

**“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
June 20, 2016**

Ezra 9:1–10:44. God’s people’s intermarriage with pagans and their subsequent confession.

1 John 4:7–12. The Love of God in believers.

Psalms 107:23–43. Concurrence, suffering and virtue thinking.

COMMENTS:

Ezra 9:1–10:44. Chapter 9: When Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, the city leaders confronted him with the problem of intermarriage. Echoing the days of Moses, the sins of the people were likened to those of the Gentiles who had ensnared Israel in the past (Exod. 34:11–12; Deut. 7:1–6). The purpose of this segregation was not to create a pure race but to avoid marriages that would lead to spiritual unfaithfulness (see Judg. 3:5–6). Ezra’s distress over the people’s sins moved him to pray for God’s forgiveness. He recalled the sins of their ancestors who suffered exile for their guilt. He offered thanksgiving that the Lord had spared them as a remnant. Yet he feared that they had repeated their ancestors’ sins and neglected their prophets’ warnings. He confessed the inadequacy of the people and invoked the continued mercy of God. **Chapter 10:** Ezra’s prayer and example of contrition contributed to the people’s conviction for their sins. As we have seen, Ezra was a godly man and this confession stands in stark contrast to modern conduitism, mechanism, and legalism regarding confession of sin. Note how the people recommended a covenant renewal and urged Ezra to reform the community. Ezra called for a convocation of all the tribes under threat of confiscation of property and excommunication (see 7:26). Ezra chastened them and ordered them to separate from their pagan wives. Divorce was not God’s will for His people (see Mal. 2:16; Matt. 19:4–6), but it was permitted in this situation in order to preserve the spiritual life of the nation (see Deut. 24:1–3). The same holds true today: it is never God’s antecedent will, but it can be God’s consequential will in light of certain circumstances like abuse. One of the most common mistakes young Christians make today is marrying someone who is an unbeliever or a believer who is not serious about the Lord. The practice of marrying pagans was so widespread in Ezra’s times, that it took three months for a tribunal to hear the cases. A listing of the guilty ends the book. The religious leaders are listed first. No group escaped the sin nor the punishment. This somber conclusion contrasts with the register of those honored for their faith back in chapter 2. These exiles desperately needed to grow in spiritual virtue, the only state in which a believer, as a way of life, thinks right, wishes right, and feels right. How can any believer really overcome his problems without the proper development of intellect/cognition, will/desire, and feeling/emotions in virtue, the Whole Truth, Total Truth? As long as his soul is filled with vice, he will be imprisoned in thoughts he hates, which means that instead of victory, he is constantly confessing his sins, which gives testimony of corrupt thinking to start with and the need for spiritual virtue as a state of being rather than a flash of some modern “fellowship” power model. What kind of victory over sin (and sin is always an act of the intellect, a “rational” act, a depraved way of thinking) is it when a believer needs to confess sins for most of each day? What would it take to change that? an intellect of virtue, that truly sees good for what it is and sin for what it is! As we have noted, no one ever sins without seeing that sin as a good in some way. This is where the problem lies—not in OSN cooties. Every person must take responsibility for this own thoughts that he has cultivated over

his life, both the good thoughts and the bad thoughts, the latter of which really is calling/seeing evil as a good and good as an evil on some level. Even if the evil that is seen as a good is on a sense level, it is still the intellect that gives the assent and *approval* of the sin as a good *apart from God*.

1 John 4:7–12. John returned to the subject of love which, like faith in God's Son, is a product of the Spirit. Since divine love comes from God, the who loves with divine love has been born of God and he knows God. Love stems from a regenerate nature and also from fellowship with God which issues in knowing Him (2:3–5). The absence of love is evidence that a person does not know God. Since God is love, intimate acquaintance with Him will *always* produce love. Like light (1:5), love is intrinsic to the character and nature of God, and one who is intimately acquainted with God walks in His light (1:7). In verses 9-11, he notes that if one wishes to know how God has demonstrated His love, he need only look at the fact that God sent His One and only Son into the world that we might obtain eternal life thereby. Moreover, this love was not a response to man's love, but an initiative on God's part (1 John 4:10). By it the Son became an atoning Sacrifice for our sins. Nothing less than God's love in Christ is the model for the love Christians should have toward one another. In light of the fact that love is given the kind of content we have in verse 10, it is a wonder how believers could have ever watered down and distorted the true nature of love. I am afraid that when love is watered down and even redefined, it tells us more about the people who do the redefining and those who follow those redefinitions and their lack of understanding of biblical fellowship with God, than anything about the true nature of love as such. Note the interesting connection in verse 12 about His divine nature and essence: God has never been seen by any living man; yet in the experience of mutual love among believers, this invisible God actually lives in us and His love is made complete in us. This idea of love being "perfected" (τετελειωμένη) carries the idea of God's love reaching completeness in a believer in the sense of deep and full experience of that love. The word "perfected" is in the perfect tense. This word is counter evidence to the common Cratylean fallacy among "Bible exegetes," who erroneously teach that the Greek perfect tense refers to action in the past that is complete and continues forever—unless one thinks that a believer can reach a point of love in his life for the Lord that guarantees permanence, which is of course absurd. Anyone can fall. All one has to do is get his eyes off of the Lord and on something else as a greater good, even if that good is legitimate. Is that not what happened to Adam and Eve, who instead of keeping their eyes on the goodness of the Lord, turned their attention to the "good" of the forbidden tree? And remember: they did not even have old sin natures to blame their own perverse thoughts that led them to partake of the tree *apart from God*. Anything that is done apart from the Lord is by definition evil and perverse.

Psalm 107:23–43. We have a shift in pattern and theme of gratitude from the previous verses in this psalm to one of concurrence, suffering, punishment, and reward in the last section of this psalm. His point is that God is ever working through all of the changes of life. The wise, observing these things and remembering the great love of God, are prayerful and grateful. We should all be mindful of the fact that no matter what happens to us here on this broken planet, as long as we are living for the Lord, we will be more than compensated for our sorrows. Note the attitude of the spiritual virtuous believer regarding his sufferings: *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us* (Rom 8:18). Not worthy?? Wow! Not even worthy to think about our problems as any big deal? Really? Really! But this cannot become a reality unless the mind, the will, and the affections are changed in seeing good as it truly is. All other systems are doomed for failure. *And* the fact that modern mechanistic and “programy” new systems are always popping up to replace old systems demonstrates their emptiness. Note how, in concurrence, God is in all things as He is the existential and efficient cause of all things in these verses—this is far more than metaphorical poetry. This the realist knows all too well.

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

Pastor Don