

# Revival and Recommitment

by Robin Boisvert

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing our disobedience and responding to God's grace with a heartfelt recommitment to Him.*

**Duration:** 48:59

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 11:9, Deuteronomy 28:65-67

**Topics:** "Revival"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the theme of revival and recommitment in the book of Nehemiah. He begins by referencing Deuteronomy 28, where God warns the people of the consequences of their sinful ways. The preacher shares his personal experience of feeling the weight of these consequences until he found solace in reading the Bible and being convicted by the Holy Spirit. He emphasizes that God pours out more grace when His people squander His grace, leading to revival. The sermon also highlights the importance of love for neighbor, both locally and globally, as a response to God's grace.

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## Transcript

Why bother with all this Old Testament stuff? Why do we even really need the Old Testament? Can't we just have the New Testament that talks about Jesus and that's sufficient, isn't it? Why do we have the Old Testament? Why do we have all these old stories? It's just ancient history, isn't it? Well, Paul writes, in the context of teaching the Corinthian people about an occasion in the history of Israel, he says, now these things happened to them as an example. But they were written down for our instruction on whom the end of the ages has come. Isn't that interesting? These things happened to them, they certainly did happen to them, but they didn't just happen to them for them, they happened to them for us.

They happened as an example, and then God took the further step of having them written down so that we could be instructed from them, it's for us, upon whom the end of the ages has come. Well, we're going to be looking at chapter 10 of Nehemiah, but before we do that, I thought it would be helpful to give a little bit of recap. Because we've been in a series now for several weeks on the book of Nehemiah, took a little break last week, but it would probably be helpful if we just remembered where we are right now in the story.

The people of Israel, at the time we're going to read here, are at a very difficult and delicate moment in their national history. Hundreds of years earlier, at the time of Moses, God made a covenant with them and told them that if they were obedient to his commands, they would be blessed, but if they were

disobedient, they would be punished. The very first of God's commands was this, I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, you shall have no other gods before me.

It was a command meant to guard against idolatry, and it was a command that they broke again and again. Over the years, God sent prophets to warn them, to say things like, if you obey, you will eat the good of the land, but if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword. Well, the most severe consequence that would come as a result of disobedience was that they would be expelled out of the promised land, taken into captivity.

Now, this was anything but a snap judgment on God's part. He is long-suffering, but after centuries of disobedience, after centuries of unfaithfulness and idolatry, it finally happened. Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed, and the people of God had been taken into captivity.

It happened in a couple of waves over a period of time. The first wave taken into Assyria, the second wave into Babylonia. These were hard-faced nations, hard-hearted nations.

They had no respect for the old. They had no concern for the young. The book of Lamentations describes and details the utter devastation and suffering of Israel.

But then, after 70 years of captivity, the first exiles were allowed to return to the land of Israel. Around 536 B.C., they came back under the leadership of a man named Zerubbabel, and these first Jews to return commenced in the rebuilding of the temple, the temple that had been destroyed by the Babylonians. After about 20 years, it was completed.

Zerubbabel's temple, it's called. Compared to Solomon's glorious temple that existed before, it was like nothing, but at least it was there. And then some 50 years after that, Ezra arrived.

Ezra was a priest. Ezra was a scribe. He was a man of the book, and he returned to call the Jewish people back to covenant faithfulness.

Fifteen years after he returned, Nehemiah comes back, and that's the book that we're in. Nehemiah showed up, and he showed up to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. And they did rebuild the walls, really in record time, amid much opposition.

The peoples of the land opposed them, and it was very difficult, but Nehemiah skillfully, as a man of God, a man who trusted God, led in the rebuilding of the walls. And now the year is 445 B.C. It's almost 100 years after the first exiles returned. The city walls have been rebuilt.

The people now are entering into a great covenant renewal ceremony that actually begins in Nehemiah chapter 8, and that's the context for what we're going to look at today. All right, so the walls have been rebuilt. They're back in the land, but they're kind of a sketchy ragtag group.

For the last 100 years, things had not been going well. The situation is anything but secure. They have a foothold in the land, but that foothold is tenuous at best.

They even said in the end of chapter 9, Behold, we are slaves this day in the land that you gave us. We are in great distress. Now the main concern that Ezra and Nehemiah have for the people of God at this time is that they would be faithful to the Lord.

