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Tuesday, December 10, 2013  
<http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>

**Personal Study of the Bible-48**  
**(1 Thessalonians: Faith, hope, love)**

Read the following passages on faith, hope, and love in 1-2 Thessalonians and take time to reflect on the essence of these realities. I have provided a few questions and notes for you to reflect upon.

1 Thess. 1:3. Who made it possible for these believers to receive and live in the supernatural virtues of faith and hope? See 1 Thess. 1:5-6. He not only gave them the power of conviction but also gave them supernatural joy. He is Person who gives God's grace for all supernatural virtues. This shows the importance of living under His unhindered ministry.

1 Thess. 3:5-7. Note again the connection between supernatural faith (trust) and love. Without a deep faith or trust in God, love for God is impossible. Undoubtedly, this is why Paul is so concerned with their faith throughout these verses.

1 Thess. 3:12. Note the source and growth of supernatural Christian love. We do not have the power to possess, let alone grow in spiritual love for "one another" or for all human beings. God must give it to us in grace. He gives it to us as we live in fellowship and seek Him. He also withholds it from those who persist in sin and evil, in other words negative volition.

1 Thess. 4:9. Who ultimately teaches anyone about true divine love? All any human teacher can do is give you information. No one can teach you the true nature of divine love, but God Himself.

1 Thess. 5:8. Note the command for diligence regarding the importance of the three Christian cardinal virtues. It is importance for each believer to aspire to possess more faith, love, and hope. For such a believer, God will respond by granting these supernatural virtues.

2 Thess. 1:3. Note the connection with growth in Christian faith and love toward fellow believers. True faith, the supernatural ability to see and trust God, always brings true love and appreciation for fellow believers. A person who does not love fellow believers really does not love God either, read 1 John 3:16-18 (note how love manifests itself).

2 Thess. 2:10. Note God's judgment on those who did not receive a love for truth. God not only hardens the hearts of unbelievers who suppress truth, He also hardens the heart of believers who suppress Truth, Isa 6:10. God hardens man's hearts by giving more freedom to man's negative heart, see Romans 1:24-28.

2 Thess. 3:5. Note who alone can direct your hearts/will into love of God and steadfastness (hope/confidence) in Christ. This verse, among many others above, illustrates the fact that God directly provides the supernatural power. This is not automatic simply by being in fellowship with God. God decides when and to whom to give supernatural faith, hope, and love—yet His decision is always compatible with what a person really wants (2<sup>nd</sup> order will). I believer who does not desire—therefore, does not see as good—faith, hope, and love will not be given these supernatural virtues even if they happen to confess their sins and are momentarily in fellowship with God.

I would like to spend a bit of time on reality and language in an effort to move us closer to philosophical Realism (Reality). Realism is one of the greatest needs for doctrinal believers since it is doctrinal believers who really are interested in truth, correspondence truth. Unfortunately, due in large part to dismantling of metaphysics and Realism, most think that the meaning of these virtues are primarily contained in the original words of Scripture. In this Nominalistic approach, someone would claim something like, ‘unless you know these virtues as they are in the original languages (in Baconian inductive fashion), there is no way you can *know* what they really mean.’ Think about that propositional for a minute. Based on the passages above, did the Thessalonians *know the reality of these virtues*? Did these spiritual believers know the meaning of faith, hope, and love? Was their understanding based primarily on knowing the Greek words as used throughout history by the Greeks? No! Another false view is that unless one knows what *all* of Scripture says about these virtues, then one cannot know what they are. This is also false. Consider the Thessalonians who neither had the rest of Scripture (most of New Testament was not yet written when they were enjoying faith, hope, and love) nor likely knew the Old Testament or Gospels. Yet, the passages above clearly show that Paul presupposes that they know what he was talking about when he mentions their love and how he was praying that God would increase that love (spiritual love must come directly from God, it is never automatic). It is ludicrous to assert that the Thessalonians knew the meaning of divine love because they knew the Greek word for love—for the Greeks did not even have a word for supernatural love. This supernatural love from God was unknown among the Greeks so how would their words for love really define the reality of that love? Isn’t it obvious that the Thessalonians knew of this supernatural love in a way that did not depend upon Greek etymology or even what the rest of Scripture said about love? But how? They did not have bibles and their Greek language did not have a separate word for supernatural love. This is the quandary for nominalists who see reality in the words rather than in the metaphysical Realism.

The Realist, on the other hand, understands that the Thessalonians understood faith, hope, and love based on direct contact with Reality as such—with direct contact with the supernatural realities of faith, hope, and love—just like any other human being who has received these virtues from God’s grace. While the Greek language is important in that it serves as great signs to point to certain realities, the Greek words *in themselves* do not define reality. The only thing that really captures Reality is the Real. No human being can really know what faith, hope, and love really is unless God bestows on him these virtues. God always grants these virtues in accordance with man’s desire and capacity to receive them. He also withholds these things from believers and unbelievers due to negative volition and sin. When you experience that supernatural faith, hope, and love, it is not due to some automatic process like studying your Bible or walking in fellowship with God. Rather, it is because God is directly giving you that power. Fellowship with God is necessary condition, but it is not a sufficient condition for gaining these virtues.

