

Rubbish Behind the Wall

by George H. Alquist Jr.

The sermon highlights the reality of the enemies of God's work and the importance of removing the rubbish behind our spiritual walls to build a strong and effective wall for God's work.

Scripture: Nehemiah 4:1, Isaiah 59:2, Matthew 16:18, 2 Corinthians 6:17, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Overcoming Sin"

Description

George H. Alquist Jr. preaches on Nehemiah and the building of the wall, illustrating the reality of enemies hindering God's work. He emphasizes that wherever God's people work, enemies are at work to hinder progress, but ultimately cannot stop God's plan. Alquist highlights three groups of hinderers: those who say 'Ye Shall Not' from outside opposition, those who say 'Ye Ought Not' with one foot in the world, and those who say 'We Cannot' due to internal struggles with sin and rubbish. He urges believers to recognize and remove the sin (rubbish) hindering their spiritual growth and effectiveness in God's work.

Transcript

"But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews."

And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?

"Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.

"Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity:

"And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders.

"So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.

"But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth,

"And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.

"Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.

'And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall." Neh. 4:1 -10

Nehemiah and his wall is an apt illustration of the reality of the enemies of God's work. Wherever God's people are doing God's work, God's enemies are fast at work. The Devil's thrust is to hinder the Lord's work and to try to stop it, but the Devil cannot do that.

The Bible says the church is built upon the foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ and 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!' The church is a victorious entity that marches through time by the power of Christ.

As we look at Nehemiah's building of the wall, we see three groups of hinderers at work against the Lord's work. We also see them at work in our own lives today.

I. 'Ye Shall Not'

The 'ye shall not' group usually consists of those from without, the unsaved, those who oppose God's work whether it be Nehemiah's wall, Christ's church, our own Christian growth or our own Christian life. Those from without want to say, "Ye shall not!"

In Nehemiah's case, this group consisted of Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem and all that company that followed them.

"But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?" Neh. 2:19

The enemies of God are saying to Nehemiah, 'Ye shall not build the wall!'

"But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth,

"And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it." Neh. 4:7,8

They did not believe in God, had no affinity with His work, and they mocked Him. So they conspired together to try to hinder the work of God being done in Jerusalem. These men had actually made a sinister plot to stop the work.

"And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease." Vs. 11

They conspired against the work of God, made it known publicly, and said, "Ye shall not build that wall!"

Men like this still exist today! Often they are more sophisticated and more cleverly camouflaged than these men in the Book of Nehemiah, but they are present among us today! These enemies of the cross conspire against the work of God and the advancement of the Gospel of Christ on a worldwide level.

Five Hinderers of the Work of Christ

1. City government is a hinderer. With its zoning restrictions and frivolous and costly codes, city government is hindering the work of Christ and the promotion of the Gospel in various ways. We cannot have anything that relates to Christ on a public building nor have a manger scene in the public square. Government is a hinderer that says, 'Ye shall not!'

2. Look at the federal government and its abuse of what they call the separation of church and state. It tries to use this straw man, this misinterpretation of the Constitution of the United States, to foster the idea of separation of church and state to the extreme that they believe nothing of the church should have any influence upon the state-the exact opposite from the belief of our Founding Fathers. They said government shall not establish a religion, but they were always in favor of allowing religion to influence the government. It's easy to verify this. Read their statements, their writings; go to Washington and see the Word of God all over the buildings they built.

Yet today the federal government says, "Ye shall not build!" It tries to use separation of church and state as an excuse to hinder the work of Christ.

3. Not only have the city and federal governments conspired to hinder the work, but the public school system is also a hinderer.

Public education teaches pro-evolution and pro-homosexuality. It has its own agenda: to brainwash the children of the United States. They teach the children that homosexuality, abortion and all these 'alternate lifestyles' are okay. They teach children that creation is a lie and that evolution is true; yet they cannot prove evolution, and they cannot disprove creation! It is a conspiracy against Christianity that says, 'Ye shall not build!'

4. The court system is a hinderer. Its pro-abortion decisions are standing against the Word of God.

5. The legislative bodies are hinderers. Their hate-crime legislation is headed in the direction of halting Christianity. Mark it down, this hate-crime legislation will get to the point where Christian preachers will be in danger when they preach against sin; when they preach against homosexuality, it will be called a hate crime; when they preach against immorality, it will be called a hate crime; when they preach against abortion, it will be called a hate crime.

