

**“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
July 3, 2016**

1 Samuel 5:1–7:17. From victory to a return to idolatry.

James 1:19–27. The spiritual life, virtue style.

Psalms 119:33–48. More on spiritual virtue.

COMMENTS:

1 Samuel 5:1–7:17. In **chapter 5** we see the vindicating power of God. The Philistines first put the Ark into the temple of their god Dagon in Ashdod as evidence that Dagon was stronger and greater than Jehovah. At the beginning of the battle, the Philistines were frightened when they heard that the God of Israel was in the camp, but now they were making fun of Him and exalting their own gods. In their mythology, Dagon was the principal god of the Philistines and the father of Baal, the storm god, whose worship brought so much trouble to Israel. However, Dagon didn't have a chance, for Yahweh was and is well able to take care of Himself! The next morning, the worshipers found Dagon prostrate before the Ark like one of the worshipers. Like every dead idol, Dagon had to be righted again, but things were even worse the next morning. The stump of Dagon was prostrate before the Ark of the Covenant, but his head and hands had been cut off and placed at the threshold of the temple. But that wasn't the end, for the Lord not only humiliated the god of the Philistines, but He judged the people who worshiped that god. When the Philistines captured the Ark and arrogantly treated the Lord as though He were just another god, they invited the judgment of God. In **chapter 6** the Lord sent infected mice or rats (1 Sam. 6:4) among the people and spread a terrible plague to punish the enemy. Some believe this was the bubonic plague and that the people experienced painful inflammatory swellings of the lymph glands, especially in the groin. Note that 50,000 people were killed by the Lord. It is indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31). In today's Western society, with its informality and lack of respect for the sacred, it's easy even for believers to get so "chummy" with the Lord that they forget He is "high and lifted up." The idea that the fear of the Lord is something that was done away with in an absolute sense because of the cross of grace is not biblical. In the Book of Revelation, we see the fear of the Lord commanded as well as celebrated (Rev. 14:7; 15:4; 19:5). **Chapter 7** shows us Samuel's leadership as well as the people's idolatry and repentance. Idolatry had been Israel's besetting sin: Jacob's family carried false gods with them (Gen. 35:2), and when the Jews were slaves in Egypt, they adopted the gods and goddesses of the Egyptians, and after the Exodus, worshiped some of these idols during the wilderness journeys (Acts 7:42–43). Moses commanded Israel to destroy every evidence of Canaanite religion, but the people eventually lapsed back into idolatry and worshiped the gods of the defeated enemy. Samuel specifically mentioned the Baals and Ashtoreths (1 Sam. 7:3–4). Baal was the Canaanite storm god to whom the Jews often turned when the land was suffering drought, and Ashtoreth was the goddess of fertility whose worship included illicit sexual activities. At Mount Sinai, the Jews didn't see a representation of God, but they heard His voice; and they knew that worshiping any image of their God was to practice false worship. Putting away their false gods was only the beginning of their return to the Lord; the Jews also had to prepare their hearts for the Lord and devote themselves to the Lord alone (7:3). This was in keeping with the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me." An idol is a

substitute for God—anything that we trust and serve in place of the Lord. The Jews gave themselves to idols of wood, stone, and metal, but believers today have more subtle and attractive gods: entertainment, narcissism, being flattered, ambition, and materialism/wealth. Anything in our lives that takes the place of God and commands the sacrifice and devotion that belong only to Him, is an idol and must be cast out. Idols in the heart are far more dangerous than idols in the temple. The people of God did confess their sins of idolatry (7:5-6), but without the building of virtue they would fall into the same vices as before, which they did in the next chapter. Only by the cultivating of virtue in concurrent power of the Lord can the believer really make a change in the way he thinks, in what he wishes, and the way he feels. Apart from virtue, the believer will eventually fall back to his former base desires, and ending up rejecting the true good of God Himself. By nature, and without any exception, we seek what we think is good; we never sin or do evil unless it is under the guise of good in some way and thus on some level in effect call good evil and evil good. The first step is to recognize this problem, to recognize how disgusting and gross our sins are before God. Then we need to seek God and seek His sanctification wherein He changes our appetites as we actualize goodness in concurrence with Him, which just is what spiritual virtue is all about. Let us never forget that is the “goods” of this earth that compete with the Good of God Himself as illustrated with the Israelites. *Quo Vadis?*

