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

Personal Study of the Bible-38 (1-2 Thessalonians – Listing the Spiritual Virtues)

The ability to do an accurate and objective personal study of the Bible is practically a lost art and science among Christians in the age in which we live. I have discovered that this is not only true among lay Christians, but even among many pastors as well. That's right: many pastors do not know how to really study the Bible as such. So how do they teach? some live off commentaries, others just read the doctrinal notes from previous pastors, which they supplement by looking up Greek and Hebrew words, which they use to eisegete (read into) the Bible with a mixture of modern psychobabble (as per Cartesian dualistic soul and emotions), rather than really doing personal exegesis (read/dig out from the original text). How sad and, frankly, pathetic for a *man* who has been given the wonderful gift of pastor-teacher not to have the ability to read God's Word and dig out truths for his congregation that are peculiar to the needs of that flock. This is inexcusable.

I love many things about the wonderful doctrinal tradition in which I was saved and grew up spiritually. However, one thing that is drastically wrong is the lack of emphasis on believers reading their bibles for themselves. In fact, in some groups it is actually discouraged. Imagine that: Christians are actually laughed at for thinking they can read and understand anything in the Bible. There is something very frightening, even diabolical, about such an attitude. Given such an attitude, it is no wonder that as new believer I was never taught *how* to study God's Holy Word. As I reflect on many doctrinal believers who really are "out there" as far as their views of truth, doctrine, the spiritual life, fellow believers, the pastor, and the local church, the problems are always traceable to lack of *personal direct* time in Word for themselves. They take slivers of truth here and there and mix it with modern psychological ideas and end up totally unbalanced. In fact, they will often tell you that they cannot understand the Bible for themselves. Something is terribly wrong here. This must be corrected.

The ministry at FBC is dedicated to giving believers the opportunity to learn whole truth, total truth—instead of just a pragmatic/functional neo-orthodox view of truth ("application only, whether we really understand God/Esse/Reality or not"). All of this to say that this an opportunity for you to really understand your Bible, which will give you a love for all of its truth, rather than just getting you through another Faith-rest day with little understanding of the Bible or theology or 'Ehyeh as such.

We have been working through six fundamental principles 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.

Now to step three. By now you should have read 1-2 Thessalonians several times and have become personally aware of its introductory material like the author, the readers, the occasion, and purpose. You know Paul is the author. You know the readers are the Thessalonians, and the background is found in Acts 17. You understand the occasion of 1 Thessalonians by noting Paul's encouragement of these new believers who were being persecuted by Jews and Gentiles in Acts 17. You also are aware of the purpose by reading how

Paul encourages and exhorts them to continue growing in faith, hope, and love. As far as the purpose of 2 Thessalonians, you have read how these believers became confused by thinking that maybe they were living in the end-times (Tribulation). Paul corrects this by telling them that the end times (Tribulation) will not come until the man of sin comes, who will not come until the Restrainer is taken away [the Rapture = removal of the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit]. This is all *introductory* material you have gained simply by reading these epistles repeatedly.

The fourth step is making an outline. It is impossible to make an outline unless and until the epistle is read several times and understood conceptually on an introductory level (step 3). Let's take 1 Thessalonians: notice that the first verse constitutes the salutation, while the last three verses of the epistle form the conclusion. Then notice that the epistle is divided into two main conceptual sections, the personal and then exhortations to spiritual virtue. Note the verses in each division and mark them in your Bible. All of Paul's epistles are divided in the same manner: he gives the doctrine and then exhorts believers in the spiritual virtues. As far as the first doctrinal section, note how all of Paul's epistles can be grouped according to the various doctrines.

- 1-2 Thessalonians: **Eschatology** (prophecy: coming of Christ)
- Galatians; 1-2 Corinthians; Romans: **Soteriology** (salvation, cross of Christ)
- Colossians; Philemon; Ephesians; Philippians: **Christology** (nature of Christ)
- 1-2 Timothy; Titus: **Ecclesiology** (structure of the church)

For this lesson, I would like for you to reread 1-2 Thessalonians (it will only take a few minutes). This time I would like for you to read them with the framework of its doctrinal and exhortation-to-spiritual-life sections. After you have read both epistles, I would like for you to list the spiritual life virtues in the 2nd section of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. In the next lesson, I will summarize them. First Thessalonians can be divided into doctrinal (1:1-3:13) and exhortation-to-the-spiritual-life virtues (4:1-5:25); for this lesson read 4:1-5:25 and write down each spiritual life virtue listed. Second Thessalonians can be divided into doctrinal (1:1-2:17) and the spiritual life virtues (3:1-18). Do the same for 2 Thessalonians. To list these exhortations, you will need to think through them and put them in your own words. See how many spiritual virtues for each book you can discover *by your own personal interaction* with the living and powerful Word of God. Below is an example to get your started☺

First Thessalonians

- 1st half = doctrinal (Rapture and Second Advent), 1:1-3:13.
- 2nd half = exhortation to spiritual virtue, 4:1-25.
 - 4:1 = walk and please God.
 - 4:3 = sanctification, abstain from sexual immorality
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Second Thessalonians

- 1st half = doctrinal (more detail on the Second Advent), 1:1-2:17
- 2nd half – exhortation to spiritual virtue, 3:1-18
 - 3:1-2, pray for communicators of the Word, for the spread of the Word of God
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*In 'Ehyeh,
Pastor Don Hargrove*