It was their faithfulness that got them into trouble in the first place. Nehemiah, Ezra wanted to make sure that didn't happen again. So in Nehemiah chapter 8 and following, we have this covenant renewal ceremony.

It happened over the space of a couple of weeks. And this is what they did. If we went back and read it, we would see that they read the law of God aloud to the people.

And a wonderful thing happened when they did that. Accompanying the reading of the law of God, the Spirit of God came and touched the hearts of the people. And what happened was, when they heard this reading of the law, the Spirit of God moving upon them, it caused them to weep.

And then it caused them to rejoice. And then it resulted in soul searching. The conviction of sin.

The confession of sin to God. And true repentance. It was an amazing thing that happened.

Their hearts were warmed toward God again. And God was reviving His people. And if you were here last week, you heard Ray Ortland preach.

And one of the things he said really struck me. He made this statement that I thought it was scandalous when he said it, but it's really true. What does God do when His people have squandered His grace? Do you remember what he said? He pours out more grace.

That's exactly what we see happening here. I am so glad we have a gracious God. God was reviving His people.

And when God revives His people, they respond in grace-filled recommitment. If you wanted to title this message, you could call it Revival and Recommitment. This is the point.

When God revives His people, they respond in grace-filled recommitment. And now I'd like to read our passage today, Nehemiah 10. But I'm going to start the verse before, 9.38. Because of all this, we make a firm covenant in writing.

On a sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests. Those were the leaders. And what follows then are the actual names of the people who signed this covenant.

Skip down to chapter 10, verse 28. I won't read their names. The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, to the law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law that was given by Moses, the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord, our Lord, and His rules and His statutes.

We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day, and we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt. And then verse 32.

Please note the repetition of the phrase, house of our God, as we read these last verses. Verse 32. We also take on ourselves the obligation to give a yearly, a third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God, for the showbread, the regular grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the Sabbaths, the new

moons, the appointed feasts, the holy things, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel and for all the work of the house of our God.

We, the priests, the Levites, and the people, have likewise cast lots for the wood offering to bring it into the house of our God, according to our fathers' houses at times appointed year by year to burn on the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the law. We obligate ourselves to bring the first fruits of our ground and the first fruits of all fruit of every tree year by year to the house of the Lord. Also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, and the firstborn of our herds and of our flocks, and to bring the first of our dough and of our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God, and to bring to the Levites the tithes from our ground, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all the towns where we labor.

And the priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive the tithes, and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse. For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the chambers where the vessels of the sanctuary are, as well as the priests who minister and the gatekeepers and the singers. We will not neglect the house of our God." Well, there's some specific things that they committed themselves to, and we'll see how they can be helpful to us in a moment.

But what I'd like to point out at the very beginning here is that as a result, or as it says in 938, because of this, they made a firm covenant. They made a solemn recommitment of their lives to obey God. And it took the form that we just read there.

But why did they do this? Why did they make this solemn recommitment? They did it because they had made a connection. They made an important connection, an essential connection that everyone has to make or suffer consequences. They made a connection between their predicament and their lack of obedience to God.

They made a connection between their present situation and the way they had been living. They made a connection. When I was a little boy, I enjoyed coloring books, probably like all little children.

And when our parents would take us on a long trip, they'd give us coloring books to keep us occupied in the back seat. And I enjoyed these coloring books, but my favorite kind of coloring book was what they called dot-to-dot. You know what dot-to-dot is? Any of you that have kids, you ought to know what dot-to-dot is.

You have to know your numbers now, but you connect dot number one to dot number two and three, four, and you go through all that, and after a while, wow, Mickey Mouse! And then you can color him in. That's called dot-to-dot. It's a lot of fun.

You ought to try it. Well, they connected the dots. The people of Israel put it together.

They understood. Actually, the Greek word for understand is the word *synesis*, transliterated, and if you fiddle with it a little bit, you actually get the word *synthesis* from it. And what is a synthesis? It's putting two theses together.

To synthesize means to put together. You get a fact here and a fact here, and you put them together, and the light goes on. Aha! I understand.

