

Unless the LORD Builds the House

Walking Away from Hakephirim

Psalm 126:1 *A Song of Ascents.*

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

² Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

³ The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad.

⁴ Restore our fortunes, O LORD like streams in the Negeb!

⁵ Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!

⁶ He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him."

Neh 6:1 Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates),

² Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come and let us meet together at Hakephirim in the plain of Ono." But they intended to do me harm.

³ And I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?"

⁴ And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner.

⁵ In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand.

⁶ In it was written, "It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king

⁷ And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, 'There is a king in Judah.' And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together."

⁸ Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind."

⁹ For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done." But now, O God, strengthen my hands.

¹⁰ Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home, he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple. Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night."

¹¹ But I said, "Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in."

¹² And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.

¹³ For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me.

¹⁴ Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid."

Psalm 127:1 *A Song of Ascents. Of Solomon.* Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.
² It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.
³ Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.
⁴ Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth.
⁵ Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate."

Neh 6:15 "So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.

¹⁶ And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

¹⁷ Moreover, in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them.

¹⁸ For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as his wife.

¹⁹ Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid.

Nehemiah 7:1 Now when the wall had been built and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed,

² I gave my brother Hanani and Hananiah the governor of the castle charge over Jerusalem, for he was a

more faithful and God-fearing man than many.

³ And I said to them, "Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot. And while they are still standing guard, let them shut and bar the doors. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their guard posts and some in front of their own homes."

⁴ The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few, and no houses had been rebuilt.

⁵ Then my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles and the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogy."

PSALM 126-127; NEHEMIAH 6:1-14; 6:15-7:5a

Home Improvement

“UNLESS THE LORD BUILD THE HOUSE, those who build it labor in vain.” This well-known, time-tested proverbial saying is framed and hung inside homes across the world. It is a saying of Solomon, but not from Proverbs. Solomon did say some things about building houses in Proverbs. The Proverb I’m looking at comes in one of two Psalms that are attributed to him in the Psalter: **Psalm 127:1**. “*A Song of*

Ascents. Of Solomon. Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” While this saying is always true, I believe we are living in such times that its meaning and correct application have never been more important.

As we have been doing in these Psalms of Ascent, we will be looking at Nehemiah and the Testimonies that correspond to the Psalms. This will both ground us in God’s work in history and point us forward to God’s work in Christ and how he then expects us to “build the house.”

Psalms 126-127

Let’s begin with an overview of the two songs. Psalm 126 deals with something stupendously amazing that God has done. It is so amazing, it is as if the people are living a dream (vs. 1). Because of it, God has filled the people with laughter and joy, and caused them to confess the LORD’s greatness in what he has done for Israel (2-3). Still, it anticipates a time in the future that is even greater, because though he has done great things, they pray to him to restore their fortunes (4), that those presently sowing tears will soon reap shouts of joy (5-6). In this way, the song is prophetic.

What has God done? As an evening/morning set, Psalm 127 answers that he has **built something**. Particularly, he has built “**a house**.” But he **does more**. He “**watches over**” something. In this case, it is **the city** (**vs. 1**). What house? As this is the song of Solomon, the house is clearly the **first temple**. The city would therefore be **Jerusalem**, the place where God would put his Name (**Dt 12:5**).

This song seems to be a reflection then upon how, if we lose focus on the who or the how of God’s building and watching, all will be in vain. **Vanity**, a particularly Solomonic outlook on life, is the main theme of **vv. 1-2**. Vanity of building something or doing something *your way*. In the case of the second verse, it includes even waking and going to bed, eating and getting good rest. These things come from God. “Woe to you who rise early” is not meant as a joke told to me by my lazy college friends years ago. It is a serious statement that if the Lord is not building the house, your life will be full of worry and woe.

