

1 Thessalonians

Preparation for the Rapture					
Innocence of Greed			Principles for Growth		
Chapters 1–3			Chapters 4–5		
Personal			Practical		
Silence Slanders			Strengthen Stand		
Historical			Hortatory		
Reflections			Exhortations		
Looking Back			Looking Forward		
Commendation 1:1-10	Conduct 2:1-16	Concern 2:17–3:13	Love 4:1-12	Eschatology 4:13–5:11	Church Life 5:12-28
Encourage Others	Be Innocent	Care for Others	Please God	Be Comforted but Watchful	Live Holy
Corinth					
Early Summer AD 51 (on second missionary journey)					

Key Word: Rapture

Key Verse: “May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones” (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13).

Summary Statement: Believers can prepare for the Rapture by serving without greed and by strengthening their doctrine and relationships.

Application: Are you ready for the Lord’s return if he comes today?

1 Thessalonians

Introduction

- I. **Title:** The Greek title (*Πρὸς Θεσσαλονικεῖς ἅ* *First to the Thessalonians*) distinguishes this letter from Paul's second letter to the church just a few months later.
- II. **Authorship**
 - A. **External Evidence:** Pauline authorship has been upheld since the Marcion Canon (AD 140) and Muratorian Canon (AD 170). The early Church Fathers also believed Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians.
 1. **Attacks:** Nevertheless, radical 19th century critics denied apostolic authorship, claiming: (a) a lack of Pauline ideas and Old Testament citations, (b) a reference to the fall of Jerusalem (AD 70) which places the epistle after Paul's death (AD 68), and (c) a large amount of non-Pauline vocabulary in the letter.
 2. **Response:** Since the church was mostly Gentile (1:9-10; Acts 17:4) Paul would not cite the OT frequently. Also, the supposed reference to the fall of Jerusalem (2:16b) is very ambiguous. Finally, as this was one of his earliest letters and not primarily a doctrinal treatise, it does not reflect the same theological vocabulary as later letters.
 - B. **Internal Evidence:** The letter itself strongly supports Pauline authorship:
 1. The epistle claims to have been written by Paul (1:1).
 2. The church organization is primitive, reflecting an early date (Guthrie, 567).
 3. No later writer would have attributed to Paul the unfulfilled expectation of living to see the Rapture (4:15, 17; cf. Kümmel, 185).
 - C. **Conclusion:** The attacks upon Pauline authorship have been soundly defeated so that nearly all scholars, despite their critical assumptions, believe that Paul penned this epistle.
- III. **Circumstances**
 - A. **Date:** The evidence from the letter suggests that Paul wrote it only a few months after leaving the city on his second missionary journey in early summer 51 (Hoehner, 381-84).
 - B. **Origin/Recipients:** Paul wrote from Corinth to Thessalonian believers to his north in Achaia (see "Occasion" below for support). This was a very young church—only about six months old.
 - C. **Occasion:** After Jews in Thessalonica incited crowds against Paul, he left Silas and Timothy with the church with instructions to meet him in Athens (Acts 17:11-16). They did, but Paul then sent Timothy back to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 3:1-2) and Silas back to Macedonia (probably Philippi). Both men rejoined Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:5) and are mentioned with Paul in his salutation (1:1). Timothy brought the good news that the Thessalonians, despite persecution, had remained true to the Lord (3:6f.). Paul notes repeatedly how happy this made him (1:2-10; 2:19-20; 3:6, 8-10), especially as he thought that Satan might have undone his work in them (3:5). Therefore, he wrote to encourage the church still more, urging them to press on in growth in light of the Lord's return. Timothy also probably informed him of some questions from the church.