You don't believe it will happen? Hang on awhile. If things keep going the way they are going, it will be dangerous for a preacher to stand in the pulpit and preach the Gospel from the Word of God.

These hinderers and others are in effect saying, "We've had enough of your Christianity. We've had enough of your morals. We've had enough of your restrictive lifestyles and trying to jam old-fashioned teachings down our throats. We're going to halt it. You will not build!"

Needless to say, the work continues because the work of Christ will march onward no matter who conspires against it.

These are some of the enemies, the hinderers, just like in Nehemiah's day, who say, "Ye shall not."

II. "Ye Ought Not"

There are hinderers who say, "Ye shall not" but there are others who say, 'Ye ought not.' This group usually consists of those who have one foot in the work and one foot out in the world.

"And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them [the enemies: Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, the Arabians, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites] came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you." Vs. 12

These hinderers are those Jews who had one foot in Jerusalem and one foot over with the enemies. These Jews had lived so near the enemy that they were influenced by the threats of the enemy. Ten times they came to Jerusalem and became a hindrance to the work of God. They said, "Maybe you ought not be so dead set on building this wall. Don't you understand that you are putting yourselves and your families in danger? Maybe you should calm down a bit about this matter. Maybe you ought not be so foolhardy. Let's talk about it."

They solicited the Jews one by one to abandon the work on the wall with appeals of genuine concern for their safety and that of their families. Today this group is comprised of weak, anemic, worldly Christians who have one foot in the church and one foot in the world. Their walk is wobbly and unsteady.

What do they say to the Christians who want to win people to Christ, who want to live like their forefathers - men and women who had standards and something about them that was different than the world? They say this: "Well, maybe you ought not be so strong headed about living for the Lord. It is the twenty-first century, you know!"

This group of hinderers have been influenced by the world because they choose to live so close to the world. They would rather live closer to Arabia than to Jerusalem. They would rather live closer to the Ashdodites than to the Jewish people. They have been influenced by the enemies in the land because they choose to live so close to them.

These hinderers have listened so closely to the world that they have adopted their ways. Living too close to the world causes them to adopt the world's thinking and philosophies and its way of doing things. They will start to mimic the world and pattern their Christian lives after the world.

For example: They have created 'Christian rock' from country rock; they have the world's ways, but they still want to be considered scriptural Christians.

In our text, these Jews had been influenced by Sanballat Tobiah and Geshem and the other hinderers. They had now adopted their philosophies, but in their thinking they still wanted to be considered Jews.

So these hinderers came up with an idea: 'We'll change their minds by reminding them of the dangers to themselves and their families.' They tried to hinder the work which God had called Nehemiah to do.

Just as America has subcultures within it hinderers have created an entire subculture within Christianity. There is the subculture of the hippie Christians, the Gothic Christians, the rock 'n' roll Christians, the grunge Christians (shabby and sloppy in appearance). These subcultures are nothing more than little satellites of worldliness floating around within the realm of Christianity.

These people live too close to the world. They have been influenced by the Ashdodites. They bring their influences into their Christianity and say, 'Preacher, you ought not preach against sin!' 'Fundamentalist, you ought not be so judgmental against sin!'

The Bible says what sin is and what it is not. It says that Jesus, Paul and Peter preached against sin. From Genesis through Revelation we find preaching against sin; yet today the weak, wimpy, namby-pamby Christians say, 'Ye ought not!'

I don't judge! God is the judge, and I preach what He teaches.

These hinderers of the Gospel of Jesus say, 'O preacher, you ought not mention names when you're preaching!' Well, Paul did. He warned Christians to beware of Alexander the coppersmith.

Weak Christians today do not want us to mention names. Tell me, how are you going to know who is right and who is wrong if the preacher does not name names?

The Bible says, 'Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing' (11 Cor. 6:17). But this crowd wants inclusion, not separation. They say, 'You shouldn't preach that old-fashioned holiness stuff. This is the twenty-first century. Get with it and be up-to-date. Be cool and 'relate!'