That’s all rather straightforward so far. But the second half of Psalm 127 shows that **God does not merely build cities or temples**. It moves to the building, first, of **families** with children who will then become those who, second, build **the**

next generation (3-5). It has some wonderful, well-known language. “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward” (3). You are not to think of children as so many do today, as that which ruins your selfish interests of getting ahead in life. This is a usurping of godly house building, the very opposite of the song. They are a blessing, a wonder, a miracle from God. There are entire sermons to be had here, but I have something else I want to focus on today.

Through this metaphor of children, the psalm speaks another “house” that need to be built. This is the national house with its warriors that protect the city gates (4-5). “Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.” Our children are vital to the next generation. I pray this sermon might help you to think on their behalf.

Nehemiah’s Seventh and Eighth Testimonies

After thinking briefly about these songs, we can move to Nehemiah to see that the song was actually applied to his circumstances which differed somewhat from Solomon’s. In

other words, the songs are not just memorials to the long-lost golden age of Solomon. They are a living, breathing Word of Life and Warning to those later on, and therefore, also to us. Let's look briefly at how these songs correspond to the Testimonies of Nehemiah.

Continuing in chronological order from the book of Nehemiah, **Nehemiah 6:1-14** corresponds to Psalm 126. **Nehemiah 6:15-7:5** corresponds to Psalm 127. Nehemiah's **Seventh Testimony** begins **yet another trial in his life** in the land of Israel. His by now familiar enemies Sanballat and Tobiah, along with **"the rest of our enemies"** heard that he had now built the wall. The actual completion of the wall proper has finished, though he had not yet put the doors in the gates (**Neh 6:1**).

In **a last-ditch desperate attempt** to stop these Jews from finishing their project, Sanballat and Geshem send word to Nehemiah to come and meet together at **Hakkephirim** in the plain of Ono (2). We do not know exactly where this place was, though some put it about 30 miles northwest of Jerusalem. What is more curious is the meaning of the word. It comes from words that mean a young **lion** and **covert/cover** and may have therefore been named after the

sacrificial system of Israel. But in the context of the Testimony, it's not exactly subtle. Who is the lion and who will be the sacrifice? Nehemiah tells you, **they intended to do me harm (2)**. It is therefore an easy guess that their letters were under a pretense of dialogue and learning to be tolerant with one another. Come, Nehemiah, let us reason together.

Four times they sent him word to come (4), but Nehemiah refused with the curious statement that we saw a couple of sermons ago, **“I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you” (3)**? Finally, a **fifth letter** was sent (5), this time with a trumped up, utterly false charge that his sole purpose in building this wall was to incite the Jews to rebel and more, that they say Nehemiah is going to set himself up as king (6-7). If we can't ambush him, then we'll destroy your reputation with lies.

Nehemiah responds to the fake news, **“No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind” (8)**. And why? **Fear-mongering, intimidation, and power**. **“For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, ‘Their hands will drop from the work, and it will**

not be done” (9), and Nehemiah prays, “But now, O God, strengthen my hands” (9).

Next, we read something that is stated in an almost *Psalms of Accent* type way, with repetition. Nehemiah goes to the house of someone named Shemaiah who had been confined to his home (perhaps he was among the men so chastised in the previous Testimony?). This man told him that they need to meet together in the “house of God, within the temple” (10). The house theme from the Psalm pops up. He says, “They are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night” (10).

Nehemiah may have suspected this was an attempt to keep him safe, but certainly he also knew it would also cause his work to stop if he sought protective sanctuary. “Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in” (11). (He isn’t a priest!)

Then he found out something, something I’m sure he suspected, but couldn’t quite put his finger on. More fake news. It turns out that Sanballat and Tobiah had actually hired him to give a lying report to keep him from finishing the work (12), thus sinning against God, ruining his public

reputation, and slandering his character (13). Anything to keep the false narrative alive; anything to stop truth from prevailing. This is the arrogance of power-politics that suppresses righteousness at any cost. Comparing it to the present day, it is good to remember that there is nothing new under the sun.

Nehemiah, as he always does, finishes the testimony with a prayer. “Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid” (14).

