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

Personal Study through the Bible-13 (1 Thessalonians 4:9-12)

As I mentioned in the last lesson, one of the biggest myths today is that the Bible is too difficult for the average Christian to understand for himself. Based on what you have read thus far, 1 Thess. 1:1-4:8, would you agree with me? What is inscrutable about chapter 1 that covers Paul's appreciation of these believers' spiritual virtues? What is so difficult about chapter 2, where Paul defends himself, praises these believers, and expresses concern over their sufferings? What is it about chapter 3 that is so mysterious about Paul's repeated focus on their spiritual virtues of faith, hope, and love, and the need for them to continue to advance even further? Certainly the first eight verses of chapter 4 are not ambiguous about what Paul has in mind regarding his exhortations regarding temptations with sexual immorality.

Isn't the message pretty straightforward in these chapters? Paul highlights their spiritual virtues of faith, hope, and love, and expresses concern over their sufferings as well as the sexual temptations that would threaten these virtues. Note the strong and recurrent spiritual-ethical tone throughout these chapters. Keeping this in mind, I would like for you now to read 1 Thess. 4:9-12. Note the continuation of spiritual and ethical focus:

1. Paul informs them that they are ___ by God to ___ one another (4:9).
2. Paul tells that that this love that they possess for one another is to ___ still more (4:10).
3. Paul tells them to make it their ambition to mind their own ___ (4:11)—not to be gossips and busybodies. In other words, be more concerned with your own life that the life of others.
4. Paul tells them to ___ with their own hands (4:11). This is the Protestant work ethic.
5. Paul tells them to be ___ properly (be good witnesses) before unbelievers & do not be dependent on others, this would include government welfare (4:12).

Do you find anything in these passages that make the Word of God inaccessible to the average believer? Is there anything that is too difficult for the average believer to understand? Why would Paul continue to emphasize these virtues unless they were extremely important? Why is virtue so important? Can't we just take in doctrine, confess our sins, and not be concerned about living out these principles, which alone enable us to develop true spiritual-ethical virtue? Do you really need a pastor to read and exegete this section of Scripture before you can understand its basic points? I think not. The real problem is not with what the text says, it is with what we want it to say. Only by living out these principles is virtue developed. Certainly there is a lot to develop exegetically & philosophically, but the basic message is clear.

In 'Ehyeh,

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