Understanding comes along with wisdom when we put things together. Well, they were putting something together. Check back in chapter 9, just a few verses.

Look at chapter 9 and verse 30. Recounting the history of Israel, they recall that many years, they say, you, God, bore with them and warned them by your spirit through your prophets, yet they would not give ear. Therefore, you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the land.

Nevertheless, in your great mercies, you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you're a gracious and merciful God. Look at verse 33. Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully, and we have acted wickedly.

And then verse 36. Behold, we are slaves today. In the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves.

And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you've set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and even over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress. Because of this, we're going to do something.

We're going to make a covenant, a firm covenant. Here's the point. God, you acted faithfully.

We've acted wickedly. That's the reason we're in such distress. They made the connection.

It took some honest soul-searching, some courageous soul-searching. They really looked hard. They took a good, hard look at themselves.

And the Spirit of God brought gracious conviction through the reading of the Word of God. Have you ever made that connection? Have you made the connection that your present situation is largely the result of choices that you've made, the actions that you've taken, the actions and reactions that brought you to the place you are now? Now, this is not to say that all of your problems are the result of your disobedience. Just ask Job.

That's not the case. But some are. And making the connection here is an essential point if a person is to be saved and if there's going to be spiritual growth.

Another way of saying this is that God saves sinners. If you don't think you're a sinner, God can't save you. Jesus said, I didn't come to call the righteous to repentance.

I came to call sinners. Paul said, Whatever a man sows, that will he also reap. If you sow to the flesh, you will of the flesh reap corruption.

If you sow to the Spirit, you will of the Spirit reap life. There's no way to sow to the flesh and not reap corruption. I think you know what I mean.

I recall making this connection myself many years ago, two-year period in my life when I was depressed. I didn't know that's what it was. I just thought I was bummed out for a long time.

At the time, I didn't connect the fact that I was living a sinful, rebellious life. I really didn't even have those categories. But that was truly the case.

I wasn't trying to hurt anybody. I was just trying to get by. And my main method in trying to get by was to get high and stay high, and I did that.

That's how it started. That's how the problem started. But before I knew it, I was trapped.

I was ensnared by my own sin. For me, it showed itself in just drunkenness and smoking a lot of dope. But the result of that was that I became restless on the inside.

I was uneasy. I had an uneasy conscience. I had a pervading sense of hopelessness about my life.

I started to withdraw from friends because I was such a downer to be around. And then I was scared. I had what now they call panic attacks.

I didn't know that's what it was. As far as I knew, I was just scared. But that's not something the young man likes to admit, so I didn't say that to anybody.

I just withdrew more and more into myself. In the morning, I would say, I wish it was night so I could just go to sleep and escape. But at night, I couldn't sleep, so I'd say, I wish it was morning.

I was amazed later when I read in the book of Deuteronomy chapter 28, a portion of Scripture that specifically talks about the curses that would come on God's people for disobedience. Deuteronomy 28, 65 through 67, as a result of their sinful, rebellious ways, God warned the people that He would give them, quote, a trembling heart and failing eyes and a languishing soul. Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life.

In the morning you shall say, if only it were evening. And in the evening you shall say, if only it were morning, because of the dread your heart shall feel. I was amazed.

I said those exact words. Maybe you've said them too. And this went on and on, week after week, month after month.

And then a friend gave me a Bible, and I began to read it. And something wonderful happened. The Spirit of God attended the reading of the Word of God, just like in Nehemiah's day.

And I became convicted and drawn by the Holy Spirit to trust in God and Jesus Christ and His Gospel. Now this did not happen overnight. It took place over the course of many months.

I did not know at the time what was going on. In retrospect I can see it so very clearly. It was the gracious Holy Spirit using the Bible and the circumstances of life and ordinary Christian people to draw me to faith in Jesus Christ.

And finally I made the connection, I made the connection between how I was living, sinfully, proudly, rebelliously, selfishly, and the mess I was in. And I wanted to repent. And I did repent.

And I needed help. And I called out to God for help, sincerely and desperately. And when I started to obey God, believe me, it wasn't a question of take it or leave it.

This was life or death to me. If this didn't work, I was sunk. It was a solemn committal of my life to obey God.

I don't think I understood grace in those days very well at all. I just knew whatever Jesus said, I was going to do it. Well, maybe you're here today and you can relate to my story.

