth, it continued for about three hundred years in one united body. During this time, while it had its troubles without, and its imperfections within, it was not troubled with

the divisions now produced by sects and denominations. This was before denominationalism was born, or sectarianism became respectable. The followers of Christ were simply disciples, or Christians. They belonged simply to the Church of Christ, or, which is the same, to the Church of God. They wore no human names, nor did they belong to any sect or denomination, such as are now claimed to be within the pale of the Church of God. This everybody knows who knows anything of the New [88] Testament. But finally the "man of sin," whom Paul describes, began to be manifest. One corruption followed another, till the Church was led away into a dark night of captivity, strikingly typified by the Babylonian captivity of the Jews. The Church was in Babylon, and, like the Jews, the devoted friends of the Master, hung their harps on the willows, and mourned over the desolation of Zion. The Great apostasy predicted by Paul was upon the Church, and her few uncorrupted children sat in sack-cloth and ashes. Be it remembered that this great apostasy originated and developed within the Church, not without. Brethren, allow me to suggest a gentle warning just at this point.

The night of the Church's captivity grew darker as it grew longer, till twelve hundred years lay like a pall of death upon her prostrate form. During the greater part of this time the Bible was virtually a sealed book, just as the Church of Rome would like to have it sealed today. The priest-ridden people were kept in ignorance of the Word of God; indulgences were sold as cattle in the market, to meet the extravagances of the papal court, and the temples dedicated to the service of Jehovah became but whitened sepulchers, full of the corruption of death.

In the sixteenth century that grand man of God, Martin Luther, awoke the world, as it were, from a slumber of ages, and gave the Bible to the people. By exposing the corruptions of the Church of Rome, and giving the Bible to the people to read for [89] themselves, he gave the "man of sin," a blow from which he has never recovered and never will.

Luther attempted to reform the Church of Rome. In this he failed. That Church is as corrupt to-day except so far as it has been influenced externally by its contact with Protestantism, as it was in the days of Luther. But while Luther failed, signally, to reform the Church of Rome, he succeeded in building up a mighty power in the earth, protesting against these corruptions, and hence called Protestantism.

But while Luther accomplished a great work in the world, for which we delight to honor his memory, it never entered into his mind to cease his fruitless efforts at reforming a corrupt and apostate Church--a thing which, as yet, has never been accomplished--and going back over all the dark and corrupt ages of the Church's history, and taking the divine model which God has left us in the days of its primitive purity, and reconstruct the Church as it was at the beginning. At least, if such a thought ever entered his mind, he never acted upon it; hence it has never come down to us.

Contemporary with Luther, and co-operating with him in his grand work, were other great reformers; such as Zwingle, Knox, and Calvin. Of all these, Zwingle alone seemed to have a correct conception of such a reformation as the age demanded. These are the different lights in which he and Luther viewed the same subject: "Luther was desirous of retaining in the Church all that was not expressly [90] contradicted by Scripture, while Zwingle was intent on abolishing all that could not be proved by Scripture. The German Reformer wished to remain united to the Church of all preceding ages (that is, the Roman Catholic Church), and sought only to purify it from everything that was repugnant to the word of God. The Reformer of Zurich passed back over every intervening age till he reached the times of the Apostles; and, subjecting the Church to an entire transformation, labored to restore it to its primitive condition."--D'Aubigne's History of the Reformation. But while Zwingle had this just conception of a true reformation his influence was

overshadowed by that of Luther; hence his principles never obtained in what is known as the Reformation of the sixteenth century.