IV. Characteristics

- A. The tone of the epistle shows very fond feelings for the Thessalonian believers (1:2-3, 7-8; 2:17-20).
- B. First Thessalonians contains the fullest explanation of the Rapture in Scripture (4:13–5:11). Paul believed in the imminency of Christ's return ("we" in 4:17) and thus revealed himself to be a proponent of a pretribulational Rapture (see the study after 1 Thessalonian notes).
- C. How long Paul stayed at Thessalonica is debated because Luke recorded that Paul reasoned in the synagogue only three weeks (Acts 17:2). However, Hoehner says Paul stayed from November 50-January 51, then the letter came in early summer AD 51. Many arguments suggest this longer stay:
 1. The Philippians sent Paul at least two gifts when he was at Thessalonica (Phil. 4:16).
 2. He stayed there long enough to use his trade of tent making (2:9; cf. 2 Thess. 3:7-9).
 3. Paul's general practice was to preach in the synagogue until he got kicked out (Acts 13:46; 18:6; 19:8-9). Evidently this took only three weeks at Thessalonica, after which he taught Gentiles.
 4. Since most Thessalonian believers were Gentiles formerly involved in idolatry (1:9; 2:14-16), a Gentile ministry would have required a fair amount of time after his three-week Jewish ministry.
- D. The purpose of the letter has been seen in different ways (Ryrie, *1 & 2 Thess.*, 13-14):
 1. Paul encouraged the people to continue to grow in Christ as they had been doing, based upon Timothy's good report (1:1-10; 3:6-13).
 2. Paul defended himself against some in Thessalonica who had accused him of insincerity and greed (2:2-6) as well as for failing to return to the city (2:17–3:5).
 3. Paul exhorted them to remain steadfast in the face of persecution (3:1-13; 5:16-18).
 4. Paul answered doctrinal questions relating to believers who had died prior to the Lord's return (4:13–5:11).
 5. Paul instructed them in healthy church life, such as sexual purity (4:1-8), respect for leadership (5:12-13), laziness (5:14), and relationships (5:15f.).

Argument

While each purpose above finds support at some point in the letter, only the common theme of the Lord's return (Rapture) appears *throughout* it. Each of the five chapters closes with an exhortation on the Lord's soon coming (1:10; 2:19-20; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:23-24).

Paul writes two major sections in this first letter to the Thessalonians, each showing how believers should live in light of the Rapture. He first uses himself as an example of proper conduct until the Lord returns (1 Thess 1–3). In this section he seeks to convince them of his sincere motives in establishing the church to defend himself against the false attacks of Jews and Gentiles in the city who had accused him of being a religious huckster concerned only with money (2:3, 5, 7, 9).

Paul then gives principles for growth until the Lord's return (1 Thess 4–5). These doctrinal and relational matters facing the Thessalonians that Timothy had reported include instruction on living to please God (4:1-12), eschatological issues (4:13–5:11), and church life (5:12-22).

Synthesis

Preparation for the Rapture

Rapture:

1–3

Innocence of Greed

1:1	Salutation	
1:2-10	Commendation	1:10
2:1-16	Conduct	
2:1-12	Gospel delivered without greed	
2:13-16	Gospel received in suffering	
2:17–3:13	Concern	
2:17–3:5	Longing to see them	2:19-20
3:6-13	Timothy's encouraging report	3:13

4–5

Principles for Growth

4:1-12	How to love God and others	
4:13–5:11	Eschatological teaching	
4:13-18	Rapture comfort	4:13-18
5:1-11	Day of the Lord (Tribulation/Millennium) warning	
5:12-24	Healthy church life	5:23-24
5:25-28	Conclusion	

Outline

Summary Statement for the Book

Believers can prepare for the Rapture by serving without greed and by strengthening their doctrine and relationships.

- I. **The way Paul prepared for the Rapture was by serving without greed seen in his honorable life as he planted the Thessalonian church (1 Thess 1–3).**
 - A. Silas and Timothy (co-laborers in Thessalonica) wrote with Paul, who did not note his apostleship to show his concern (1:1).
 - B. Paul commended their lifestyles as evidence of God's blessing on their ministry and their godly living in view of Christ's return (1:2-10).
 - C. Paul's conduct among them was not motivated by greed since he made tents and cared for them like a parent for his children (2:1-16).
 - D. Paul showed his concern by longing to see them and sending Timothy since he had not been able to see them again (2:17–3:13).
- II. **The way Paul prepared for the Rapture was by strengthening the church's doctrine and relationships (1 Thess 4–5).**
 - A. Believers should love God through sexual purity, love Christians by continued growth, and love unbelievers by earning their own living (4:1-12).
 - B. The Rapture both comforts in its resurrection of believers but warns since the Tribulation will follow unexpectedly (4:13–5:11).
 - C. Healthy church life where each person fulfills his roles will lead to continued growth in sanctification until the Rapture (5:12-24).
 - D. Three requests and a benediction show Paul's genuine concern for the church (5:25-28).

