

Don Hargrove
Faith Bible Church
<http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>

Personal Study through the Bible-12 (1 Thessalonians 1:1-4:8)

One of the biggest myths today is that the Bible is too difficult for the average person to understand for himself. The myth goes something like this: *The Bible is so difficult to understand that only highly skilled theologians with technical training can deal with the Scriptures.* By *Bible-believing* Christians, the myth is perpetuated with something like: “I know I can’t study the Bible, because every time I try to read it, I can’t understand it.” When they make that statement, they never expect someone to reply with “oh, yes you can,” which is the response you would get from me. What Christians want to hear is “That’s all right. I understand. It’s really a very difficult book, and unless you’ve had seminary training, there is no way you can understand the Bible for yourself.” In some respects this response is a great deal easier to hear because, on this account, you are no longer responsible. Now you can just sit back and let someone else teach you what to believe about God and the spiritual life. It is certainly a lot less work, *but consider how very harmful this is to the growth of your God-given mind with its capacity to personally learn and grow in Truth, God, and Prime Reality—Esse and esses!* The fact of the matter is that if you can read a newspaper or blogs, you can read and understand the basic message of the Bible. As a matter of fact, I would venture to guess that more difficult words and concepts are expressed on the front page of today’s Tulsa World than on most pages of the Bible. Of course, you are free to disbelieve me, but you have no epistemic right to say the Bible is too difficult unless you have actually tried to go through the Bible, with a little help, to see if you can understand it for yourself. What if someone came up to you and said, “I read 1 Thess 1-3 and don’t understand anything, not even on a basic level? I wish someone would help me.” Would you be willing to read the first three chapters with them and explain the main concepts or would you say, “I know what you mean, you have to be a specially trained pastor to understand the Bible?”

As I have mentioned several times, there are at least three layers of grasping truth in the Scriptures. The first layer is understanding the basic message of the Bible, the second is a more developed understanding based on the original languages, which then depends upon and leads to metaphysics, the third and ultimate level of reality. Understanding the basic message actually aids one understanding the deeper or higher levels; it also protects the believer from false teachings.

Consider the basic content of the first three chapters of Thessalonians that you have learned simply by reading it for yourself in the context of the background in Acts 17:1-10. Consider the basic understanding of the dynamics and virtues of the spiritual life as demonstrated by Paul and these young Thessalonian believers. Embracing these truths has a sanctifying effect on your soul as it edifies you in truth, which always puts more distance between you and the thinking of kosmos diabolicus.

As I have noted, there is nothing in the basic structure that is going to contradict the deeper truths that one can glean from the original languages or metaphysics. As a matter of fact, once you know the basic truths, you will have a very healthy appetite to learn more details about the higher truths. I would like for you to read the following sections and reflect on its truths and my comments.

1. Read 1 Thess. 1:3. On the first level any believer can see the virtues of faith, hope, and love in these believers. On the second level someone with the training in the original languages will recognize that the “ofs” in “the work *of* faith . . . labor *of* love . . . and steadfastness *of* hope” are subjective genitives meaning that they directly produce the action: the faith produces work, the love produced the arduous labor, and the hope produces steadfastness. On a philosophical level one understands the form or reality of faith, hope, and love and how they related to virtue in rational man in his intellectual capacities.
2. Read 1 Thess. 2:10-12. Note the importance of Christian virtue for the spiritual life.
3. Read 1 Thess. 3:3-8. Note the attacks from kosmos diabolicus on the Christian and the issue of virtues (faith and love) in all testing (6-7). All of our testing is related to developing more virtue in our souls.
4. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8.
 - 1 Thess 4:3-8. What is God’s stated will for your life in verse 3? How are you doing in this area? As you are confronted with this issue, you will form 2nd order desire about sexual ethics. Regardless of your problem with sexual immorality or lack thereof, you have 2nd order wish about the desires you presently possess. God will never work on your first order experiential desires apart from the desires in your second order will. He is always working to establish your freedom, which is only possible by bringing the way you are (1st order) with the way you want to be (2nd order).
 - Augustine is an example of a great theologian who was defeated by thoughts of sexual immorality throughout his young life. Guess what his prayer was to God during all of those years of conflict with sexual temptation? It was something like, ‘Give me chastity and continence, but not yet’ What does the “not yet” really express? His second order will, what he really wanted, or in this case what he did not want.

- For Paul to bring up this issue of sexual immorality indicates there must have been a problem in Thessalonica in A.D. 50. God did not design the body or the mind (“lustful passion”) for sexual immorality. Sexual immorality and temptation are always related to idolatry in one way or another. In the OT the idols were gods of neighboring nations, in the Thessalonica and other cities of the first century it was various gods, and in our age the idols or self, money, fame, beauty, accomplishment.
- Believers who are anti-intellectual have far more problems with thoughts of sexual immorality, and thus, less virtue in the area of sexual thoughts, than those who develop their minds in truth and virtue. Believers who are anti-intellectual always need to be entertained as they are pushed and pulled by their sense nature. They constantly live in an atmosphere of entertainment: their music, television, Facebook, smart phones, and internet trash. So many are bathed in entertainment and then when they come to church, they expect the same. God forbid that the pastor would ever offend them by telling them like it is—oh my! They never read a book of any philosophical or theological substance, and due to their sensate, narcissistic personalities, they never really grow up. They remain children with superficial ideas about God, always looking for God to fix some problem most often created by their passions or misplaced cosmic goals. All one has to do is visit some of these individuals for a few minutes before some sexual reference or innuendo come out of their mouths. By the way, if you do not approve of their filth, they will be only too quick to peg you as a legalist—this is far easier than self-examination. What is most tragic is that they bring shame to the name of Christ and Christianity, not only with their gutter antics, but their whole anti-intellectual demeanor, which corrupts and destroys the true nature of Christianity. One of the worst things any believer can do before any unbeliever is to make Christianity look like it is only for the weak minded and ignorant—that Christianity really is not about the pursuit of truth but only for helping one with their problems, in other words just another religion. Furthermore, without intellectual development, it is guaranteed that these believers will have many confused and heretical views about their own Lord Jesus Christ. How very sad!
- Besides all of these anti-intellectual, sensate problems, a believer who is not set on consecrating himself to the Lord (2nd order will), never takes reproof well. He does not correct himself and does not accept correction from others, not even the pastor. The reason is obvious, he does not want to change. After reading 1 Thess. 4:3-8, you will either become more sanctified or hardened/dismissive to the plan of God. Embrace the Word and it will edify, sanctify, and bless you, be dismissive of the Word and it will harden you against the Lord, and His marvelous plan. The choice is yours: listen or not:
 - ✓ Proverbs 19:20 Listen to counsel and accept discipline, That you may be wise the rest of your days.
 - ✓ Proverbs 15:31 He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof Will dwell among the wise.

- ✓ Proverbs 15:32 He who neglects discipline despises himself, But he who listens to reproof acquires understanding.
- The good news is that the person who really wants to have the right mental attitude, i.e., pure thoughts about sex, is in the perfect position for God to do what that person cannot do himself. What God is looking for is a 2nd order will that really wants God more than anything else, anything! With the right desire, God will provide the believer with transformative power to “possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor.” All a believer has to do is embraced 1 Thess. 4:3-8, God will do the rest. As we go through the Word together, we will see just how He does this—how He builds virtue in the believer’s soul through the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. For now, He *has* told us to “abstain from sexual immorality” (4); this is the first step to gaining control and freedom and blessedness in the midst of a dirty, frustrated, and unsatisfied world.

In 'Ehyeh,

Pastor Don Hargrove