

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

December 6, 2016

**Jeremiah 10:1–11:23.** Jeremiah preaches against idolatry and his people turn against him.

**Philemon 1:1–7.** Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus.

**Proverbs 14:1–14.** Clichés and conduits, or wisdom and true abundant life in God?

**COMMENTS.**

**Jeremiah 10:1–11:23.** This reading can be divided into four parts. *First*, Jeremiah preaches against idolatry (**10:1-16**). People like a god they can see and touch. But God cannot be reduced to the shape of a creature or the size of a doll. He is eternal Spirit and not to be imaged—the great, invisible, holy Lord. The only image of God is the One he himself has given—a living and self-giving human being: Jesus Christ. Jeremiah ridicules the whole process of manufacturing an idol. Cut, chiselled and bejewelled, it is no more effective than a scarecrow. It can’t speak or walk by itself. It has no power to punish or save. Why trade idol-worship for a relationship with the living God? He isn’t a part of the creation—he is the Creator. He isn’t a bolt of lightning or a shower of rain—he is the founder of the universe. Idols are a con, as everyone who makes them knows. Worship the only maker that matters—the One who made you. *Second*, we have a description of Jeremiah’s pain and prayer (**10:17-25**). Jeremiah tells the people under siege that it is nearly time to leave for exile (**10:17–18**). He himself is in great distress. His life is like a collapsed tent and there are no leaders to put things right (**10:19–21**). Away to the north he hears the advancing foe—the Babylonian armies which will wreak such terrible destruction (**10:22**). Jeremiah pleads with God. Humans are unable to live as they should and deserve to be corrected. But Jeremiah prays that God’s punishment won’t destroy him. He prays that God’s anger would be poured out on the nations that have oppressed Israel (**10:23–25**). *Third*, God responds to Jeremiah (**11:1-17**). God speaks to Jeremiah of all that has happened in Israel’s history. God rescued his people from the furnace of Egyptian oppression (**11:4**) and made a covenant agreement with them. They were to obey Him and He would bless them (**11:7**); but they have utterly betrayed his trust (**11:9–10**). Now God is about to punish his people, and they must turn to their Baal-idols for help (**11:11–13**). Jeremiah is forbidden to pray for his people. They are like a much-loved wife who has now gone too far in her adulterous affairs. They are like a once-beautiful fruit tree, which is now fit only for destruction (**11:14–17**). *Fourth*, Jeremiah’s own people plot to kill him (**11:18-23**). Jeremiah has been given an insight and a message which have plunged him into trouble. He feels that he got involved quite innocently, like a lamb being led to be slaughtered (**11:18–19**). Now his own neighbors, the people of Anathoth, are plotting to destroy him (**11:19**). Jeremiah asks God to avenge him (11:20) and is promised that He will (**11:21–23**).

**Life in God by second person proper knowledge and proper love.** In **10:1-16**, Jeremiah ridicules the various idols his people are involved in (**10:1-16**). Instead of separating themselves from the evil practices of the nations, as Moses had instructed, Israel gradually imitated those practices and began to worship pagan gods. But these gods were worthless, manufactured by craftsmen, “like a scarecrow in a melon patch” (**10:5**). They can’t speak or walk, and they must be carried around. If only the people would contemplate the glory and majesty of the true and living God—the everlasting God who

created the heavens and the earth by the Word of His power! The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. It means worshiping and serving the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25), the gifts rather than the Giver. The idols were senseless, and so were the people (**Jer. 10:8**), because we become like the god we worship (Ps. 115:8). Our contemporary idols aren't ugly as were the pagan idols in Jeremiah's day, but they capture just as much affection and do just as much damage. Whatever we worship and serve other than the true and living God is an idol, whether it's an expensive house or car, the latest stereo equipment, a boat, a library, a girlfriend or boyfriend, our children, a career, or a bank account. That on which I center my attention and affection and for which I am willing to sacrifice is my god, and if it isn't Jesus Christ, then it's an idol. "*Little children, keep yourselves from idols*" (1 John 5:21). The remedy for idolatry is for us to get caught up in the majesty and grandeur of God, the true God, the living God, the everlasting king. An idol is a substitute, and you would never want a substitute once you have experienced the love and power of the Lord God Almighty. As one lives in God *by proper knowledge and proper love* and partakes of the life of God, all idols lose all attractions. Life in the goodness of God is far more satisfying than the temporal pleasures and attractions of this world.

