

# ESSENTIALS OF EVANGELISM

The Bob Jones University Lectures on Evangelism for 1958

by

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### WHY MANY CHURCHES OF AMERICA ARE DEAD AND FORSAKEN

TEXT: “**Why is the house of God forsaken?**” (Nehemiah 13:11).

Two of the most wonderful books in the Bible for the Christian worker are the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The book of Nehemiah especially sets forth some essentials for success in the Lord’s work. If the fundamental methods used by this spiritual giant Nehemiah were to be used by Christians and New Testament Churches today, we would see great revivals and multitudes saved. The book of Nehemiah should be taught in every course on soul winning and evangelism.

The Word of God had come to pass with such minute and wonderful accuracy. The Children of Israel had been taken into captivity for a period of 70 years as God said they would be. At the close of the 70 years captivity after the Jews had been scattered to the various heathen nations, God began to work in the hearts of men like Ezra and Nehemiah. The Temple of God in Jerusalem so ruthlessly destroyed by the cruel and wicked Nebuchadnezzar must be rebuilt. The walls of the glorious city of Zion lay in shameful debris. Who would dare to undertake such a gigantic task? Who would have the courage in face of such bitter and persistent opposition to take a little chosen handful of believers and assail such a tremendous problem? Only a God-called, Spirit-empowered, giant-hearted man such as Nehemiah!

What a wonderful man is this man Nehemiah. He has so many admirable characteristics of leadership. He was a man of prayer, and the book of Nehemiah records his prayers and how earnestly he prayed. He was a man of compassion; he wept over the pitiful condition of the city of Jerusalem and the people of God. He was a humble man, a man who knew the weaknesses and the sin of his own heart, for he confessed that he himself as well as his fellow countrymen had sinned. This shows his humility. He was a man of courage, and he needed great courage for every subtle effort of the Devil was used to dishearten him. Notice how this opposition manifested itself. The Devil works the same today to keep churches and preachers and laymen from winning souls and getting the job done.

1. *The enemies were grieved because there was a small group of people with deep concern for the work of God.* “**It grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel**” (Nehemiah 2:10).

2. *The enemies laughed at this God-called minority: “They laugh us to scorn and despised us and said, What is this thing that you do?”* (Nehemiah 2:19).

3. *The enemies ridiculed and counted this true and scriptural work a small and insignificant matter. They said, “Even that which the build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall”* (Nehemiah 4:3).

4. *The enemies joined hands and cooperated together to defeat this true work of God. “And conspired all of them together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to hinder it”* (Nehemiah 4:8).

5. *The enemies sought to bring about an unequal and unscriptural union of believers and unbelievers. They said, “Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages”* (Nehemiah 6:2) and Nehemiah sent them this classic answer, **“I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, while I leave it and come down to you?”** (Nehemiah 6:3).

6. *The enemies tried to frighten them by threatening words. They said, “Their hands shall be weakened from their work, that it be not done”* (Nehemiah 6:9). Nehemiah responded with this compassionate prayer, **“Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands”** (Nehemiah 6:9).

Because the few remained courageous and true, a great work was done, a great revival broke out, and great honor was brought upon the Lord and his work.

There are some things recorded in the book of Nehemiah that he did which show that he feared no one. These things he did in the power of God, for there is no other way that a man could get by with some of the things that he did except it be done in the energy of the Spirit and by the power of God. For instance, he threatened the merchants who desecrated the Sabbath Day and sold their wares in the city of Jerusalem on the Holy Day. He said, **“If you do so again, I will lay hands on you.”** He showed courage when he went into the temple and threw the furniture of one wicked Tobiah out of the holy chamber in the temple. He showed courage again when he pronounced a curse upon the backslidden, vacillating Jews who had married wives of Ashdod. He threatened them, pronounced a curse upon them and smote certain ones and plucked out their hair. Then we read that he chased the son-in-law of Sanballat — chased him away, ran him off. He was a man of great courage. He was a great worker and great leader. There is much to be learned about Christian leadership and soul winning and church building in the book of Nehemiah. In many respects, it is a book on how to work for the Lord.

We read what the enemy will do when we undertake to work for God. The enemy tried to make fun of what they were doing and laugh them out of their holy purpose. They stood back and said, **“If a fox were to go upon the wall, it would break down.”** Then they threatened them and told them they were violating the law of the King and of Persia and that they would suffer for it. Thus they tried to put fear in their heart. Then they tried to join them.

The Devil has never changed in his tactics.

He seeks to laugh us out of our work; he seeks to put fear in our heart as to the consequences of being true to God; he seeks to get us to join the wrong crowd or allow them to join us in order to weaken the forces of the church. What a wonderful book it is.

