

“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
June 25, 2016

Nehemiah 9:1–10:27. Confession and commitment.

1 John 5:13–16. Confident prayers.

Psalms 111:1–112:10. Honoring of God and a list of blessings for believers with spiritual virtue.

COMMENTS:

Nehemiah 9:1–10:27. On the twenty-fourth of the month, two days after the feast, the exiles fasted while dressed in the clothing of contrition. They prepared for confession by sanctification, reading the law of Moses, and worship. The Levites led a prayer of confession, calling the pilgrims to arise. They praised God as great and gracious. Note their recounting of history from Abraham’s call to Moses’ experience at Sinai, and how God protected and provided for Israel. In contrast to the longsuffering of God, Israel was stiffnecked and rebellious throughout its history. Still, the Lord remained merciful. One thing is clear: God always dealt with them on the basis of grace, not on the basis of their righteousness. God is always faithful, even when believers are not faithful. The prayer concluded with supplications. They admitted that God had justly chastened them by Gentile oppression, but now they prayed that God might see their economic distress and rescue them from oppression. Their prayer of confession concluded with the nation entering an oath of commitment to obey the law of Moses. In chapter 10 we have the list of signatories—the point is that each individual has a responsibility to accept for himself the oath of commitment. We are responsible for our own lives and what we do with them. Life is both a gift as well as a trust. We not only have the privilege of life, God has given us the free will to sculpt our character each day either for the good or evil according to what we actualize in our lives. We all have potentials in both areas.

1 John 5:13–16. In verse 14 John moves from confidence regarding salvation to confidence in prayer. He sees prayer as having a wide scope for he speaks of asking *anything*, but he immediately qualifies this with *according to his will*. Prayer is not a device for inducing God to change his mind and do what we want. It must be offered in accordance with His will if it is to be effective. When it is offered in this way God *hears us*. The Bible teaches us what God’s will is, for example, we learn that prayer must be in faith (Mk. 11:24), in the name of Jesus (Jn. 14:14), offered by those who abide in Christ (Jn. 15:7), who have forgiven those who offend them (Mk. 11:25); it must be accompanied by obedience (1 Jn. 3:22), and it must not be for the gratification of one’s passions (Jas. 4:3). All this is involved in praying according to the will of God. What is not in view is the common teaching, as per Word of Faith Movement, that if we just pray with enough faith that God will answer prayers simply because of our personal trust that He will answer them. James heads this off at the pass by warning believers to be careful how they pray: “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures” (Jas 4:3). Prayer is not a convenient device for imposing our will upon God, or for bending His will to ours, but the prescribed way of subordinating our will to His. It is by prayer that we seek God’s will, embrace it and align ourselves with it. Every true prayer is a variation of the theme “your will be done.” We are given the promise that God “hears

us.” This does not mean that God simply acknowledges that we have prayed but that he hears us favorably or, even better, answers us favorably.

Psalm 111:1–112:10. Note the praise of the Lord and moral commitment in Psalm 111. Observe the focus on the greatness of the Lord’s works (2–3) and what He has done for His people apart from any merit on their part (4–9). Psalm 112 enumerates some of the blessings enjoyed by a person who fears/respects the Lord, that is, the believer with spiritual virtue. Note the virtue in verse 5: giving to the poor, a theme found throughout the Old Testament and New Testament, and emphasized by Jesus Christ Himself—such a believer is promised here to be honored by the Lord (“his horn will be exalted with honor,” 112:9). Of course, helping the poor is simply a matter of loving the poor as Christ loves them. With Christ every single person has equal significance and dignity as a human being. It is unfortunate that government has taken over the role of “helping” the poor to such extent that many Americans have lost a sense of moral conscience in this regard, and with it love for the weakest and most needy among us.

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

Pastor Don