The Eighth Testimony begins in the next verse which takes place a few days or weeks later. We learn that “the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days” (15). Curiously, this is three weeks before the Feast of Tabernacles, which we have said became the liturgical occasion for the reading of Nehemiah and the singing of the Songs of Ascent in those days. Again, this feast celebrated the year-end harvest, which corresponds nicely to the end of Psalm 126 with its reference to the sheaves. In fact, one of our own familiar hymns is taken from 126:6, “Bringing in the Sheaves,” a simple little song that teaches in

very basic ways how the harvest of souls is sown and eventually brought in on the Great Day. But more on that later.

This Testimony deals with how the enemies of the Jews reacted once they heard that the wall had been fully rebuilt. “All the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of God” (Neh 6:16). Ah, this fits perfectly with Psalm 127’s, “Unless the LORD builds the house...”

Now, the nobility of Israel had been sending letters to Tobiah (17). They had bound themselves to him by oath because he was himself married into an important Jewish family (18). The rich in bed with politicians? Couldn’t be. These same wealthy men had been telling Nehemiah about all the “good deeds” Tobiah had done, while they told him Nehemiah’s words, and Tobiah sent threatening letters to make him afraid (19). Political scare tactics.

But Nehemiah’s hands were too busy to give into the fear formed in the devil’s workshop. He had been preparing the city with its priestly guard. He was setting up gatekeepers, singers, and Levites all around the city (7:1). He was

appointing men like his brother Hanani to the government over Jerusalem, “Because he was more faithful and God-fearing than many” (2). An important commentary on the great need for godly character in politics. He gave instructions for the opening and closing of the gates, for the protection of the city. It needed this protection because “the people within it were few, and no houses had been rebuilt” (4). This part strikes closely at the second half of Psalm 127 with the children that are like arrows in the hand of a warrior who keep shame from coming upon a man when he speaks with his enemies in the gate (Ps 127:4-5).

You can hear in all of this the relevant application of the psalms to Nehemiah’s own situation. As one person has put it looking at Nehemiah, these two songs (including Ps 126’s anticipating the need for God’s future help), and the surrounding Psalms of Ascent together in this regard, “Turn again our fortunes, O LORD. We need decent harvests (126:5-6), and houses to be built (127:1-2), and children to live in them (127:3-5, 128:3-4), and above all peace upon Israel (128:6); and forgiveness for our sins (130), and in time a horn to spring forth unto David (132).”¹

¹ Goulder, 62.

The House of All Houses

So that's a brief survey of the two psalms and their corresponding parts in Nehemiah. We've seen that at least Psalm 127 had **an original application**—to the temple Solomon was building. But both songs end up having **an application in Nehemiah's day** that is fairly different. This time, it is the walls around a newly built temple and long empty city that becomes the occasion for singing about the LORD building the house. So how should we think about this all today? I want to spend the rest of our time this morning thinking about this question in light of these passages. There is a **vital and urgent** need to learn the biblical applications here, so that we can truly sing these songs in a way that is meaningful and true.

I want to start with the idea of **house building**. We will need to begin with things we looked at a couple of weeks ago, with the area of **typology**. For Solomon, the house was **a grand temple** the likes of which the world had never seen. For Nehemiah, it was a **rebuilt temple** with newly secured walls to protect it and the city within. But this **looked forward** to the need for something more, even as Psalm 126

intimates. God had filled them with joy and had done great things for them, but they still needed *all* their fortunes restored.

They were a people long since dried up. For seventy years they had been like the desert of the Negeb (**Ps 126:4**). The Negeb is basically the entire southern third of Israel, just south of hilly Jerusalem. The only water near them came from their tears (**5**). They needed God to bring **streams of living water** to the hot, dry wasteland that had become their people's soul. They needed **a bountiful harvest** so that the seeds they had sown might become sheaves of grain and abundance (**6**). What rich, lovely metaphors to whet the appetite for some greatly needed fulfillment in the future.