Following this, in the eighteenth century, was the Reformation of John Wesley. Wesley's work was, in some respects, similar to that of Luther. He labored to reform the Church of England, of which he lived and died a member. But in this, like Luther trying to reform the Church of Rome, he made a signal failure. His efforts resulted, however, in the building up of another denomination characterized largely by those principles which he tried to infuse into the Church of England. But great as was the work of Mr. Wesley, for which we delight to do him honor, it seems never to have entered into his mind to leave the Church with which he stood identified, whose corruptions he was powerless to correct, and, [91] going back over all the intervening ages to the days of the Apostles, reconstruct the Church of Christ; it was at the beginning. None of the Reformations of the past, therefore, were based upon this principle. It is chiefly in this respect that the Reformation with which we to-day stand identified differs from all others. Hence it is in strict propriety called

THE RESTORATION.

The current Reformation, inaugurated by the Campbells and their co-laborers, was not an effort to reform some existing church or denomination, as such. Evidently the correction of the unscriptural abuses in all the denominations was one purpose for which these godly men labored, yet it was not the fundamental principle on which their Reformation was based, nor the leading object for which it was inaugurated.

Neither was it the purpose of these Reformers to establish a new church, or to build up another sect or denomination in the world. They believe that already the world was cursed with too many; hence, to add another to the number was the farthest thing from their purpose.

Since their leading object was not to reform churches or denominations as such, nor to establish another, the question arises, what was the specific

OBJECT OF THIS REFORMATION.

I shall attempt briefly to answer this question. [92]

About the beginning of the second quarter of the nineteenth century there seemed to be, in the special providence of God, a turning of many minds, wholly disassociated and unknown to one another, to the Word of God as the only authority in religion. There seemed to be almost a simultaneous longing in many hearts to throw off the yoke of human bondage in religion, and form their faith and practice simply and purely by the Holy Scriptures. Chief among these were Thomas and Alexander Campbell.

In contemplating the Word of God as our only authority in religion, these men saw the wonderful reformation that it involved as a consequence. They saw that the Church, as it was at first established, when it knew no other authority but that of divine inspiration, had fallen under the apostasy predicted by Paul.

It was led away into its Babylonish captivity by the "man of sin;" and from this bondage it had never been liberated. Luther had broken the fetters with which Rome had for ages manacled the people of God; but instead of bidding the captives go free, and return to their native land, he strove only to mitigate their bondage. Consequently the Church was yet in Babylon. It had long been her privilege to go out, but as yet she had no one to lead the way.

This was what the Church of God needed above all things else--to be taken out of Babylon; and this, by the help of God, they resolved to attempt, [93] They resolved to go back over all the dark and polluted pages of the Church's history, disregarding all authority that had been usurped during the long centuries of her captivity, until the golden age of her virgin purity was found, before the polluting touch of human hands was laid upon her, or the perfume of her garments defiled by the foul breath of the apostasy, and restore her to the world in all the divine perfection that characterized her when she emanated from Him who said: "On this rock I will build my Church." Or, in other words, it was their purpose, like that of Nehemiah, to go up out of the land of captivity and rebuild the walls of the spiritual Jerusalem. Those walls had been broken down. Those gates had been consumed. The city of our fathers lay in ruins. Its principal highways were blockaded with rubbish. Even the sepulchers of those dearest to our hearts were dishonored. Laying aside the figure, it was their purpose to go back to the beginning, and, taking the Church as it is revealed to us in all its characteristics in the New Testament, restore it to the world precisely as it was at first. Their work, then, was really a work of restoration.

Every one must admit that the Church of God, during the first age of its history, when everything, both in faith and practice, organically, was given it by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was just such a Church as God would have. Had He desired it otherwise, He would have ordered it otherwise. [94] Not only was this true for that age, but for all ages. He who saw the end from the beginning, constituted His Church to meet the wants of His cause in all times and in all countries. This being true, it follows that the restoration of that Church in all respects as it was at the beginning, is the thing above all others that God in His providence would have accomplished. If He does not look upon a work of this kind with special favor, then we are without evidence that He looks with favor upon the observance of any divine precept or example. That which was well pleasing to the divine Father in the establishing and perfecting of the Church, must be well pleasing to Him now. If this be not true, then we are left in this age without a criterion of truth. It seems to us, therefore, that this work, when properly understood, must meet the approbation of all good men. While it lays the ax at the root of all sects and parties in religion, it lifts us infinitely above them. Since the Church of God at the beginning was purely a divine institution, its restoration is a divine work. Such a work is as far above that of laboring to build up a mere sect or party in the world, as the divine is above the human. This work is not in the spirit of sect. It is wholly

UNDENOMINATIONAL.