**Philemon 1:1–7.** In this reading we have Paul's introduction (**1-3**) and his good word about Philemon (**4-7**). It was customary for Paul to open his letters with words of thanks and praise to God. In his thanksgiving, Paul described his friend Philemon as a man of love and faith, both toward Jesus Christ and God's people. His love was authentic and powerful as he "refreshed" (*ἀναπέπρωται*) the saints through his words and work.

**Life in God by second person proper knowledge and proper love.** Paul was a prisoner in Rome, his friend Philemon was in Colossae, and the human link between them was a runaway slave named Onesimus. The details are not clear, but it appears that Onesimus robbed his master and then fled to Rome, hoping to be swallowed up in the crowded metropolis. But, in the providence of God, he met Paul and was converted! Now what? Perhaps Onesimus should remain with Paul, who needed all the assistance he could get. But what about the slave's responsibilities to his master back in Colossae? The law permitted a master to execute a rebellious slave, but Philemon was a Christian. If he forgave Onesimus, what would the other masters (and slaves) think? If he punished him, how would it affect his testimony? What a dilemma! Paul told Philemon that he was praying for him and asking God to make his witness effective ("the sharing of your faith") so that others would trust Christ. He also prayed that his friend would have a deeper understanding of all that he had in Jesus Christ. After all, the better we know Christ and experience His blessings, the more we want to share these blessings with others. Note how Paul is moving Philemon to share in the life of Christ *by proper knowledge and proper love*. Paul knew that if he could get Philemon to focus on partaking of the life of Christ, this would resolve the issue in a way that would bring glory to God. It was not the life of Paul or his influence that would resolve the issue, it was none other than the life of Christ brought to bear on the issues of life.

**Proverbs 14:1–14.** The chapter opens with an implicit challenge to seek wisdom and avoid folly. In this context, then, the two figures are personifications of wisdom and folly. The point in **verse 1** is to be careful not to allow folly to tear down the house that wisdom builds (3). A view of wisdom which leaves out God and morality is forbidden by a saying which draws attention to right and wrong and to attitudes to God (2). To put it negatively, folly is destructive (1), self-destructive (3), self-perpetuating (6), self-expressive (7), self-deceptive (8), and stubborn (9).

**Life in God by second person proper knowledge and proper love.** Obtaining true wisdom in God, which brings light to all of life is one of the most difficult things to attain in life, especially about life as such. Yet, it is mandated for every child of God. It has been my experience that what keeps most believers from entering a life of wisdom is not folly as such. In other words, they are not attracted to manifestly absurd ideas that obviously do not work. Instead they are attracted to and resonate with clichés and superficial viewpoints that are *clear and distinct*. It is the clear and distinct thoughts that seem to ring true that capture so many believers into false spiritual systems. This is the Cartesian philosophy into which we all grew up in, methodologically it is a form of idealism rather than realism. Reality is complex, not simple. We love simple and clear concepts. This is why we must always ask “but is it real?” There are plenty of clear and distinct conduit forms of Christianity painted in black and white frameworks (in fellowship and out of fellowship based solely on being confessed up) that sound good, but that are not supported by the Word of God (Bible teaches fellowship in 1 John 1:7 not 1:9), by what is real. It may sound simple, clear, and distinct that the main issue is to confess sins and take in Bible doctrine to grow in love for God. That idea is pretty simple and clear. But such an idea cannot be supported by the whole truth, total truth perspective of the Word of God—it is not real, even if it is clear and distinct. The ontological dimensions of loving God have far more complex aspects that involve the complex mutual interplay between the intellect and will. In other words, it is a lot easier to think of life with God as being confessed up and taking in Bible doctrine than it is to understand the nature of our intellect and will. However, only the latter is real, which is why it fits perfectly with every mention of love in the Bible, and every act love in our daily lives. Throughout Proverbs, the challenge is to do whatever you can, even if that means to sell all that you have, to get wisdom because it will lead to true life with God. Only in wisdom does one see the wholeness of truth is such a way as to see the true/good/beautiful. Only in wisdom does one really see the goodness of God in all things and be moved to live in Him *by proper knowledge and proper love* rather than by being plugged into some power system. Only in wisdom is one even aware of what a real relationship with God is all about, a second person relationship with God instead of circles, power grids, and nice Bible-sounding clichés set within a Cartesian clear mindset.

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

*Pastor Don*