

Don Hargrove
Faith Bible Church
<http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>

Personal Study of and through the Bible-20 (1 Thessalonians 4:18-5:3)

In the last lesson I mentioned that the basic message of the Bible is perspicuous and how this belief is part of our wonderful Protestant heritage. I also mentioned that some areas of Scripture are more difficult than others. This can be illustrated in the five chapters of 1 Thessalonians. Anyone who can read, can understand and be edified from the basic concepts that Paul lays out in Thessalonians regarding the three theological virtues and the need for ongoing sanctification—in the areas of sexual temptation, as well as being responsible, and minding one's own business. There is absolutely nothing difficult about understanding these concepts. Now that we are moving into prophecy of the Rapture and Second Advent of the Lord, things get a bit more complicated, primarily because we are not as familiar with these biblical themes. While we daily deal with issues of faith, hope, love, sexual temptations, and sanctification, it is not every day that we deal with the *details* related to prophecy. Even though prophecy is a bit more complicated, the basics are relatively easy to understand and communicate to others as it is laid out in 1 Thessalonians.

Most of the time the difficulty in understanding the Bible, whether it is talking about faith, hope, love, or making it “your ambition to lead a quiet life” (=don't be a busybody, see 2 Thess. 3:11),” has to do with arrogance. There is a lot in the Word of God that people just do not like. They, therefore, seek a pastor or message that is more acceptable for them. I have noticed over the years how some believers dislike and distort the whole concept of love by equating it with *merely* a relaxed mental attitude—to see how that does not work try putting in “mere relaxed mental attitude” every time you find the word love in the Bible or just in the first few chapters of Thessalonians. While I do think that love includes a relaxed mental attitude and it is OK to think of it in those terms as far as mechanics in staying under the filling of the Holy Spirit, the term in and of itself is deficient and without a good grounding in the Word of God is easily distorted. The reading and reflecting on Paul's love as well as the faith, hope, and love of these Thessalonians in the first few chapters of Thessalonians have a way of keeping us balanced when someone comes along and provides a *helpful* concept like relaxed mental attitude. However, without that biblical structure, that can *only* be gained by reading and absorbing the living Word of God, it is very easy to get really messed up. More on love later when we go through Romans and 1 Corinthians. My point here is that by reading and “meditating” on just the few chapters of 1 Thessalonians you are gaining conceptual structures that will inform you even on an intuitive and context level about all of the great themes of the Bible. Other doctrinal themes that are established in your soul as you read and re-read 1 Thessalonians will be the ministry of the Holy Spirit (read 1:5-6; 4:8; 5:19), assurance of the gospel through the Holy Spirit (1:5), ultimate sanctification (read 5:23), and respect for the pastor-teacher (read 5:12-13).

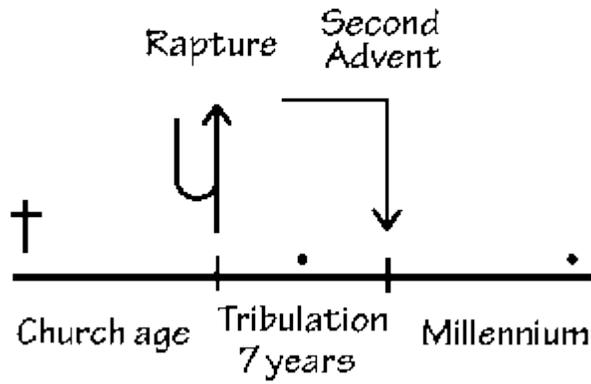
By reading 1 Thessalonians several times you will not only gain an accurate conceptual understanding of such things as the importance of spiritual virtue, you will gain a framework for eschatology as presented in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 on the Rapture, and 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3 on the Second Advent. Therefore, if someone challenges you on the Rapture, you know exactly where the passage is, and you can intelligently discuss its salient points instead of being embarrassed. You can have an informed and intelligent conversation about the passage instead of being intimidated. This does not mean that the person who does not want to believe in the Rapture will change his mind simply by you going over the passage with him. However, at least you are showing him its biblical basis. Then if he scoffs, it is obvious that the problem is with him and not the doctrine of the Rapture. Let the mocker be embarrassed as you show him the passage. Furthermore, by being able to discuss the passage, instead of only having the doctrine in your soul, your understanding and faith in these truths will be greatly enhanced.

Before we move to the Second Advent mentioned in our next chapter, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3, let's go over a few more things about the Rapture. Note how references to the Rapture, in one way or another is in every chapter of Thessalonians: read 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:23. Paul contributes more to the doctrine of the Rapture in Thessalonians than any other book of the New Testament. Basically, Paul is giving us details on Jesus's promise to return for believers and take them to where He is—read John 14:2-3.

It is significant that the doctrine of the Rapture is given such prominence in this young church. Note how the Rapture, the Lord's returning for His own, is viewed in Thessalonians. In 1:10 (read again) we can see that the Thessalonians were eagerly looking for the return of the Lord *any day*. We also see in this verse that this hope of the Lord's returning from them is seen as an event that precedes the coming wrath of God, which is another name for the Tribulation. Again, note in this verse that the Rapture is imminent. They are not looking for signs of the Tribulation. Note in the closing of 1 Thessalonians 2, where Paul describes his future joy when these believers will stand before the presence of the Lord Jesus when He comes; read 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20. Again, note how the Rapture is presented as an event that could occur at any time. No preceding events are mentioned. Note how in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 (read again) a similar thought is expressed. Again, the Rapture is picture as imminent, there are no signs to look for for the Rapture—unlike the Second Advent. Now read 1 Thessalonians 5:23 again. Note how there are no preceding events mentioned. It is implied that the Lord's coming could come at any time.

The immanency of the Rapture is clearly established by a plain reading of these passages. There is no unfulfilled prophecy before the Rapture. We will see that the Tribulation and Second Advent are much different. There are distinct signs that believers are exhorted to look for. There is distinction between the Rapture and the "day of the Lord" that Paul introduces in 1 Thessalonians 5:3. As we will see, the day of the Lord refers to the period from the beginning of the Tribulation to the end of the Millennium. More on this later.

Pretribulational Rapture



Day of the Lord (1 Thess 5:2) = from Trib. through Millennium

In 'Ehyeh,

Pastor Don Hargrove