Maybe you're making the same connection that I made, the same connection that the people of Israel made. Maybe you too have been reading your Bible and maybe you're being convicted by the Holy Spirit and drawn by Him. Maybe Christianity is new to you.

Or maybe it's not new. Maybe you've been raised in the church but you turned away from what you knew to be true. You've been sowing to the flesh and you don't like what you've been reaping.

And you wonder, is there a way back? Is there a way back to God? Well, whether this is new to you or not, I want to tell you, I have good news for you. Yes, there is a way back. A way back to God.

It is by repenting, it is by agreeing with God that you are a sinner, and it is by coming to Jesus Christ who actually beckons you. He says, Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. My friends, those are gracious words and those are addressed to you.

Come unto Me, all, everyone, who labors and is heavy laden, who is burdened, make the connection. They had made the connection. Again, Nehemiah 9.38, because of all this, because of all what? Because of all they'd been through, because of all this, we make a firm commitment in writing.

On the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, our priests. They made a connection between their predicament and their lack of obedience to God, so they solemnly recommitted themselves to obey God, to live lives that followed God. They are here now with another chance and they don't want to blow it.

They know that faithful obedience to their covenant-keeping God is the way forward. No more complaining, no more faithless disobedience, no more idolatry. They're poised to make this solemn commitment.

They make a covenant. Look at it here. It's a covenant.

It's a firm covenant. It's in writing. It's a document.

It's a sealed document. Couldn't be more official than that. And they signed names to it.

They signed their names to it. I read this and I thought of our Declaration of Independence. That was a solemn committal.

Boy, that was solemn. They signed their names to that. And if you've ever looked at the Declaration, some of those names are so small you can hardly read them, except for good old John Hancock.

Well, it was our Declaration of Independence. But you know what? As far as the British were concerned, it was a declaration of treason. That's why some of those names were written so small.

It led one of the signers to say to his colleagues, well, gentlemen, we must hang together because otherwise we will most certainly hang separately. Solemn recommittal. I think the people that we're reading about today took it just as seriously.

And it wasn't just the leaders that signed. Chapter 1028 says the rest of the people, they were involved too. They recommitted themselves to obey.

They were serious about it. They joined with their nobles and they entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law. This indicates the seriousness of it.

They were going to observe and do all the commandments. And this recommitment to obey God was not just sort of a general, hey, God, yeah, we'll try to do better. I've seen the error of my ways.

Yeah, I'm going to be a better person. No, they got specific. They got very specific.

There were some things that were problems in their day, in their particular moment. I see four specific areas that are addressed here. Intermarriage with the peoples of the land.

Failure to observe Sabbath laws, especially with regard to commerce. Disregard for the poor among them. And neglect of the house of God.

That's what you find in verses 30 and following. It said, we will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we won't buy from them on the Sabbath day or on a holy day and we'll forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.

All right, these are some specific things that were important points for them at the time. But what's really, I think, important for us to see in these verses is that they indicate how important it is for the people of God to be distinct from the other nations. So here's the point.

When God revives His people, they respond in a grace-filled recommitment and demonstrate it by desiring to be distinct. Desiring to be distinct. First of all, no marriage, no intermarriage with the peoples of the land.

Now, I'd just like to step out of their context for a moment here and say that this really does have application for us today. When Christians get involved in evangelistic dating, you know what I mean? And they follow that up with evangelistic marriage. I suppose perhaps that works in some situations, but I think it's a very bad idea.

God doesn't want us to be unequally yoked. We should know the spiritual condition of the persons that we become interested in. I say this to help you.

I know of many sad situations where that's not the case, and I would spare you that. But what's going on here in Israel when it's no intermarriage with the peoples of the land? It wasn't a matter of racial pride or ethnic exclusivism. Marriage to foreign wives, that was the chief avenue by which idolatry came into Israel.

When you married the foreign wife, you just didn't get the wife. You got the idol, the false god, the foreign god along with the woman. This is what happened to Solomon.

He married many foreign wives and they brought their idols with them and they turned his heart away from the Lord. Well, this is what was happening to the people of Israel intermarriage with the people of the land. And then the bit about the Sabbath and commerce on the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was a gift that God gave to the people of Israel to help them be distinct. It was to bless them. After six days of working, God rested.

