

“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”

December 15, 2016

Jeremiah 29:1–30:24. What are you seeking?

Romans 6:1–14. Requisite attitudes for progressive sanctification.

Proverbs 20:13–30. Individual proverbs.

COMMENTS.

Jeremiah 29:1–30:24. In **29:1-14** Jeremiah writes to the exiles. However, instead of assuring them that their captivity will be short, he advises them to settle down. They are to build houses and plant gardens and make a life for themselves (**29:4–6**). They are also to work hard and pray for the city where they are exiled (**29:7**). They are not to believe the vain hopes of false prophets and clairvoyants (**29:8–9**). Jeremiah is blunt: God is telling His people that the period of exile in Babylon will be seventy years (**29:10**). But God will not forget them and has wonderful plans for their future (**29:11**). This future will begin when they turn to God with their whole heart (**29:12–13**). When they finally do this, God will not hide from them (**29:13–14**). He will gather them from all the places where they are scattered—and bring them home (**29:14**). In **chapter 30** Jeremiah writes about God’s new covenant to Israel and Judah. God will bring both Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to their land! God promises His people will return home, and He will make a new covenant with them. This covenant will be written on their hearts. Babylon’s yoke will be broken. God’s people will be released. They will once again be ruled by a king like David. Meanwhile, there is punishment to be endured. Sin can’t simply be brushed aside. God’s people are guilty, hurting and seemingly abandoned by God. But God promises to heal and restore them in the future. He makes a simple, total commitment: *So, you will be my people, and I will be your God (30:22)*. This is what God desires for us more than anything else. What a blessed thought!

Life in God by second person proper knowledge and proper love. Jeremiah makes it clear that true spiritual and godly hope is based on the revealed Word of God, not on the “dreams” or feel-good messages of false prophets and false teachers promising peace and freedom to the spiritually apathetic people of God. Only God offered a *truly* “gracious promise” (**29:10**) to deliver them, and He would keep His promise. God makes His plans for His people, and they are good plans that ultimately bring hope and peace. Therefore, there is no need to be afraid or discouraged. In every situation, however, God’s people have the responsibility to seek the Lord, pray, and ask Him to fulfill His promises—for the Word and prayer (2nd person relationship) go together (Acts 6:4). The purpose of chastening is that we might seek the Lord, confess our sins, and draw near to Him and thus draw near to True Goodness (Heb. 12:3–13). According to **29:14**, God’s promises reach beyond the Jews captive in Babylon and include all of Israel throughout the world. Jeremiah was looking ahead to the end of the age when Israel will be regathered to meet their Messiah and enter their kingdom. Jeremiah notes the evil of the false prophets’ messages of peace and security (**29:15–23**). The false prophets in Babylon were giving false hopes to the people concerning Jerusalem and Judah, and this word got back to Jeremiah. It is common for believers to seek hope in false messages. In fact, you might say it has been the norm throughout the history of believers. Except for the Christians of

the first century, historically the majority of believers in every generation usually ended up more tuned into an inordinate love for temporal deliverance from difficulties than making love for God the top priority of life for His own sake. There are many grave dangers in seeking temporal security and blessings over and above the things of God. The gravest danger is that one blinds himself to the beauty of God and His plan. Instead of basking in the beauty of God and Scripture for its own sake, God and the Bible become means or servants to perceived “higher goods” of this earth, like a comfortable, prosperous life. To see the beauty of God in Scripture and all of life, even in the tragedies of life, is to be drawn to Him in love and submission. Once a believer loses sight of God’s beauty, it is extremely difficult for Him to recover because God increasingly will only be attractive as a means. In such case, when there are no difficulties, God is hardly relevant at least until another crisis appears on the scene. There is a radical difference between a believer who attends church because He loves God and wants to learn more of the beauty of God, His Person, His Word, and His people versus a believer who comes to church because He needs God to fix this or that. There is a world of difference between a believer sitting in Bible class and seeing and enjoying the beauty of total truth being taught versus a believer who is blind to the beauty of truth as such because he is only interested in pragmatic, temporal use of the truth. There is difference between a believer who is able to bask in the glory of God and one who is blind to it all. The former is only too willing to accept correction while the latter is a fool who despises correction. The former grows in God *by proper knowledge and proper love* while the latter is suffering from attrition to the faith whether he realizes it or not. It is not like God did not warn us: 1 John 2:15 *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world-- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-- is not of the Father but is of the world.* 1 Timothy 6:9 *But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* All men seek what they think is true, good, and beautiful: be it evil or God. No wonder the first words Jesus asked His first disciples were “*what are you seeking,*” John 1:38. The answer to that question determines the direction of life and everything else because it reveals what any person really believes is true, good, and beautiful, even if inchoately. The Bible teaches that it is love that enables us to rejoice in truth as such (1 Cor. 13:6), not just truth that works in a pragmatic, problem-solving manner. Such a pragmatic view blinds us to the beauty of the whole truth and total truth and ends up living a blasphemous life where God is only or primarily of value because He helps us with our frustrating temporal pursuits. Moreover, to add insult to injury some even think they are spiritual because they can quote a Bible passage to help them in the pursuit of the temporal rather pursuing God Himself as life’s greatest treasure.

