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

Personal Study through the Bible-26 (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)

Before we continue in our journey through the Bible with the various Christian duties beginning in 1 Thessalonians 5:12, a comment or two on the importance of daily personal Bible study are in order. It is important for you to understand the basic content of the Bible for yourself because it contains information that you are not going to get anywhere else—and information that you will likely forget unless you are involved with it on a daily basis. If you *only* listen to someone else, then you will likely *only* get his emphases and find yourself, even after 20+ years of listening to his doctrinal tapes, totally ignorant of certain truths that are clearly taught in your Bible. By daily reading of the Bible, you will expose yourself to *all* of the truths of the Word of God—a wealth of truths that you will not get from college, TV, or conservative politicians. The only place you are going to get the transcendent perspective in your daily life, that eternal perspective that is the final and absolute authority, is from the Bible. There is nothing like daily reading of the Word of God. Pastor-teachers were never designed by God to replace the believers' personal study of God's Word. The pastor-teacher was given to the church to help each believer understand the Bible for himself.

Most modern believers would be absolutely shocked if they could really see how much they are influenced by their culture instead of Jesus Christ, God and His Word. I see it all of the time. I see it in wives' attitudes toward their husbands; I see it in believers' and society's attitudes toward local church, and I see it in believers' attitudes toward government and life in general. Instead of the Word of God determining their attitudes, it is society filtering their understanding of God and His Word and reality. Society shapes these believers even if they have a Bible passage at-the-ready to "justify" their worldviews and lifestyles.

From my perspective as a pastor, the thing that causes me the most angst is modern society's influence on the believer in the area of Truth. The fact is that most Christians have a pragmatic view of truth. This is, in fact, the spirit of America. This spirit manifests itself nowhere more clearly than in the arena of politics and in the public school system, which has been informed by the principles and methods of education set down by John Dewey. Pragmatism may be defined simply as the approach to reality that defines truth as "that which works." The pragmatist is concerned about results, and the results determine truth. Consider the far-reaching implications of this pernicious philosophy, whose first question is not "Is it true?" but "Does it work?" Consider the pathological thinking in a believer who can sit through a *Bible* class on Total Truth and be totally unmoved because it did not have any practical effect on existential temporal "needs." Consider how much truth in the Bible a believer is going to miss because certain truths do not meet *his* bar of temporal pragmatism. Consider how much a person is going to miss by governing his life chiefly by short-term pragmatic values (e.g., Mammon, money, work, entertainment) in contradistinction to the long-term, transcendent values of the Word of God (cf. Matthew 6 and eternal rewards). Consider how blind temporal pragmatism can make a person to the eternal perspective—a perspective which is probably only within arms' reach on

the nightstand by your bed. But of course, some things are just more pragmatic for the short term, like watching TV, checking out Facebook, or relaxing after a long day. It is not like the person needs God's perspective right then? Right? What good is the eternal perspective in the midst of these immediate temporal needs? What good is God, *at the moment*, unless He is going to fulfill some temporal pragmatic existential need? See the problem that rank pragmatism causes? The bottom line for the pragmatist is always short-term temporal pragmatic needs. What happened to love for truth? Pragmatism threw it and God right out of the window!

Now back to our Thessalonian study. I would like for you to reread 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5:11 and note the various spiritual and eschatological (future events) themes. Broadly speaking, we have spiritual and ethical principles followed by eschatological teaching on the Rapture and the Day of the Lord.