And He told the people, six days you shall work and the seventh day you shall rest. And that rest was to be a blessing for them. It was a time for them to rest from their labors and to worship God and rejoice in God and to enjoy fellowship and His goodness to them.

But it was also intended to keep them distinct from the surrounding idolatrous peoples. They were to be distinct so that they might be able to represent God and offer hope to the families of the earth. God made a covenant with Abraham and He told him, I'm going to bless you and make of you a great nation and through you all the families of the world will be blessed.

And this is the plan of God, God's plan of redemption, His plan of reclamation. He saved Abraham, entered into a covenant with him. Then you get Isaac and Jacob and the twelve patriarchs, the people of Israel.

And out of the people of Israel comes the Messiah, Jesus Christ. And through Jesus Christ, the gospel comes to all the nations, all the families of the world, every kindred, tribe and tongue. And that's the reason that you're sitting here today worshipping the true God and not idols.

It goes all the way back there. But it was necessary for the people of God to be distinct, to remain distinct from the peoples of the land. At this point in redemptive history, when we encounter Nehemiah, all this was being threatened.

It was threatened because the people of Israel were in danger of no longer being distinct from the other people. It wasn't a matter of racial pride. It wasn't a matter of ethnic exclusivism.

Anybody could become a Jew. You look at Ruth. She was a Moabite.

The Moabites worshiped false gods. But she said to Naomi, her mother-in-law, your people shall be my people. Your God shall be my God.

And by saying that, she turned her back on the false gods of Moab and joined herself to the one true God. She became the great-grandmother of King David. We have a book about her in the Bible.

She was a foreign woman. So in order to bear witness to the one true God, the people of God have to be distinct. And when God revives His people, they recommit themselves and have this desire to be distinct, to stand out in a good way.

And this is no less true today. In order for us to bear witness to the gospel, the people of God have to be distinct from the world around us. And that's so we can represent God to a lost and dying world.

The church in every age has to figure out what this looks like. And it's not easy. If the church is too distinct, too different, then it becomes isolated.

It becomes irrelevant. It becomes even perhaps a mere curiosity. I lived in the 1980s in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

And that's an area where there are a lot of Amish. And they are certainly distinct. They have many fine qualities.

But in their desire to maintain an identity distinct from the world, it's as if they've entered into a time warp. And while there are many things for which they may be rightly admired, they have no evangelistic impact

whatever. But then you can go to the other extreme.

If the church is not distinct at all, if she so resembles the surrounding culture, again, she has no impact. Her mission is blunted. We have to beware of being too cool so as to be accepted.

We have to beware of being a little too relevant. It's possible to be so with it that you're actually without it. And then the world says, well, why should I become a Christian? You know, different from me.

Distinct means different in a good way, different in representing God so that others will be drawn to Him. So others will say, I want to be like you. I want what you've got.

Well then, what should characterize the church? How can we be distinct? And while there is a lot of things that we could say, and I think these are great things for discussion among ourselves, I think one thing definitely that should characterize the church that we should really stand out for and be distinct, and that one thing is love. It's love. Chapter 10, verse 31 says this, We will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.

Those obscure little words actually have to do with a regard for the poor, showing consideration for others, especially those who are in need. You see, the law provided that every seventh year, the farmers of Israel were to let their fields lie fallow along with their vineyards and olive orchards. And then the poor would come and benefit from what grew of itself.

Likewise, every seventh year, they were to forgive all debts. This showed regard for the poor. It was a demonstration of love.

And by extension, that kind of love should go to everyone. As Paul said in Galatians, he said, As we therefore have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to those that are of the household of faith. Meaning we should take care of one another.

We should also try as best as we can to take care of those who are not a part of the church. It's love for one's neighbor. Jesus in the parable of the good Samaritan was asked, Who is my neighbor? And he responded by telling that story.

And really the point of that is that your neighbor is anyone who God in His providence puts in your path that has a need. You're able to supply. Do it.

Do it. That's showing love. That's showing love for your neighbor.

Many years ago, a good man, a man named Francis Schaeffer, wrote a small but significant book. Its title, The Mark of the Christian. I don't know if you've ever heard of it or read it.

