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

### **Personal Study of the Bible-32 (1 Thessalonians: The Virtuous Church)**

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. Any discussion about understanding the Word of God must include the three levels of understanding. Apart from grasping the three levels, there is likely to be much equivocation in the very use of “understanding.” No one can answer rightly the question of whether a believer can understand the Word of God unless the three levels of understanding are understood: the basic conceptual understanding that every rational human possesses, the exegetical level for the one who knows the original languages, and the metaphysical level for the one who understands philosophical realism and metaphysics.

We all start at the basic conceptual level. If you can read this, you can at least understand the Word of God for yourself on a basic conceptual level. However, you cannot stay at this level. To do so will mean that you will likely end up in error because on the conceptual level you are primarily just dealing with concepts. However, those concepts have not been developed. You have common sense about these concepts, but because they are not developed, you do not now as much as you think you do. Have you ever thought you knew something and then someone asked you to explain it and suddenly you feel all confused? That is because you only understood it at a basic conceptual level. You knew it intuitively on a certain level, but only on a certain level. When you are challenged to go deeper, you realize that you did not know it like you thought.

Let’s note the third myth: that only believers can understand the Word of God. Many believers actually find this myth “useful” in apologetic contexts. When an unbeliever points out what seems to be a contradiction or problem in the Bible, the believer can, instead of rolling up his sleeves and doing the work to see what the solution to the *apparent* problem is, he will often shirk his responsibility with something like, “Oh, he is just an unbeliever. Of course, he does not understand the Bible, how could he? He is not saved and is not in fellowship with God. He does not even know 1 John 1:9.” Because the unbeliever is not saved and does not have the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit, the reasoning goes, he has no hope of understanding the Bible. Ergo, I do not have to deal with his objections. He must first believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ so he can get the Spirit, so the view goes. While there are certain things that the unbeliever will not be able to get because as an unbeliever he does not have the capacity for spiritual truths, it is not true that an unbeliever cannot understand anything in the Bible. Although much of the Bible is addressed to believers, John’s gospel indicates that one of the reasons it was written was so that unbelievers might believe (John 20:30-31), which is impossible if there is no understanding. Furthermore, the fact that Jesus held those responsible for rejecting Him and truth indicates that they *could* have believed His testimony. The problem is not *could* as much as *would*.

Back to 1 Thessalonians. Before we move to the next book, I would like for you to spend some time this week going through the book once again, chapter by chapter. This time we are going to focus on some spiritual lessons that fill this small epistle. This will further ground you in the book's content as well as enable you to reap spiritual application. Here is the assignment for this lesson:

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 1 (takes about 1 minute and 15 seconds). I am not going to develop "the wrath to come" at this this time—except to say that this does not refer to salvation or God's final judgment of sin. To take it that way is to introduce something foreign to the text. This wrath of God is the coming wrath of God upon the earth during the Tribulation. This is a reference to the fact that believers are not destined for God's wrath on the earth as depicted in Revelation 4-19: they will be raptured (1 Thess. 4:13-18). As a matter of fact, there is a reference to the rapture in every chapter of Thessalonians. Write down something about the Rapture from the following verses in 1 Thessalonians:

1:9-10

2:19-20

3:12-13

4:13-18

5:23

2. Note the three individuals in 1:1. We could spend months on developing the characters and spiritual virtues of each of these supergrace believers. For now, I would like for you to think about Silvanus, which is the Latin spelling of "Silas." You probably do not know much about him. Silvanus was a prophet from the Jerusalem church (read Acts 15:22, 32). He was a Roman citizen (read Acts 16:37-38). He was a great help in forming the church of Thessalonica as he travelled with Paul on his second missionary journey. He was an amanuensis, a secretary, to Peter (read 1 Pet. 5:12) and Paul. The fact that Silvanus was a secretary/writer for Peter and Paul shows the theological closeness of the two great apostles. This brings me to the point of spiritual application. Even though Silvanus did much to help the apostles Paul and Peter, and even though he was the human writer of eternal Scripture as dictated to him by Peter and Paul, we never hear a word *from him* in Scripture. He assumed a subordinate role in aiding Paul and Peter and only too happy to stay out of the limelight. In fact, I would posit that most believers could not write more than a couple of sentences about Silvanus even though he was a tremendous blessing for Paul, Peter, and the early church. The interesting thing is that that is OK with him. He was faithful to do what God called him to do. No doubt, some people receive more "glory" or focus in Christian work than others. Pastors generally get more focus than the believers in the pew, but that does not mean that they are any better before God than anyone believer. The issue is faithfulness, not human recognition. I could tell you I could not do what I

do apart from the support of the believers of FBC. I certainly did not earn nor deserve the gift of pastor-teacher, that wonderful privilege of spending my life in the truths of God and watching believers grow in truth, develop spiritual virtue, and move into the supergrace blessed life. It is all of God's grace from beginning to end. Whether it is me or my former pastors, Thieme and Carnagey, we all could not do what we do apart from God's provisions of unknown, unsung believers supporting the teaching of the Word of God and encouraging pastors by simply loving the Word and desiring to be led into more of His wondrous truths. Neither Paul or Peter could have done what they did without Silvanus. He was their right-hand man. It does not matter to him that he is relatively unknown. He was available for God to help teachers of the Word. He did not mind playing "second fiddle" to the "stars" of the first-century, namely Paul and Peter. The issue is faithfulness to the Word of God. We should all be known as supporters and promoters of the Word of God whether we are teaching the Word, listening to teachers, and eager to provide opportunities for truth for our husbands, wives, children, and even in our parents. All of our personal histories should be one of progressing in the Word and seeking, as far as we can, to spread the truth to all of those around us, in precept and practice.

3. Note in 1:1 the "church." Church means called-out ones. It carries the idea of an assembly. The gospel team of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy travelled over the Roman Empire starting many churches. These churches became self-supporting and self-governing entities. Every church has a history. Every church has two addresses, a physical address as well as a spiritual address, note the spiritual address in verse 1: "In God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." This is the sphere of every church positionally. On an experiential or temporal level, each church is either growing in truth or growing in evil. Now I did not say "sin." "Evil" is the operative word here. Evil is a privation, something that is missing. When the teaching of Truth, Whole Truth, is not the focus, then the church is certainly missing the Good. What does a church look like when it becomes increasingly evil, lacks good, when it does not continue in truth? While there are many manifestations, the bottom line of an evil church is one where the people care little about truth as such. The motive for coming to church in this ugly state is for socialization, see old friends, fulfill one's duty to attend a local church, political camaraderie—not much different than a social club. How sad indeed. What I would like for you to do is note the characteristics of the church of Thessalonians. It was not a perfect church by any means, but it was a very healthy church.

4. Write a description of the virtues this church from the following verses. In each set of verses there are often more than one spiritual virtue. Note the emphasis on the Word of God, both receiving and living out its beautiful truths:

1:6-7

1:9-10

2:13-14

3:4-6

3:12

4:9-10

5:1-2

Because the Thessalonian church was a very healthy church, as evidenced by the believers' love for the Truth and eager anticipation of being with Christ (occupation with Christ), it does not mean that it did not have problems, or at least dangers that needed to be exposed.

5. In the following verses, write down problem areas or potential problem areas for the Thessalonian believers:

2:5-6 (the implication here is that some were saying that Paul was motivated by money).

4:3-8

4:11-12

4:13

5:12-14

I will provide my descriptions for all of the verses above in the next lesson. Since this lesson is a little longer than usual, I will not write the next lesson until Thursday (10/10/13).

*In 'Ehyeh,  
Pastor Don Hargrove*