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

### **Personal Study of the Bible-39 (1 Thessalonians 4:3 – Virtue and Sex)**

We have now advanced to step five of the six fundamental principles that enable any rational believer to *grasp and master in a very personal and direct way* the contents of the various epistles of the Bible (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). As I noted in the last Bible class, the Bible is the only visible manifestation of the invisible supernatural truths of God which come to us in pure form without any mixture of human error. All believers need to understand those truths as they are perfectly written down in the form in which we possess them. This form or truth structure is metaphysical and not limited to the original languages, but more on this at another time.

By the time you get to step five you have read 1 and 2 Thessalonians several times. Only after you have become more familiar with their structures are you ready to do a verse-by-verse study. Based on your reading and doing the lessons, you understand that both 1 and 2 Thessalonians have structures that begin with doctrine in the first part of the book and end with various exhortations to spiritual virtues. Furthermore, you also know that the doctrine in both of these books deal with eschatology, the eschatology of the Rapture and Second Advent. While one could spend several lifetimes mining all of the truths regarding eschatology, all we are interested in now is getting the basic divine structure of these epistles etched in our souls. This is far more important than using the Bible to find a promise to help you get through another day. If you get the structure of the Truth down, you will not find yourself desperately needing another “shot in the arm” to simply get through another day of problems. E.g., the believer who really understands eschatology, the future, in these books is going to worry a lot less about issues of death than a believer who is afraid to die, who frantically searches for passages in the Bible to help him with his fear of impending death. The believer whose soul is molded by the truths of the Rapture as per Thessalonians is going to have a far different attitude to life, namely a Christian attitude, than the believer whose whole approach to life is just to use the Bible as a crutch and problem solver. Furthermore, the believer who has the Rapture established in his soul by rereading and personally restudying that truth in Thessalonians is going to have a lot more confidence about that truth than the believer who is “just hanging out there” and totally dependent upon and trusting in a pastor teacher to give him the doctrine of the Rapture. I have discovered recently that even many pastors are just trusting in other pastors. They do not personally read and reread and study the Bible. How did we ever get to our sorry state in contemporary Christianity?

Back to step five: after you have gained acquaintance with the epistle as a whole through your repeated readings of it, and having noticed the various larger divisions of the epistle, you are now ready to make a detailed study of the epistle. You now want to look at each verse in the Thessalonians letters. Notice the force and meaning of the exact words and phrases used. Study the verse in the light of its context and notice the connection with what has gone before. Seek to gain all the information and light you can gain from the passage *for yourself*. Independent study is of vital importance in the development of your abilities as a student of Scripture. This is a skill

that needs to be developed by every Christian. Write down your thoughts about each verse of the epistle. Since you are already familiar with 1-2 Thessalonians, you should naturally have confidence about the general flow of the verses. I recommend you getting a notebook of some type to record your thoughts on each verse. This would be your own commentary of the Bible, a commentary that would later include the thoughts of others who have studied the book. When I taught Bible at Wakefield Academy, I had my students write their own commentary of the book of Revelation, after which they would examine the views of others. They loved it. As a matter of fact, when I ran into one of the students ten years later he told me that he still had his commentary of Revelation. You might balk at the idea of an untrained teenager writing a serious commentary on the book of Revelation, but some of them were actually pretty good. Furthermore, by moving to the next step of examining the works of others on those passages, they could correct or confirm their own views. The point is that they gained a personal knowledge of the Word by going through this process in a way that they would never have gained by simply listening to someone else. By continuing in personal study, whatever weird view they might have had about Revelation would be open for *self-correction*.

Only after you have done your own work of going through the various verses are you ready to profit from the labors of others on it. Now you are ready to listen to great teachers of the Word of God unpack those great truths. You are not only in a better position to *accurately* understand what a pastor is teaching, you are in a better position to evaluate his teachings. With the structure of these truths firmly embedded in your soul, you are no longer totally dependent on the pastor for core Christian truths. At the same time you can greatly benefit from his lifetime of study as he unpacks these truths that you have already *personally gained* from reading and studying the Bible for yourself.

In a previous lesson I had you note the four prayers of Paul for the Thessalonians. Note God's will for your life in each prayer. Note the prayers for goodness, faith, power, comfort, good works and word, the love of God, the steadfastness of Christ, and peace in every circumstance. Note how they all revolve around the spiritual life. These are not automatic and are not cultivated simply by taking in doctrine and confessing your sins. Any and all development of virtue requires the doing of truth—there are no exceptions. Virtue is never gained simply through the mind, the will must be involved for virtue to be developed. Simply knowing that gossiping, lying, and dishonesty is wrong does not make a person virtuous one bit.

- 2 Thessalonians 1:11 To this end also we pray for you always that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power; 12 in order that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 2 Thessalonians 2:16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, 17 comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.
- 2 Thessalonians 3:5 And may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.
- 2 Thessalonians 3:16 Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!