I am concerned primarily in this message with the statement found in the last chapter of the book which is a most vital and important question, “**Why is the house of God forsaken?**”

In this chapter there are five reasons shown why the house of God in Jerusalem was forsaken. I want to make it clear that the house of God can be forsaken in more ways than by one's physical presence. We are seeing in many instances today thousands of people attending the house of the Lord, and yet the house of God, the true, scriptural house of God and the work of God is being forsaken. It is being forsaken in the very same five ways that this chapter points out that the house of God was forsaken in the days of Nehemiah. Thousands of churches across America today know nothing about the old-fashioned prayer meetings. The Sunday night evangelistic service has long since been abandoned by many. A soul-winning visitation program is unheard of in most churches. God's house has been forsaken!

## **I. THE HOUSE OF GOD WAS FORSAKEN BECAUSE OF A LACK OF SEPARATION**

First of all, the house of God was forsaken by lack of separation. In the first three verses in this 13th Chapter of Nehemiah we read this significant statement: “**On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people**” (They were reading from the first few verses of the 23rd Chapter of the book of Deuteronomy).

Reading these verses they discovered that God had said many years previous that the Ammonite and Moabite should never come into the congregation of God forever. Now Nehemiah finds that the Ammonite and the Moabite, these heathen, unconverted ones, were in the congregation of God and were allowed there. The thing that caused them to see this lack of separation was the reading of the Word of God.

You know, dear friends, it is most important today that we know what the Bible says on the subject of separation. There is much involved. The Christian individually is to be separated from evil and from the world and from all that is anti-Christian and anti-God. The church collectively as a body is to be a separated group. We are to be separate doctrinally as well as from the standpoint of conduct. Many today who are separated from the standpoint of Christian conduct are not separated from the standpoint of Christian doctrine; that is, the very freely mix and mingle with people who do not believe in the virgin birth of Christ and the entire verbal inspiration of the Word of God, and many other cardinal truths held dear by the born again child of God. We must be careful that we are not only separated from the standpoint of Christian doctrine, but separate also from the standpoint of Christian conduct and vice versa. One without the other is not complete consecration. The Pharisees were separated from the standpoint of conduct; that is, they lived a self-righteous life; but from the standpoint of Christian doctrine, they were not separated.

The substituted the traditions of men and their own conveniences and that which was expedient for them for that which was clearly set forth and laid down in the Word of the eternal God. These Ammonite and Moabites and all their descendants were people upon whom the curse of God had rested. Ammon and Moab were the two sons born to the two wicked daughters of Lot by their own father after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The curse of God was upon them; yet they had been allowed in the house of the Lord.

Then we read in verse 3 of this chapter of a “**mixed multitude**.” Mark that phrase in your Bible. It is found a number of times. In Exodus 12:38 we read of a “**mixed multitude**” who went out of Egypt when Israel was redeemed by blood. This mixed multitude went along, not because they had been redeemed and sheltered and cleansed by the blood of the Passover lamb but because they had seen God work miracles in Egypt. They went along from a fleshly standpoint, from the standpoint of curiosity, and to be with a great group of people who were going out. Their hearts were not changed.

Later on, hundreds of years later, we find this mixed multitude still present approximately 1000 years after they went out of Egypt. We find also in the book of Numbers, Chapter 11, verse 4 that when Moses was leading the Children of Israel out of the bondage of Egypt to the freedom and blessings of the land of Canaan and had come to Kadesh-Barnea, a most important place and most epochal event in the life of Israel, that this same “**mixed multitude**” was there to hinder and caused a weeping and murmuring among the people of God.

The mixed multitude is always a hindrance. It always has been and always will be. There is absolutely no point to be gained by the admission of unconverted people into the membership of churches. In fact, it is a wicked sin against God. God’s Word says: “**Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.**” God says in His book. “**Come out from among them and be ye separate and touch not the unclean thing.**” The greatest need in the churches of America today if they are to be soul winning churches is to get back to the Bible in the matter of Christian separation.

## **II. THE HOUSE OF GOD WAS FORSAKEN BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF CLEANNESS**

We find in verses 4-9 of this 13th Chapter of Nehemiah that Eliashib, the priest, had taken a compromising attitude toward Tobiah, a wicked man who had opposed the work of the Lord carried on by Nehemiah and his faithful cohorts. We read how this priest with great compromise had allowed Tobiah to occupy a most important and sacred chamber there in the temple. Tobiah had taken up his abode there. This is most important because this chamber typically speaking was a chamber reserved for the Lord Jesus Christ. There the meat offerings and frankincense were stored which were typical of Jesus.

