

The Social Curvature
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From Nehemiah 13:23-31. THE SOCIAL CURVATURE
PART 1: FORBIDDEN TYPOLOGY v.23-27.

#1. The people of Israel were chosen by God to live a separate existence, spiritually, morally and intellectually, from the world. That revealed course was unsatisfactory to them.

#2. They rejoined the world. Ignorant of revealed truth, they followed the **social curvature** of the pagan people around them. In so doing, they became "types" of those pagan peoples. This is inevitable. The Israelites willingly pursued the **pagan typology**. (A typology is the doctrine or study of symbols; thus Israel "bought into" the religious culture and symbols of their pagan neighbors.) Once the Word of God is forsaken, then the *de facto* world-typology is certain.

#3. The mechanism for this apostasy was **social influence**. "In those days I also saw the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab" v.23.

#4. The condition of **right thinking and right behavior** was not an issue for them. Revelation was no longer important. The pagan typology became a continuum through time. "As for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod, and none of them was able to speak the language of Judah, but the language of his own people" v.24.

#5. Those people lost access to revealed truth, through language! The revealed language manifold became a foreign and unknown tongue to them. Nehemiah warns us that pursuing the social curvature of the world and accepting its typology is **our undoing**.

#6. The pagan language could not capacitate the reach of revealed meaning. The social curvature and its human typology erected language walls against Scripture. Their language inclined toward the pagan culture.

#7. Now, in our day, where do we and the churches stand on the Bible?

From Nehemiah 13:23-31. THE SOCIAL CURVATURE
PART 2: THE CONTENTION v.25.

#1. "The culture drift" is concomitant with (that is, it naturally accompanies) social influence. Once believers surrender language to the social curvature, then we begin to accrue habits of thought and forms of behavior at variance with the will of God.

#2. That drift will always be a **constant potential**, generation after generation. And according to this text; it must be contested. "So I contended with them and cursed them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, 'You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves'".

#3. Nehemiah makes the point that spiritual leaders are expected to contest the effects of social influence on the churches. Preachers, among other spiritual leaders, are especially enrolled in this function.

#4. But the family is the most **potent counter force** to the ever-present corruption by social influence. Fathers and mothers are on the front lines here.

#5. The prohibitions against these marriages are not racial. These rules are about meaning: revealed, eternal meaning, the Word of God.

#6. If parents are indifferent to the social curvature and are unheeding of scriptural constraints on it, then their children will become part of the world-typology. Regularly attending church services and Bible classes, the "sons and daughters" will have steadily grown increasingly into mature types of social thought, speech and behavior.

#7. In other words, parents draw lines, firmly and persistently in the family against the evils of the social curvature. Parents are spiritual leaders. The kids may not believe it nor obey it. But the default is to deliver their children over to corruption of soul.

From Nehemiah 13:23-31. THE SOCIAL CURVATURE PART 3: CONSEQUENCES OF PERSONAL COMPROMISE v.26.

#1. King Solomon: "no king like him", "loved by his God", "God made him king". Incomparable advantages were bestowed upon Solomon. Yet, "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin regarding these things?"

#2. This great leader over Israel succumbed to the social curvature of the pagan world. In consequence **the world-typology** came to sit upon the throne of Israel with all of its ramifications.

#3. Solomon's first obligation was toward the Lord and then toward the people of the realm. He failed on both counts. "Nevertheless the foreign women (he married) caused even him to sin". Solomon imported paganism and idolatry into the land: a stunning failure of leadership.

#4. In what sense did the foreign women cause him to sin? Social influence is the answer.

#5. No personal compromise is small; it is a matter of potential. Personal compromises run from small potential --> to large potential. King Solomon embraced social influence without regard to the laws of God.

#6. What was forbidden by the Almighty became normative in Israel.

#7. There is a principle taught in both the Old Testament and the New Testament; which is that **meaning is not to be constructed by men, rather meaning occurs**. It is delivered by revelation.

#8. One may venture an observation. Spiritual leadership of the caliber required, appears to be conspicuous in its absence in many contemporary churches and universities. Social influences are not sufficiently nor effectively contested. Perhaps the culture drift has carried us too far downstream.

From Nehemiah 13:23-31. THE SOCIAL CURVATURE

PART 4: WRONG MANIFOLDS OF MEANING v.27.

