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

### **Personal Study of the Bible-37 (2 Thess 2 – False doctrine of post-tribulationism)**

In the last lesson, I noted six steps to gaining a *personal* mastery over the content of the epistles that we are now studying: 1) Read the epistle *straight through* at one setting; 2) notice the setting of the epistle, 3) study the introduction of the epistle; 4) notice the outline of the epistle from the introduction; 5) make a *verse-by-verse* study of the epistle; and 6) meditate upon and *digest the results* of your study.

Let's note step two. After re-reading each epistle, certain concepts will become obvious to you. As your mind goes through each epistle, it will abstract certain realities about the setting. The setting includes information about the human author, the recipients, the purpose for writing, and a major doctrine. There are four major categories of doctrines in Paul's epistles:

- 1) Eschatological (coming of Christ) in 1-2 Thessalonians;
- 2) Soteriological (salvation through Christ) in Galatians, 1-2 Cor.; Romans;
- 3) Christological (nature of Christ) in Col.; Philemon; Eph.; Philippians
- 4) Ecclesiology (church of Christ) in 1-2 Timothy and Titus.

By re-reading 1 and 2 Thessalonians, I am sure you are well aware that both letters are written to the Thessalonians and cover future events (eschatology), namely the Rapture and the Day of the Lord (Tribulation-Second Advent). In order to have a true appreciation of the Word of God, the believer must first and foremost understand its theological emphasis. The Bible was never designed to be a book *just* to deal with our problems in life. It was never designed to be a book of isolated pop, self-help "spiritual" principles. The Bible most definitely addresses all of our needs, but never in isolation from its doctrines. A true doctrinal believer is one who really knows the various doctrines and their applications to the issues of life. We read the Word of God to learn and grow in the doctrines, which will solve our problems in a more comprehensive manner. There is a vast difference between using 1 and 2 Thessalonians to handle this or that issue *versus personally* understanding these books doctrinally, which will include wonderful promises for the issues of life, but in the right context: in the light of the doctrines—rather than in the light of some pop psychological framework with passages attached to it.

The bottom line is that if you really want to understand and love the Word of God like you should as a Christian, you are going to have to spend a great deal of personal time with it. Nothing can replace personal time with the Word. It will not only help you understand God's plan for your life, it will enable you to get more out of Bible class where we go into more detail. If the Bible is confusing and does not make sense to you, it is only because you have not spent much personal time with it. In that case, all of the Bible classes in the world are totally incapable of giving you what you can only get by personally reading your Bible. One of the tragedies in the doctrinal movement is that there are some believers who have been in doctrine for many decades who have no personal knowledge of or interest in the Bible as such. One of the reasons is because they have been told that they cannot understand it. That is false and dangerous. Remember, there are three levels of understanding the Word (on a natural level): basic, exegetical, and metaphysical. Everyone who is rational can understand it on a basic level, which

will include some metaphysical truths. Just because you cannot understand everything by reading the Bible does not mean that you cannot profit greatly by spending time in it daily. The more familiar you are with God's Truth, the less dependent you will be on your pastor-teacher. Any believer who has been a Christian for any length of time who is *totally* dependent upon any pastor-teacher has real problems as far as understanding the true nature of Christianity.

Let me illustrate this in another way. Say you need to learn Homer's Iliad (for Book 1, see <http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/iliad.1.i.html>). At first reading, it would not make much sense. But then after repeated reading, certain concepts will begin to emerge, and because they do, you will have enough knowledge and curiosity to start forming questions. Say that after trying to read it once or twice, you give up. You just listen to someone exegete a word or phrase and give principles of "wisdom" from the Iliad. But you never read it again. You just listen to someone who talks about words and principles. Contrast this to a person who re-reads the Iliad over and over and *then, in that context*, receives technical *details* from an expert. Which person will really come to understand the Iliad, the person who never reads it but listens to word studies and principles, or the person who through repeated exposure, has the structure in his soul with details that continue to be filled in by the experts? It is an outrage that some believers are as confused about the Bible as they are about Homer's Iliad—even though the Bible is easier to understand primarily because it is written in a framework of realism. Satan has done a masterful job of keeping believers away from God's Word. Why do you think he wants you to stay away from a personal understanding of God's Word? Think about it.