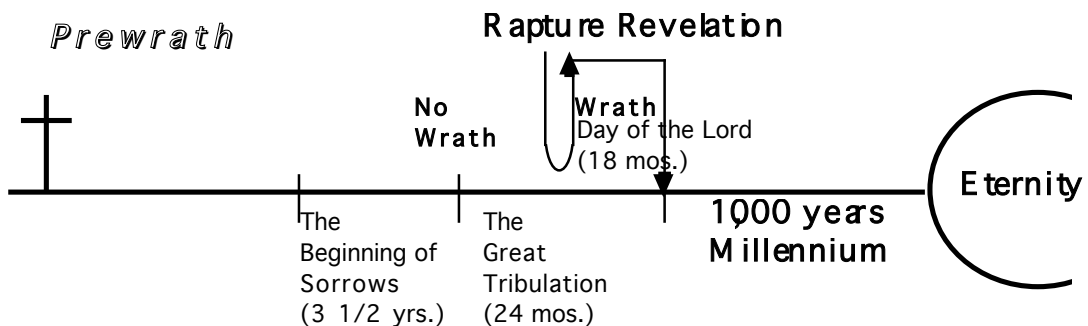
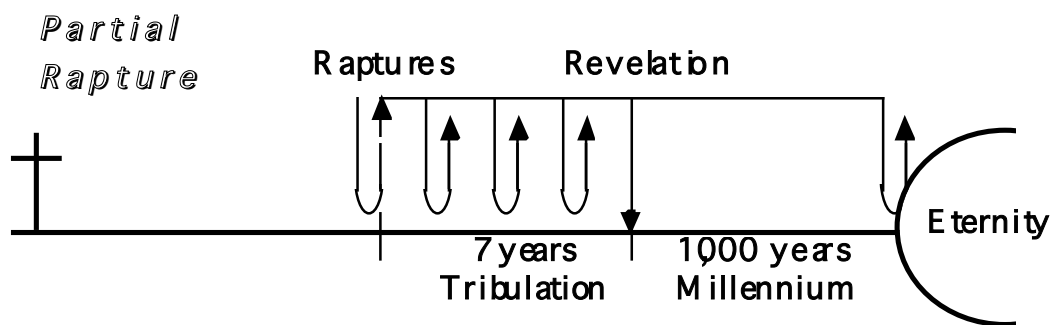
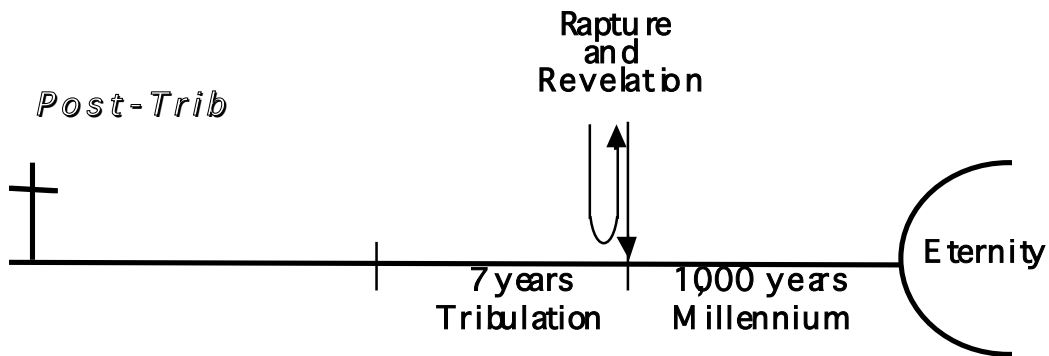
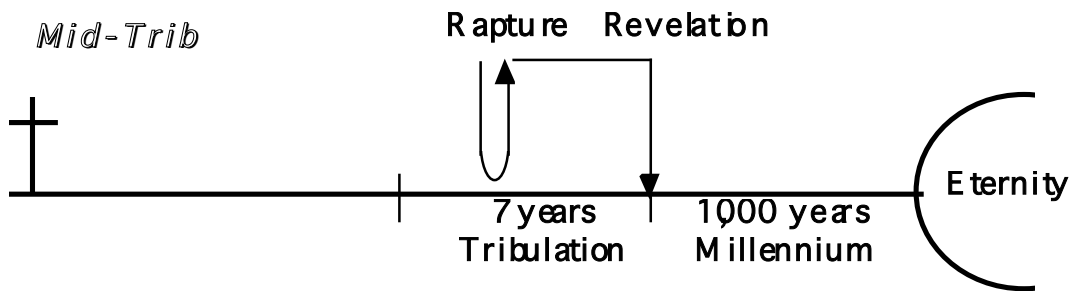
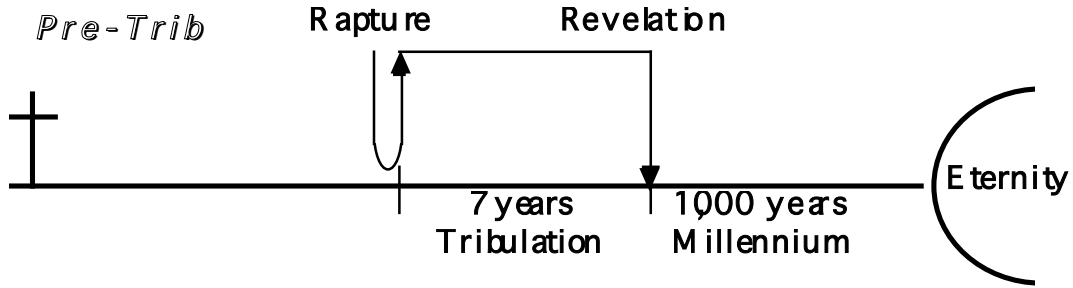
Themes in 1 Thessalonians

