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Personal Study Through the Bible-08 (1 Thessalonians 1)

One of the chief aims of Satan has always been to keep believers away from personally understanding the Bible. He is very well aware of the Bible's power to change believer's lives, to sanctify them, to infuse them with virtue, and to give them capacity to love God as well as their neighbors and fellow believers. Satan keeps believers from understanding God's Word in two ways: in distorting the context in which they understand the Word of God (by distorting their philosophical view of reality) and by keeping them from personally interacting with its truth (by keeping them from personally digging in the Bible for themselves).

I am very confident that the devil is very pleased with the progress he has made. Practically all believers approach God, reality, and the Bible with pagan mindsets, and good deal of believers do not feel that they can understand the Bible for themselves—they have absolutely no confidence in sitting down reading and mining truths out for themselves. My current focus at FBC is on restoring philosophical realism so believers can enter into the wonders of reality in the world in which they live as well to provide realistic framework to understand the grand realities of the Word of God. My aim in this series to provide the opportunity for any believer to gain the skills of understanding the Bible for himself and thus to be blessed by its power to sanctify them, which is to bring his first order will and volition in line with godly second order will and volition.

I am sure that you have noticed, by now, the change of the title of this series. I began with a plan to just go through the Pauline epistles, but I have decided that, while we are here, we need to go through all of the church age letters from Thessalonians through Revelation. After we finish Revelation, we will see where we are and take it from there.

1 Thessalonians 1- interacting with concepts in the text:

1. By now you have read the first two chapters of 1 Thessalonians 1-2 more than once. You have also read Acts 17 which forms the background of the Thessalonian church. From reading the Bible for yourself, you understand the background as well as Paul's concern and praise for these Thessalonian believers. There are many things in this section we could go into more depth by understanding the original languages, but, for now, I just want you to interact with its basic structure and content, *which never contradicts* the depth of meaning one can gain from understanding the original. The basic structure and content is the context. The idea that any word carries its own meaning with it wherever it goes is false. I will talk about this as well as other modern corruptions of philosophy of language at another time.

2. It is vitally important to know the structure of a book of the Bible, instead of just favorite passages. Many believers know about the rapture passage in 1 Thess 4:13-18 or the one about praying without ceasing, 1 Thess. 5:17. However, they are often unaware of the total nature of the author's thought. To miss this is to miss many vital spiritual life issues. For many Christians the Bible has reduced to a collection of proof- texts and memory verses—a sort of biblical telephone directory, with chapter and verse instead of understanding the message as a whole. It is wonderful to learn about the Rapture and memorize the passage on prayer, but what about the structure of the letter that reveals the attitude of believers who are truly living the spiritual life, like Paul and the Thessalonians?
3. Based on your reading of Acts 17:1-10 and 1 Thessalonians 1-2 answer the following questions.
 - a. What is the general tone of the first two chapters of Thessalonians?
 - b. What are Paul's purposes for writing the letter?
 - c. What concepts of the spiritual life stand out for you in reference to Paul and the Thessalonians?
 - d. It is significant that Paul does not use his title of authority, "apostle" in the first verse. What does it say about him that he would rather identify with Silvanus and Timothy than throw his authority-title around? Should pastors seek to be among the people, or apart and above the people? If the pastor is on a very friendly and equal basis with believers, does that potentially create the problem known as "familiarity breeds contempt," where the believers forget about the fact they are to honor the pastor and respect what the pastor is doing? Consider the fact that Paul has no problem in putting the names of his helpers in this address instead of his title of authority. What do you think about pastors who never give others credit or glory for their work in the ministry of the Word of God?
 - e. Paul's thanksgiving for these believers is introduced in verse 2 of chapter 1 and elaborated on in the follow verses. Fill in the various virtues and things for which he is thankful for
 - their work of ____ (3)
 - their labor of ____ (3)
 - their steadfastness of ____ (3).
 - God's love for and ____ of them (4)
 - the way they became ____ of the Lord (6)
 - their reception of the Word of God in spite of much ____ (6)
 - the ____ from the Holy Spirit that they received in the midst of tribulation (6)

- the way they became ___ to all believers in Macedonia and in Achaia (7)
- the way their ___ toward God was reported throughout the empire (8)
- their turning from idols to ___ a living and true God (9)
- their focus on the return of God's ___ from heaven, whom they knew had been ___ from the dead (10)

Consider the power of the Gospel of Christ as you reflect on how it changed these believers' lives and how so very grateful Paul was to see these changes in them—this is so encouraging for any teacher of God's Word! Simply by understanding and living out the truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ brings tremendous sanctifying effects on any believer's will and thus his life. Contrast these transformations with believers who are only interested in a few passages or themes of this letter, like the Rapture passage (1 Thess 4:13-18), or the pastor who is only interested in the passage that instructs believers to appreciate and honor him as pastor (1 Thess 5:12-13). Consider the blessings of gaining a conceptual understanding of 1 Thess 1, from which one can always go into more depths, but one which nonetheless contains eternal life-changing truths. Consider the confidence one gains before the Lord just by interacting with the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians, *for yourself!*

Blessings in Christ,

Pastor Don