Well, this is **exactly the situation** the Lord Jesus (the Psalm of Ascent's Horn of David; **Ps 132:17**; **Luke 1:69**) came into when he descended upon this world of flesh. 400 years had gone by and not a single word from a single prophet had been spoken. There was truly a famine of the word, as Amos once put it (**Amos 8:11**). The only water for their souls was the putrefying stagnate pond-scum of the Greek and Roman gods, which had been introduced in a new form of captivity, a kind of house-arrest in their own land.

Israel had become a desert of slavery, much of its own making, with legalistic rulers and shepherds keeping their own people in bondage in hell.

When Jesus came out of Egypt as a youngster to the rich, fertile watered land of Galilee, the Heavenly Father was signaling a new kind of exodus was imminent. When Jesus returned from 40 days in the desert of great hunger and thirst, he began his ministry to a dried-up people, providing living water to a thirsty sinful woman, and miraculous food from heaven to a group of hungry followers who had nothing.

During that ministry, **Jesus was preparing the ground** for the building of a new house. It was a house that *he would build*, and he would build it in just three days. **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19)**. Like Nehemiah before him, they accused him of sedition and trying to make himself king. More, of threatening to destroy the temple in Jerusalem. But it was all lies. For the house he was talking about was that of his own body. You see, Jesus Christ is the House of God. **Until you understand that this is the House around which all others are built, you’re building godless or pagan structures.**

How would Jesus build this house? By first *tearing it down*. This was the purpose of his death on the cross. His temporary physical body had to be resurrected with one fit for heaven and eternity. Out with the old; in with the new. And again, like Nehemiah before him, they tempted him to give up his work. “Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him” (Matt 27:42). But like Nehemiah, he still had work to do and it wasn’t “finished” until he had expired in the flesh. Unlike Nehemiah, in building this house, he would become not governor, but King of kings!

What’s truly incredible is that the Targums at just this point in the Psalm say something directly aimed at Christ. Rather than saying, “Unless the LORD build...” they say, “Unless the Memra of the Lord build the house, its architects labor in vain on it; unless the Memra of the Lord watches the city of Jerusalem, the watchman stays awake in vain” (Ps 127:1 PsTg). *Memra* is the Aramaic equivalent of Logos—Word. It is deeply Christological. He is the builder. It isn’t that the Targum is somehow truer than the Psalm. Rather, the Targum is simply bringing out the necessary meaning of the Psalm (albeit, for reasons that the Jews themselves did not understand).

What happened in those last days of Jesus. Was he not [watching over the city of Jerusalem](#), weeping over it ([Matt 23:37](#)). As he is God in flesh, was not his [house building in fact the LORD's work](#)? Unless the LORD builds this house and watches over the city, all the labor of the people is truly in vain. Is the Lord building your houses? Well, unless your houses are erected around his like medieval towns around the local castle, unless you first funnel your work through his house like sand through an hourglass, your building will be in vain.

Modern House Building

So, what houses? What construction labor is it that we in our day go about building? This is important, and it is all related to our Psalms. I can think of four of them, and they are all, like Nehemiah's helpers, things that you are helping to build.

You have a [personal house](#). This is your own soul. If you are a Christian, it is the very temple of the Holy Spirit. If not, then you are a temple to Baal.² This is what it means to be

² Curiously, there is good reason to think that Baal is Satan. See my paper, "Thoughts on Satan, Baal, and Zeus," at <http://www.dougvandorn.com/Satan%20Zeus%20and%20Baal%201-7.pdf>

born children of darkness, and to have the devil as your father by birth. All are born into this condition. This house corresponds to the first part of Psalm 127.

You have a **family house**. Whether single or married, with or without children, we all have families. We are to be building them up in the Lord. This corresponds directly to the second half of Psalm 127 with its children that must come from God.

You have a **church house**. Christ is the Cornerstone, and we are the **living stones** fit around it, being built into “**a spiritual house**” (1Pe 2:5). Finally, you have a **national house** with all of its institutions (from government to education to corporations, etc.) that you are to be in and part of as salt and light to a decaying and dark civilization. These last two correspond to the work of Psalm 126 and 127, as Israel was simultaneously the OT church and God’s chosen nation. In these way, we have much labor that is similar, only fuller, greater, and truer than that of Nehemiah. There is much work to be done!

