

**“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
June 26, 2016**

Nehemiah 10:28–11:36. The separation of God’s people.

1 John 5:17–21. John’s last words, ‘guard yourself from those idols.’

Psalms 113:1–114:8. Thank the Lord, to begin with: for the gift of life!

COMMENTS:

Nehemiah 10:28–11:36. Note the phrase in 10:28, “all who separated themselves.” For the Jews this indicates that this was a definite community with definite limits. Separation from the neighboring peoples was important to maintain the distinctive beliefs and ethical principles of the community. God still wants his people to be separate by repudiating values and beliefs that are contrary to His will. We must take seriously the scriptural emphasis on separation without falling into an isolationist situation. The other danger is to accommodate the world so much that we fall into a syncretism that loses our Christian way of thinking and acting. It is unfortunate that most Christians think like the world rather than like people of God. So many Christians live not only under the same values of the world, but for the same temporal things and even get their self-esteem from the same things that the world does—even though they have an altogether different destiny. In the situation of Ezra and Nehemiah, separation was imperative to secure the continuity of the redeemed community. Note the promise in 10:29 of complete submission to the authority of God’s Word. The first step toward solving these problems was a commitment by the whole community to submit to the authority of God’s revelation as found in the Scriptures. The same is true for God’s people today. This commitment to the authority of Scripture must be applied to present situations, for “true religion cannot be merely general principles.” The principles must be applied to specific actions and decisions. As we have studied, there is no true virtue in theoretical reasoning (universals) alone; growth comes from applying those universal truths to practical reasoning in choices where we actualize the Word of God in our lives. The prohibition against intermarriage (10:30) was for religious reasons as we have seen gentiles like Rahab and Ruth were accepted in the community. It was not a racial issue. The prohibition was due to fear of apostasy, which was all but assured if a Jew married outside of the faith. No matter how much we may love someone, even our spouse, God always takes priority, and when one makes God a priority then His mandates for the spouse also become mandatory, like love and support your spouse as unto the Lord. We all could do ourselves a favor by stop thinking of ourselves so much and start thinking of our spouses more in light of what God’s Word says about our responsibilities instead of his or hers.

1 John 5:17–21. Verse 17 mentions the ‘sin *not* leading unto [swift] death.’ This passage has suffered a great deal of conjecture as to what kind of sin *is* directly punished by swift death. John’s emphasis, however, is on sin ‘*not* leading unto [swift] death.’ John’s emphasis is that a believer should demonstrate love for fellow believers by praying appropriately. Prayer for one’s sinning brother is therefore in obedience to the single two-pronged command of 3:23. As far as sin that *does* lead to death, it is more of a state than a single isolated act; it is more of a state of consistent rebelliousness to the Lord than a single type or category of sin. Note the admonition in the last verse, “keep yourselves from idols.” John is not talking about staying away from idols in the form of Roman figurines on the hearth. He is talking about anything in the world in that when anything in the world becomes more important than the Lord, it *becomes* an idol. In fact, greed or covetousness is itself a form of idolatry: Colossians 3:5 *Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*

Psalm 113:1–114:8. Psalms 113–118 form the *Hallel*, a collection of songs sung at the great festivals of Israel—Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles—as well as on other holy days. The theme of Psalm 113 is the universal and transcendent, Lord, exalted above heaven and earth, embracing all time, filling all space, over the nations, raising the poor and transforming the frustrated. The movement of thought is from the sovereignty which rules all, to the goodness which touches each. In Psalm 114 the whole story of the exodus and the settlement in Canaan is here told in eight lines as the writer briefly and beautifully celebrates God’s care of His people. No matter where you are or what you are going through, God loves you and desires an intimate relationship with you. He is there and He is not silent. Your life is His first gift to you. What are you doing with it? What are you going to do with it? Quo Vadis?

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

Pastor Don