



## “Commit”

Nehemiah 9:38-10:39

**Idea:** Public commitment solidifies our decisions.

**Intro:** Commitment is one of the most beautiful things in this world. It is the state or quality of being dedicated to a cause, activity, or the like despite the circumstances. Commitment is precious because it is rare.

Thankfully, our great nation was built on commitment. 242 years ago, on July 1, 1776, the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia to discuss and debate separation from England. The following day 12 of the 13 colonies voted in favor of Richard Henry Lee’s motion for independence. The delegates then spent the next two days debating and revising the language of a statement drafted by Thomas Jefferson. On July 4<sup>th</sup>, Congress officially adopted the Declaration of Independence, and as a result the date is celebrated as Independence Day.

In signing the Declaration of Independence, these men committed themselves to two things: securing the colonies’ independence from the King of England and the surety of

death if they failed. These men, however, without reservation signed their lives away. Why did they do so? They signed the document because they believed in freedom and were dedicated to that end despite the circumstances. Today, 242 years later, we enjoy the freedoms that the commitment of those men secured for us at great cost to themselves.

We find a similar picture of commitment in Nehemiah and the Jews. They weren't committing themselves to throwing off the tyranny of Persia, but they were committing themselves afresh and anew to God because they understood that it was their forsaking of Him, which had led to their exile. Nehemiah, Ezra, the Levites, and the people had read from God's Word (Neh 8). It had exposed their sin, reminded them of God's grace, and led them to repentance (Neh 9). The forsaking of God's Word had caused Israel to forget God, but the reading of God's Word caused them to remember God. Their remembrance led them to recommit themselves to the Lord.

Read Nehemiah 9:38; 10:28-39.

**Inquiry:** At the conclusion of the prayer of remembrance that we read in chapter nine, the people made a renewed surrender to the God of the covenant. This reminds us that those who belong to the Lord must behave, as He demands, and the time had come to affirm their loyalty in the presence of their families, friends, and neighbors. Their commitment to God took the form of a series of written promises (9:38).

What the returnees do in Nehemiah 10 serves as a good example for us in the church today. Covenants are important because they have figured prominently in biblical history. God made covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. He pledged His faithfulness to the promises He made to them. At specific times in Israel's history, God's people, led by men such as Joshua, Hezekiah, and Josiah realized with sorrow how greatly they had forsaken God. They led the people to recommit themselves to God through written covenants.

Covenants are important because they have also been prominent in Christian history. For example, a number of sixteenth-century congregations prepared written accounts of their corporate commitment to the Lord and to one another. Some of the English Puritans recorded their personal promises of love and loyalty to the Lord. Later, men like Jonathan Edwards, David Brainerd, and John Wesley followed their example. Some seventeenth and eighteenth-century Nonconformist commitments took the form of corporate covenants as local church members pledged themselves to honor God in specific ways and appended their names to such promises.

These examples show us the importance of affirming our commitment to God by putting words down on paper. The value of a covenant is that it saves our admirable desires from hovering in a pious word. Instead, we make firm decisions in God's presence to do His will over particular contemporary issues. As a church we have a covenant. In order to be a member, one has to put his or her name on the covenant. By doing so, you are committing yourself to the same things the Jews in Nehemiah 10 committed themselves to do. Let's look at the four things they committed to do, and I want you to see that these are four things you need to commit to in your life.

## **1. Commit to God and His Word.**

Read Neh 10:28-29.

The people promised to obey God's Word. The nobles, priests, Levites, and pagans, who had turned from idols and embraced Yahweh, all committed to God and His Word. They all had forsaken God to chase after idols. By recommitting themselves to God and His Word, they separated themselves from something to Someone.

As Christ-followers, we are people of the Book. We have no other resource because there is nothing outside of what God has spoken and been recorded for us in the

Bible. This reminds me of Peter's confession to Jesus in John 6. The Lord had spoken some hard words, and as a result many stopped following Him.

*66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. 67 So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." – John 6:66-69*

Peter and the disciples were committed to Jesus because they understood that He was God. Therefore, He alone had the words of eternal life. And nothing has changed over the last 2,000 years. Jesus still has the words of eternal life. What God has said in His Word is still as true and applicable to your life today as it was the day He spoke it. And so, commit yourself to God and His Word. Turn from and throw off any sin and entanglement that would hold you back from complete abandonment and commitment to Christ (Heb 12:1). This is the proper response when we hear from God's Word.

There is a second thing to commit to in your life.

## **2. Commit to mutual accountability.**

Read Neh 10:28-29.

They joined together in a public commitment to God. They committed to hold others to this covenant and to allow others to hold them to it.

The default position of the flesh is to be on your own. The Christian life, though personal, is not individualistic as if it only concerns the solitary believer. The sins that each person had committed were

not isolated to the individual. Far from it, the sins of each person had collectively affected everyone. Therefore, in signing the covenant they were making to God, they were testifying openly to their neighbors that they had presented themselves afresh to God.

Commitment of this kind is an important part of an effective Christian testimony. Baptism, for example, provided the early Christians with a form of witness, which publicly declared to their neighbors their resolute loyalty to Christ. This is one of reasons you should be baptized soon after trusting in Christ. You need the accountability.

