

“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
June 17, 2016

Ezra 3:1–4:24. Worship and rebuilding.

1 John 3:11–18. Abiding in the Life.

Psalms 106:16–29. What we become when we reject God’s grace.

COMMENTS:

Ezra 3:1–4:24. In the first thirteen verses of this reading we have worship and rebuilding. The first concern of the community was the worship of the Lord. Sacrifice had not been offered for fifty years since Jerusalem’s fall (586 B.C.). Note the beauty of the phrase *“the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem,”* demonstrating a strong sense of community among the people of God. They had a common bond of faith in God and a common purpose to worship and obey Him. Even in times when it is difficult or dangerous to assemble, God is honored and His work is accomplished when His people unite to learn, worship, and obey Him. It is unfortunate that so many of Christians today are not part of a local assembly of gathering with other likeminded believers. Little do they know that such disobedience really is an act of rejection of God’s grace. In fact, I wonder how many Christians are even aware of the fact that every act of apathy, sin, and living for the wrong things are acts of resistance to God’s enabling grace, which alone brings superhuman faith, hope, and love. In **chapter 4** of this reading, the residents of Samaria offered to assist the exiles because they claimed to worship the God of the Jews. Zerubbabel spurned their help because their religion was a mixed cult that included elements of paganism as a result of the Assyrian policies of intermingling foreign populations (see 2 Kgs. 17:24–41). The Assyrian kings from the time of Esarhaddon (681–669 B.C.) had exiled foreigners to the northern provinces of Israel. The Samaritans impeded the work by harassing the builders and hiring counselors. The work stopped for sixteen years (536–520 B.C.) until the reign of Darius. A point of application here is that believers, no matter how small the assembly, do not need the help of those who really are not seeking the Lord and His truth. Any local church that waters down and otherwise corrupts the teaching of Total Truth just to accommodate the world’s desires (in believers), gets what it deserves: all kinds of functional, religious, and aberrant views of God and the spiritual life, which prevent any believer from really growing in God’s grace and thus in the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. In sum, apart from actively growing in God’s truth and grace, the believer is guaranteed failure.

1 John 3:11–18. John makes it clear that his admonitions were directed to Christians: *This is the message you (Christians) have heard from the beginning: We (Christians) should love one another.* But before telling his audience precisely what love is, he first told them what it is not. It is most certainly not the kind of action Cain exhibited toward his brother Abel. Cain murdered his brother (Gen. 4:8) and the source is of the evil one. The reason for this murder was Cain's jealous resentment of his brother's superior righteousness (Gen. 4:2–7). While the world's hatred for believers is normal, hatred among believers is perverse. In verse 14 John states that *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers.* Love for one's brothers is evidence that he has entered God's sphere of fellowship with the Life (cf., John 13:35). The expression translated "*passed from death to life*" must be defined in terms of this context. The statements in 1 John 3:14–15 indicate that the spheres of "death" and "life" are here treated in terms of experiential fellowship, which *are* determined by one's actions and not by faith alone. The issue of conversion is not in view here. The statement, *Anyone who does not love remains in death,* is considered under verse 15. Even though verse 15 is usually taken to mean that a true Christian cannot hate his fellow Christian, since hatred is the moral equivalent of murder, this view cannot stand up under close scrutiny. To begin with, John speaks of "anyone" who hates his brother. It is an illusion to believe that a real Christian is incapable of hatred and murder. David was guilty of the murder of pious Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam. 12:9) and Peter warned his Christian readers, "*If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer*" (1 Peter 4:15). The view that 1 John 3:15 cannot refer to the saved is totally devoid of all realism. The solemn fact remains that hatred of some other believer is the spiritual equivalent of murder (Matt. 5:21–22), as a lustful eye is the spiritual equivalent of adultery (Matt. 5:28). John insisted, then, that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. John does not say that someone who hates his brother does not possess eternal life, but rather that he does not have it abiding in him in the sense of fellowship. But since for John, Christ Himself is eternal life (John 14:6; 1 John 1:2; 5:20), John's statement is saying that no murderer has Christ abiding in him. Thus once more the experience of "abiding" is what John had in view. This is fellowship talk. Hatred on the part of one Christian toward another is thus an experience of moral murder. As John had indicated in 3:14, he held that a Christian who fails to love his brother *remains/abides in death.* Such a believer is thus experientially living in the same sphere in which the world lives (see 13). Because he is a murderer at heart, he can make no real claim to the kind of intimate fellowship with God and Christ which the word "abide" suggests. Eternal life (i.e., Christ) is not at home in his heart so long as the spirit of murder is there. Such a person is disastrously out of touch with his Lord and he experiences only death. No service is rendered to church age believers by denying their applicability to Christians. The experience of the Christian church through the ages shows how urgently this is needed. Hate, unfortunately, is not confined to unsaved people. No matter how many times a person may confess his sins, if he habitually has hatred in his heart, he is not abiding in the life, he cannot live a life of fellowship with Christ. He is functional dead, living like an unbeliever. That is the point. Moreover, no conduit system is going to magically change that. This is self-evident and undeniable.

Psalm 106:16–29. What an ugly sight of God’s people as the psalmist spoke of the people’s sins as they traveled to the Promised Land. They soon forgot God’s miracles (21–22) and began to live in lust (cf. Num. 11:4) and God sent a plague on them (Num. 11:33). They also murmured out of envy over Moses and Aaron, so God destroyed Dathan and his company (Ps. 106:16–18). At Horeb, the ancient name for Mount Sinai (cf. Deut. 5:2; Mal. 4:4), they made a golden calf in violation of the Law. God would have destroyed them if Moses had not interceded (Ps. 106:19–23; cf. Ex. 32). They murmured again so God swore with uplifted hand that they would die in the wilderness (Ps. 106:24–27). They despised the pleasant land by disbelieving the LORD. At Peor they sinned again in involving themselves with pagan worship as they “ate sacrifices made to the dead.” Behind these sins and acts of evil, like with any sin, is a rejection of God’s grace. Every time we sin, we reject God’s grace that is available to raise up our intellects and wills to know and love Him as He is. Anytime the believer rejects God’s grace, God hands him over to his depraved desires (habituated desire/taste for sin) wherein he always call evil good and good evil due to man’s inner natural unchangeable penchant for truth and for goodness, which is why no evil is sought unless it is sought under the guise of a good. You know that thing that God said about considering yourself dead to sin? He meant it. Moreover, is this not an example of grace provision that should be taken seriously?

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

Pastor Don