How We are Building Houses (How Not to Build)

So how do you go about building these houses? This is a vital question that arises naturally from the language that even though God builds the house, there are still laborers—us. God builds, and we also build. It is not an either/or. There are two ways we can think about this. First, let's ask **how we are *not* to build** the houses.

Taking our cue from Nehemiah, we are not to build out of terror or intimidation or fear-mongering. That is, **we are not to make others build this way**, as the Jews opposing Nehemiah were doing, and **we are not to give in** to this kind of intimidation coming from others who are trying to build (or rather stop the building) this way, as Nehemiah's Gentiles enemies were doing to him. The latter stops the work. The former makes it a joyless drudgery, and may in fact stop the work too.

There are some things that have been on my mind recently with regard to this. I've talked with some of you about them. They are increasingly distressing to me, for their anti-Christian, destructive nature. They are each directly related to our daily lives in this country and as Bible-

believing Christians, and you need to be able to identify them, which so many seem almost totally unable to do. Given the nature of Nehemiah today, I've not seen a better opportunity to share them with you.

I want to focus here on something known as **legalism**, legalism which confuses the law for the Gospel. There are many kinds of it.³ But rather than just give definitions, I want to look at it from various building projects. Legalism stops the building of all these kinds of houses.

Some of you have come out of this in some pretty radical forms of legalism: **Fundamentalism**, radical **Pentecostalism**, **Mormonism**, each of which have cultic tendencies or are in fact cults. Each has its own unique deep confusion of law and gospel. Many times, the law isn't even God's law, it is man-made law or rules and these become the "good news." Which, of course, law never is, unless you are obeying it perfectly. Only Jesus can do that. But obeying man-made taboos as if they are God's law or gospel, you couldn't get more opposed to the gospel than that.

³ A good summary of most of them was written by my friend Nick Kennicott, "The Many Faces of Legalism," *The Christward Collective* (Feb 27, 2018), <http://www.alliancenet.org/christward/the-many-face-of-legalism#.WuNXs9PwaDU>

A major problem here is that these things can and have been used **externally** (from someone like a pastor or a mother or father) to intimidate obedience. Outward conformity becomes the marker of being a true Christian. What's going on inside matters little. Faith is hardly mentioned, because you really only need that at the beginning of the journey, to walk and aisle and say a prayer. After that? Obey or else.

Sadly, our circles are not immune from this. Many years ago, when I became a Reformed Baptist, mostly on my own, having cut my teeth with Reformed but not Baptist teachers, I was surprised to see legalism right there in the midst of our movement (it's in theirs too). I couldn't really understand this, because logically it is the exact opposite of our confessions, especially the Solas. I still can't really understand it, other than that it fits with the biblical teaching that all of us are totally depraved, and we cannot escape our own hearts. But it's here, make no mistake.

I've seen it too many times for comfort. From **doctrinal righteousness** that insists you must believe this obscure (I'm not saying it isn't important) doctrine exactly the way we tell you to believe it or else, to churches **handling moral issues** like husbands always being right in the eyes of the elders *de*

facto, and therefore the wife must repent because she probably isn't a Christian. The fear and intimidation that is created externally is a powerful weapon against the Gospel, and often leads the abused right into the welcoming arms of atheism. At the very least, it leads to much division and separation.

At the same time, we can intimidate ourselves. This is **internal** intimidation. Self-taught or self-pressured legalism can be just as bad. You can create a whole world of fear and bullying in your own hearts when you do not get the Gospel right, when things substitute for it, when you try to build outside of the Celestial City.