You need other believers praying for you, encouraging you, teaching you, helping you, and rebuking you. Where would you receive those blessings without church membership? Therefore, by entering into covenant church membership you are committing to mutual accountability.

There is a third thing to commit to in your life.

### **3. Commit to walk in purity.**

Read Neh 10:30-31.

God's Law commanded the Jews to be holy as God is holy (Lev 20:7). Israel's history in the Old Testament reveals that they were anything but holy. By forgetting God's Word, the Jews were lured into immorality, and by flirting with immorality the Jews little by little forgot God's Word. It was a double-edged sword.

In the covenant they were making with God, the Jews in Jerusalem committed to walk in purity by promising not to give their daughters in marriage to pagans or take their daughters for their sons. They also committed to keep the Sabbath holy.

We should not understand this intermarriage issue as a racial or ethnic issue. It had nothing to do with race or ethnicity. If it did, then the *“all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands”* would not have been included in their covenant (10:28). They understood that one of the main reasons their kings, priests, and fathers walked away from God’s Word was because their marriages with pagans led to syncretistic worship. God’s plan for His people was for them to be an uncompromising light to the nations, but that could not be if life’s most intimate relationship (marriage) compromised their devotion to God. Solomon’s heart was led away from God because he had married foreign women (1 Kings 11:4).

Syncretism also led to neglecting the Sabbath. The Jews saw the success of other peoples who worked seven days a week. Why only make money six days a week, when you can make money seven days? God commanded in creation that the seventh day was to be a day of rest in order to remember the holiness of God. The main reason for the Sabbath was to demonstrate faith toward God. In an agrarian society, the Jews had to gather each day what they would eat. There were no supermarkets. There was little downtime. Instead, there were many things that had to be done each day. Resting on the seventh day of the week was a demonstration of trust and faith in God to provide for their needs. The same was true of the Sabbath year and the cancelation of debts. By resting as God commanded, they upheld their belief in God’s holiness to keep His promise to provide for them.

This prohibition and the command to keep the Sabbath served primarily to keep the Jews spiritually pure. God commands us to be holy and pure before Him. The only proper response for the believer is to commit to walk in purity.

There is a final thing to commit to in your life.

#### **4. Commit to participate in worship.**

Nehemiah 10:32-39 describes the Jews' commitment to support the worship of God at the temple. The whole point of the Mosaic law and the temple was that these things enabled Israel to enjoy the presence of God. These commitments were not about legalistic obligations. No, they made possible the Jews ability to enjoy the good pleasure of God.

Today, we no longer live in the era of the old covenant. Our sins are not covered by the slaughtering of bulls and lambs at the temple. Today, we live in the era of the new covenant in Jesus Christ. He became for us the better and final sacrifice to atone for all sin (Heb 9:13-14). Therefore, today, we don't go to the temple to offer sacrifices. We bring the temple with us. It is the collective church, consisting of each and every believer. Subsequently, there is no building in Jerusalem that believers are obligated to support financially. Instead, the teaching of the New Testament tells us now our financial support goes toward the work of the gospel ministry through the local church (1 Cor 9:6-23; 16:1-2; 2 Cor 9:6-8; Gal 6:6, 10; 1 Tim 5:17-18).

Why does the Jews' commitment to participate in worship center on financial giving? Why does it not center on service or attendance? These two aspects of worship are important, but they don't give the full picture of a person's worship. Perhaps, it is better to understand worship as *worship*. Jesus taught, "*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*" (Matt 6:21). In other words the best way to ascribe worth to someone or something is to spend your treasure on it. If you value Jesus, then you will give to support His work. It's not a quantity issue. The widow

who gave two copper coins gave very little, but what she did give cost her very much (Mark 12:41-44).

The contributions to the temple made possible the entire sacrificial system, including priests, Levites, offerings, and benevolence. When the Jews gave systematically, consistently, and joyfully it revealed hearts that loved and worshiped God. When they didn't do so, it revealed hearts that were wicked and far from God (Mal 1). It is no different for us today in the age of the church. Our heart follows what we treasure. In many ways, your love and worship of Christ will result in you giving systematically, consistently, and joyfully to His work through the church.

**Conclusion:** When John Hancock, John Adams, Samuel Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and the other colonial leaders signed the Declaration of Independence, they committed themselves to two things: securing the colonies' independence from the King of England and the surety of death if they failed. The time for talking about independence was over. It was now time to put up or shut up. It was time to commit to the cause.

For some of you, it is time to commit. You have sensed the Lord stirring your heart. You know you are lost and in need of salvation. It's time to commit. As a Christian, you know that your walk with Christ is not what it should be. You are living in sin and need to return to Jesus. It's time to recommit. For others, the Lord has led you to RLBC. You sense that God wants you to pursue membership. It's time to commit yourself to serving God through this local church. If the Lord is leading you to commit to Him this morning, I'm going to ask you to respond publicly. Why do you need to respond publicly? The devil is not worried by our pious aspirations. He is troubled when, in obedience to God, for the glory of Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, we make firm practical decisions to do specific things for the Lord.