

## Neh. 10:28-39 “Covenant Obligations”

**For the Children:** If you say you are going to do something your parents ask of you, it's not good to break your word. If you *promise* to do it, and don't, it's even worse. If you *swear* you're going to, and don't, it's worst of all. God places His children in a situation where we swear to obey His will – to make more sure that we obey. Even so, we often don't obey. Thankfully, the Lord Jesus died to cover our sins of oath-breaking. This should make us even more determined to seek His help to obey – out of gratitude. **Questions:** How does God's covenant make us different than unbelievers? What are some areas in which we can show that we are different than the world? Why do we need the Lord Jesus to keep us in God's covenant?

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### Introduction:

#### First Point: The Nature of Covenant Obligations

- 1) Separate Identity: Covenant-renewal has a lot to do with the separate identity of God's people, because the covenant itself stresses that point – by reinforcing promises only God's people enjoy and bringing commands that differentiate believers from the world. The particular commands singled out here are ones that especially create that separation. This covenant-renewal occurred because the people saw that their sins, which made them like the world, threatened their existence as God's people
- 2) Personal Commitment: The covenant required of them a strong personal commitment and submission to God's Word. V. 9 piles up words that speak of “doing” God's Law. One cannot be committed to only some of God's Word. That commitment involves not only acceptance of Biblical principles, but also practical application – as follows from v. 30 on
- 3) Taking on a Curse and an Oath: The covenant involves an oath-bound promise by God, to have a people for Himself. The people respond by an oath to do what the Word says and to accept that they will be cursed if they break covenant. (v. 29). This is a most powerful incentive to obey and disincentive for rebellion. All who were of an age of understanding followed their leaders in signing the covenant-document. The whole community was committed, even the children – all obligated to obey. They were all obligated already as God's covenant-people. But expressing the vows personally (as at Profession of Faith) is a way of being renewed in it

#### Second Point: The Details of the Post-Exilic Covenant-Renewal

- 1) Separation in Marriage: The “mixed marriage” issue is raised again (v. 30), for this was an ongoing threat to Israel's separation from the world. See Ezra 9, 10 and Neh. 10, 13. Satan often uses relationships to bring worldly influences into the believer's life and home. It is not a light matter, since this, too, is a matter of oath and curse!
- 2) Separation on the Sabbath: The people vow to avoid Sabbath-trading with the peoples of the land (v. 31). Keeping the Sabbath and using it for worship help maintain the difference from the world. For on this Day God's people focus on His covenant-promise and law. If the Day is ignored, the difference from the world is generally blurred. The Returnees also vowed to uphold the other OT holy times, such as the Sabbath Year, with its resting of the land and release of debts. See Neh. 5
- 3) Identity around the House of God: The House of God provided a central source of Israel's identity as a holy people who lived with God in their midst. The Temple offerings, services, servants and facilities needed to be maintained with money, food, wood etc. This was commanded in the Law (Ex. 30:11-16, Num. 18 etc). The Persian government had been supporting these costs so far (Ezra 6:9, 7:17). However, there are dangers in the church being beholden to the State – including the danger of being “unequally yoked.” Israel needed to support the Temple ministry and keep it separate from an ungodly State – even if this was hard for the small community. Support for the Church and its ministry – by tithes, attendance and sharing in the work – are essential for maintaining the identity of God's people
- 4) Renewal in Christ: None of these measures, however, will suffice – unless there is a daily recommitment to our vows in Christ's merits and strength. His work covers our oath-breaking. His Word and Spirit, if in our hearts, enable daily renewal that will otherwise escape us

### Conclusion: