

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

December 7, 2016

**Jeremiah 12:1–13:27.** Jeremiah complains, and God answers.

**Philemon 1:8–25.** Biblical love resolves all problems.

**Proverbs 14:15–35.** The foundation of the spiritual life: love.

### COMMENTS.

**Jeremiah 12:1–13:27.** In **chapter 12** Jeremiah complains to the Lord and the Lord responds. Jeremiah knows that God is “righteous,” but he still desires to complain about his situation (**12:1**)! Like Job and David before him, Jeremiah sees wicked people prospering. They are even people who claim to be religious, but the things they say are very different from the things they do (**12:2**). For his part, Jeremiah has tried to be genuinely faithful—as God knows (**12:3**). He begs that God will intervene to judge the wicked because the whole land is suffering from their evil influence (**12:4**). In addition, Jeremiah feels discouraged already, because his own family and hometown have rejected him, so what chance does he stand in Jerusalem (**12:5–6**)? God reveals that He, too, is estranged from His loved ones. He has set Himself against His own people and is giving them up to be defeated by their enemies (**12:7**). His own land has been trampled by those who should have treasured it, abused by idolaters and laid waste by violence (**12:10–12**). God swears that He will judge the neighboring nations that oppress Israel. He will pull them up like weeds (**12:14**). But then He offers mercy. If pagan nations learn God’s ways from Israel, instead of corrupting her, they will be saved (**12:15–16**). **Chapter 13** lays out various warning signs about impending judgment. These warning signs are illustrated by various images, including a stiff loincloth to represent stiffness and pride of Israel and full wine jars to represent drunkenness.

**Life in God by second person proper knowledge and proper love.** “Why does the way of the wicked prosper?” This is a question frequently asked in Scripture, and it’s being asked today. Job wrestled with it (Job 12; 21); the psalmists tried to understand it (Psa. 37; 49; 73); and other prophets besides Jeremiah grappled with the problem (Hab. 1; Mal. 2:17; 3:15). Many Jewish theologians, pointing to the covenants, taught that God always and *without exception* blesses those who obey and judges those who disobey, but the situation in real life seemed just the opposite! How could a holy God of love allow such a thing to happen? A common practice among contemporary Christians is to judge fellow believers (especially those who do not believe in the same doctrines) when bad things happen to them. This is especially prevalent in prosperity movements, although other groups are guilty as well. These Christians see other Christians suffering and they are only too quick to remark something like “look at the divine discipline, hope they turn around before they go out under the sin unto death. . . they are suffering from divine discipline because they do not based fellowship 1 John 1:9 (even though biblically, the foundation of fellowship is 1 John 1:7) . . . they must be suffering because of some hidden sin in their life or because they do not have enough faith . . .” Believers need to be very careful before making such pronouncements. It is one thing to recognize divine discipline on a believer who is conspicuously living in wickedness or who has renounced his faith or denied the veracity of the Word of God. It is quite another to judge another

believer because he is not in one's doctrinal camp or denomination. Not only is this illicit judging, the whole inductivistic framework is non-Christian. I wonder how many Jews who saw Christ crucified and believers burned at the stake in the first century thought that God was judging them. Boy were they wrong! It is invalid, both logically and biblically, to go from particular instances of anything and make universal statements (inductivism). One must always start with universal principles and then move to particulars. Had Job, the psalmists, Jeremiah, and modern Christians grasped this principle, they would avoid much evil thinking and speaking—although Job did finally grasp this and overcome the problem of evil in his life and worshiped God. In sum, we start with universal principles that God is love and loves us and no matter what happens: all that He does is out of love! Then we will not be tempted to see *any* difficulty in our lives as evil (because of starting with a particular). Universally and always the principle is to *walk with God by proper knowledge and proper love*. Everything else is just a detail from the loving hand of God (universal principle). The problem of inductivism is not only a problem among Christians; it is rife among political pundits, all of whom can inductively point to their data rather than work from a foundation of absolute truth. Through induction, anyone can just about prove anything, especially what they want to be true. Hence, truth leaves the realm of correspondence and ends up in the realm of coherence—what fits one's *Dasein*, what coheres to what one *desires* to believe.

**Philemon 1:8–25.** Paul offered several appeals to Onesimus. He started with Philemon's reputation as a person who brought blessing to others. Paul could have commanded Philemon, but instead he appealed in love, and he focused on the conversion of Onesimus. Paul then explained how valuable Onesimus had been to him. The final appeal was related to God's providence over the entire situation. Legally Philemon could have punished Onesimus. Some slave owners were cruel; others, more merciful in these situations. Paul carefully convinced Philemon that he should receive his disobedient slave and forgive him. This situation was quite difficult for Philemon. How should he respond? If he were too easy on Onesimus, his other slaves might rebel or try to "become Christians" to receive special treatment. If he were too hard, it might disrupt the church. Paul recognized this dilemma and offered a helpful suggestion. Paul volunteered to become a business partner with Philemon and help him deal with the Onesimus situation. Two suggestions followed: (1) "Welcome him as you would welcome me." (2) "If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me" (17–18). Philemon was then able to receive Onesimus as though he were receiving Paul. Paul did not suggest that Philemon ignore the slave's crimes and forget about the debt Onesimus owed. Instead, Paul offered to handle the debt himself. The apostle assured Philemon his debts would be paid. Biblical love can overcome all obstacles as it provides the rightly ordered thinking and rightly ordered desires. As 1 Cor. 13 so vividly declares: divine love is the warp and woof of spiritual life with God.

**Life in God by second person proper knowledge and proper love.** Obviously there are many parallels in this reading that are reminiscent of our relationship with Jesus Christ and others as we share in the love of Christ. God's people are so identified with Jesus Christ that God receives them as He received His Son (Eph. 1:6). Moreover, as we walk with God *by proper knowledge and proper love*, we partake of the love of God and are then able to share it with others. True love of God leads to love for others, a love that does include "emotions" (contrary to Cartesian Christianity. 1 John 3:16 *By this we know*

*love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his feelings/emotions (τὰ σπλάγχνα) from him, how does the love of God abide in him? This love is not just any love. It is the very love of God. It is always inextricably connected to faith, and hope. Faith, hope, and love always enjoy a circumincession of dynamics.*

**Proverbs 14:15–35.** In this reading, we see that the health and well-being of a nation depend upon both the ruler and the governed. A ruler must be fair and above all must respect the rights of his people. The people, on the other hand, must have virtue in their lives or they will bring society into chaos. No government can succeed without the people, and no people can thrive if corruption and evil abound.

**Life in God by second person proper knowledge and proper love.** At FBC, our opening passage is always Matthew 22:37 *Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." 38 "This is the first and great commandment. 39 "And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 40 "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."* This passage not only sums up the capital virtue that provides the right perspective and motivation for everything else, it tells us that this divine love simply is the point of all Scripture. Man's distaste for this love is often reflected by attempts to redefine it into everything from emotionalism (non-cognitive) to a relaxed mental attitude (only cognitive). Consider the dynamics of love from the realistic biblical perspective both in rightly ordered thinking and rightly ordered desires regarding God and others: 1 Corinthians 13:3 *And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. 4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 1 John 4:8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 1 John 3:16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?* Life with God by proper knowledge and proper love is not some peripheral concept. It is the essence or foundation from which all spiritual thriving flows. As far as what all of this has to do with this reading, consider Proverbs 14:21 *He who despises his neighbor sins; But he who has mercy on the poor, blessed [happy relationship with God] is he.* Love is not an option that one can take or leave or redefine. Love is essential to a thriving spiritual life with God and anything that is impossible with love (e.g., lack of forgiveness, animosity, lack of caring, bitterness) makes any chance of enjoying an abundant life with Jesus Christ absolutely impossible.

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

*Pastor Don*