Since the Church of God in the apostolic age did not contain sects and denominations such as now claim to be identical with that institution, it follows [95] that whenever the Church is restored as it was in that age, it will be divested of all these denominational peculiarities. Whether the Church restored shall eventually cover the whole earth, and destroy all denominationalism, or whether it shall obtain only in part, the principle is the same--it will be wholly undenominational.

The world is exceedingly slow to learn that Christianity may be purely undenominational. I do not mean in the sense in which Moody and that class of sensationalists use the word, and even in which some brethren are now using it--that is, laboring in the interests of all denominations. But I mean it in its true sense--that is, standing identified with no denomination.

When you talk to men about being a Christian, they want to know what kind of a Christian. Or in other words they want to know what you are in addition to being a Christian. When you tell them that you are simply a Christian; that you decline to be anything else, they know not where to place you. When you tell them that you belong to the Church of God, or, which is the same, the Church of Christ, they want to know

to which branch of the Church, or to what denomination you belong. When you tell them that you don't belong to any denomination, but simply to the Church of Christ, they are unable to give you a "local habitation and a name." Yet this is one of the simplest things in all the world. This was precisely the [96] position of the first Christians. They were Christians, or disciples of Christ, and they were not anything else. They belonged to the Church of Christ, and they did not belong to anything else. In this consisted their unity.

The undenominational attitude of New Testament Christianity may be clearly perceived by the aid of a simple illustration. It is said that during the late war a circumstance of this kind occurred in Northern Kentucky. Two preachers of different denominations who were quite friendly, as all preachers would be if it were not for these unscriptural divisions, concluded to hold a meeting together. The understanding was that each was to lay aside his denominational peculiarities, and they would labor together to bring sinners to Christ, without reference to denomination. Then, at the conclusion of the meeting, their converts, if they should have any, should be left free to identify themselves with either denomination, as they preferred. As well as I remember, and it was where I lived, they had about twenty converts. Assuming that they were truly converted, they were converts to Christ, not to party. They were all brought to faith in Christ, and to repentance of sins, and were buried with Christ in baptism. Now, before these converts are divided, and take their denominational stand, while on the seat before us, I want to ask with reference to them, a few questions.

1. What are they? They are Christians. This [97] every one must admit. For if they are not Christians, then believing in Christ and obeying the Gospel do not make one a Christian. But what else are they? Nothing. Not yet; as yet they have taken no other name. They are simply Christians; nothing more; nothing less.

2. To what church do they belong? To the Church of Christ. If not, then becoming a Christian does not make one a member of the church of Christ. They have believed in Christ, been baptized into His death, and become members of His body. They, therefore, belong to the Church of God. But to what denomination do they belong? They do not belong to any. As yet they have taken no denominational stand. They belong simply to the Church of Christ; nothing more; nothing less. They now occupy a position in which all Protestants, at least, admit them to be Christians and members of the Church of Christ.

3. Now suppose that, perceiving this, and seeing that they occupy the most popular and "orthodox" position possible, they conclude to continue in that position, and refuse, therefore, to go with either of the preachers. On the contrary, they continue to meet and edify one another, and to keep the ordinances as they were observed by the first Christians. Then what are they? The world must answer: They are Christians. What more than Christians? Nothing more. To what church do they belong? To the Church of Christ. To what denomination do they [98] now belong? To none. They stand precisely where the first Christians stood in all these respects; and they constitute just such a congregation as those engaged in this work of restoration have been constituting all over the land for the last half a century.

