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

Personal Study through the Bible-28 (1 Thessalonians 1-5: tone, purpose, interests?)

Your Bible is filled with truths that are eminently practical to your life in regard to both temporal and eternal matters. It addresses short term problems as well as those deep long term issues. In fact, nothing is more practical than the Word of God because it directly proceeds from God and thus proceeds from the ultimate eternal structure of truth/reality. Only the Word of God connects you with the eternal perspective and reality.

It is that eternal perspective that man needs the most if he ever hopes to find value and meaning in anything, let alone life itself. Face it, you and I are constantly faced with many issues involving all kinds of challenges in life regarding work, our loved ones, our health, and the very meaning and purpose of life itself. Apart from connecting to the eternal reference point, how can any of these issues mean much of anything? even if things go well for us? so what if we make more money? so what if people respect and like us? so what if we get in better shape and lose a few more pounds? so what if we find someone we love? What is the point of it all if there is no eternal perspective? Any Christian whose focus is so narrow as to *only* be concerned with temporal matters like how cute she looks or what people think of her is an idiot. She has thrown away her eternal *perspective* (but not standing) for a mess of cosmic pottage. What a shame! I don't know a better term than "idiot" for any believer to live like the blind unbeliever, that is, only for the temporal life, day in and day out, year after year, decade after decade, only to end up losing the temporal "bene" or boon in her last stage of life on earth (money, health, beauty). Instead of beautifying her soul with the truths of the Word of God, she spends all of her time working on the outside only to lose it in the very end. Don't misunderstand me: there is nothing wrong with desiring outward beauty, unless and until it becomes more important than the inward beauty only gained by the Word of God and the spiritual life. Outer beauty is not only impossible to maintain, it becomes more grotesque when viewed in light of frantic attempts to retain this fleeting "god."

The believer who only lives for the here and now will, sooner or later, become sensate. Sensate believers are those who live by their feelings rather than through the understanding of biblical truths. Churches are filled with sensate believers and pastors who are more than happy to cater to those feelings. Sensate believers cannot be moved to do something for God unless "they *feel* like it." Their Christian life is only as effective and personally meaningful as the intensity of their *present* feelings. When they experience spiritual euphoria, they are a whirlwind of godly activity; when they are depressed, they are spiritually incompetent. They constantly seek new and fresh spiritual experiences, and use them to determine the state of their spiritual lives. Their "emotions" become the test of truth. They are always looking for something different: a new Bible breakthrough, a new power word, new mechanics to do this or solve that; it never ends. The world is the same way. It seems like McDonalds and Wendys are always having to make a different burger or chicken sandwich because people are always needing something different for their otherwise boring lives.

Sensate Christians don't *feel* the need to study the Word of God because they believe they can know God by their feelings. They really don't want to know God; they want to experience Him. Sensate Christians go their merry way until they encounter the pain of life that is not so merry—and they fold. They frantically look for some “relational theology” where personal relationships and experience take precedence over really learning and being transformed by the Word of God. The highest “value” in the sensate Christian is that bad feelings *must be avoided at all costs*. This translates into anti-intellectualism because thinking is hard *work*. This anti-intellectualism translates into antipathy for the function of the mind in understanding God and the Christian life. This is one of the reasons Christians do not diligently study their Bibles. It takes work, real effort. It is always easier to opt for something more along the sense level like TV that does not require much *thinking*—hence, boob tube. Furthermore, it is always easier to let someone else teach you what you should believe about God and the spiritual life. It is also easier to make excuses like, “I am not qualified” to learn this or that. However, I am going to make that excuse a bit more difficult for you to hold by offering you some guidance on learning the Bible for yourself. Yes, it will take effort. However, think of the blessings of personally understanding the Bible—being personally confident of its truths about God. Priceless!

It is time to roll up your sleeves and read 1 Thessalonians 1-5 in one sitting (I just did it and it took me about 6 minutes). Remember, there are three levels of understanding: basic conceptual understanding, exegetical level, and metaphysical level. They are all important and interconnected. Without the basic conceptual level, one could receive the greatest and most in-depth exegetical study, and yet not really have a clue about main message of the letter. After reading 1 Thessalonians, I would like for you to answer, based on your *personal* understanding, the following (you might need to take another *whole* 6 minutes to read it again):

- 1) What is the general tone or atmosphere of the letter?
- 2) What are Paul's purposes for writing the letter?
- 3) Does Paul have one over-riding theme?
- 4) Which parts or topics interest you the most?

*In 'Ehyeh,  
Pastor Don Hargrove*