This is wholly destructive. It is destructive to a person's emotional, ethical, and spiritual integrity. It creates severely bruised reeds and faintly burning wicks. Why? Because the means by which the Bible tells us we are conformed into the image of Christ goes M.I.A. There is no comfort here, only harshness, severity, and callousness. Unless, of course, you actually buy into it and think you are doing these things when others aren't. And this creates deadly spiritual, moral, and doctrinal pride that is used like a weapon against others and a blindfold on yourself.

Beloved, the law's work is to tear you down. You are built up through the Gospel, and obedience is but the expression of the Gospel's happy working in you. It is not its substitute or replacement.

There is [another form of legalism](#), although most people never think it this way because of how it disguises itself. It isn't only conservative Evangelicals or right of center cults that can be legalistic. In fact, my opinion of liberal theology (and by extension secular liberal ideology that expresses itself in politics) is that it is this strange orphan child of a Legalistic father and an Antinomian mother. It is every bit as legalistic as the other kind, but in some ways, it is even more pernicious and nefarious because of how it does things like [weaponize compassion](#). As I heard someone say this week describing what that means, “[If you were a good person, you would do what I'm telling you to do on behalf of those oppressed people of whom I speak.](#)”

This came to my mind again in a powerful way for the first time in decades just earlier this month.⁴ Two quite

⁴ I went to a college and seminary where the following had strongly invaded the academic thinking. For a while, the Reformed seemed immune to it, as they have been since I have been in the movement strongly focused on the Gospel. But each of us has our own unique ability to replace the gospel with things that seem good to us, and this is now happening as you will see in what follows.

conservative Reformed-ish movements, both with “Gospel” in their name, decided it would be really neat to take the 50th year anniversary of **Martin Luther King’s** tragic assassination, and use it as a club to bludgeon their mostly white male audience in the name of the Gospel. Of course, they don’t think that’s what they are doing at all, but the reaction on the internet tells a different story.

People have reacted exactly like you would think when they are told things like, “**There can’t be any reconciliation deep and lasting if my white Evangelical brothers and sisters don’t own this (slavery that ended now some 150+ years ago) ... as a people who are complicit, like all the rest of us, and own it as a people who need that restoration themselves as much as others may need kindness.**”⁵ “**My white neighbors and Christian brethren can start by at least saying their parents and grandparents and this country are complicit in murdering a man *who only preached love and justice***” (emphasis original).⁶ This kind of rhetoric is anything but Christian.

⁵ **Thabiti Anyabwile**, “One Thing White Evangelicals Should Understand About Racial Reconciliation,” *The Gospel Coalition* (April 20, 2018), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/one-thing-white-evangelicals-should-understand-about-racial-reconciliation/>.

⁶ Thabiti Anyabwile, “We Await Repentance for Assassinating Dr. King,” TGC (April 4, 2018), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/thabiti-anyabwile/await-repentance-assassinating-dr-king/>. An excellent analysis of this can be found at Joshua Sommer, “Thabiti and TGC: A

What people do not seem to understand is the ideology that lurks behind what seems to be a good idea (and it is, not only a good idea, but a necessary idea to confront racism *when it occurs*, but how we do that is the key thing). It is called **Postmodernism**. But people don't see it because they don't know what this wicked movement is really all about.

Postmodernism at its heart is a **rejection of the concept of truth**. Along with it, it is a **rejection that language has objective meaning**. Most important for us, it is the **rejection of the individual as the center of Western Civilization**, not a group, especially not the government. PoMo replaces the individual with groups—infinite numbers of groups: racial groups, sexual groups, economic groups, each of which continues of necessity to fracture into smaller and smaller pieces. In this way, as **Jordan Peterson** has brilliantly analyzed, it is nothing but the old hyper-destructive philosophy of Marxism wrapped up in clothes of compassion and tolerance.⁷ In other words, PoMo was no accident. It was a deliberate and intentional infiltration of our schools, our politics, and our arts with the most overtly wicked and

Response,” *The Baptist Reformation* (April 6, 2018), <https://reformbaptist.com/2018/04/06/thabitis-social-gospel/>.

