

Don Hargrove
Faith Bible Church
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<http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>

Personal Study through the Bible-31 (1 Thessalonians 1-5; 2nd myth about PBS)

As I noted in the last lesson, there are 5 modern myths about personal Bible study (PBS): #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. When evaluating these myths and my comments about them, it is important to remember the three levels of understanding God's Word: the basic conceptual understanding for any rational believer, the exegetical level for the one who knows the original languages, and the metaphysical level for the one who understands philosophical realism. Each level takes the believer into deeper realms of God's marvelous truth. At each level it is important for the believer to be under the ministry of the Holy Spirit for illumination before he can really "get it."

We are now looking at the second myth. The second myth is close kin to the first one; in fact, it builds on it. It claims that unlike laymen, the pastor-teacher not only has knowledge of the original languages but *also* possesses special insights in the Bible because of his spiritual gift of pastoring and teaching. The idea is that because he has been given the gift of pastor-teacher, he has been given certain insights into the Word of God that *do not directly come from the Word of God*. The idea that having the gift of pastor-teacher means the pastor-teacher becomes a source of special revelation from God is not only not found in the Word of God, it is dangerously heretical. If he takes his calling seriously, there is no doubt that his soul will be filled with truths that will enlighten other truths, but all of these truths come from the Bible where all special revelation is deposited. This means that any pastor-teacher should be able to back up what he says from the Word of God. The idea that a believer must just trust the pastor is unbiblical and unhealthy. The effect, many times, is to keep the believer from even trying to understand the Bible for himself. It is reminiscent of the Middle Ages when many believers were treated like they were too stupid to understand the Bible.

There is no special or additional revelation a pastor possesses *because* of his spiritual gift. He may see certain things in Scripture because he habitually lives under the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit. He certainly should understand where his congregation is and be able to move them forward in the spiritual life. However, all of the biblical information is objectively deposited in the Word. There is no additional revelation that a pastor has that is not grounded in and demonstrable from the completed canon of Scripture. Think of it this way: most of the Bible is addressed common people (invalidating myth #1) and most of the Bible is *not* even addressed directly to pastor-teachers (invalidating myth #2). As a matter of fact, look at Paul's command in 1 Thessalonians 5:27, "have this letter read to all of the brothers." Certainly, there is the need and provision of the pastor-teacher. However, he is only an aid to further and deeper understanding of God's word through exegesis and metaphysics. The basic level is understandable to all rational believers.

Back to 1 Thessalonians. By now you should have a pretty good understanding of this epistle on a basic level. We have not moved very deeply in the book. My goal, at this point, is to get you familiar with the text. After you have some familiarity with the text, the next step is to move into some exegetical detail and metaphysical depth. This is where the pastor-teacher can really provide you with help in really understanding truths of the Word more fully and more categorically (how it lines up with the rest of the Word of God). However, before one moves into the details, it is critical *for every believer* to first understand the basic thought structure of the book.

Note the thought structure in 1 Thessalonians 4-5 regarding the Rapture and the Day of the Lord. Note how the Day of the Lord (God's wrath upon the earth, 1 Thess. 5) follows the Rapture (the Blessed Hope, 1 Thess. 4:13-18). Note how Paul specifically says that the believer is not destined for the wrathful day of the Lord on this earth (which will fall on both believers and unbelievers). The church age believer has the hope of the Rapture. Those who discount the Rapture (posttribulationists) have major problems with the basic structure of 1 Thessalonians (that is why they rarely comment on this book). As a matter of fact, by taking the position that there is no Rapture (posttribulationists), at least not one before the Tribulation, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 is very strange indeed—very confusing, in fact. Let's see: a plain reading of 1 Thessalonians 4-5 indicates a message of hope of 'being caught up [raptured] in the air' and then a message of the Day of the Lord, which is a day of wrath upon the earth which the believer is not destined for (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9). To say, as some do, that there is no passage on the Rapture is very strange indeed. I am glad that the Thessalonians did not get that message from our posttribulationist friends. The message of Hope is what they needed and received from God through Paul. Again, a plain reading of 1 Thessalonians reveals the blessed Rapture of the church followed by the wrathful day of the Lord. To be sure, there are many exegetical, categorical, and metaphysical truths that support this position and invalidate posttribulationism's contention that believers will go through the Tribulation. I am not going to deal with those arguments at this time. All I want you to see now is the basic message of 1 Thessalonians on a conceptual level, which is what the Thessalonians would have received when the letter was just *read* to them as commanded by Paul: *I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren* (1 Thess. 5:27). Paul did not say to make sure the pastor-teacher *first* exegetes or explains it or metaphysicians explain the ontology of the spirit, body, and soul of 5:23. He commanded that this six minute letter be read. Every believer must understand the Word of God on the basic conceptual level before he advances in the details and the depths of the Word of God. Attached are a couple of additional studies on the Rapture for more details. However, don't get bogged down into the details, not yet. We must first understand the Word of God as it is laid out by God. We must first understand 1 Thessalonians conceptually. This is God's way for the Thessalonians and for us. Read the Word!

*In 'Ehyeh,
Pastor Don Hargrove*