

“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
June 27, 2016

Nehemiah 12:1–13:31. The importance of separation.

2 John 1–6. The importance of walking in love and truth.

Psalm 115:1–18. Stupidity of idolatry.

COMMENTS:

Nehemiah 12:1–13:31. Now that the walls and gates of Jerusalem were restored, it was important that the Jews inhabit their capital city, even if it might be safer to live in the small outlying villages where they can blend in with Gentile society. Of course, if the people really loved God and their holy city, they would want to be identified as the people of God in the city of God. Likewise, Christians should want to be associated with God’s people in a local assembly of believers. It is a sin not to associate with a local church when there is an opportunity to do so (Heb. 10:25); the sin is categorized as a sin of omission (cf., James 4:17, *Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin*). Every believer needs to find a church that stands for the Whole Truth. As far as sins of omission, I think it is very likely that more Christians are living in apostasy for sins of omission than for sins of commission. In 12:1-26 Nehemiah lists the various temple ministers, which illustrates the principle that everyone brings something to a local body of God. Every believer is gifted in some way for the mutual edification of the local church. In 12:25-36, Nehemiah names the various villages where the Jews were living, some of which were quite a distance from Jerusalem. When the exiles returned to the land from Babylon, they would naturally want to settle in their native towns and villages. They would still be under the authority of Nehemiah and expected to be loyal to the king of Persia. This loyalty to their native cities was what helped make it difficult for Nehemiah to get people to reside in Jerusalem. The Jews were accustomed to having *workers* and *watchers* on the walls of Jerusalem, but now Nehemiah and Ezra assigned people to be *worshipers* on the walls. They conducted a dedication service with such enthusiasm that their shouts and songs were heard “even afar off” (12:43). Note that it was not only the “professional musicians” who expressed praise to God, for the women and children also joined in the singing. So great was the people’s praise that “the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off” (12:43). In 44-47 the people fulfill their promises in giving to support the Temple. Note that all of the giving was done joyfully. Chapter 13 indicates that their promise of separation from the heathen (10:28-29), had not been made complete. There is still a “mixed multitude,” which is composed of unsaved people who want to belong to the fellowship of God’s people for the blessings but not the obligations, as their appetites are still for things of the world as illustrated with the hireling prophet Balaam back in Numbers 22-24. The modern church is plagued by mixed multitudes today who urge the church to follow the philosophy of Balaam and do what the world wants us to do (e.g., prosperity movement), to be like it rather than follow the Word of God. In Neh. 13:4 we have the traitor Eliashib with the enemy intruder, Tobiah the Ammonite, *both living in the Temple!* All of this happened while Nehemiah was away at the palace. It does not take long for the enemy to capture leadership, and too often the people will blindly follow “leaders” in the path of sweet personalities who compromise on Total Truth. It was bad enough that an Ammonite was living in the temple, and that a Jewish high priest had let him in; but this intruder was using a room dedicated to God for the storing of the offerings used by the Levites. He defiled the temple by his

presence and robbed the servants of God at the same time. Nehemiah lost no time throwing out both the man and his furniture, rededicating the room to the Lord, and using it again for its intended purpose. Like our Lord, Nehemiah had to cleanse the temple; and it appears that he had to do it alone. On the seriousness of how Nehemiah took the mandate not to get mixed up with pagans, note his actions in 13:25. We see his stated reason in verse 26. It is the same reason today that believers should never get *intimately* involved with any unbeliever.

2 John 1–6. Apostle John’s letter to the “elect lady” presents a picture of joy and hope, as he “rejoiced greatly to find some of her children walking in truth, just as we were commanded by the Father” (2 John 4). John used the word *truth* four times in this salutation, so it is an important word. Basically, the word means “reality” as opposed to mere appearance, the *ultimate* that is the basis for all that exists. But the truth is not only an objective revelation from the Father, but also a subjective experience in our personal lives. We cannot only *know* the truth, but we can “love in the truth” and live “for the truth’s sake.” The truth “lives in us, and shall be with us forever.” This means that “knowing the truth” is much more than giving assent to a body of doctrines, though that is important. It means that the believer’s life is controlled by a love for the truth and a desire to magnify the truth. John opened his letter on this note of “truth” because there were false teachers abroad who were spreading error. He called them deceivers and antichrists (2 John 7). John was not one to say that all religious teachings are true in one way or another, and that we should not be critical just as long as people are sincere. To John, there was a great difference, in fact, a deadly difference, between truth and error; and he would not tolerate error. Since the truth will be with us forever, we certainly ought to get acquainted with it now and learn to love it. Of course, all truth centers in Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, with whom we shall live forever (John 14:1–6). Note the emphasis of walking in Truth in 2 John 4-6 as well as its connection with love. As we have noted in our study of spiritual virtue, love just is the form of all virtues as clearly illustrated in 1 Cor. 13:4-7. Observe how inextricable love and truth are in these verses. Note how truth and love are tied to rewards at the Judgment Seat of Jesus Christ (JSJC) in verse 8, a point he also makes in 1 John 4:16-17. Given that all virtue finds its source in love, it should be no wonder that whatever is not done out of love is useless and fruitless, again a point made in 1 Cor. 13. In sum, all that is *not* done out of love for God will be burned up at the JSJC—as it should be!

Psalms 115:1–18. The Lord had given His people a great victory, and they wanted to acknowledge this before their pagan neighbors to give God the glory. Note the recognition of the sovereignty of God (He is the efficient cause of everything). Verses 4-8 mock idolatry, which, nonetheless, had always been Israel’s most habitual sin. For this the Lord chastened Israel often, but the people persisted in breaking God’s laws. Israel did not seem to learn its lesson until Babylon carried the people away captive after destroying Jerusalem and the temple. In the great city of Babylon, two or three generations of Jews saw idolatry firsthand and the kind of society it produced. This cured them, at least from gross idolatry, as they became very hard monotheists from that point forward. Verses 15-18 drives the point home of how stupid it is to worship idols given that they have (1) No mouths—They cannot speak to their people, make covenants, give promises, guidance, or encouragement. Our God speaks to us! (2) No eyes—They offer their followers no protection or oversight. (3) No ears—No matter how much the idolaters pray, their gods cannot hear them! (4) No noses—no pleasurable smells from sacrifices. (5) No hands—The workers whose hands made the idols have more power than the idols they call “gods.” (6) No

feet—The people had to carry their idols. But the greatest tragedy is not what the idols cannot do but what they *can do* to the people who worship them. *We become like the God we worship.* Modern man's idols cannot really do anything for him either, except to deceive him as the true God who has done it all in grace and who will provide for His people eternal happiness, which no other entity even pretends to claim to be able to do. None but God alone can fix us and give us what we really need- Him! There can be no true peace until there is complete and total security for all of eternity, which God guarantees for all who have trusted in Christ for salvation. It is just a matter of time when all of God's people will experience perfect peace in perfect security before our perfect Lord and Savior throughout perfected eternity.

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

Pastor Don