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

Personal Study of the Bible-60
1 Thessalonians 1- Application: The idol of self

We have been looking at 1 and 2 Thessalonians from several different angles for almost six months. By now, you should have read these two epistles dozens of times and taken the time to reflect/meditate on its many wonderful truths. Before we move to our next Book, I would like to do one more run-through, chapter by chapter, with emphasis on spiritual life principles. I would like to reiterate the importance for every believer to spend time reading and *meditating* (thinking about habitually) on the Word of God for himself. To really grow, you must spend time directly interacting with God's living and powerful Word. Failure here will guarantee spiritual failure, namely a life that remains ungrounded in the Word of God, and thus at the mercy of others regarding the meaning central truths of God's Word. You simply cannot afford to let the world crowd out your time in and with the Word. Read the following passages on the wonderful blessings God promises for those who meditate on His Word: Joshua 1:8; Psa. 1:1-3; 119:15, 48, 78, 148. The Word of God also promises blessings to those who meditate on God's works, i.e., creation as per our *Esse-esse* studies, cf. Psa. 77:12; 143:5; 145:5. Psalm 19 notes spiritual blessings associated with meditating on the Word and creation. Again, meditation is regularly thinking about *what* His Word actually says and means.

Mediating on the Word is not the same as meditating on what some teacher says about the Word. Again, it is imperative that every believer ground *himself* in the Word of God. We noted in yesterday's Bible class how disconnected the disciples were regarding the Lord's reiterated announcement of His impending sacrificial death. It is not hard to see the connection between their lack of mediating on what Christ said in Matthew 6 about Mammon and their lack of capacity to appreciate Him and His impending sacrifice for all sins. They were so absorbed in the world that they were not able to love Him as they should, unlike Mary who poured out her ointment, worth a year's wages, on Him out of belief, love, and adoration—which act of love the disciples verbally criticized.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1. The focus of this lesson is on the phrase "*turned from idols.*" Prior to salvation, every person without exception, is an idolater; read 1 John 5:19. The idols of man are numerous and varied. All of the various forms of idolatry have one thing in common at their core: *self*. The modern idol of self takes on various forms. Modern man no longer bows down to manufactured images set up around his fireplace. One of his favorite idols is materialism, as we have noted in Matthew 6. The idol of materialism takes on countless forms, but they all revolve around an insatiable desire to acquire more and more and more "stuff." Bigger houses, newer cars, nicer clothes, more money in bank accounts, is what defines such an idolater's life. This insatiable desire for more stuff is nothing but naked covetousness, read Exodus 20:17 and Colossians 3:5, the latter of which makes an explicit link between covetousness and idolatry: "and covetousness, which is idolatry." It is not like God is against

man having and enjoying nicer houses, cars, and clothes. What He is against is the desire for those things that becomes more important than Jesus Christ, Bible doctrine, the spiritual life, and supporting fellow believers. When materialism becomes a believer's god, the believer's entire life is managed around materialistic goals rather than the Word of God. God warns against these evils throughout the Old Testament; Jesus Christ explicitly says such an attitude brings great darkness in the soul of the person, read Matthew 6:23-24—note how all it takes to become engulfed in this evil is a bad “eye,” i.e. *focus*. God knows that materialism as life's focus can never satisfy the human soul. He knows we will never be happy indulging our materialistic desires. He knows how Satan uses materialism to trap the believer to keep his focus on self instead of God. This is why God warns the believers; read 1 John 5:21.

The idolatry of self in materialism drives the believer to worship at the altar of his own pride and ego, which takes the form of obsession with careers and jobs. Millions of Americans spend 60-80 hours a week working. Even on weekends and during vacations, laptops are humming while minds are filled with thoughts of how to make more money and get ahead in the world. In the meantime, thoughts about Jesus Christ, the beautiful doctrines of the Word of God, fellow believers and the local church get neglected. If these believers even attend a local church, thoughts and cares for doctrine and fellow believers quickly get *discarded* after church service as work and materialism once again *grab* their hearts, minds, and strength. All for what? read Ecclesiastes 2:21-23! What did Christ call a person who lives for materialism? read Luke 12:16-21 and Mark 8:36!

There is nothing wrong with making money and acquiring things as such. However, if this *materialism* becomes the consuming desire of life—more consuming than acquiring greater spiritual wisdom and love for God—then it is not just *a* sin, it is a great evil that falls in the category of idolatry. The idolatry of self not only manifests itself in preoccupation with and worry about material things. It is also accompanied by worship of man, from self to celebrities. The fact that many modern believers get more excited about the talent/greatness of a singer, athlete, actor, or football game than Jesus Christ demonstrates how dark a soul can become to the beauty of Jesus Christ and Bible doctrine. By nature man is irresistibly drawn to greatness, and if it is not the greatness of Bible doctrine and God, he will be illicitly drawn to human celebrities and idolize them, hence “*American Idol*.” The great evil is not in appreciating human talent. The horrendous evil is in the believer's lack of capacity to appreciate God, Jesus Christ, or Bible doctrine, and the lack of zeal to advance in truth, whole truth, total truth.

In worship of self, man worships at the altar of self-aggrandizement and selfishness to the exclusion of all others, even fellow believers. This manifests itself in self-indulgence in food, entertainment, alcohol, drugs, approbation lusts. The more people turn to these things to fill the void in their souls, the less control they have over them and less ability to see the beauty of God and His glorious plan. Those who have such a void in their souls live out their lives in a frantic search for happiness, a happiness they never attain regardless of how much effort they expend.

All idolatry of self has at its core the three lusts mentioned in 1 John 2:16 (which read). If we are to escape modern idolatry, we have to recognize it for what it is: Satan's great lie, ‘this is good, take it and you will be like God;’ read Genesis 3:15. This idolatry has become so popular today that it is now peddled in many “seeker-friendly” churches, which preach a health-wealth-prosperity gospel built on nothing but the idol of self-esteem. Even in faithful doctrinal churches

there are often complaints from believers who were *offended* by a *Biblical* message. What has happened? It is simple: the believer has come to love self and materialism first and foremost and is more concerned with loving self with all of his heart, soul, and mind instead of appreciating the correction so they can move forward loving the Lord with all of his heart, soul, and mind. As the Lord put it, where our hearts are there will be our treasures. Where is your treasure? Surely it is worth serious consideration. Note what must take place first before one can truly serve the living God in 1 Thessalonians 1:9.

*In 'Ehyeh,
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