I know it is sometimes thought presumptuous to speak of belonging to the same Church to which Paul and Peter belonged. But I must be allowed to say, that if I could not belong to the same Church to which they belonged, I would not belong to any. If I could not stand where the Apostles stood, I would stand nowhere. Every one admits that Paul belonged to the Church of Christ. But to what denomination did he belong? Every one knows that he did not belong to any. Therefore, there is such a thing as belonging to the Church of Christ without belonging to any denomination; and, in so doing, standing precisely where the Apostle stood, and occupying the position of all the primitive Christians and thus presenting the only

Scripture ground of

CHRISTIAN UNION.

The leaders of the Reformation saw very clearly that the Church thus restored would enable all God's people, who love truth more than party, to unite on the ground on which the first Christians were united during the golden age of the Church's purity. The Church as it was, without any human legislation, furnished the ground of Christian union then, and that alone can furnish a basis of Christian union [99] now. Consequently the union of all God's people on the Bible as our only authority in religion was the ultimate object to be accomplished by the restoration of the Church. Grand conception! Glorious execution! The very thought never ceases to thrill me! I desire no higher honor on earth than to give all the powers of my life to the advancement of such a work, nor any greater glory in heaven than that which God has in reservation for those who are true to Him in this the divinest and holiest work ever committed to uninspired men.

That we occupy the only ground on which Protestantism can unite against its common and relentless foe--Catholicism--is simply conceded by those who have the freedom to impartially think, and the courage to fearlessly speak. Of this we had, but a few years ago, a striking illustration. During the excitement in the city of Cincinnati over the exclusion of the Bible from the public schools in the interests of Roman Catholicism, a public meeting was held at some point that I do not now remember, in the state of Indiana, of various denominations, to express their sentiments with reference to the introductory step in a mighty contest between the enemies and the friends of the Bible--a contest between the authority of "the Church" on the one hand, and that of the Book on the other. During the meeting, a minister of high standing in one of the most influential denominations in the world, speaking of the conflict which must inevitably come between [100] Catholicism and Protestantism, and how Protestantism must be united in order to meet it, turned to one of our preachers who was occupying the stand with him, and, taking him by the hand, said; When it comes to this, my brother, then we will meet you on 'THE BIBLE AND THE BIBLE ALONE!'

The inference from this is clear. As the exponent of the sentiments of that meeting, and of the Protestantism which it represented, that speaker virtually said; "We will maintain our partyism, and keep up our divisions till in the providence of God we are driven together; then we will come to that position to which you have for half a century been inviting us in harmony with the intercessory prayer of Jesus! Your position is right, and the only Scriptural and possible ground of union, but we will not come to it as long as we can help it! When forced from our sectarian position we will go to yours!" How wondrous are God's ways in making wrath of man to praise Him!

Since "it is glorious to create, but more glorious to redeem," the redemption of the Church of God from its captivity and apostasy, is the most glorious work that ever thrilled, the human heart, or nerved the human will. My faith is that God's benediction will ever rest on the man who is faithful to this work, and that His curse will ever follow him who abandons it, or understandingly opposes it. But that the work of restoring the Church was to be opposed, is clearly indicated in several places in the Bible, [101] and typified, perhaps, in the opposition experienced by Nehemiah. Hence a few words with reference to the

OPPOSITION TO THE WORK.

The ridicule and contempt heaped upon the work of Nehemiah in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, have been more than reproduced by those who have set themselves in opposition to the work of rebuilding the walls of the spiritual Jerusalem of which that was a type. Especially have the fathers in this Restoration

experienced this in a high degree. "These people talk about restoring the Church as it was in the beginning! Why the church that they would restore, even the bats and owls would hardly deign to occupy in twenty years!"

