

“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
June 18, 2016

Ezra 5:1–6:22. The Temple is rebuilt through the help of a pagan king.

1 John 3:19–24. Confidence in God even when we fail to love other believers.

Psalms 106:30–48. Israel’s failure and God’s earnest grace.

COMMENTS:

Ezra 5:1–6:22. Work on the temple had been stopped for a long time. After sixteen years a new beginning was needed. Like many spiritual advances recorded in the Word of God, from Abraham’s to the missionary expansion in Acts, this venture began with a word from the Lord. For this God used two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, whose messages of rebuke, exhortation, encouragement, and assurance were desperately needed by the restored community. Their mission was to bring about spiritual renewal and to motivate the people to restore the proper worship of the Lord. Consider how God uses pagan rulers to help the people of God “complete” the rebuilding of the Temple (6:15). This occurred on March 12, 515 B.C., nearly four and a half of years later. This was seventy-two years after the destruction of the Temple in 587 B.C. Note the celebration of the community as they come together to thank the Lord for the privilege of being restored to the privilege of being able to serve the Lord at Jerusalem, “according to what is written in the Book of Moses” (6:18). There is a dual principle in 6:21 that is applicable to all Christians. They are joint principles that always go together in that a believer cannot fully do one without the other: a complete commitment to the Lord coupled with a complete separation from the “filth” of unbelievers. First, they “separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbors.” In order to follow Christ, we must reject an immoral lifestyle. The biblical faith is an ethical faith. God is holy and demands that His children be holy. The other decision is a positive one: “To seek the Lord.” This means turning to Him, seeking communion with Him, seeking to do His will. Time after time the prophets condemned the people and announced God’s judgment because the people did not seek the Lord (Isa. 9:13; 31:1; Hos. 7:10; Zeph. 1:6; Jer. 10:21). We find the same exhortation of commitment/separation in the New Testament: 2 Corinthians 6:14 *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? ¹⁵ And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.” ¹⁷ Therefore “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.” ¹⁸ “I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.” 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God; Ephesians 5:11 *And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them;* 1 Corinthians 5:9 *I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.* 1 Peter 4:3 *For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles-- when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. ⁴ In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.* While a believer cannot separate from every*

immoral person—1 Corinthians 5:10 *Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world*—he is commanded not to allow himself to become too close to immoral believers or unbelievers because anytime the believer becomes intimate with another person, he is vulnerable to evil as he opens his soul up to a friend that he would not with anyone else. The doctrine of “separation” never becomes passé because the dangers always exist regardless of when and where the believer lives. To reject this doctrine because of some so-called “love” of an immoral believer or unbeliever is simply one way to rationalize away God’s command for full commitment to the good and away from the evil.

1 John 3:19–24. Verses 19 and 20 are difficult in the original, but probably should be translated, “And we shall persuade our hearts before Him that, if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knows all things.” It is precisely in the sphere of a believer’s love for other Christians that a believer may feel his own inadequacy. However, even if his heart condemns him, he can remind himself that God is greater than any failure of the believer. In other words, his guilt-ridden heart can be persuaded by realizing that God is well aware of his fundamental commitment to the truth. Once a condemning heart has been silenced by resting on God’s knowledge of all things, there comes a new confidence (παρρησία) before God. In prayer (3:22), Christians can calm their disapproving hearts and achieve boldness in prayer, and their prayers will be answered because they, as believers, are consciously subject to God’s Word. Now those commands are summed up in a *single* command (ἐντολή) consisting of faith and love (23). The phrase “believe in the name of His Son” contains the epistle’s first direct reference to faith. The Greek here contains no word for “in” so the expression could be rendered “*believe the name of His Son.*” In this context it certainly includes the faith in Christ’s name which true Christian prayer involves (see John 14:12–15; 16:24). First John 3:23 furnishes a kind of climax to the paragraph beginning in verse 18: As a Christian actively engages in deeds of love (v. 18) and as he achieves boldness before God in prayer (v. 21), he is doing what God commands (cf. 2:3; 3:24; 5:2–3): living a life of confidence in the name of Christ which is undergirded by love (3:23; cf. v. 14; 4:7, 11, 21). Since faith and love, thus conceived, go together, this kind of life is seen as obedience to a single “command.” As I noted in our last Bible class, the superhuman or theological virtues of faith, hope, and love take God as their direct object, which then shares in the nature of God and by sharing in the nature of God the believer shares in God’s love for others. This love is to extend to all people, not just believers. There is no place for misanthropy in Christianity, let alone execration.

Psalm 106:30–48. The psalmist reminded the people of their failure to destroy the inhabitants of the land, as the LORD had commanded them to do (Deut. 7:1–2). Instead of obeying the Lord’s command to demolish the Canaanites’ idols (Deut. 7:5, 16, 25–26), Israel worshiped them (cf. Jud. 2:11–12) and even sacrificed their sons and daughters to demons (Ps. 106:37; cf. Deut. 32:17) associated with the idols (Ps. 106:38). Because Israel sinned so grievously, the LORD was angry (figure of speech to communicate righteous indignation) with His people and gave them over to the oppression of enemies. Many times, however, God delivered them (Ps. 106:43–46): This refers to His raising up judges to deliver Israel from her oppressors (cf. Jud. 2:16) because of His covenant and His faithful love (*chased*). Thus the Lord constantly brought judgment on His disobedient people, but He also constantly responded to their cries. There is nothing more earnest than God loving grace. In verses 47–48, after retracing the nation’s sin and God’s punishment, the psalmist prayed that they would be again delivered so that they might praise Him.

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

Pastor Don