Does this mean that the Thessalonians understood *everything* about faith, hope, and love simply by receiving them from God? No! Consider what I have noted in the past with respect to three levels of understanding in the Word: the basic conceptual level, the exegetical level, and the metaphysical level. By simply reading these passages, you have a basic conceptual understanding of faith, hope, and love—you understand faith is not skepticism, hope is not despair, and love is not hate. The exegetical level is going to fill in more details on what the Greek words are really pointing to. The metaphysical level is going to get you to that Reality both cognitively as well as experientially.

Don't misunderstand me! We need the exegesis and metaphysical explanation or framework of these virtues to keep the experiential from being misinformed and misdirected. It is important to understand the different levels of understanding. On a basic conceptual level, the Thessalonians knew what it was to believe ("faith") in the Gospel, have eager anticipation of being with the Lord in the future ("hope") and knew they loved Him, which was evidence by living for Him. However, no word study can infuse these realities in any believer. Again, supernatural faith, hope, and love are only possible because of the direct grace and power of God. Regardless of what word (sign/arrow!) man uses, Greek or English, it is the reality that we need to grasp and develop. The reality of believing/trusting in Christ, hoping in Christ, and loving Christ is the same metaphysical reality regardless of the arbitrary words used by different languages to point to those realities. I have studied the original languages for over thirty years. I love being able to read the Word of God in the original languages. The languages are very helpful as signs pointing to realities. However, it is a common mistake for pastors to assign reality to the signs, a reality that was determined by the lexicographers who in many cases are nominalists, not Realists who are focused on Reality as such.

All of this to say that if you want an understanding of the concepts of faith, hope, and love that comports with Reality on an academic level, you must understand how language works between God and man. There are three choices: univocal (words means the same thing = God's love and man's love are the same), equivocal (God's love and man's love are totally different) or analogical (there is an analogy between God's love and man's love). Of course, only analogous language gets us to the Reality of love, at least an academic understanding of love. When God talks to man about love, He expects man to understand the concept of love analogically. For example, God could appear to any rational man on the planet who did not understand the original languages or anything in the Bible and He would expect that man to understand the basic concept of love because of its analogous reality in man. Consider how many people throughout human history have read John 3:16 and intuitively understood God's love on a basic conceptual level and accepted the Savior even though they knew nothing of the Bible or original languages.

The Realist, because he is always looking to track reality, is very aware of how culture, especially politicians, attempt to change reality by changing the meaning of words. In the context of Christianity or religion, this often occurs by changing the meaning of "faith" into referring to some wishful thinking, like a blind stumbling in the dark. However, this is not only false with reference to the Hebrew and Greek words, it is not the way faith is used in science in scholarly works on the history of science. For example, scholarly works regularly demonstrated that for the first 1600 years science had *faith* in an organistic view of physics until that model collapsed under the weight of math and mechanistic view of science of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. How from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, virtually all scientists *believed* in ether-physics and when that collapsed so did classical physics as far as complete view of physics. Then scientists had great *faith* in numbers being the ultimate reality of everything as per Niels Bohr and quantum physics,

but then along came Gödel's incompleteness theorems which destroyed all scientific *faith* in numbers being the ultimate constituency of reality. Many scientists have now turned to *faith* in infinite layers of matter as the ultimate. There was a time when the Steady State of the Universe was widely *believed*, but this is no longer *believed* by most physicists. There was a time when science *believed* in Carl Sagan's contention that the earth was not a very special place in the universe, but that is no longer true in light of what we *know* about the fine tuning of the universe from its initial creation. The point here is that science really had enormous amount of *belief*, of *faith*, in all kinds of theories of the ultimate. As a matter of fact, virtually all scientists were teaming with faith, hope, and love in the new and changing ultimate explanations of the universals of physics. To see how arbitrary the term "faith" is used in society pick up a good, scholarly book on the history of science and see how often "faith" is used for what scientists once really believed and had absolute confidence/hope and love for in their theories of the ultimate (Aristotelian-organistic, Newtonian-ether, Bohr-numerical, and modern layer-physics). Then see how society talks about faith in context of Christianity or religion. Even though the former has been proven false, faith in that context is viewed with approval whereas faith in a spiritual sense is seen as chimerical, yet it is faith/belief in Esse that is only explanation for ultimate reality of our finite, contingent creation.

