

“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
June 28, 2016

Esther 1:1–2:23. The dethroning of Vashti and the crowning of Esther.

2 John 7–13. Exclusivity and cults.

Psalms 116:1–19. Loving God simply for temporal benefits is sinful and evil.

COMMENTS:

Esther 1:1–2:23. Let’s begin by getting acquainted with the king. His Persian name was Khshayarshan, which in Hebrew becomes Ahasuerus and in the Greek language, Xerxes. His father was Darius I, and his grandfather was Cyrus the Great; so he came from an illustrious family. Ahasuerus ruled over the Persian Empire from 486 to 465 B.C. The empire was divided into twenty “satrapies,” which in turn were subdivided into “provinces”; and the king was in absolute control. Like most monarchs of that day, Ahasuerus was a proud man; and in this chapter, we see evidences of his pride. The Book of Esther begins with a banquet given by King Xerxes. The events of the banquet led to the king’s disapproval of the queen. Eastern rulers enjoyed hosting lavish banquets because each occasion gave them opportunity to impress their guests with their royal power and wealth. Three banquets are mentioned in this chapter: one for the key military and political officers of the empire (1–4); one for the men of Shushan (Susa in Greek), site of the king’s winter palace (5–8); and one for the women of Shushan (9), presided over by Queen Vashti. The anger Xerxes exhibits toward Vashti, and her subsequent departure, sets the stage for Esther to come forth and deliver her people. Esther is the only book in the Hebrew Bible that does not mention God’s name. However, for the Realist, God’s name does not have to be mentioned to see that He is always present and active. Opinion about the book’s religious value has varied. Luther considered it worthless, which tells us a lot about his philosophical/theological framework. The theme of Esther is about God working behind the scenes to save the Jews from destruction by exalting Esther as queen of Persia and turning the tables on their enemies. In the first section of the story (chapter 1) we see the king calling for Queen Vashti to “display her beauty” before his guests. Her refusal out of decency, threatened the king’s reputation. In the second section of the story, we see the exaltation of Esther and the evil plot by Haman to exterminate the Jews. Note the contrast between the king’s drunkenness (1:10-12) and Jewish temperance (1:8; 4:3). Excessive alcohol destroys untold lives and families, which is why the Word of God warns against drunkenness (Prov. 20:1; 21:17; 23:20–21, 29–35; Isa. 5:11; Luke 21:34; Rom. 13:13–14; 1 Cor. 5:11; Eph. 5:18; 1 Peter 4:3–5). There is nothing cute or funny about getting wasted and acting stupid. It really is beneath the dignity of any person, especially Christians, 1 Pet. 4:3-5: *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. 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. They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*

2 John 7–13. “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house and do not speak a greeting to him, because the one who speaks a greeting to him shares in his evil deeds” (2 John 9–11). This passage is often used by separatist cults, like the *Exclusive Brethren*, as support for forming exclusive communities—ones that don’t interact with people who don’t believe in the gospel or who have a different faith. Based on this passage, some believe that we as Christians are not permitted to interact with nonbelievers. Is that what John is really teaching? John issued this warning during a time when false teachers were spreading confusing doctrines about Christ. He exhorted believers to “test the spirits” to see if these teachers were actually from God (1 John 4:1). They would know if these teachers were from God if they confessed the true message of Jesus Christ—specifically that He had come in the flesh and was from God (1 John 2:1). John wanted the community to be aware of false teachings so they wouldn’t become confused or weakened in their faith. We, too, need to be intentional about the teaching we adhere to. If we are weak and troubled in our faith, we should seek out mature believers who can teach and minister to us. However, if we are confident in our faith, we should be ready and willing to share the message of salvation with those who need to hear it—both inside and outside our communities. Due to lack of understanding of the development of Christian doctrine throughout the church history, many modern believers are very vulnerable to cultish ideas. As I reflect on all of the things that I believed about reality that are not true, I now recognized it was *mainly* because of lack of understanding the philosophical and theological development of Christian doctrine throughout church history. There really is nothing new under the sun, which means all of the false ideas that surround us today have been seriously considered and refuted by Christian men who are far superior to virtually all Christian leaders today—a statement that *informed* great Bible teachers today would readily admit. While many moderns continue to have a supercilious attitude to those in the past, especially toward the Middle/Scholastic Ages, the fact is that many are recognizing the realism of what they taught, and *some* are even turning back to those ancients, prompted in part by the utter failure of modern systems (from exegetical studies to the study of the mind/body problem). This not only true in biblical exegesis, but in *contemporary* philosophy of mind, free will, ethics, virtue, philosophical psychology. Of course, there are always those who are too proud to admit they were wrong and so continue to live in and teach error. But why? besides pride, it is generally for functional or pragmatic reasons.

Psalm 116:1–19. This psalm is very personal as the psalmist uses the personal pronoun over thirty times. In verses 1–4 he expresses his love for the Lord in response to God’s love and provision. However, his love for the Lord is not simply because of the temporal benefits. To love the Lord only for His temporal benefits is sinful because it places temporal goods above the ultimate good of God Himself. We see the psalmist’s love for the nature of God in verses 5–11. Note the ultimate focus of God’s concern and love in the last verse. If the Father loves us that much at death, how much more is He concerned with how we live our lives right now? Life is a gift from God, and *as beings* we are made up of actual and potential, and there are only two options for our “potential parts”: good or evil. We literally sculpt our own characters by what we actualize in our lives. There are many circumstances in our lives that we have no control over. However, the shaping of our lives, our intellects and wills, what we think is good and what we love as good, is very much in our hands as we are the formal causes of what is shaped all the while being concurrently shaped by God as the Efficient Cause on that formal cause. *Quo Vadis?* As I mentioned in the last Bible class, every time we sin we do so because we see sin as a good

and love it as a good; in other words, we call evil good and good evil when we sin. We are all sinners and as such act like perverts when we sin. However, God's grace is always there to change our view of sin so we can see it for what it is, namely disgusting rather than good. God's grace is far greater than our sin, but not even God's grace can change us as long as we continue to see sin and evil as goods to think about (intellect) and pursue with love (will). For God to change us against our wills would be to destroy *our* wills as such.

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

Pastor Don