⁷ A great introduction to this is his talk, “Postmodernism and Cultural Marxism,” *Youtube* (July 6, 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLoG9zBvvLQ>.

destructive ideology the world has ever known. It was just packaged differently.

The things you feel about how society is literally ripping itself apart? It stems from this. All of these groups are the oppressed vs. the oppressors. And since truth and communication and discussion are impossible in such a world, all there is left is one group against another, and at the end of the day, this is about one thing: **power**. These various platforms have become the societal rod of verbal and legal and emotional power that beats its opponents into submission. Just like Nehemiah's enemies tried to get him to believe they had over him through their intimidation, lies, and threats.

The result of all this is not the development of an enlightened culture, but the retreat to tribalism and territorialism and splitting apart and fracturing of unity. Not *E pluribus unum* (out of many, one), but the opposite: *Unum de multis* (out of one, many). Chaos ensues. Anarchy. Lawlessness. We become animals towards each other.

This is truly tearing apart the fabric of our civilization.⁸ All one has to do is look at the degeneration of our education,

⁸ **Going Deeper.** A quote I heard this week from of all people, Nietzsche, is an almost prophetic warning 150 years ago of what I'm speaking about here. "**Thus I speak to you in a parable-you**

our entertainment and art, and our politics. All recent elections are evidence of this. When this kind of identity politic comes into the church, it does the same thing to her. It destroys the walls that protect the city and houses. And it is 1,000x worse, because it does it under the guise of the gospel.

We need to walk away from [Hakkephirim](#). It is a lion waiting to pounce. We must not reject the power of God to bring people together through the Gospel and replace it with man-made philosophies and ideologies and theologies. The black Christian rapper [Shai Linne](#) said it much more positively with regard to just one of the issues facing us today, “[Justification by faith is the key to eliminating](#)

who make souls whirl, you preachers of equality. To me you are tarantulas, and secretly vengeful. But I shall bring your secrets to light; therefore I laugh in your faces with my laughter of the heights. Therefore I tear at your webs, that your rage may lure you out of your lie-holes and your revenge may leap out from behind your word justice. For that man be delivered from revenge, that is for me the bridge to the highest hope, and a rainbow after long storms.

The tarantulas, of course, would have it otherwise. "What justice means to us is precisely that the world be filled with the storms of our revenge"-thus they speak to each other. "We shall wreak vengeance and abuse on all whose equals we are not"-thus do the tarantula-hearts vow. "And 'will to equality' shall henceforth be the name for virtue; and against all that has power we want to raise our clamor!"

You preachers of equality, the tyrannomania of impotence clamors thus out of you for equality: your most secret ambitions to be tyrants thus shroud themselves in words of virtue. Aggrieved conceit, repressed envy-perhaps the conceit and envy of your fathers-erupt from you as a flame and as the frenzy of revenge” ([Friedrich Nietzsche](#), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 1883). The man foresaw exactly what the world would be like when it deconstructed God out of existence.

racism.”⁹ Was not racism at the heart of Nehemiah’s woes? Did not Paul tell us, “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2Co 5:18). Was this not the power of God to turn him from his hatred of Christians? How are we reconciled to one another? By knowing that in Christ we are both reconciled to Jesus Christ and have become brothers. This goes for any -ism you can name. Christ is the only ultimate solution to them.

How God Builds the House

This then is how we are to build our houses. It is **by faith and faith alone**. What does **Ps 127:1** say again? *Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain*. You must believe that the LORD builds these houses, and that his building begins, and all other building goes through, the building of the Jesus-House, the one in whom you are to find your rest and comfort.

Believe it or not, it really is as simple as that. This is the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. “**Come to me, all**

⁹ “‘Racism and Justification’ with guest Shai Linne,” Rightly Divided Clips, *Youtube*, (June 1, 2011), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C61tPK8Uu3I>

you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). The house of God is a house of rest (Acts 7:49), and it is he who builds it (50). Thus, it says, “**You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house**” (1Pe 2:5). Who is doing this work? **God!** It is *his* work, we are *his* building. Can you get any better news?

It is only when you come to this personal, individual recognition that you can enter into that trance like state of a dream that Nehemiah and those people had. Group identity does nothing for you here. Everything else leads to terror or tyranny.

What is the opposite of fear and intimidation of guilt-laden group identity politics or shame driven legalistic religious abuses? Is it not **joy and happiness and comfort** in the Lord? Look at the very first thing told us about the Christians who believed Peter’s first sermon. “**And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people**” (Acts 2:46-47). Or listen to this one. “**So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the Name of the Lord ... so the church throughout all Judea and**

Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being **built up**. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the **comfort** of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:28, 31).

Listen to Psalm 126 again. “When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream” (Ps 126:1). WWII Norwegian scholar Sigmund Mowinckel, writing on these Psalms comments about this using the 8th of May, 1945 as his example. This politically neutral, pacifistic country suddenly found itself living under the tyranny of 5 full years of Nazi occupation. But on this day, the Norwegian people agreed to the unconditional surrender of Hitler’s army.¹⁰ It must have been dream-like to finally and suddenly be free from such corruption and evil. This week, North and South Korea entered into a treaty, with the former’s leader walking into the South for the first time in 65+ years. This has been so dream-like that most think he must have something up his evil dictatorial sleeve. But maybe, just maybe, it will happen. Tweets this week from unexpected sources on some of the very things I’ve been talking about above have caused more than one social

¹⁰ This is cited in Goulder, 62. I’m assuming it from Mowinckel’s *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, 1951), though he has several of his works in the bibliography and does not give the actual citation.

commentator to say they have to be dreaming.¹¹ How much more should the Gospel seem as a dream to you?

In Christ, it has happened, and if you know him, then you are to understand that you are living in a perpetual true dream! You have been reconciled to God, he has built up the walls of your soul and the houses of your life. He is in the midst of your family, there guiding your children. He goes with you to church and school and work, and if you will get involved in it: your nation. Should this not fill you, like Israel of old, “with laughter” and “shouts of joy” even among “the nations” who then see it and say, “The LORD has done great things for them” (Ps 126:2)? I’m talking here not about activism, but about internalizing the Gospel. Are they saying this about you? If not, then what does it say about how you are receiving this good news? Does it demonstrate that you have replaced it with news of tyranny to your own soul?

Beloved, “The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad” (Ps 126:3). I so desperately want to break the power of this evil tyranny that has infiltrated my country, and the churches I affiliate with, and the families who are brought

¹¹ See [Andrew Klavan](#), “Ep. 502 – Kanye Torches the Cultural Left,” 4-26-2018. He literally started the show by talking about this “dream” that wasn’t a dream.

under our care, and the individuals who come to our church. Do you? I've seen it happen many times. Have you?

There is something so simple and profound about that old gospel song that takes its inspiration from Psalm 126.

Sowing in the morning, sowing seeds of kindness,
Sowing in the noontide and the dewy eve;
Waiting for the harvest, and the time of reaping,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

Sowing in the sunshine, sowing in the shadows,
Fearing neither clouds nor winter's chilling breeze;
By and by the harvest, and the labor ended,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

Going forth with weeping, sowing for the Master,
Though the loss sustained our spirit often grieves;
When our weeping's over, He will bid us welcome,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

Bringing in the sheaves, bringing in the sheaves,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves;
Bringing in the sheaves, bringing in the sheaves,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

The Scripture tells you about your responsibility in these matters. And I leave you with these words. “I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance” (Acts 20:32). “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as your are doing” (1Th 5:11). “Love builds up” (1Co 8:1). It is love, with its patience, kindness, and longsuffering and builds up. Not identity politics. Not legalistic despotism. It is God’s job to produce this in your life through the Spirit. He does this through his glorious word in the Gospel. So, heed the words of the Word who has been raised from the dead and is even now building these buildings for us: “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the Rock” (Matt 7:24).