Since all of the scientific *beliefs* about ultimate reality do not comport with reality (as acknowledged by most physicists), they are not virtuous beliefs. Any belief that does not correspond to reality is not virtuous. What makes faith/belief virtuous is its truthfulness. To date, there is but One Who accounts for all *existence* and His name is Esse/Existence as revealed in Exodus 3:14. So to believe in Esse is to have a virtuous belief. To believe in God is virtuous because God exists. To reject God is a vice because it is denial of what is evident from multiple aspects of reality, including science's immutable laws of causation. From the vice of rejection of God come a multiplicity of other vices as God hands suppressors of truth over to their negative volitions as clearly depicted in Romans 1:20-25.

Everyone has faith. The person who does not believe in miracles has faith in naturalism as all there *must be*. The liberal Christian who denies miracles like the Virgin Birth has irrational faith in naturalism: for on the one hand he believes in God, which immediately opens the door for miracles, while on the other rejects the miracles in his Bible. The scientist that has faith in materialism is also irrational for believing that nothing can create the universe. For faith to be virtuous, it must comport with reality. Belief in God is virtuous because God is real and one has to deny science (e.g., causation) to deny God. Belief in the Santa Clause or unicorns is not virtuous because that belief does not comport with reality. Faith is only virtuous or noble as long as what one believes in is true. Belief in Christ is virtuous because He is real. Belief in the Sasquatch monster is not virtuous because, he is not real. Faith, especially in reference to God and Jesus Christ has moral aspect because faith is a function of the will as it makes value decisions on the information in the mind. The will can accept or reject data in the mind be it about God or the truth about oneself.

Let's reflect a bit more on the Realism of hope. As noted in 1 Thessalonians, hope is but a fruit of faith with emphasis on the future. Biblical hope or hope in God is analogous to the various aspects of hope found throughout the human race. People have a belief that leads to hope in all kinds of things. They make plans for the future believing/hoping to be with family over the holiday season. People have hopes regarding work in regard to getting things accomplished and making a certain amount of money. People are always planning according to their hopes. This is licit as long as it does not put all hope and plans in this short life. Hope is evil when it excludes

God and the next life. What did Christ say in this regard, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? (Mark 8:36). The problem is that people make all kinds of plans and have all kinds of hopes in this world, but make no plans for the next life, which means they have no active hope with regard to being with Christ. All of their hope is in this life. This is not only an evil among unbelievers, it is also a great evil among believers. Read Christ's message to the disciples regarding future plans and hopes in Matthew 6:19-33. What are your plans in 10, 20, and 100 years from now? As a believer do you have biblical hope, a living hope, an eager anticipation of being with your Lord? Or is your soul full of darkness because your eye/hope is evil, being only on this life? Read what Jesus says about this in Matthew 6:23. While one can understand the nature of hope academically, its spiritual reality cannot be possessed in you unless God imparts this grace into you, and He only does that for those who seek Him as their hope. No man can make himself live in the realities of the Blessed Hope; this is a supernatural virtue that comes through the channels of fellowship and study of the Word of God, and among other things, like positive volition. If God does not give this to believers it is only because their hearts/hopes are mainly on the things of this world instead of on Him. God withholds and gives the power of this Blessed Hope according to the recipient's will, which means according to what that person really thinks is good. It just is the case that many really believe their earthly kingdom is a greater good than the Lord's kingdom and therefore they suppress thoughts about the next life. This is a great evil!

Let's note a few philosophical and theological things about love. If God appeared to you and started talking to you about love would He expect you to understand the *basic concept* of love even if you did not know the original languages of Scripture or know any passages in the Bible or knew any Bible doctrine? Yes! We can see this throughout the Word of God as Jesus talked to people about love who knew nothing of the Bible or much about God, cf. John 3:16ff. It was presupposed that those who God talked to understood the nature of love on a *basic conceptual and analogical level*. It is part of man's nature to understand the nature of love. But what is this love that so resonates with man? What is in the concept of love that is used in the Bible for such loves as loving soup (Gen. 27:4), the world and things in the world (John 3:19; 1 John 2:15) and God (1 John 2:15; Matt. 22:37)? What is the basic metaphysical idea? I think we all know intuitively what it means when we love something as simply an "appetite" or "desire" for something that we view as good. Both intellectual loves as well as sensual loves have this in common: love for God and love for wine are both desires for objects seen as good. We can see right away that love presupposes knowledge of the object loved, whether the love is spiritual, intellectual, or sensual. So how does this translate into love for God? Nothing less than seeing Him as Infinite Goodness! The person who truly loves God is a contemplative person who thinks often of the Greatness of God. He understands God as the unceasing source of all his existence along with everything else (Esse). The believer who loves God is a believer who lives in awe of God's Goodness. He unhesitatingly dedicates His will to God from within, and yields himself to Him and devotes himself to His service—his devotion to God is born out of His love for God. This is the greatest virtue possible. It all starts with faith that leads to hope that leads to love of God that truly is supernatural in virtue and blessedness.

*In 'Ehyeh,*  
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