Actually, it was a room which spoke of His glorious Person; but Tobiah, an enemy of the work of God, had been allowed into the Holy Temple and into this most sacred spot which was to be occupied typically by the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. We read how Nehemiah came to Jerusalem and was grieved in his heart because of this compromise and uncleanness in the house of the Lord.

He went into this particular chamber in the temple and threw all the furniture of wicked Tobiah out into the street and commanded that the chamber be cleansed, and it was. This speaks of cleanness in the house of the Lord. God's church is always to be a clean church. The Bible tells us how that God through the Holy Spirit from time to time has purged out and cleansed wickedness from the midst of the people of God and that purging and chastising on the part of God has always brought fear to the hearts of unbelievers and caused them to be converted and to respect and revere God.

This was true in the days of the early church as recorded in Acts 5 as God struck with sudden death Ananias and Sapphira, who lived a life of pretense and sham and pretended to have achieved a level of spirituality which actually they did not possess, There were funerals and sudden death in the midst of the early church because God wants a clean church.

I read years ago of one of the bloody revolutions that took place in France during the reign of King Louis XVII and his beautiful queen Marie Antoinette. History tells us of how the little Prince, Louis often called The Little Dolphin, was a most feminine looking little boy with beautiful curly hair. Some even hinted that the little Prince was feeble-minded. The revolutionists took the King and Queen and executed them. Just before they were to take the life of The Little Dolphin, the wicked crowd suggested that they have some sport and jest with him.

They said, "Let us not kill him now; let us take him down in the slums and filthy parts of the city and turn him over to old Aunt Mag, the most wicked and vile woman who ever lived. This they did. Aunt Mag, it is said, used all kind of vulgar and vile language in the presence of the Little Prince. She set before him vile and corrupt food and urged him to eat. She sought to induce him to do things that were corrupt and vile. It is said that the Little Prince would shake his curly locks and clench his little fist and beat upon the table and cry, "I will not; I will not. Don't you know I am the son of a King? I shall not defile myself with these wicked thoughts and this vile and corrupt food. I'm a child of a King. I'm a child of a King." He said, "You may kill me, but I will gladly die before I will defile myself with these wicked things."

This ought to be the spirit dominating the heart and life of every Christian. First of all we should realize we are children of the King. We are not our own; we have been bought with a price. We thank God that because of the new birth and the cleansing blood and the indwelling Holy Spirit we are a royal people. God give us the spirit to say, "Gladly would die before I would defile myself and desecrate my body, which is the temple of the Holy Ghost." The house of God is often forsaken in the matter of cleanness on the part of the members of the household of faith. Only clean Christians will ever be able to win the lost and check the awful flood tide of wickedness which threatens to destroy our homes and churches and freedom.

### **III. THE HOUSE OF GOD WAS FORSAKEN BY LACK OF GIVING**

Verses 10-14 show how the tithe had ceased to be brought into the temple, and as a result of this the priests were not even being supported and had gone back to the fields and farms in order to make their living. Now the Word of God teaches that His work is to be supported by the tithes and offerings of the Lord's people. There is no argument on the subject.

There is no question whatever but that the Bible teaches this is God's way and the only way God has ordained in the Scriptures that the work of the Lord be supported. All manner of excuses can be given why people do not tithe. Some say, "I believe tithing was under law, and I am at complete liberty under grace to do as I will on this matter." I will show you, God helping me, that the Bible does not teach that tithing was at first instituted under law. Abraham in Genesis 14 tithed. This was at least 500 years before the law was given at Sinai. Abraham tithed before the law was given, and God commended him for it.

We read further in Genesis 28 that Jacob made a covenant with God. He said, "**If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God . . . and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.**"

Jacob tithed some several hundred years before the law was ever given. So the tithe was not instituted under law; it was reaffirmed under the Mosaic Law. Malachi 3:10 is certainly a tremendous statement concerning the tithe and its connection with the house of God. Malachi 3:10 reads, "**Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.**"

It is a significant thing that the tithe in the Bible is connected with the house of God. It is our conviction that God wants the Christian to give to the local church if that local church is truly the house of God in a scriptural sense. In fact, referring again to the instance of Jacob and his tithe we find even in this case that the tithe is connected to God's house, for when Jacob made this holy resolve and covenant with God to tithe, he poured oil upon a stone and called that place Bethel. Bethel means *the house of God*.

