

A note to fathers on Father's Day... A man is always fathering whether he is present in a child's life or not. Each is teaching about our heavenly Father - either lies or truth - by the way that they live. Sacrificing preferences, habits, addictions, and self will pay true dividends. The opposite is also true - living for self will hinder children. Today, many of our youth are growing up without a father in the home and represent many drug and alcohol addictions, school dropouts, runaway children, behavioral problems, etc. The church needs to rise up in America to coach, mentor, and support these fatherless children.

Out of Exile Series from Ezra and Nehemiah continues... Good boundary markers are important and provide security and protection. They are the first step toward identity in a people and when deeply set and rooted will last a long time. In Nehemiah's day and in our day, living inside the boundaries of the Kingdom of God are essential. In our series "Out of Exile," Ezra and Nehemiah were called out by God to reestablish Jerusalem after 70 years of exile in Babylon.

Two different men, motivated by the same God, were called to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. Ezra rebuilt the temple and worship. Nehemiah rebuilt the walls and the gates of the city. All of the people agreed on worship, agreed where the boundaries would be, but they had not yet agreed on how to live. Agreeing on how to live was and is a key to success in a community. **Nehemiah 10** lists the leadership and then the rest of the people's charge begins in verse 28.

Nehemiah 10:28-29 *Now the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, all those who had knowledge and understanding, are joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to comply with all the commandments of God our Lord, and His ordinances and statutes.*

The people had rebuilt the walls, rehung the gates, conquered enemies, but yet still needed to agree on how to live. The people all got together and took an oath and a curse to obey an agreement. The oath is the promise. The curse is the discipline applied when the promise is broken. Our Father will discipline us in order to love us well.

These six covenants to live by were agreed by all of the people - a community commitment. This week we'll cover 3 of those. Freedom Fellowship is based on these same covenants as God led Pastor Dennis to restore this church.

1. They agreed to obey God. Nehemiah 10:29 to walk in God's law, to keep and observe all the commandments. Notice the words of three different actions... *walk* (the normal activities of life), *keep* (to protect and love), *observe* (spend time to gain a deeper understanding of God's Word). The object was all of the laws (10 commandments and other 613) spoken through Moses. These were a big deal to the Jews. Jesus boiled it down to one law... **John 13:34-35** *I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another.* Jesus is adding to God's laws which was not acceptable to the Jews. This was a new commandment of love. People today want to see that Christians are different. Walking in unity and love is noticeable. Love makes us different. This alone defines the fulfilling of the law. Jesus loves us and we need to love one another.

If you do not love... **I John 2:11** *But the one who hates his brother or sister is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.* This is John speaking to the church. "Hate" can also mean "to be indifferent." Forgiveness is a choice we make, not an emotion. If you have trouble forgiving, then say it and keep saying it an infinite amount of times. Say "I choose to forgive because Jesus forgave me." **I John 3:14** *because we love the brothers and sisters. The one who does not love remains in death.* **I John 3:12** *not as Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And for what reason did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil, but his brothers were righteous.* Cain chose evil over love. We must choose to live a lifestyle after God. We must agree to love one another. Love is a choice for the highest good of all concerned. Jesus' love for us was a sacrificial, joyful, holy love leaving a mark on those touched by it. Have you been touched by His love? Submit to Jesus today!

2. Protect our children. Nehemiah 10:30 *and that we will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.* We are to protect our children. It weakened the covenant of God when they intermarried and then worshipped other gods. Tips for parenting today:

- You are not your children's friend; you are their parent. Act like it.
- Let children make mistakes early and suffer the consequences. Don't be a helicopter or bulldozer parent. Mistakes develop fortitude.
- Stop being a victim; stop making excuses.
- Look for a person to model successful parenting. That means one who has grown children that are giving more than they are taking from society. Let those models become mentors.
- Sacrifice your own needs and wants.

3. Observe the law of the Sabbath. Nehemiah 10:31 *As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day.* Most think of Sabbath as doing nothing or as a time to do as we want. The Sabbath goes back to creation - God created rest. Sabbath is a long-term goal, subtle yet powerful beyond imagination. Yet, it is the most disobeyed of all.

July begins our Sabbath celebration at Freedom. It is not a time to do nothing but a time to emphasize doing things together and doing what God says, resting with God. The Sabbath was powerful because it was the time to supply needs. These people committed to be where God was. We need to get our families to church and serve together. Expect to be offended by people in the church. This is not about agreeing with others or being obligated. It is about coming together to see the blessings of God, to love the way Jesus loves so that real community takes place. It's our boundary marker.

John 10:29 *My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.* There is a Father who loves us more than you could even imagine and who has always been there for us. Turn to this Father if you don't know Him. Embrace this Father. The love of God is expressed through Jesus Christ who came to pay the price for our sins once and for all. It is given freely. Accept it today.

How does the new commandment of Jesus fit with the Old Testament laws?

Explain how you understand these 3 covenants as applied to FFC?

Can you apply any of the parenting tips for your family?