Themes in 1 Thessalonians

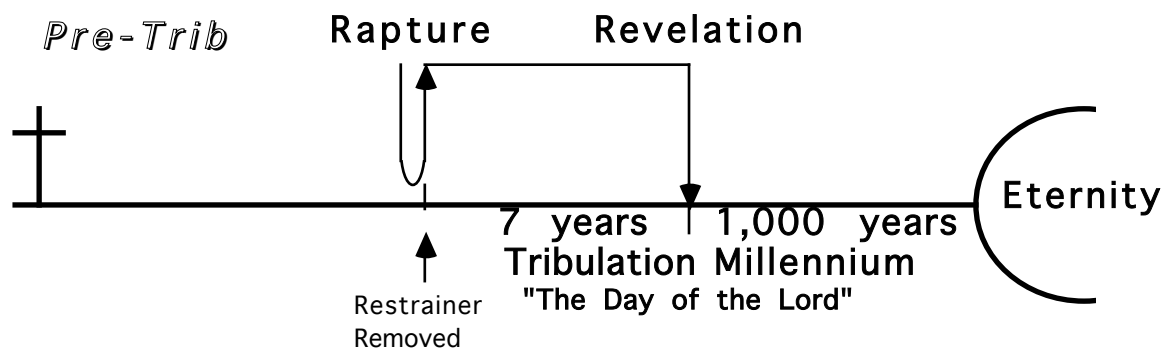
New Testament Background
Group Presentation of 1 Thessalonians