The story has been told of a young man years ago during the days of great depression who was forced to leave his father's home to seek to make a living for his own. This young man as he left his father's home was passing a farmer's house, and the farmer came out and took him by the hand and said, "Bill, you are leaving your father's home and going to the city. There are two or three words of advice I would like to give you. First, be a Christian; serve God and never forget that you belong to Jesus. Second, the first dollar that you ever make and all that God gives you in your life, be sure to honor God with at least a tenth."

The young man looked in the face of the Christian farmer and replied, "These two things I will observe." He went into the city and he gave 10 cents of the first dollar he made unto the Lord. He followed this practice throughout all of his career.

That man was William Colgate, who was the head of the Colgate industries and out of whose hands have come hundreds of thousands of dollars for the work of God. It pays to tithe because it pays to obey God, and it is always best to observe the Word of the Lord. Many times the house of God is forsaken by people's not giving of their tithe and offering unto the Lord.

God will not bless a Christian and give him a soul-winning ministry if he is disobedient to God in the matter of the tithe and offering, and God will not bless a church and make it a great soul-winning church if it attempts to support the gospel in any other way except by the scriptural method of the tithe and offering.

#### **IV. THE HOUSE OF GOD WAS FORSAKEN BY THE DESECRATION OF THE SABBATH DAY**

In verses 15-22 we read that Nehemiah was grieved because of the merchants who came to the walls on the Sabbath Day and were allowed to peddle their merchandise and sell their wares to the people in the city and go through the opened gates on the Sabbath Day. This, of course, was a flagrant violation of the Holy Scriptures. The people of Israel had the seventh day, the Sabbath Day, set aside as a holy day unto the Lord, and they were not to pick up sticks or cook food or go out of their tents, much less to be peddling merchandise on the Sabbath Day.

Now understand that the Bible speaks plainly that the Sabbath was given not to the church, not to the saved gentile, but the Sabbath was given in the book of Exodus clearly points out unto Israel. In Exodus 31:13 God said, **“Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbath ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you.”**

Now the Lord never gave the seventh day to the church. If I had no other proof that the Lord’s Day is the day that we worship and meet together in the house of God than the fact that it is the day that Jesus arose from the grave, that would be enough. However, the Bible goes further. Acts 20:7 records the observance of communion in the early church on the Lord’s Day, not the seventh day. I Corinthians 16 tells us that we are to bring our tithe unto the Lord on that day, and we are to forsake not the assembling of ourselves together in the house of the Lord bringing our offering with us on the first day of the week.

Now then, in spite of the fact we do not keep the seventh day or the Sabbath, we observe the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day; and in spite of the fact that there is a distinct difference between the two, one was a day of complete rest and inactivity for Israel while the other is a day of worship and meeting together and service for the Lord for the church. The Lord’s Day is a holy day. We believe that it is wrong to violate the holy day of the Lord and not to observe and keep it. It certainly is wicked for a Christian to absent himself from the house of the Lord on the day of the Lord. Desecration of the Sabbath Day was a sin in Nehemiah’s generation. Forsaking the house of the Lord on the Lord’s Day is a sin in our day which is prominent among hundreds of thousands of professing Christians.

In the interests of the nation we must keep the Sabbath. Said the great Victorian statesman, W. E. Gladstone, “Tell me what the young men of England are doing on Sunday, and I will tell you what the future of England will be.” For our own sake, for the sake of our families, our sons and daughters, and all coming after, let us safeguard the Sabbath Day. The Christian Sabbath has been provided for us in the wisdom of God for our physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, and we act wisely when we use this God-given day in the worship and service of our Maker, and in giving heed to the things that matter most.

A few years ago the ladies of my church told me this strange and yet true story. These ladies said they went out to the woods hunting some kind of berries. While they were walking out through the woods along a little road, they suddenly heard an awful noise. They looked in the direction of the noise, and it appeared that a building had collapsed. They went over to the building and there stood a man shaking like a leaf. The color had left his face, and he looked deathly sick. He said to these ladies, "Just a few seconds before this garage fell, one of my little children who was playing in there came out. Then the garage collapsed into the pile of rubbish that you see now. I am a Christian, but I let God's house go, and I got out of fellowship with God, and I stayed away from the Lord and built this garage on the Lord's Day. Look at it now." He continued, "Just think, but for the mercy of God my little child would have been crushed beneath that heap of stone and wood at this very minute."

I'll tell you, my friends, when God says something in His Word, I believe that it is important, God says, ". . . **forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is.**" David said in Psalm 122: "**I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.**" A Christian is always connected with the house of God.

Now there are 52 Sundays in the year. In our section of the country there are at least ten Sundays in the winter that some fellow who doesn't really want to serve God will say, "Well, it's just too cold." There are at least ten Sundays in the summer, around July and August, when he will say, "Well, it's just too hot."

