

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Nehemiah: Pattern For Solutions In Spiritually Hard Times

C. Handling Potent Belittling

(Nehemiah 2:17-20)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

One challenging difficulty we face is the trial of potent belittling: Kristin Kobes Du Mey's book, Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation, 2020, with other authors, belittled evangelical gender norms, alleged racism and the general failure of evangelicals to adopt social justice platforms. She asserted that evangelicals have thus corrupted the faith and caused the deep division that exists in America. (Isaiah Murtaugh, "Evangelical disillusionment is finding a home in book clubs," March 25, 2021; religionnews.com)

Actually, the cause for this divide is a **contrast** in *beliefs* between *progressives* and *conservative evangelicals*:

(1) They sharply differ in their views on humanity: (a) Brannon S. Howse's book, Marxianity, 2018, p. 191-193, cited Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith's work, Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America, 2001, p. 76, that claimed, "Progressives view humans as essentially good," but that they "are shaped in profound ways by social structures and institutions." (b) In contrast, "(w)hite conservative Protestants" believe that they "are accountable freewill individualists" who "exist independent of structures and institutions . . . and are individually accountable for their own actions." (Ibid., Howse, p. 193, citing Emerson and Smith, Ibid.)

(2) Second, these sharply opposing views on humanity stem from sharp differences on interpreting the Bible: (a) many conservative evangelicals use the **consistently literal** method to interpret the Bible, leading to premillennial, pretribulational, dispensational theology (Charles C. Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 1970, p. 96; J. Dwight Pentecost, Things to Come, 1972, p. 193, 372) that holds "the present world is evil and will inevitably suffer moral decline until Christ comes again. Thus, to devote one's self to social reform is futile." (Ibid., Howe, p. 191 in citing Emerson and Smith, Ibid., p. 47) (b) In contrast, many progressives are deconstructionists (Ibid., Murtaugh), believing there is no absolute truth so that there cannot be any "single correct meaning or interpretation of a passage or text." ("Deconstructionism -- is it a valid way to interpret the Bible?"; gotquestions.org) This stance leaves progressives exposed to adopting heavily promoted extrabiblical ideologies that circulate in the world like Marxism.

(3) In summary, by holding to a consistently literal interpretation of Scripture, conservative evangelicals believe that individuals are sinners and are personally accountable to God, that society will continue to deteriorate until Christ returns so that addressing social ills by social reform is futile. In vast contrast, many progressives adopt deconstructionism and deny that there is a knowable, sure interpretation of Scripture, so they assert that individuals are essentially good, that society must be the cause for man's ills so that one must address these ills by applying social justice in society like Marxists teach. Progressives have thus come to view white conservative evangelicals as being calloused to social ills, leading such progressives to belittle conservative evangelicals!

Need: *So, we ask, "How does God want us to handle potent belittlements that we face?!"*

- I. Nehemiah and the Hebrews rebuilding Jerusalem's wall faced belittlement from their foes, Neh. 2:17-19:**
 - A. After urging his fellow Hebrews to help him rebuild Jerusalem's city wall, they agreed to do so, Neh. 2:17-18.
 - B. However, Israel's foes reacted to news of this by belittling the Hebrews to hinder their work, Nehemiah 2:19:
 1. The parties that belittled the Hebrews were powerful, influential foes of nations near Jerusalem, Neh. 2:19:
 - a. Sanballat ruled Samaria and his associate Tobiah was from Ammon (Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 677)
 - b. However, Geshem the Arab was even more powerful, for he ruled a league of Arab tribes that controlled the national boundaries of Moab and Edom along with part of Arabia and various approaches to Egypt. ("Expository Notes of Dr. Thomas Constable," studylight.org/commentaries, Nehemiah 2:19)
 2. These formidable foes implied that the Hebrews were rebelling against Persia's king by rebuilding the city wall, an implicit threat that they might report the Hebrews' effort to the king, leading to trouble for them!
- II. Nehemiah replied to this belittling by stating Scriptural support for the Hebrews' work, Nehemiah 2:20:**
 - A. Nehemiah claimed that the Hebrews had God's Scriptural **authority** to support the work, Neh. 2:20a: the "God of heaven," the only, true Creator God of Genesis 1-2 who made the ancestors of Israel's Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem and even the Persian king himself, had [in Nehemiah 1:4-8] approved the Hebrew's rebuilding effort!
 - B. Nehemiah claimed that the Hebrews had God's Scriptural **blessing** to prosper their effort, Neh. 2:20b: in 537 B. C., Daniel 9:25 predicted Jerusalem would be rebuilt in hard times, so Nehemiah knew that the work of the wall 90 years after this prediction (445-425 B. C.) would prosper! (Ryrie Study Bib., KJV, 1978, p. 1217, 719)