I was a new Christian at the time and I read it for two reasons. One was that it was a little book. I think it was about 50 pages.

And since most of my reading up to this point had been comic books, I thought it was a volume I could handle. But there was another reason. The title intrigued me.

The Mark of the Christian. I remember thinking, What's the mark of the Christian? I remembered Paul's words, Let no man henceforth trouble me for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ. Ah, that must be what it is.

Paul was persecuted and beaten and he had these scars to show it. That's what marks out the Christian. Well, I started reading the book and Schaefer began by saying that throughout the history of the church, Christians have done different things to try to stand out among others in their society.

They've had special clothes, even special haircuts. But then he went on to quote an authority on the matter. He quoted the one whom Christians are named after and that one said, By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

That's the mark of the Christian. Love. It is what should be distinctive about us.

Love for neighbor. Love for God. Love for neighbor, whether that neighbor might be across the street in Latonia or in Ethiopia, Mexico, Uganda, just this year, men and women and young people from this church have gone to other parts of the world to share the love of Jesus.

No less significant, they've gone across the street to share the love of Jesus in practical ways. When I was in Uganda, I was walking down one dusty street in a little village with a young Ugandan boy named Martin. He was wearing a VTech jersey.

They have all kinds of clothes over there coming from VTech. You know, Virginia Tech. Somebody should say amen.

I know there's a lot of VTech people out here. I'm walking down the street with this kid. He could speak English and we walked past this door and I heard some men say some things as we passed by.

And I said to Martin, I said, What did they say? He said, They pointed at us and they said, These people love us. They have come from America and they love us. And they were referring to wells that the giving of the people in this church had provided money for the drilling of wells so that these people could have fresh water.

It was a big deal to them. And I remember feeling so, just so full of joy. I thought this is wonderful.

This is a practical way of showing love. And it opens hearts to the gospel. A medical team went to Ethiopia this year.

We had the folks that went to Mexico to work at the baby orphanage. But no less important are those that go across the street to Latonia or the many different things that you all are doing on your own to show love for others. I tell you, I am appropriately proud of the men and women and youth of this church because I think you bear the mark of the Christian.

But that's not all. When God revives His people, they respond in grace-filled recommitment. They make a connection.

They care. Also, they desire to be distinct. And finally, they care about the church.

They care about the church. Our passage again, verses 32 through 39, are framed by that phrase, the house of our God. You see that phrase? That phrase is used 9 times in 8 verses.

And that's a clue. That's a clue to tell us, well, this is an important feature of this passage. Something about the house of our God.

And it's about caring for the house of our God. What is the house of our God? Well, it's the temple. The temple, however, in the Old Testament is a type of the church in the New Testament.

The church is the fulfillment of the temple, the house of God. The church is the place of His presence. It's God dwelling in the midst of His people.

Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. And He will dwell with them and they will be His people and God Himself shall be with them and be their God. God with us.

The presence of God, that is what is most important. The thing that makes the people of God the people of God is the presence of God. And these verses, these last verses today have to do with the service of the house of God.

It ends up saying we will not neglect the house of God. Well, they had neglected it. And that had to change.

You see, God had revived them and now they were interested in obeying God. That's what happens when God revives us. When God revives us, we want to obey.

And part of that obedience means we care about what God cares about. When God revives His people, they care about the church. They graciously recommit themselves to care for the church.

Why? Because the church is the bride of Christ. He shed His very blood for the church of Jesus Christ. She is His bride.

He loves her. He provides for her. He protects her.

When I think about the church, I like to think in terms of relationships. I'm grateful for this building. I'm grateful for the beautiful campus that the Lord has given us.

But the church really is not a building. The church is relationships. It's a relationship of the individual believer who's been reconciled to God by the blood of the cross.

And it's the relationships that exist among the believers, again, because they've been reconciled to one another through the blood of the cross. Jesus loves the church and we ought to love what Jesus loves. We ought to care for the church.

Now, how do we do that? Well, it says here that they obligated themselves. They obligated themselves to provide for the house. They did it by contributing money.

They contributed time, effort. I mean, they even got together for bringing the wood into the altar. So there were practical ways that they did this, but what they did was they brought their treasure, their time, their money, their effort, and they made the investment.