Now read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13. This passage instructs believers to appreciate and esteem very highly in love their leaders who diligently labor and have charge over them in the Lord. Your leader in the local church is your pastor-teacher. You are to respect your pastor-teacher 'because of the work.' I do receive a great deal of love and respect from many believers at Faith Bible Church, I have also received opposition over the years: I have been praised and reviled; I have been appreciated as well as depreciated; I have been commended as well as criticized; I have been lifted up, and I have been pushed down; I have been encouraged to teach Total Truth, and I have been told what not to teach; I have been told that whatever I do, do not stop teaching truth, and I have been "threatened" by individuals who told me that they would not come back if I taught on certain subjects; I have seen the joys and excitement in believers who get Total Truth, as well as the kicking and screaming from those who do not want to go through the effort; I have been told that I am too sensitive, I have been told that I am not sensitive enough; I have been told that I repeat too much, and that I do not repeat enough; I have criticized for having too many charts, and I have been told that the charts are helpful; I have been told by certain people that I do not look at them enough while I am teaching, yet on other occasions they complain that I look at them too much when covering certain points; I have been judged and compared by those who like and well as dislike Thieme. I could go on and on and one, but I think you get the point. What is the real problem? What is missing in these emphases?

I have received much praise and blame for all of my work. And it is very difficult work. In some ways it is far more difficult than the pastors' work of the first century that Paul was telling the Thessalonians to appreciate, while in other ways it is less work (less physical persecution). It is more work academically because not only do I have to teach the Word of God to God's people, I have to help them get rid of their ungodly viewpoints in which they see the world, God, the Bible, the spiritual life, and Ultimate Reality. It is very hard work, but I do love it. There is hardly a moment that goes by where I am not thinking about Truth and how to lead believers into God's awesome truth. It is my life, my passion, my whole life until I draw my last breath. If you see me "get short" with pragmatic believers who presume to tell me that I need to be, in essence, more pragmatic (without using those words), perhaps you understand why I bristle so at such an idea—an idea that goes against everything that God, Jesus Christ, the spiritual life, and the Bible stand for, an idea straight from the likes of kosmos diabolicus, Satan, Judas, and Demas. My job is not to give you a nice encouraging message to help you along your

short-term, temporal, self-promoting goals. My job is to teach you the truth. This is what I have been called to do. This is why the Lord continues to keep me alive. This is what I love!

What I have noticed in over 30 years in the doctrinal movement is the stark difference in how positive and negative volition plays out in one's respect or disrespect of a pastor teacher. I have especially noticed this with Bob Thieme and Dr. Carnagey. Those who really love truth may disagree with Thieme or Carnagey on some issue, but they always have a respect for these men—and some of the disagreements are very big issues. However, their love and respect for the Word translates into a love and respect for these men. There are areas where I think Thieme and Carnagey got things wrong, but my love for these men is indescribable. Why? because of all of the truth they did teach me, because of their work of labor. How could anyone not *highly esteem these men in love* after benefitting from their teaching? Just because they were wrong on some things will never negate my respect for these great men anymore than your mother or father being wrong on some issue means that you do not love or respect them. Those who constantly run down Thieme for this or Carnagey for that are simply revealing more about themselves and their attitude toward the Word of God than they are about these men. If one does not really love the Word of God, why would they highly esteem these men? I have also noticed that certain individuals, who are never happy with the pastor, end up causing problems in a local church and then go start another church where they precede to do the same thing. This happened at Berachah as well as Patrian.

What I do not want to get lost in all of this is *my appreciation for those believers who really want Truth as such*. What I have noticed over the years is that no matter what I am teaching, you love it because it is truth. You are not in it for pragmatic advantages for your temporal life issues. You are not into religion with all of its games. You are into Truth. As you know, once you get Total Truth, all kinds of pragmatic benefits fall right into your life—benefits that transcend this world. I thank God for you. I so appreciate *your labor* in moving forward in truth. I am so grateful for your support. I thank my God daily for you☺

We have so much more to learn about our God, Reality, and the Spiritual Life. I am truly blessed to be given the opportunity to explore these truths with you. Your enthusiasm for truth and desire for someone to lead or aid you into a fuller understanding testifies to your Christian nature that has not been defiled and stifled by the likes of John Stuart Mill or Laodecianism or demonic-inspired "*pragmatism*," where the "golden" rule is always that "man is the measure of all things" (Protagoras). Man may be the measure of all things at Johnny Carino's, but may it never be that any man is the measure of all things at Faith Bible Church.

In 'Ehyeh,

Pastor Don Hargrove