#1. "Do we then hear about you that you have committed all this great evil by acting unfaithfully against our God by marrying foreign women?"

#2. Accepting the spiritual potentials of the social curvature is "committing great evil" and is acting unfaithfully against our God". That is its ontology (state of being). There are different **manifolds (many things) of meaning** in the world. And we choose which one, by which, we intend to live. Social influences are ever present and unavoidable. These influences lay open before us, they offer to us the alternative manifolds of meaning. Israel chose the wrong one.

#3. Scripture, the Bible, revelation, the Word of God is best thought of as a manifold of revealed meaning. It should be read that way.

#4. Today, as always, believers must make distinctions between revealed truth and the meaning manifolds generated by the world. Israel, to Nehemiah's surprise and great alarm, **married the social curvature**.

#5. All meaning manifolds have something in common. They create a common basis for shared meaning, perception and understanding.

#6. We in the churches are not very good at grasping just how to acknowledge the imperatives of the biblical meaning manifold and then to defend it against the alternatives.

#7. So, we compromise personally, easily, quietly. Admixture is effortless. And therefore the alternative manifolds of meaning are allowed to define what is right, correct, acceptable, meaningful, practical and normative.

#8. Maximum spiritual leadership at home and in the churches is a marvelous thing. It champions the revealed truth and sets it above its rivals. It calls the children to awareness of this contested range of meaning. "Great evil" is averted. "Unfaithfully acting against our God" is repudiated.

From Nehemiah 13:23-31. THE SOCIAL CURVATURE

PART 5: THE SANBALLAT MEMORIAL v.28, 29.

#1. The social curvature has leaders. Sanballat was one of them. Such people can be as ruthless as they can be intelligent. Nehemiah would have believers remember the example of Sanballat as the leading edge of the social curvature of that time. "Remember them, O my God".

#2. Social influence creates **the typology of defilement**: "They have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites".

#3. Their aim is **to corrupt all things holy** and all revealed truth. The Sanballat Memorial: Remember:

- (a) Their motives are driven by self-interest 2:10.
- (b) They deny the power of divine providence 2:19, 20.
- (c) They enfold all events in a matrix of misrepresentation 4:1-3.
- (d) They can resort, easily, to violence 4:7, 8.
- (e) They set traps for the unwise and naive 6:1-3.
- (f) Their staple is false accusations; sometimes political in nature. An attempt to bring in the power of the state.
- (g) They can enlist agents to serve their purpose of defilement 6:12.
- (h) They relish instilling fear of reprisals in those who oppose the social curvature.

#4. Resisting social influence and the social curvature is dangerous at best. It requires non-natural wisdom, robust faith and personal courage.

#5. But not resisting it, thoughtlessly falling into the social curvature, is a sin. Such thinking and behavior is to commit a "great evil" and is to act "unfaithfully against our God" v.27.

#6. Believers and the churches are prescribed a posture of confrontation. The Almighty has spoken, therefore, we don't give an inch. Not an inch.

From Nehemiah 13:23-31. THE SOCIAL CURVATURE
PART 6: PURIFICATION v.30, 31.

#1. "Thus I purified them from everything foreign...". A sobering and revealing statement. Being alert to the constant encroachment of social influence on thought, speech and behavior is absolutely necessary. The point is to keep the social curvature at a distance from the church. But once it is in, then other measures become required.

#2. The solution to that corrupt state of affairs is purification. Not modernization; not efficiency, acquiescence and not accommodation; but purification.

#3. Spiritual leadership, wherever exercised, in marriage, in the family and in the church must transcend encouragement and "vision". Its job is to execute the commands of God in whatever situation at hand.

#4. Of course, this will not happen unless there is, in place, an acute love for the Word of God. In its absence, there is no way to even recognize "foreign" influences.

#5. This is, apparently, the factual condition of many believers and many churches of today. Purification is painful. Its cost is great.

#6. "Purification from everything thing foreign" takes the Bible off of the social curvature. Understanding and behavior are taken off the social curvature.

#7. In Israel foreign typology proved too attractive to resist. More important than Scripture. One ventures the observation that many believers and churches are well down the social curvature.

#8. There is no will to purify. "So I contended with them and cursed them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, 'You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves'" v.25.