- C. Nehemiah claimed that the Hebrews had God's Scriptural **commissioning** to sanction their work, v. 20c: the Daniel 9:25 divine promise coupled with the Persian king's edict certified this divine commissioning.
- D. Nehemiah claimed that the Hebrews and not their foes had God's Scriptural **inheritance** in Jerusalem, Neh. 2:20d: in Genesis 15:18-21, God promised the property of the Jebusites would belong to Abraham's seed, and 2 Samuel 5:6-9a reported how David conquered the Jebusite fort of Jerusalem with God's blessing.
- E. Nehemiah claimed that the Hebrews and not their foes had God's Scriptural **right** to the city of Jerusalem, v. 20e: 2 Samuel 5:9b-10 records how after conquering Jerusalem, David built the city up with God's blessing.
- F. Nehemiah claimed that the Hebrews and not their foes had God's Scriptural **heritage** in Jerusalem, Neh. 2:20f: 2 Samuel 5:11-12 records how Hiram, king of Tyre had built David a palace in Jerusalem, producing this rich royal heritage for the Hebrew people in which their Gentile foes had no share!

Lesson: *When their plan to rebuild the Jerusalem city wall was belittled by powerful foes, Nehemiah asserted God's Scriptural authority, promised blessing, divine commission, inheritance, right and heritage given to Israel that countered the effort of the Hebrews' foes to try to intimidate them from wanting to address the work.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-11. (2) May we handle belittling by asserting Biblical truths that counter it.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

We itemize below the Biblical supports that counter the belittling issues we face as noted in our introduction:

(1) In response to the belittling of conservative evangelical gender norms, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 claims that homosexuals who let themselves be used unnaturally [*malakoi*, "catamites," Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 489-490] along with homosexuals who take the aggressive role in homosexual relationships [*arsenokoitai*, "pederasts," Ibid., p. 109] do **not** inherit the kingdom of God unless they are justified by faith in Christ. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to 1 Cor. 6:9) God holds that conservative evangelical gender norms are correct!

(2) In response to the charge of racism against conservative evangelicals, Acts 17:26 with Galatians 3:28 claim there is only one human race, and that in Christ there is no racial divide, but all are spiritually unified in Him.

(3) In response to the criticism on not adopting social justice platforms, in Ezekiel 18:1-32, God explained that each individual is personally accountable to God for his actions, the belief conservative evangelicals hold by way of their consistently literal interpretation of Scripture. Man's ills are not caused by society in general, but by sin in individual hearts that make up society, so sin must be addressed in individuals in order to correct society's evils.

(4) In response to the progressives' belief that human beings are essentially good, Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 3:1-28; Acts 4:12 and Ephesians 2:8-9 claim that the human heart is desperately wicked, that man is thus in great need of the salvation that is available by faith alone in Christ alone.

(5) In response to the difference between progressives and conservative evangelicals on how to interpret the Bible, Jesus in Matthew 5:18 claimed that the smallest Hebrew letter and the smallest appendage to a Hebrew letter that affects the identity of that letter, and hence the spelling of each word and so its literal meaning in the Hebrew text, will not pass away until all Scripture is thus literally fulfilled! (Ibid., Ryrie, ftn. to Matthew 5:18)

(6) In response to opposition to the belief in the inevitable moral decline in man until Christ comes, 2 Timothy 3:13 claims men will go from bad to worse, and Revelation 6:1-20:15 predicts how that will occur in future history!

(7) In response to the claim that there is no absolute, knowable truth, in John 8:31-32, Jesus said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Also, Jeremiah 23:28-29 ESV records God as saying, "Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? declares the Lord. Is not my word like fire, declares the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"

(8) In response to the claim that there is no single correct meaning or interpretation of a passage or text, in Mark 12:26-27, Jesus interpreted Exodus 3:6 by using the literal, grammatical, historical method of interpretation that many conservative evangelicals use to show the Sadducees that their reason for denying the resurrection due to their presupposition that the soul ceased to exist at physical death was in great error. [Jesus argued that though the Hebrew forefathers were long dead, God said He was still their God, their spirits still existing opposite Sadducean belief!] By Christ's own example, then, there **IS** a correct, knowable interpretation of Scripture passages, one that is obtained by use of the literal, grammatical, historical or "normal" approach to interpreting the Bible!

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life. May we handle ungodly belittling by relying on the Biblical truths that refute the belittling effort.