

Eliminating Extortion

As revival proceeds there will be those who come into the church, encounter God, get set free and begin to turn their lives around. They will have needs and there will be those in the Body that God has blessed to help. They will also have a past that does not need to be exploited.

This was exactly the case in Acts 2 and in Nehemiah 5. The enemy has a strategy he seeks to employ that at least slows the revival and at best stops it. Scripture calls it extortion.

Extortion can be financial (money, lands) or relational (due harm to relationships) extortion.

Extortion - to obtain from a person by force, intimidation, or undue illegal power; a gross overcharge,

The implicit threat of violence or other means to cause harm to person, reputation, or property as a means to obtain something from someone else with his consent.

A criminal act of extortion, malicious threatening to do injury to another to compel him to do an act against his will. Usually involves the threat to release information, often true, about the person that will defame his reputation or bring criminal actions against him.

OR we can say that extortion is a strategy of the enemy against us in the area of finances and friendships.

1 Corinthians 1:10–13 *Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. ... 13 Has Christ been divided?*
divisions were arising, reputations were being damaged

1 Corinthians 3:1–4 *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. 2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, 3 for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?*
jealousy and strife exist, Malicious maligning

Nehemiah 5 the people felt mandated by God to rebuild the wall and the work took a lot of time. So much that it was creating an economic crisis in families because there was not sufficient time to plant and harvest crops.

Ezra 9:9 *“For we are slaves; yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, but has extended lovingkindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us reviving to raise up the house of our God, to restore its ruins and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem.*

I. There are several different groups or situations represented in Nehemiah 5.

- A. **First**, in **Nehemiah 5:2** there are the wage earners whose families were becoming destitute. The economic crisis was especially difficult for large families. During the months they were working on the wall, they could not produce enough grain; therefore, they had to buy it even though they were poor. Little money buys little grain.

This whole episode in Nehemiah teaches us that we cannot ignore the needs of people, even when involved in a special project. The conditions of oppression here are similar to those described in Malachi 3:5–15.

- B. **Second, in Nehemiah 5:3–4** The second group in trouble consisted of landowners. In order to get loans to buy grain, they had to mortgage their property.

Others had to borrow money to pay the taxes on their property. The Babylonians had taxed real estate, and the Persians continued the same practice.

Darius had instituted a tax on the past harvest plus the present yield. In the time of Artaxerxes taxation was heavy throughout the Persian Empire; many landowners fell into the hands of “loan sharks”, fellow Jews, who made enormous profits.

Heavy taxation is a form of socioeconomic oppression (Prov 22:7). Sometimes the charge was as much as 40 percent interest instead of the normal 20 percent. The result was a form of slavery (Neh 9:37).

- C. **Third, in Nehemiah 5:5** At times a family was forced to resort to debt slavery.

This practice was common in the ancient Near East, and in the laws of the Pentateuch it was controlled but not prohibited (Exod 21:1–11).

The son or daughter had to work for the creditor until the debt was paid (2 Kgs 4:1). In many cases the daughter was taken as wife by the creditor or for one of his sons. The law of the Sabbatical Year required that debt slaves be released in the seventh year (Lev 25:39–43).

- II. There existed those (brethren) who were taking advantage of the situation to profit themselves.

- A. In our culture:

This is the reasons credit card debt is limited

Gas stations and other services cannot drastically increase prices after a disaster....

- B. Factors at work here

1. They had large families
2. Haggai 1:9 tells us that God had sent a drought because some of the people were more interested in working on their own homes than the house of God. Therefore, the crops were suffering.
3. Some think it was a Sabbatical year and the land was to be at rest.
4. They were taxed by the Persian king
5. They were facing the selling of their children into slavery.
6. AND, there were those among them (Jewish brothers) that had means who were lending money and charging interest, buying up choice pieces of land at very low prices and selling food at very high prices.

- III. Nehemiah’s rebuke

Nehemiah 5:7-11 *“What is this you are doing?” I demanded. “How dare you demand a mortgage as a condition for helping another Israelite!” Then I called a public trial to deal with them.*

⁸At the trial I shouted at them, “The rest of us are doing all we can to help our Jewish brothers who have returned from exile as slaves in distant lands, but you are forcing them right back into slavery again.

“What you are doing is very evil,” I exclaimed. “Should you not walk in the fear of our God? Don’t we have enough enemies among the nations around us who are trying to destroy us? ¹⁰The rest of us are lending money and grain to our fellow Jews without any interest. I beg you, gentlemen, stop this business of usury. ¹¹Restore their fields, vineyards, olive yards, and homes to them this very day and drop your claims against them.”

1 Cor 10:4 Now these things happened as examples for us,

Luke 22:31-32 “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; ³²but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

IV. The test financially is

1. Integrity issues –

Proverbs 2:7 ⁷ He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity,

Prov 28:6 Better is the poor who walks in his integrity
Than he who is crooked though he be rich.

Integrity MUST be tested

Luke 16:10 “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.

¹¹“Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you? ¹²“And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?”

Parable of Talents

Luke 19:17 “And he said to him, ‘Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.’

2. Faith issues

Luke 18:8 will I find faith on the earth?”

Am I going to believe God for what He has said Or not?

Am I going to believe that He is my provider ... or not?

3. The test with broken friendships is

Bitterness

Ephesians 4:30–31 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. **31** Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Resentment

Hebrews 12:14–15 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. **15** See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

Revenge

Romans 12:17–21 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. **18** If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. **19** Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord. **20** “BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.” **21** Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Matt 5:44 “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Matt 5:11-12 ¹“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. ¹²“Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

V. Job as an example to us

On a bet Satan took:

Job’s family
His herds
His home
His health

In this extortion Job was tested After passing the tests Job was restored

Often I come out of an act of obedience to discover ...

A/C is broken
Car needs repaired
Appliance needs serviced
Friendship is fragile

There are those that give this a name “backlash”

Personally, I do not want to credit darkness by giving it a name

Issues in these times are to

Integrity	walk in it in thought and deed.
Faith	believe God, no wavering
Bitterness	quick to forgive and forget
Resentment	none of that
Revenge	none of that either!!!