Forty years ago, such prophetic sarcasm was common as household words, not only in the family, and the irresponsible neighborhood gossip, but in the pulpit and the public prints. But there were false prophets in those days, even as there are false prophets now. These sect-inspired seers were estimated at their proper value; hence those grand men of God were not to be turned from their heaven-born purpose by the sneers and scoffs of a people who did not comprehend, and consequently did not appreciate, their work.

But this was not the only kind of opposition which the work was destined to meet. The united force of arms brought to bear against this work, like that against the work of Nehemiah, has made this [102] country resound with their clash for half a century Where is there a grand old hero in this contest for things as they were at the beginning, who has not felt the blows of the enemy, thick and heavy, from every quarter, and smiled as he heard their harmless ring upon his armor? AM my brethren, the man whose spirit is not stirred within him, whose best mettle is not aroused, who is not inspired with no mean kind of inspiration, as he stands in the thickest of such a fight for such a cause, clad in an armor of divine truth as impenetrable as the shield of Achilles, is a stranger to the spirit of genuine, sanctified chivalry ! But, soul-inspiring as is this plea, and the labor for its accomplishment, there have ever been those who object, and I wish to notice the grounds of their

OBJECTIONS TO THE WORK.

"The idea of reconstructing the Church of God after the divine model, and on this confessedly orthodox ground unite God's people as they were at the beginning, I grant," said one of the leading men of Kentucky to me, "to be a grand conception of spiritual work in this age, and worthy of all acceptance; but I have serious objections to some of your methods of accomplishing the work."

"First. I think your people are too fond of controversy. You are too pugnacious. You delight too much in theological warfare."

Now, in this, I frankly confess there may be some truth. It may be that we are just a trifle more [103] pugnacious than necessary. People are liable at times to overestimate the importance of opposition, and do more in meeting it than it really deserves. But if, in our work of restoration, we have occupied a war-like attitude, the question arises, who is to blame for it? If there has been too much theological warfare over this work of restoration, blame certainly attaches somewhere; then let us see who is responsible, and let the blame rest where it belongs.

When Nehemiah's men went forth on the wall day after day, each one with a sword girded by his side, and holding a weapon in one hand while he worked upon the wall with the other, what did it mean? Why were they thus armed? Were their arms any advantage to them in their work? Were they wearing them simply as ornaments, in whose glitter they took more delight than in their work? To ask these questions is to answer them. Nehemiah's work was opposed by the force of arms. He was, therefore, left to the alternative of arming his men, and defending his work while he prosecuted it, or, in craven cowardice, to abandon the enterprise. In the fear of God, and the love of his work, he chose the former; and his name is enrolled high upon the scroll of God's grandest heroes. The arming in his case was a necessity; and it has been none the less so in ours. Our work has been opposed; opposed by theological arms; opposed by the united forces of Christendom, because it means death to their party divisions; consequently we had to arm

ourselves, [104] stand upon those walls, repulse the enemy as the work progressed, or, in the contemptible fear of human opposition against a divine work, ignobly abandon it. In the fear of God, and the love of truth, we chose to stand upon those walls, and by the help of God we expect to stand there till He shall say, "Well done! good and faithful soldiers!" It is not our purpose to leave these walls and draw a sword or poise a lance outside of their limits; but woe be unto him who assaults the work! The objection, then, to our warlike attitude is not well founded. It is based on a misconception of our relation to the work. The blame attaches to the opposition; and there let it rest.

"Secondly," says the objector, "you lay too much stress upon some parts of your work, and not enough upon other parts. For instance, you attach too much importance to baptism. You preach too much about it; write too much about it; debate too much about it. You seem to lay more stress on baptism than on any other part of your work. Instead of advancing your work, I think you retard it by this everlasting harping on baptism."

Now, that all of this may contain some truth I have no disposition to deny. I think it is at least probable that we have given just a little more attention to baptism than the strength of the opposition has demanded. Indeed, it would have required wisdom more than human to have determined at all times just the amount of force necessary to protect any part of the work from the opposition that sought [105] its destruction. That man is a skillful gunner who never uses shot too numerous nor too heavy for the game.

But if we have given more attention to baptism than to some other parts of our work, the question again arises: Who is responsible for this? Remember that when Nehemiah was rebuilding those walls, he labored to bring them all up in uniformity--not one part to the neglect of another. Consequently he said, "The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. In what place, therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us; our God shall fight for us." Now, imagine yourself standing on one of the mountains overlooking the city. You are watching the men as they quietly perform their work on all parts of the walls. Every man has his sword girded by his side, and holds a weapon in one hand while he works on the wall with the other. You discover, however, that their minds are not on their weapons, but on their work. You look down one of the valleys and you see the "army of Samaria" stealthily approaching the city. It is unobserved by the workmen. It selects its point of attack, and rushes to make a breach in the wall. Instantly the trumpet sounds, instantly the forces rally--to the other side of the city! What would you think of it? What would the world think of it? Those workmen would be held in everlasting contempt.

When did Nehemiah's trumpet sound? When an [106] attack was made. When did the workmen rally? When the trumpet sounded. Where did they rally? To the point of attack--the place where the enemy was. Therefore, if they rallied to one place more frequently than to another, it was not because they valued this part of the wall more highly than any other part, but because the enemy had selected that part for its attack. Precisely so with the workmen on the spiritual walls of the city of our God.

If we have had much controversy over baptism, it is not because we value it more highly than any other part of the work of restoration. It has been our purpose to bring this work up in uniformity, and hence to guard with equal care every part of it. What would baptism without faith be worth? Just as much as the sprinkling of an infant. And yet we have had comparatively little controversy over faith. Occasionally we are called to meet an infidel at this point, and fight the battles of our religious neighbors, as well as our own. Who met, in the city of Cincinnati, in 1829, the boastful champion of infidelity, who had come from the far-off shores of Scotland, and, Goliath-like, had challenged to deadly combat the "clergy" of our land,

from New Orleans to Boston? Was it a man who lightly estimated faith in Christ, and made baptism the center of a religious system? The believing world, whose battle was there fought and gloriously won, know better. Who fought the battle of Protestantism in the same city, in 1837, against a power that would nullify the Word of God, [107] and subvert our pure faith in Jesus Christ into the veriest idolatry? Was it one who held as efficacious mere external forms, regardless of the spirituality for which Protestantism has ever contended? I envy not the head nor the heart of him who so contends.

We have had little or religious neighbors over no controversy over the divinity of Christ, prayer, repentance, godliness and the like. Not because we do not value these things as highly as it is possible to value anything else, but because they have not been assailed. Let one of them be attacked, and the trumpet will sound, the forces will rally, and the clash of arms over that hitherto quiet point will awaken the sleeping energies of Zion! The controversy over baptism, then, depends wholly on the movements of the opposition. So long as they see proper to attack that point, we are prepared to defend it. And equally so of every other part of the work.

NO COMPROMISE.

When the opposition saw that the walls of Jerusalem were to be completed in spite of their efforts to prevent it, they changed their tactics. They tried to induce Nehemiah to leave the work and counsel with them with reference to its completion. But he saw that this was only another trick to accomplish that which they had failed to accomplish by the force of arms. And just here, dear brethren, is our greatest danger. [108] While we remain true to the principles on which we started out, there is no earthly power that can impede our progress. But the day we leave these walls and go out to take counsel with the world, will mark the day of our decline. We have nothing to fear from without. Our only danger is from within. This danger lies in the direction of indifference and compromise. While we are true to God in the maintenance of these principles, the divine blessing will rest upon our work. But should they ever be surrendered, ruin will as certainly follow as that the Bible is true.