My friend, if the Word of God doesn't relate, then what does it do? 'The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword' (Heb. 4:12)

Christians today who are weak and anemic have no power, no spiritual guts, no strength to stand up and say, "This is right, and that is wrong. We'll go this far and no further!" They have been influenced by the Ashdodites and the Ammonites and the Arabians. Because they have dwelt too close to them for so long, they've started to think like them and live like them. Now they begin to draw away the workers one by one to get them away from the wall.

We have churches in our city who don't give two cents for the lost. They make no effort to win souls. They wouldn't know how to lead someone to Christ if their lives depended on it.

But let the old-fashioned, Bible- believing, soul-winning fundamentalist go out and win some souls; and as soon as the hinderers hear about it, they want to draw those new converts away from the wall.

III. "We Cannot"

There are those who hinder the work of our Lord by saying, "Ye shall not." There are those who hinder the work by saying, "Ye ought not." But there is a third group of hinderers who say, "We cannot."

The most pressing peril that Nehemiah encountered in his work was from those within the ranks who said, "We cannot," and they abandoned the work.

A deserter is more demoralizing than a dozen foes. One taken from the helpers and added to the hinderers makes a difference of two - it compounds itself.

What caused the unbelievers to say, 'Ye shall not,' was animosity toward the work of God. What caused the half-in and half-out Christians to say, 'Ye ought not,' was the influence of the world. But what was it that caused those actually on the wall and doing the work of God to say, 'We cannot'? It was rubbish!

"And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall." Neh. 4:10

The rubbish was part of the old city, the old ruins. The rubbish of the past had become an obstacle to the future. The rubbish of the old wall, the old edifices, hindered the work of the Lord.

They had a wall, but it was only half built because of the rubbish behind the wall. No doubt it was a fine-looking, sturdy wall. As people walked past it and saw the wall built to the half, I'm sure they said, "Oh, my! What a wonderful, sturdy wall!" But the rubbish behind it hindered its completion, its effectiveness.

There are three walls that hinder the work of the Lord:

Walls Built by the World of Men

A lot of people are building walls today. The world of men builds walls, but what types of walls?

They build the wall of respectability, with its high social standing and position; with their fancy cars, plush offices and huge salaries; with their expensive clothing. They want the rest of the world to look at this wall and say, 'Oh, how respectable!' Yet behind this wall is the rubbish of the fallen nature.

Walls Built by the Corporate World

Can you imagine working in a company like the following?

This company has 535 members: 29 have been accused of spousal abuse; 7 have been arrested for fraud; 19 have been accused of writing bad checks; 117 have bankrupted at least two businesses; 3 have been arrested for assault, 71 cannot get a credit card due to bad credit, 14 have been arrested on drug-related charges; 8 have been arrested for shoplifting; 21 are current defendants in lawsuits; 84 were stopped for drunk driving in 1998.

This organization is the United States Congress! Yet they have a wall of respectability, and behind that wall is all this rubbish of the fallen nature.

The corporate world tries to build a wall of acceptability. Three of the strongest builders of this wall are the tobacco industry, the booze industry and the gambling industry. While they are getting people addicted to their walls of gambling and alcohol and tobacco, people are losing their marriages and families and homes- in some cases, their lives. Yet they want the people of the United States to accept them as respectable companies.

How do they deceive the public into believing that their wall of acceptability is respectable? They build things like hospitals, even though they are responsible for most of the patients in the hospitals. They make donations to charities, sponsor parades, send help in disaster areas and do good civic deeds. They build arenas and social centers. Why? So their wall of acceptability will be respected. But behind that wall is the rubbish - death, destruction and disease that they themselves promote.

What is behind the wall is really what is important. Behind the wall of man and his respectability is the rubbish of fallen nature. Behind the wall of the corporate world and its acceptability are the wickedness of its trade and the rubbish that it produces.

Walls Built by the Christian World

The Christian world builds a wall of spirituality and tries to hide behind it. Sometimes that wall is as frail as the wall of respectability built by men and as flimsy as the wall of acceptability built by the corporate world.

This wall of spirituality has false perceptions, phony concerns and an outward appearance of Christianity. Yet behind this wall lies the rubbish of the old man who retains his freedom to exhibit his attitudes of jealousy, envy and hatred.

A myriad of sinful practices go on behind the wall: pride, lust, rebellion, twisted relationships and worldly ideas.

Things will pile up from the old life if we allow them to do so, and soon behind our wall of spirituality we have a large pile of rubbish and filth. No wonder we only have a half-built wall!