Now let's get back to 2 Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians Paul touched on how the Thessalonians were being persecuted (1 Thess 1:6; 3:3-5). In 2 Thessalonians he goes into more details concerning the fate of these persecutors, unless they believe in Christ. As far as the first chapter of 2 Thessalonians, note that Paul reminds the Thessalonian Christians that *in due time* God would punish their persecutors, read 2 Thess. 1:4-10. God always provides grace before judgment. However, unless they believe in Christ they will suffer eternal torment in the Lake of Fire, Hell, forever—Gentile and Jew, those who do not know God and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:8).

In 2 Thessalonians 2 (re-read 1-9) Paul deals with false eschatological teachings that crept in among the Thessalonians. Even though Paul told the Thessalonians in the first letter that the Rapture was imminent and would precede the Day of the Lord (tribulation through the Second Advent), some false teachers had come to them teaching that they were already in the Day of the Lord (Tribulation). In other words, the situation described in this second chapter of 2 Thessalonians indicates that there was false teaching that the church would go through the Tribulation. Note that Paul calls this false teaching. Don't miss the implications here: It is a false doctrine to teach that the church will go through the Tribulation (= post-tribulationism).

The Thessalonians had fallen into false doctrine because for some reason they had forgotten or forsaken the doctrine of the Rapture that Paul taught them in 1 Thess. 4:13-18. Because they did not adhere to the doctrine of the Rapture, which Paul had taught them, they were confused and filled with fear thinking they were now in the Tribulation (2 Thess. 2:2).

Paul supplemented his eschatological teaching in 2 Thessalonians by teaching them that the Anti-Christ will be revealed (3-4), but only after the restrainer is taken out of the way (7). The point that Paul makes is that the Antichrist is now being held back by a restrainer (the Holy Spirit's indwelling church age believers). When the Rapture takes place, believers will be taken to be with the Lord (1 Thess 4:13-18). It is then that the Antichrist will do his thing. In other words, Paul's argument is that the Day of the Lord will not begin until the Antichrist is revealed,

and this is not going to take place until the restrainer is removed. Therefore, the Thessalonians could be certain that the Day of the Lord had not yet begun, regardless of what the false teachers were saying.

Based on a basic reading one can see that to deny the Rapture is to end up teaching false doctrine. We can see the effects of this false teaching on the Thessalonians. To put it another way: if there is no Rapture, then it is possible that the Day of the Lord (Tribulation) has come (2 Thess. 2:2) and is upon us. However, Paul corrects this false doctrine and assures believers that the Day of the Lord and the Antichrist will not come before the restrainer (Holy Spirit's ministry through believers) is removed, i.e. the Rapture.

It is unfortunate that Reformers reject the Rapture. I admire their great achievements in regard to doctrinal teaching on the verbal and plenary view of Scripture, their development of forensic justification by faith, and their tenacity to tradition. However, the tradition of post-tribulationism (no Rapture; church age believers go through the Tribulation) is not biblical and needs to be discarded. One argument they make is that post-tribulationism is a doctrine of the Early Church. It is often assumed that the early church was a period of pure and accurate doctrine. We see that that is not true with the Galatians who had fallen into legalism and the Corinthians who were into anti-nomianism/licentiousness and denying the resurrection. Paul corrected all of these false views in the Early Church.

While the Reformers and all of those who reject the Rapture may protest over our interpretation of 1-2 Thessalonians, one thing is clear: the idea that the church would go through the Tribulation was being advanced by false teachers whom Paul is opposing in 2 Thessalonians 2. No one can rationally deny that this is a plain reading of the Text, even if they insist on fighting regarding some of the eschatological details. To deny the Rapture is to end up in the same predicament as the Thessalonian believers in the second epistle. To understand the Rapture, is to have biblical hope that before all hell breaks loose on earth, our Lord will call us to Himself. The next event for us is not the Antichrist. It is the Lord! That's grace, pure and simple. It is one thing to be taught these truths, point by point; it is something else to read through the epistles and see this for yourself—instead of just trusting the pastor and believing that you do not have the ability to see this in the Bible. The goal is “to own it” by seeing it for yourself. What do you prefer, just believe it because the pastor says so or believe it because you actually read it for yourself? What is required for you to read it for yourself? What is true positive volition to Truth as such?

*In 'Ehyeh,  
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