In the previous lesson I also mentioned that we would look at some of the spiritual virtues. Let's go through the virtues verse-by-verse. Open your Bible and read 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8. With this exhortation and virtue in mind, I would like for you to read the following verses that are going to help unpack this passage about sex, and thus see more of God's viewpoint on this issue. Read Gen. 2:24-25; Song of Solomon 7:1-10; Matt. 5:28; Mark 7:21; Gal. 5:19; 1 Cor. 6:9, 13-18; 7:2; Eph. 5:3-5; Col. 3:5-6; Rom. 13:13; Heb. 12:16; 2 Sam. 11:1-4; Prov. 2:16-19; 5:1-8; Jude 1:7; 2 Tim. 2:22. I have little doubt that a few of these passages will cause you some questions with regard to eternal security. The solution is not found in the original Greek; it is not because of an incorrect translation. The solution is reading and rereading the passages in context. No, there is no denial of eternal security in the Word. However, at this point you are going to just have to trust me or someone else about that. It is not until you have worked through these passages on your own that you will be absolutely confident about eternal security. See the importance of being personally grounded in Scripture? it is not optional for a confident, thriving spiritual life; it is absolutely required.

After looking up and thinking about the various passages listed above on sex, you know have a broad conceptual understanding about God's will and sex, which applies to the single and married person. If you sat down and wrote out your thoughts on these passages, you would note things like that

1. sex was created by God and is good (Gen. 2:24-25; SOS 7:1-10).
2. sex apart from marriage (hereinafter called "illicit sex") is sinful and evil against God and one's body (1 Cor. 6:13-18);
3. illicit sex is dangerously addicting and even idolatrous (Prov. 5:1-8; Col. 3:5-6);
4. illicit sex involves sinful and evil thinking, e.g., fantasizing about sex with someone with whom you are not married (Matt. 5:28);
5. illicit sex is often associated with sexual talk (Eph. 5:3-4)—I am always taken back with certain "doctrinal" believers who seem to be always talking about faithfully taking in their doctrinal tapes every day and in the next sentence talk like it is somehow cool to "brag" about their illicit sexual desires (their good)—they love to gossip and talk about illicit sex, but hate to talk about philosophy or logic—apparently their spiritual life is not working as well as they might think, perhaps they are not in supergrace after all, sensatism is always deadly to the spiritual life; on another note regarding sexual talk, consider all of the gadgets the kids have today with all of the sexting activity, it is no wonder that they are becoming increasingly sensitized and sexualized in an illicit manner—God's mandate on fleeing from youthful lusts (2 Tim. 2:22) is a bit more difficult in our age of technology;

If you were going to do a deeper study regarding illicit sex, you would bring in the context of whole truth, total truth; you would reflect upon the reality of some of the causes of increase in illicit sex in our age like the

1. social pressure of immediate, physical pleasure as promulgated in popular magazines, songs, advertisements;
2. convenience for illicit sex, almost everyone has a car and a room is easy to find;
3. liberal values of today where illicit sex is no longer a taboo subject;
4. search for meaning and purpose and intimacy as the generation in which we live is now the first generation that really does not know who it is and why it is;
5. rebellion against parents or boredom with life.

In your study of whole truth, total truth, you would understand all of these principles in the context of the believer's spiritual battle against Satan and his demonic forces. Satan knows that men and women are very vulnerable in the area of sexual temptation; hence, it is here that the attack often comes. You would not only understand and be sensitive to temporal situations and issues that can cause compromise and problems in areas of sex and intimacy (e.g., watching porn, fantasizing, putting self in compromising situations, not communicating in marriage, lack of affection to wife unless hubby is "in the mood," taking her for granted, making your husband feel inadequate by always questioning his leadership, or simply being a jackass (cold, emotionless, non-caring) husband or a horsy, bossy, nagging wife), you understand as a virtuous believer the importance of staying under the protective power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. When you catch yourself in some destructive thinking/behavior you do not *just* confess the sins and never give it another thought. With virtuous thinking you understand that any love/desire for illicit sex is bad, an evil that needs to be changed. This is only possible by making the right choices under the ministry of the Holy Spirit. As far as marriage, the only way a husband or wife is going to overcome illicit sexual thoughts about others, is by loving and honoring the spouse—this requires nothing less than spiritual virtue.

In context of whole truth, total truth, you would also be aware of the destructiveness of illicit sex:

1. emotional damage like guilt, jealousy, fear, self-condemnation, anger, depression,
2. interpersonal damage like lack of sense of special sanctity with just one person; there is evidence that sexual intercourse within marriage is influenced by non-marital sex;
3. spiritual damage like destroying appetite for God, the Word of God, and the plan of God;
4. physical damage like illegitimate pregnancies, venereal disease, and AIDS.

It is one thing to be saved from the penalty of sin by faith alone in Christ alone, it is quite another to be saved from the power and guilt of sin that wreaks havoc on a person's attitude to God, themselves, and to others about the past. It is one thing to know that Christ forgives you of all of yours sins, it is quite another to forgive yourself and have the right attitude. To have the right attitude requires nothing less than spiritual virtue, which is neither dismissive about present or past sins nor depressed about them. Such a virtuous attitude is found among the women who were prostitutes saved by Jesus Christ. They neither joked about their past life or felt inferior (or superior) in any way to any human being because of their past. Christ told them to leave their life of sexual sins, they did and followed Him, and He, as only He can do, gave them the highest dignity they could have ever imagined. All spiritual virtue comes from following Jesus Christ. We are either self-made or God-made, the former is a life of vice and constant carnality while the latter is a life infused with the supernatural virtues of God courtesy of Jesus Christ. The latter is salvation from the power of sin; it is called *progressive* sanctification because *progressively* it overcomes the power of and desire for sin and evil. Remember, you always desire what you love, whether it is of the flesh or the mind. The mind truly changes in sanctification and along with it the will and the desire—in fact, your love changes from loving evil to loving good of which God is the Highest.

*In 'Ehyeh,  
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