They obligated themselves to provide so that there'd be all these offerings, the grain offering, the burn offering, the sin offering, all of these various offerings to make atonement for Israel. Well, I've got good news for you. We don't have to make those offerings now.

The full and the final offering was made by our Lord Jesus Christ who perfectly fulfills all of those typical offerings. They were pointing to something. They were pointing to the cross.

Jesus is the one who makes atonement for us. The whole offering system was to show that God is holy, that we are sinful, that we need to make a way that a way has to be made for us to have fellowship with God, and Jesus Christ has done that. Full, finished, final.

Can you say amen? Hallelujah. Amen. So we don't have to do that, but still there's a lesson for us here.

They also obligate themselves to bring firstfruits and firstborn. You see that word first occurring again and again. This is what they did.

They provided for the service of the house of God by bringing in their firstfruits, their firstborn of their sons, their flocks, their herds, even the first of their dough. And this law of firstfruits was important for them because it was God's way of helping them remember that all they had came from Him. God doesn't need the firstfruits or the firstborn.

He's not lacking anything. He doesn't need us to bring tithes to Him. He has everything He needs.

The reason God gave these laws and the reason people obligated themselves in this way was because it was to help them remember that all that they have comes from Him. Oh, yes. This is the thing.

God created everything. God, therefore, owns everything. God sustains everything.

And God draws us into this relationship. But He wants us to remember who we ought to thank. That's very important for us.

No, He doesn't need it. We need it. We need it.

And this expression, this obligation to give, is an expression of obedience. It's an expression of gratitude and dependence on Him by acknowledging Him, by bringing the first of all these things to Him. And now how about you and me? What does this mean for us? Well, there are many ways that you are investing in the house of God, and I'm so very grateful for the people of this church and the way that you invest your time, your money, your effort.

I was just thinking about even our Sunday meetings and how often I take for granted the fact that these things don't just happen. We have wonderfully edifying times, but there's a production crew, there is a worship team, there is a host team that greets us, there's a set-up team and a take-down team, there's a parking crew, and so much more. There's so much that goes on.

I don't even know what's happening here. I just know that many of you are serving in humble, practical ways so that we have a context where God can be worshipped and we can be built up. And I say, thank you, Lord.

That's our Sunday times. But that's far from the whole church. That doesn't even touch the ways that you care for one another in so many practical ways.

You provide for one another. Again, at the heart of the church, there are these relationships through which the grace of God travels. It's believers caring for one another.

This is the caring church. This is your investment of your time, your energy, and when you make this investment, you put your treasure there. For those of you that feel maybe somewhat cold to the church, I've got a suggestion for you.

Invest your treasure, your time, your effort, your money. Because Jesus said, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Your heart will follow your treasure.

The more you invest, the more you will treasure the church. The more you will love what Jesus loves. I'd like to close by saying that these obligations, this obedience, this commitment, this recommitment, these investments that we're talking about, this is not self-generated effort.

This does not arise initially from you and me. This is the willing response of a people who have been revived by God. See, when God revives His people, they respond in grace-filled recommitment and obey Him.

What we're talking about here is only the expression of grateful hearts. Obedience is gratitude expressed. Jesus said, if you love Me, you'll keep My commandments.

He didn't say, if you keep My commandments, maybe I'll show you some consideration. No, He said, if you love Me, you'll keep My commandments. But remember, we love because He first loved us.

Remember, God took the first step by giving His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life. Remember, remember that God demonstrated His love to us in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us. Now I ask you, who makes the first move in this? Who's the one that took the first step? That's right, God.

He's the one who takes the first step. He's the one who saves. He's the one who revives.

He only invites us to respond. And we respond rightly when we make a wisdom connection to live for Him, when we desire to be distinct so as to represent Him, and when we sincerely care about the church, care about what He cares about. It's like Ray Ortlund said last week, what does God do when His people squander His grace? He pours out more grace.

So whoever you are and wherever you are right now in your Christian walk, maybe you're aware of great deficiencies, maybe you've squandered the grace of God, be of good cheer. He's pouring out more grace. As you read the Word, His Spirit will attend the Word.

As you hear the Word, His Spirit will attend the Word and will revive you.

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