James 1:19–27. Note the six spiritual virtues in this section of Scripture. Also note that there is no mention of any spiritual conduit system. Did James make a crucial error in not telling believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit, walk in the Spirit, and be sure to stay in a power zone by staying confessed up? According to modern, mechanistic, Baconian views of spiritual empowerment, all of this talk of living the spiritual life without “spiritual conduit forms” is “worthless.” Is it no wonder that James is not really appreciated among those who are always speaking of some new system for “spiritual victory?” Recall that this is likely the first book written, so these believers did not have Galatians 5, Ephesians 5, or Romans 6 on the Holy Spirit and presenting oneself to the Lord. If you think that James is flawed, it is because you have a conduit form of the spiritual life, instead of a virtuous form of spirituality. I have spoken at length and repeatedly on the difference between the two systems, and how only the virtuous form of spirituality really changes the life because it is real, unlike the conduit system which really does not require virtue, in the latter all one needs is a state of being confessed up and resident doctrine in the soul. Let us note the six virtues that James outlines in this reading: **First, receive the Word of God**, for unless the Word of God is received the right way, it will not bear spiritual production/virtue. The Word of God is not some powerful talisman or good “luck” power to get what we want. The soul must receive the Word of God with no ulterior motive than living before the Lord. Note what Jesus, the half-brother of James, says in Matthew 13 about the different soils/souls. The believer who just takes in the word for pragmatic purposes will never grow because his greatest good is some pragmatic purpose rather than God and loving Him more deeply and intensely as the greatest good. **Second, be swift to hear.** This is the virtue of being an active learner of the Word of God. It is the believer who really loves the Lord who is quick to hear what God says and wants in his life. Moreover, he is quick to change former views if they are wrong (like modern conduitism). **Third, be slow to speak.** We have two ears and one mouth, which ought to remind us to listen more than we speak. Too many times we argue with God’s Word, if not audibly, at least in our hearts and minds. **Fourth, be slow to wrath.** Why do believers get so angry? Why do believers get angry at God or His Word? This disposition of being slow to wrath is a virtue—not the result of being in some conduit state! As a natural virtue,

we see it in Proverbs 14:29: “*He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.*” When we get angry because things do not go our way, we are being stupid, and showing lack of prudence, a virtue that provides a balanced perspective by avoiding extremes. **Fifth, note the virtue of humility in receiving the Word of God**, for no one can grow in the Word of God with an attitude of pride. Pride is the single most destructive vice. We must humbly receive the Word of God and follow Total Truth regardless of the costs. Apart from an attitude of humility, the believer will end up suppressing much of the Word of God, consciously or not. **Sixth, actualize the Word of God in the life**, for it is not enough to hear the Word of God, we must live it. The idea that hearing a good sermon is what makes a believer grow is manifestly false. It is not the hearing (which mainly provides universal theoretical knowledge), but the doing of the Word (practical reasoning about particulars) that sculpts the believer’s character and life. We literally are what we do for in doing we actualize good or evil. It is no wonder that the Scripture never speaks of rewards in terms of what a person knows, “the amount of Bible doctrine resident in the soul;” rather, the Bible always speaks of what the believer actually does with the truth. For example, there is a radical difference between a believer who knows (theoretical universal knowledge) that he should help the poor and does not, versus the believer who actually helps the poor (practical knowledge). Virtually all believers know they should help the poor. How does continuing to gain more and more doctrine, in and of itself, about this mandate make one better? The word James uses of those who do not do is “worthless” (1:26-27). I would add that the Lord Jesus Christ had even stronger language with regard to not living out one’s faith *by actualizing truth in our lives by doing*. Without spiritual virtue, there is no excellence, no exceptionalism, no true Christian character. Christians should stand out as *sui generis* in quality, paragons of virtue, shining lights in a dark world. Why is this not the case? Is it really because we do not have enough spiritual formulas, or does the problem of modern Christian superficiality run far deeper?

Psalm 119:33–48. Note the spiritual virtues with reference to God and His Word in this section: learning (33-34), obeying (35), delighting (36-37), fearing (38-39), longing (40), answering our enemies according to the Word of God (42), trust (43), living out the Word of God (44-45), and witnessing without any “shame” (46-48). Of course, as we have studied, the form of all virtues is always love. Love for God is the form and powerful behind all of the virtues of the spiritual life (1 Cor. 13:4-7). Without this love, all that we do is considered a waste before God (1 Cor. 13:1-3). Careful reflection on this entire psalm reveals that behind all that the believer does is his love for the Lord; all of the dynamics are simply means the will uses in seeking the *direct* object of its desires, namely the Lord.

Romans 11:36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

Pastor Don