When God dipped His hand in chaos and bespangled the universe with worlds He impressed upon them His divine will, and they rejoiced in that impression. In this impression they received the laws regulating their existence, and the moment one of those laws is resisted, disaster follows. When shining ranks of angels leaped forth from His open hand, they received a knowledge of His will, and they delighted in that knowledge; but the day that some disregarded it, they fell eternally under the divine wrath. When man issued from the plastic fingers of the Almighty, reflecting the Divine Image, the crowning work of His hands, he received a law of life unto life, or of death unto death. While he rejoiced in that law God was his companion and friend, but the day he compromised it with Satan, he fell from the favor of God, and went out under the curse of the Almighty. When God established [109] His Church on the divinity of Jesus, and under the authority of His Son, He developed that Church under His fostering care till it rejoiced in a full-grown manhood in Christ. But when that Church forgot the lessons of its development, it went into apostasy and bondage. When God put it into the hearts of our fathers to restore that Church according to its divine model, their souls were thrilled with the thought, and they rejoiced in the privilege. While they have builded according to the model, as Moses built the Tabernacle, they have received unsurpassed tokens of God's approbation; but the day that their posterity depart from that model and begin to build after the wisdom of the world, that day will God's presence and glory depart from them! Would to God I had the power to express this thought with angelic force, and burn it into the memory of our young preachers with a tongue of fire!

Never did a people have greater encouragement to hold fast their fundamental principles than do we. Their growth in the world has been unprecedented. The growth of Methodism has been regarded as one of the wonders of the world; and yet, when Mr. Wesley's plea for reformation had been earnestly pressed for nearly forty years, its adherents in Great Britain and Ireland numbered only 150 preachers and 35,000 members. At Mr. Wesley's death, when the principles of his Reformation had been proclaimed for about half a century, they were accepted [110] in Europe, America and the West India Islands, by a membership of only 80,000.

In estimating the numbers throughout the world that have accepted the principles of Restoration in half a century, would it be far from correct to multiply these figures by ten? The growth of Methodism was after the first half century of its existence. Our growth in the past has been unprecedented, and we have only to be true to God in the work He has assigned us, to see results in the next half century that will amaze the world.

But in estimating the influence of our plea for Restoration, we are not to look simply to the numbers that have publicly taken their stand on this ground. The influence of these principles on the denominational world in the correction of excesses and abuses, has been one of its marked results. The religious thought of the world to-day drifting more in the direction of the supreme authority of the one Book, and the union of God's people on that Book, than ever before since the apostasy of the church. We have, then, but to remain true to our principles--a "thus sayeth the Lord," in matters of faith; the largest liberty in matters of opinion. Uncompromising in essentials; relenting in incidentals. As unchangeable as the divine decrees, where God has bound us; as yielding as a mother's love, where He has left us free--and ere long they will prevail from pole to pole, and from the rivers to the ends of the earth. [111]

In conclusion, let us not forget an important fact in the history of Nehemiah's work. The secret of his grand success is thus expressed: "We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch day and night." Brethren, while eternal vigilance is the price of an uncorrupted religion, eternal prayfulness is its life. Therefore, while we set a watch day and night over the faith of the Church, let us not forget to make our prayer unto our God for its purity. While we gird on our sword and sleep by our work, "that we may be a guard to it by night, and labor on the day," let us not forget that "our sufficiency is of God."

One by one we will lay our armor down at the feet of the Captain of our salvation. One by one we will be laid away by tender hands and aching hearts to rest on the bosom of Jesus. One by one will our ranks be thus thinned, till ere long we shall all pass over to the other side. But our cause will live. Eternal truth can never perish. God will look down from His habitation on high, watch over it in His providence, and encircle it in the arms of His love. God will raise up others to take our places; and may we transmit the cause to them in its purity! Though dead, we shall thus speak for generations yet to come, and God grant that we shall give forth no uncertain sound! Then may we from our blissful home on high, watch the growth of the cause we love, till it shall cover the whole earth as the waters cover the face of the great deep. [112]

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/fg-allen/rebuilding-jerusalem/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net