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

Personal Study through the Bible-30 (1 Thessalonians 1-5 & 1st myth on PBS)

These personal studies of and through the Bible for every believer are my attempts to push back on the subtle, insidious, and pervasive evil within contemporary Christianity, and even in the doctrinal movement, with regard to the Word of God. This evil, at base, is that the believer cannot understand the Bible, let alone make vital applications. In contemporary Christianity this attitude manifests itself with the insatiable hunger for more and more *devotional* books to uncover much needed personal life truths that somehow the average lay person *could never* see by himself by his own personal Bible study. There is a manifest lack of confidence of believers to go to the Word of God, understand it, and through such understanding, glean applications. Don't misunderstand me: I am not saying that believers cannot benefit enormously from pastor-teachers; what I am pushing back on is the idea that the Bible is some mysterious book that only the highly trained can really understand and reap applications from.

My contention, which is the contention of the Protestant Reformation, is that the Word of God is perspicuous and all believers can understand the Word of God for themselves and make applications *in addition* to learning its truths from others who have been given the gift of pastor-teacher who labor "professionally" in the Word for others.

I have short and long term goals in this endeavor. For the short term, my goal is to continue to expose you to the Word of God so that you become very familiar with the Text and the basic message *for yourself*. My long term goal is, through the regular and consistent exposure, to so ground you in the Text that when something comes up, you think about the Text rather than me or any other pastor. So, if someone asks you about, or you are just thinking about, the Rapture, instead of needing to go to authorities such as Walvoord or Ryrie or Benware, your mind immediately goes to the texts, namely John 14:2-3 and 1 Thess. 4:13-18. In these studies I am interested in helping you build an overarching biblical background/framework in which *you* see all issues. Just like *anything* else that is new, it may be difficult at first. But if you stick with it, your faith will grow as your personal understanding of the biblical text displaces your trust in an authority like the pastor-teacher (which we all start out having to *depend* upon).

There are 5 myths about personal Bible study (PBS) that I will be writing about in this and the following lessons: #1, Only scholars can understand the Bible; #2, Only pastor-teachers can understand the Bible; #3, Only believers can understand anything in the Bible; #4, Only believers who are in fellowship can understand anything in the Bible; #5, Anyone can understand the Bible—any way he wants. Let's take the first myth. Did you know that the Bible is addressed, not to scholars, but to common people? This myth appeals to the fact that normal people do not know Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic; they do not know the culture and customs of Bible times; they do not have a firm grasp on historical context. Without these things, it is said, they simply cannot understand the Bible. While it is true that understanding the original languages is required for certain technical details, knowing the original languages is not required to understand the basic doctrinal, spiritual, and ethical truths of God's Word. In fact, I will argue

(in the future) that there are serious problems with those who view reality in the words rather than the metaphysical realities that the words are pointing to, those things which all humans, by their very humanity, grasp by virtue of their humanity. As far as the customs, what about the believers of the first century who are told to read and understand the Word of God? They did not have knowledge of isagogics of Egypt or the Canaanites of the Old Testament. Yet the Old Testament, on a basic moral and spiritual level, was understandable for first century believers in spite of lack of Old Testament isagogics—which are helpful but are not required to understand the basic spiritual and moral lessons regarding God and life with Him—both now and forever.

Please do not misunderstand me, we need pastors and seminary professors to dig out certain truths which require technical expertise. We need spiritual leaders to challenge us. However, what we do not need is for Christians to be turned into passive recipients of the messages of any teacher. What we need is for believers to be so familiar with the Word of God as such that when an issue comes up, passages are the first things their minds bring up. We also need pastors to be open to answer questions believers will encounter along the way. Pastors as here to help, not to replace the Word of God.

In the last lesson, I provided the 18 thought units in 1 Thessalonians. I asked you to provide a description for each thought unit, each paragraph. Only through activity like this will you really learn the Word, the Text—a learning that will enable you to personally mine its truths for yourself as it becomes more of your ever-present background knowledge. Any assignment I give you, I also take on myself. Here are my descriptions:

1:1 – Paul greets the church which is in God the Father and Jesus Christ: “grace to you and peace”

1:2-10—Paul gives thanks for the salvation and zeal of these Thessalonian believers.

2:1-12—Paul reviews and defends his ministry among these believers.

2:13-16—Paul gives thanks for their love for the Word of God despite persecution.

2:17-20—Paul desires to visit these believers, but was hindered by Satan.

3:1-5—Paul reviews Timothy’s ministry to the Thessalonians.

3:6-10—Paul expresses his gratitude for the Thessalonians’ faith and love.

3:11-13—Paul prays for the spiritual growth of the Thessalonians “in love for one another, and for all people.”

4:1-2—Paul exhorts these believers to live the Christian life.

4:3-8—Paul exhorts these believers to sexual purity.

4:9-12—Paul exhorts these believers to love one another and to live responsibly.

4:13-18—Paul teaches about the Rapture.

5:1-11—Paul introduces the Day of the Lord.

5:12-22—Paul outlines duties of the church and private life.

5:23-24—Paul prays for their sanctification.

5:25—Paul requests prayer for himself.

5:26-27—Paul requests that the epistle of Thessalonians be read to all believers.

5:28—Paul ends with benediction of the grace of Christ.

Compare your 18 thought-unit outline with my 18 conceptual units. After going through 1 Thessalonians conceptually, have your answers to the following changed?

- 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 the next lesson, we will look at the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 in a little more detail and note how it makes posttribulationism (that believers go through the tribulation) untenable.

*In 'Ehyeh,
Pastor Don Hargrove*