We have a wall in front of our platform. To the congregation looking at it from the front, it looks nice; but there are some things behind this wall that they don't see - a big speaker, a lot of electrical cords, a fan, a basket and some other stuff.

The people sit out there and think, "Isn't that a nice wall!" Yes, on their side it looks nice, but from behind the wall sometimes it is a mess. It is what's behind the wall that counts.

Anybody can build a wall. The Jews had a wall, but they didn't get rid of the rubbish. My friends, if you keep the rubbish behind the wall, sooner or later it will become too much for you, and you will have to stop with a half-built wall because the rubbish has piled up and you can't see over the rubbish.

This wall in front of our platform is high enough to hide some things from your view, but it can only hide so much. If we let too many things pile up behind this wall, sooner or later they will be higher than the wall. Those things will eventually spill out over the wall, and you'll see the rubbish.

My friend, the same thing will happen to you if you're not careful. The spiritual wall that you've built is only so high, and if you allow rubbish in your life it will keep piling up - and you can only hide so much. When the rubbish is more than your half-built wall can hide, it will spill out over the top.

The work on our spiritual walls can be hindered because of the rubbish which has fallen from the neglected walls of our living, and it will add to the rubbish from our old lives.

Keep walking around your wall and checking it out and removing the rubbish lest it pile up and hinder you. This filth and rubbish hinder the work of the Holy Spirit. This filth and rubbish hinder the work of personal growth. This filth and rubbish hinder the personal work of holiness within and without.

Personal holiness is more important on the inside than on the outside. Holiness on the outside is just a half-built wall, but when personal holiness gets on the inside, your wall will be strong. What counts is what is behind the wall.

The greatest danger that will knock down your wall is your reaction to your own rubbish. Some Christians have rubbish behind their walls of spirituality; but they say, 'That stuff is not real rubbish because it doesn't stink. It doesn't have any mold on it.' They excuse their rubbish and allow it to stay there. They say, 'Well, you know how busy I am. The rubbish just sort of built up over time, but I've got too much to do to clear it away from my wall.'

My friend, don't excuse the rubbish. Sin is sin, no matter what you call it.

Then some Christians blame the rubbish behind their walls on someone else. 'I wouldn't have all that rubbish there if it wasn't for Mr. So-and-so! He brought in that rubbish over there. And that other pile is from Mrs. So-and-so.'

Who cares who put the rubbish there! It is behind your wall, and you are responsible for the care of your wall!

We cannot deny the rubbish, we cannot excuse the rubbish, and we cannot blame the rubbish on anybody else. The rubbish is there. So how do you clean it out?

IV. Tidy Up the Wall

As long as believers allow the rubbish to remain, we will never come to the effectiveness desired of us by God. As long as we remain among the rubbish, we hinder the work. As long as we deny the rubbish or excuse the rubbish or blame the rubbish on someone else, we will never be able to remove it.

The first step in removing the rubbish is to recognize the rubbish for what it is: SIN. We must take out the rubbish so we can finish the wall. If we don't, we won't be what God wants us to be.

We will never remove the rubbish on a higher level until we are ready to remove the rubbish on a personal level.

Nehemiah could handle the people who said, "Ye shall not." He could handle the people who said, 'Ye ought not.' But what could he do with the people who said, 'We will not'?

What could he do with those who said, 'We will not remove the rubbish'?

We remove the rubbish from our cars, from our homes, from our backyards. So why will we not remove the rubbish from our hearts and lives? Because we have built a spiritual wall, and we think that that wall can hide the rubbish. But the wall can only hide it for a limited time, and if we don't deal with it, it will pile up and spill over. All the while it hinders our work, and we have to step around the rubbish.

Is it any wonder that the enemy laughs when there is such a lack of power? Is it any wonder that we do not have peace or joy or contentment of the Holy Spirit? Is it any wonder that we go in the wrong direction?

Only you and God know the rubbish behind your wall. Don't be deceived and make the mistake of ignoring what is behind your wall. Let God speak to you. Come before Him and say, "Father in Heaven, there is rubbish behind my wall, and it is hindering my work. I want to be going in the right direction with YOU. Identify the rubbish, Father, and together let us clear it out so I can get back into full service to You again. Thank You, Father. Amen!"

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