It's not too hot to go to the grocery store, not too hot to go to work, but too hot to go to church. It's too cold ten Sundays and it's too hot ten Sundays. There are at least ten Sundays when it is pouring down rain. Now wouldn't it be awful, friends, for a Christian to get a little bit damp going to the house of God? Wouldn't that be a tragedy? You know, I have played ball in the rain, and it never bothered me a bit; I've gone hunting in the rain, and it never hurt me a bit. There are ten Sundays that it is too wet to go; this makes thirty Sundays. There are six Sundays when it snows too much.

Some old boy from Tennessee looks out the window and sees the snow. His feet hit the cold floor, and he says, "The Lord is leading me to stay home today." This makes thirty-six Sundays. Now there are five Sundays out of the year that you have company. Let me tell you, company soon learns whom they can visit on the Lord's Day and get a good meal and not be asked to go to the house of God. If your relatives and your neighbors know that they can come to your home and with the slightest excuse you will refrain from going to the house of God, you will never win them to Jesus. They have no confidence whatever in your testimony. Five Sundays you have company. Oh, don't embarrass them. It would be an awful thing even to suggest that they go to the house of God.

You know, nobody bothers me on the Lord's Day. I have never had a caller on Sunday morning. Never. People know who is going to the house of God. Yes, five Sundays you have company. Then there are five Sundays that you have to return the visit. You say, "I've got to go visit Aunt Molly and Uncle Joe. They are getting old." You never do this on Saturday, or Monday, or Tuesday, or Wednesday, or Thursday, or Friday. It must be on the Lord's Day.

Then there are four Sundays that you are sick. Actually one day you are sick; the other three you think you are. Johnny sneezes on Friday so all six members of the family stay home on the Lord's Day. That takes up fifty Sundays, which leaves two. You very piously say, "I'm going to church today." That is Easter. Again you say, "I'm going to church today." That is Christmas.

That is a sorry kind of Christianity, isn't it?

You laugh about it, but I want to tell you if you as a Christian, and Tom Malone as a preacher have come to the place that we accept that kind of Christianity, there is something wrong with us, and we are backslidden and not very close to God.

#### **V. THE HOUSE OF GOD WAS FORSAKEN BY UNSCRIPTURAL MARRIAGES ON THE PART OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD**

Verses 23-27 give us the pitiful record of the intermarriage of the Jews with the heathen women of the Ammonites and the Moabites, who followed the false religion of Ashdod. The pitiful results are set forth, for the Bible tells us their children were confused and mixed up. They spake half in the speech of Ashdod and could not speak in the Jew's language because of the mixed marriage and intermingling on the part of God's people and the heathen people.

Mixed marriages and unscriptural marriages always cause disaster and confusion.

- Children are misled and confused.
- Homes are broken ending in divorce.
- Souls are sent to hell.
- The Word of God is violated.
- The Spirit of God is grieved.
- The house of the Lord is hindered.
- The work of God is hindered as it was in this instance.

No wonder Nehemiah was so stirred up on this matter he contended with them, pronounced a curse on them, smote certain of them and pulled out their hair. He demonstrated that he was opposed to this violation of the Word of God.

I remember years ago hearing a very Spirit-filled and wonderful evangelist tell of a family he knew in the East when he was a young preacher. It was another case of a young Christian woman who stepped out of the will of God and violated the Scripture and married an unsaved man.

The young man became very successful in business and finally they became very wealthy people. The Lord blessed them with a little baby girl. She was torn between two opinions, those of her mother who sought to serve the Lord and those of her father who lived only for this world and what he could get out of it. When she reached the age of sixteen, her father bought her an automobile, beautiful clothes and sought to shove her on to the dance floor and into the mad whirl of a godless society.

When she was twenty-one, she contracted pneumonia while attending a dance. She soon lay upon her death bed. It is said that the broken-hearted mother stood on one side and the broken-hearted father stood on the other side.

The father came and brought the jewels, the keys to the beautiful car, some of the evening clothes and laid them on the foot of the bed and sought to comfort the daughter's heart in her dying hour. The daughter, it is said, looked at her father and in her dying moments said, "Father, none of these things mean anything to me now. What I have needed all along is my mother's Saviour. You've led me astray. You've led me wrong. You've damned my soul. I'm dying now, and there is no hope."

In a moment she closed her eyes in the silent sleep of death and departed this life without hope and went out to meet God totally unprepared. It never pays to violate God's Holy Word to live in sin and unbelief.

Why is the house of God forsaken? Why have you forsaken the Lord? Why have you turned from Him? Why have you failed to trust Him?

**~ end of chapter 5 ~**

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