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<http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>

### Personal Study through the Bible-11 (1 Thessalonians 1-3)

It is important to be in the Word of God daily. And by this I don't mean listening to someone teach you the Word. What I mean is personal study of the Word to grasp its basic concepts for yourself. Apart from personal daily meditation on the Word, how is the Word of God going to change your life? I am sure you are aware of the many commands to meditate on the Word day and night. *These commands are not commands to meditate on someone's teaching of the Word:*

Joshua 1:8 "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

Psalm 1:1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.

Psa 119:97 O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day.

For this lesson I would like for you to read and reflect on the *concept* of love found in the first three chapters of 1 Thessalonians that you have been reading. It is important to understand the concept of love as laid out in the Word of God in *addition* to its rich doctrinal and philosophical development. Otherwise, one can misunderstand what love is. In other words, if one does not have a basic conceptual understanding of love as laid out in the Word of God, then when a teacher comes along with rich developments of love as a fruit of the Spirit or its philosophical dimensions, then one can misunderstand what the teacher is actually saying. Let's not forget that whatever the teacher says about love, it cannot conflict with the basic concepts of love as laid out in the biblical text.

I would like for you to read the following to move into a basic and personal understanding of love in the sections that you have been reading, namely 1 Thess. 1-3:

1. Read 1:3 and note the power of love in physical actions.
2. Read 1:9-10 and note the power of love of God in total orientation to God.
3. Read 2:7-8 and note the manifestation of love to others.
4. Read 3:6 and note the connection between love and faith.
5. Read 3:12 and note the need for growth in love for all.

On a doctrinal level, the mechanics of love certainly need to be developed. This is also a need for philosophical development. However, neither the doctrinal nor the philosophical development should ever mollify the basic concepts here, namely that regeneration and positive

response to God and His Word produced a supernatural love as evidenced in Paul, Silas, Timothy, and the Thessalonians. These believers were not dependent upon complex understandings of love from a doctrinal or philosophical point of view. In the three weeks Paul was in Thessalonians, he did not give them 25 points on what they needed to do to make sure they had divine love. He did not even need to teach them the philosophical meaning of love: a desire for the good of the object of love as well as a desire to be close to them in some way. Although I would add that these philosophical truths are manifest in Paul's desire for the Thessalonians' good and desire to be with them, their reciprocal desires for Paul, and their desire for the good of Christ's glory and to be with Him, "to eagerly await His Son." I would argue that, just based on the text, the philosophical truths are a lot more evident than doctrinal truths related to the filling of the Holy Spirit, which are *latter* developed in Galatians and other books.

One more point about the basic conceptual understanding of 1 Thess. 1-3, note how empty it is of mechanics and self-focused/self-help measures. Paul does not say do this and make sure of that! While we certainly do need some mechanics, Christianity, first and foremost, in and of itself, is not a mechanical system. I am not denying the need to know how to do things, what I am rejecting is that it is *all about* our personal problems and mechanics to fix this or that. I am asserting that it is more about spiritual virtue than mechanics. Let me illustrate: take 1 Thessalonians 3:12, where we are told that we should continue to grow in love "for all people." Think about that for a minute in the context of people testing that you face. How many of those problems would vanish if you had more love for those who annoy you? When you think about 1 Thessalonians 1-3, ask yourself if the concern is with how to deal with difficult people through various mechanics or is the focus on the virtue of love? Isn't there a difference between a Christian who is filled with mental attitude sins due to people testing who looks through the Bible for mechanics to overcome that test to deal with that d\*\*\*n person verses a Christian who grows in the virtue of God's love for that person and all others? What is the focus and the beauty of love you have discovered in these first three chapters of 1 Thessalonians? Mechanics to deal with annoyance of others and suffering? or God and growth in love for Him and others? By meditating on this section of the Word daily, what do you *see* for yourself?

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