

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

December 16, 2016

Jeremiah 31:1–40. The New Covenant.

Romans 6:15–7:6. Slaves of Righteousness.

Proverbs 21:1–12. Fellowshiping with the Righteous God.

COMMENTS.

Jeremiah 31:1–40. Chapter 31 culminates with a glorious promise of the New Covenant. The return from Babylon is going to be like a new exodus. The survivors will, like the Hebrew slaves, ‘find favor in the desert’ (2). Israel will be newly married to God, with great rejoicing. Vineyards will be planted in Samaria—the country that was laid waste over a century earlier. And those who guard Ephraim (Israel) will call people to make a pilgrimage to Zion (the heavenly Jerusalem). All the lost people of Israel will converge on Jerusalem as God brings them home. No one will be left behind because they are useless or weak. Just as they went into exile weeping with despair, now they will return with tears of joy (9). God will take the utmost care of them on the way—treating long-lost Ephraim as his first-born son. Young and old, men and women, priests and people—all will enjoy the freshness, gladness, and plenty of Zion (12–14). There has been great grief at the loss of the northern tribes. Ephraim and Manasseh (the two half-tribes descended from Joseph) were lost in defeat and exile. Jeremiah thinks of Rachel, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, weeping for her children. But now she can dry her tears. They will return. Ephraim, ‘the unruly calf,’ is turning back to God. Jeremiah wakes from his sleep refreshed. Here, at last, is a time to build and plant. There will be no more laying the blame for suffering on the sins of a previous generation. Everyone will be equally blessed by God’s grace, and equally responsible for their behavior (29–30). God will make a new covenant with his people. It won’t be a covenant like the one on Mount Sinai—defined by laws written on stone. It will be a covenant given and sustained by God’s grace and written on human hearts. In this new covenant, everyone will know the Lord for themselves and desire to keep His law. The past is forgiven. This is a new start. A fine, enlarged Jerusalem will be built—a glimpse of the glorious Jerusalem that is to come. This is a God-centered community that will never fall again.

Life in God by second person proper knowledge and proper love. We can see what God desires in and with us above all else in the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:33 *"But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin, I will remember no more."* This just is the description of life with God by 2nd person proper knowledge and proper love that will reach its fulfillment in the next life. While we can enjoy a continuous growth in *knowing and loving God* year after year, it will not be until we are with Him face to face that we will discover the ultimate in knowing and loving Him without any mediation. In the meantime, we live with God by the mediation of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, both of which are designed to engender the

continual transformation of us by pressing the Christ-form into our very being, in our minds and wills/desires (Gal 4:19).

Romans 6:15–7:6. Paul stated that sin results in death (6:16, 21, 23). Believers have been set free from sin (6:18, 22) and no longer are in bondage to it (6:20). Now believers are slaves of righteousness (6:16–19) and alive to God (6:11, 23). They are now to reject sin and do what is right by serving God. Chapter 6 (like chapters 3–5) asserts the importance of Christ’s death. The death of Christ is reasserted, but not in isolation as the death of the righteous for the unrighteous. Here the believer has been joined to Christ. Death to sin calls for resolute separation from sin, and resurrection means a new type of life in response to God. **Chapter 7:1-6** introduces the believer’s relationship with the Law. Do we discard the law because we have died to sin and now live in grace? Paul uses the picture of a woman being widowed and marrying someone else. She is free to marry again because her first husband has died; her legal contract to him has been canceled. Paul sees a parallel with our experience: the death of Jesus has canceled our obligation to sin. Now we are released for a new relationship with God; not bound by the law, but set free by the Spirit.

Life in God by second person proper knowledge and proper love. The word “present” (παριστάνω) is found five times in this section (Rom. 6:13, 16, and 19), and means “to place at one’s disposal, to present, to offer as a sacrifice.” According to Romans 12:1, the believer’s body should be presented to the Lord as “a living sacrifice” for His glory. The Old Testament sacrifices were dead sacrifices. The Lord may ask some of us to die for Him, but He asks all of us to live for Him. “To present” ourselves to Him is an act of the will based on the knowledge in the intellect that we have of what Christ has done for us. It is an intelligent, a noematic act—not the impulsive decision of the moment based on some emotional stirring. The idea here is ‘Do not allow sin to reign in your mortal body so that you are constantly obeying its lusts. Neither constantly yield your members of your body as tools of unrighteousness to sin, but yield yourselves to God.’ The longer we walk with Christ, the deeper the fellowship develops. In sum, we are to present ourselves to Him *by proper knowledge and love*, and in so doing we partake of His life. The Christian life is not about superimposing some artificial righteousness (religiosity) on top of our inner sinful beings; it is about being transformed from the inside out as we present ourselves to Him. As we walk with Him, we become more like Him both in thinking and desiring. What a privilege to become like the Son of Man in our thoughts and wishes.

Proverbs 21:1–12. In this reading, we have a clutch of proverbs on righteousness and wickedness. Note some of the characteristics: wickedness makes pride its guiding light (4), expresses itself in violence and crookedness (7–8), is graceless and craves the ruin of others (10). The result is that the wicked are dragged away violently (7). Note that Righteous God takes action against people whose character is opposite to His (12).

Life in God by second person proper knowledge and proper love. Before someone can enjoy life with God *by proper knowledge and proper love*, there must be compatibility between the person and God. ‘How can two walk together unless they are in agreement?’ (Amos 3:3). This reading (**verse 12**) tells us that God is righteous. Hence, before we can walk with Him, we are going to have to walk in righteousness. No one can walk with God and walk in sin simultaneously. What God requires (righteousness), He provides in grace as noted in the above passage in Romans where the believer is said to become a “slave of righteousness,” which is radically different than the wicked that God condemns throughout Proverbs and the entire Word of God. Being righteous is not just a matter of suppressing bad thoughts. A righteous person is a person who by the grace of God actually acquires rightly ordered thinking and rightly order desires by living and partaking of the life of God—by fellowshiping with Him. Life with God always includes an entirely new noematic existence anchored in the very life of God—for there is no such thing as any power or goodness separate from Him.

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

Pastor Don