Romans 6:1–14. The **first four verses** provide the ground of sanctification, **verses 5-11** show us that the proper attitude for sanctification is “reckon,” and **12-14** tell us that the proper mindset of a believer who has died to sin must be “to present oneself to God.”

Life in God by second person proper knowledge and proper love. “Reckon” in modern parlance often conveys ideas like “to think” or “to guess.” “I reckon” is also an equivalent of “I suppose” for many. But none of these popular meanings can apply to this usage. The word reckon is a translation of a Greek word that is used forty-one times in the New Testament—nineteen times in Romans alone. It appears in Romans 4 where it is translated as “count, reckon, impute.” It means “to take into account, to calculate, to estimate.” The word impute—“to put to one’s account”—is perhaps the best translation. To reckon means “to put to one’s account.” It simply means to believe that what God says in His Word is really true in your life. Paul didn’t tell his readers to feel as if they were dead to sin, or even to understand it fully, but to act on God’s Word and claim it for themselves. Reckoning is a matter of faith that issues in action. It is like endorsing a check: if we really believe that the money is in the checking account, we will sign our name and collect the money. Reckoning is not claiming a promise, but acting on a fact. God does not command us to become dead to sin. He tells us that we are dead to sin and alive unto God, and then commands us to act on it. Even if we do not act on it, the facts are still true. Like everything else in Scripture, these commands can be done legalistically or in a relationship with God based on *proper knowledge and proper love*. In other words, this can be just another pragmatic conduit means of attempting to power over the sin nature or it can be done in a *personal* relationship with God to move closer to Him. In other words, is the emphasis on the mechanics or on God? If the emphasis is on the mechanics, the attitude will generally grow stale over time. However, if the emphasis is on getting closer to *God*, then one will never tire of the mechanics because they are true means of getting closer to the Lord, the place of the abundant life. Note Paul’s emphases in these mechanics: *we are to reckon ourselves death to sin but **alive to God** . . . but present yourselves **to God**.* “Alive to God” speaks of a personal relationship *by proper knowledge and proper love*, the only relationship really worthy of the idea in “personal.” It is all a matter of what we actuate daily: sin (sin nature) or 2nd *person personal* relationship with God.

Proverbs 20:13–30. The individual proverbs in this reading are various moral proverbs that of themselves do not tie to any particular topic. In this context, however, they may describe aspects of character for which one should be on the alert. On the positive side this includes diligence (13), ability to give sound advice (15), sound judgment (16), and honor for parents (20). On the negative side one must be aware that deception, from the most petty kind (14) to outright fraud (17), is common. Awareness of these and other criteria enable the reader to see the tableau of someone's character, be it his or someone else's.

Life in God by second person proper knowledge and proper love. On the surface, it may appear that there is no connection between the topic of **verse 29** (*The glory of young men is their strength, And the splendor of old men is their gray head*) and its context, which discusses the power of Yahweh and the king. However, there is most assuredly a connection. Young men tend to rely upon the sheer exercise of power. Older men have learned the importance of wisdom and restraint, as depicted by their gray hair. Unfortunately, it is the case that many Christians do not seem to gain godly wisdom as they age. Instead of delving deeper into the beauty of the spiritual life, the created world, and God Himself, they become more pessimistic, agnostic, bitter, and negative. Instead of continuing on the journey of personal love with God *by proper knowledge and proper love*, year by year, decade by decade, they get set in their ways, which become more and more constrained rather than anything resembling abundance. When we are young it is easy to assert ourselves in this world and to mistake our strength for the strength of God. Failure to mature in God will only result in increasing frustration as one attempts to exert strength that wains with age. Only *life with God by proper knowledge and proper love* provides new type of strength that cannot be found in the natural realm. Isaiah 40:29 *He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength. 30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall, 31 But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.* Of course, this divine strength is not something outside of God Himself. It is only found as one lives and participates in God Himself.

Life in God by second person proper knowledge and by proper love.

Pastor Don