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Personal Study of and through the Bible-21 (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:3)

In the last few lessons, I have touched on some of the most popular myths of the Bible: #1: *That the Bible is so difficult to understand that only highly skilled theologians with technical training in the original languages can deal with the Scriptures*; #2: *The Bible is boring*; #3: *Even the basic message of the Bible is confusing*. Think about it: Who do you think is the chief source of these myths? God or Satan? To be sure, there are three levels of Scripture: conceptual, exegetical, and metaphysical; and there are some very difficult issues, but overall, the Word of God is perspicuous. The Word of God on a basic conceptual level is very easy to understand. It is only in the development of these truths on the exegetical and metaphysical levels that one usually runs into difficulty and error. The Word of God is alive and powerful on each level. You do not need to understand the original languages or metaphysics before you can receive power and grace transformation from the God's Word. The Word of God is alive and powerful even on a basic level, and is available to any believer who can read and think on a basic level.

If you have been one of those who have clung to the myth of the difficulty and obscurity of the Word, perhaps it is because you have attributed to the whole of Scripture what you have found in some of its parts. Maybe some passages have been very difficult and boring, but need you insist that the whole of Scripture is unintelligible and dull? The concepts in the first four chapters of Thessalonians that deal with virtue and progressive sanctification are clear, even if the following sections on prophecy are more difficult due to their complexity.

However, let's remember that Christian doctrines are not esoteric. Let's remember they were, for the most part, written in Koine Greek, the language of the average person. It is amazing how modern man thinks he is so much smarter than ancient man, yet turns around and says he cannot understand letters written to ancient man. There is no special intellectual prowess or spiritual gift that is necessary to understand the *basic message* of Scripture. This is in contrast to Eastern religions where insight is limited to some guru who lives in a shanty high in the Himalayas, to whom people go to unravel the mystery of life found in the sound of "one hand clapping." That's esoteric. It is also absurd. The Bible does *not* talk like that. The Bible speaks in meaningful patterns of speech. Some of those patterns may be more difficult than others, but they are not meant to be nonsense statements that only a guru can fathom.

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the problem of motivation. There is a vast difference between reading the Bible and studying the Bible. Reading is something we often do for pleasure, something that is done simply for the enjoyment of it. But study demands labor, serious, and diligent mental work. This causes angst for many in our entertainment saturated culture. Many fail to study God's Word because it is demanding. It is always easier to let someone else do all the work and leave it at that—just believe what He says you should believe about God and His plan. Spending time on Facebook, watching TV, and playing with smartphones is a lot easier—it requires a lot less effort. The problem is not in lack of intelligence in understanding the Word of God, but lack of spiritual desire to really understand it. The only

solution to spiritual apathy to the Word of God is spiritual virtue, the power for good—in this case the power for good translates to a real desire to understand God and His plan through His Word. The problem is that no one can manufacture this desire in himself. This comes only through grace—through the grace of sanctification. The passion for daily *study* of the Word of God requires nothing less than the power of God the Holy Spirit.

Please read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. We have noted how the events of the Rapture are stated with great clarity. The bottom line here is that the Rapture is imminent and when it occurs living believers will meet the Lord in the air. This passage is simply a fulfillment of John 14:2-3, read again. Those who hold to post-tribulationism (that the believer will go through the tribulation) have great difficulty harmonizing this passage with passages on the 2nd advent of the Lord returning to the earth for judgment. After all, if Christ is coming to the earth to set up His kingdom, why do saints have to leave the earth to meet the Lord in the air; and having met Him in the air, where is the evidence that they change direction and come back with Him to the earth? Our passages clearly state that the Lord will *not* come to this earth to establish a kingdom at this time: He will come for living church age believers. 1 Thess. 4:13-18 is not the day of the Lord.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3. Paul now moves to the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord is totally different from the Rapture. Verse 1 begins with postpositive conjunction *de* (δέ), which indicates a change in subject, but not necessarily an entirely new subject. It also indicates some contrast as seen in the common Bible translation of “but.” The contrast here is between the Rapture previously mentioned and the day of the Lord in this chapter. After Paul discusses the hope of the Rapture for believers, he moves to the next event, the Day of the Lord, the day of God’s wrath on the earth.

Before determining the significance of 1 Thessalonians 5 in relation to eschatology as a whole, it is necessary to establish firmly exactly what the day of the Lord is *as it is variously described in the Bible*. Read Isaiah 2:12-21; 13:9-16; 34:1-8—much of this language is difficult for us because we do not live in agricultural economy, just note the judgments in these passages and their fulfillment in the clearer passages of Revelation 6:12-15. For our Thessalonian context, note how the judgments related to the day of the Lord stand in contrast to the *imminent* Rapture, the Hope, that Paul previously mentioned. I will have more passages for you to read in the next lesson. It is very important to get a feel for what the Word of God says about the day of the Lord before we move forward.

Also reread 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10. What does it say about the church age believer and God’s coming wrath on this earth (the day of the Lord)? Although prophecy is the most complex theme of Scripture, on a basic level one can understand the idea of God’s wrath coming to the earth as per the day of the Lord, which follows the Blessed Hope, the Rapture. This is clearly and plainly laid out in our passage. Even in the midst of these complex issues, the basic concepts are perspicuous: there is great hope with regard to the Lord coming for His own (Rapture) after which there is a day of the Lord, a time of His wrath and great judgment on this earth—a judgment of which the believer has no part, 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 5:9

Rapture

Church age –Tribulation – Millennium

The Day of the Lord = begins at Tribulation with God’s wrath on the earth

In 'Ehyeh,

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