Issues	Background	Paul's response	Application
Paul defense over his ministry	Some Christians doubted Paul's sincerity. He worked for self-gain and had not had any personal interest in them	Our sincere conduct and genuine love Our gospel based on the Word Our teaching with power of the Holy Spirit	1. Continue to show Christ love to those who have accused you. 2. Responsibilities towards your disciples Always ready to be imitator of Christ. Always strengthen their faith and be encouraged by their good work Always thankful to God for His good work in them always keep praying for them
Persecution	Christians were persecuted by the Romans and Jews for their faith in God	Cost of following Christ Our example, imitate Christ The Judean church Hope of glory Christian suffering now is incomparable to that in Tribulation	1. Trials produces character. 2. But we should not go looking for them as if trial is holiness itself, like the cult of martyrs.
Sexual Immorality	Christians continued to have affairs with the prostitutes. Prostitution and Brothels are common practice and sight in Thessalonica.	Vessel of Honour A sin against each other and against God God's punishment for the rebellious God Desires sanctification	1. Sexual immorality is not only an abomination before God, it also causes harm to people around you. 2. Do not quickly associate such practice with demon possession. 3. Encourage one to turn from sin and not be judgmental. 4. God's truth is the final judge for all wrongs done.
Death and resurrection	Christians believed that Christ is coming again and they would not taste death. Unable to accept death of loved ones for Christ is not back yet.	Jesus' resurrection is the first fruit God will not abandon the dead The dead will rise first	1. It is alright to cry at someone's death for we grief for our own loss and not for the departed.
Second Coming of Christ	Took on passive attitude by idling around and not work. Depending on others like parasites	Jesus will come like a thief Live watchfully Work diligently and not idle	1. Christians should live watchfully as expecting Him to come in their lifetime. 2. Be faithful in your work and diligently fulfil your responsibilities
Godly living	Christians need to be encouraged to lead a life pleasing to God after all the above problems are settled.	Looking forward to a hope Encouraged them to pray for Paul and the other churches Thanking and praising God always	1. It is important to uphold one another in prayer 2. Show Christ love in practical ways.

Views on the Time of the Rapture



Arguments for a Pretribulational Rapture



Pretribulationists teach that the Rapture of the Church will precede the Tribulation. Why?

1. Christ told the Philadelphia believers, “I will keep you from the hour of testing (*καὶ γὰρ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ*), that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth” (Rev. 3:10). The definite article before “hour” indicates that the Tribulation period is in view (cf. Rev. 4–19).
2. The nature and purpose of the Tribulation is to test “those who dwell upon the earth” (Rev. 3:10b), a phrase used over a dozen times in the Book of Revelation. Each time this “phrase occurs... the *enemies* of the church are always in mind” (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 120, emphasis mine). Since the Church is not to be tested, why would the Church be present during this time of testing?
3. The Holy Spirit’s work of restraining evil will be absent in the Tribulation. His restraining ministry is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture (Gen. 6:3; John 16:8-11). It is hard to conceive of a period when the Spirit’s restraining influence will be curtailed with the Church still present.
4. There is no mention of the Church in Revelation 4–19, the portion of this book relating to the Tribulation. Rather, the church (the “tabernacle of God”) is in heaven (Rev. 13:6; cf. Eph. 2:21-22) as Bride (19:1, 7-8) ready to return to the earth at Christ’s Second Coming.
5. The Church will never come under God’s wrath (John 5:24; Rom. 5:9; 8:1; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9). Although the church has been promised persecution and tribulation (John 16:33; Acts 5:41; Phil. 1:29), this is different from the wrath that describes the Tribulation (Rev. 6:15-17; 11:18; 14:10, 19). Wrath and persecution are not the same!
6. Since the Rapture is imminent it must be pretribulational. Christians are not to wait for signs of his return but for his coming itself. The New Testament teaches that the next event on God’s eschatological calendar is an imminent Rapture:
 - a. “For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night... so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober... and build up one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thess. 5:2-11). This means the day of the Lord (that begins after the Rapture and continues through the Millennium) was imminent so that it would take people by surprise. Paul told the Thessalonians to fight “sleep” (spiritual lethargy) to prepare for Christ’s unexpected arrival.
 - b. Jesus told the disciples, “I will come back and take you to be with me...” (John 14:3) by actually using the present tense (“I am coming”). This shows a sense of the immediate future without any intervening signs (Herman A. Hoyt, *The End Times* [Chicago: Moody, 1969], 96-97).
 - c. Other New Testament texts teach that Christ will come to receive his saints to himself before the Tribulation (James 5:8-9; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 1:6-7; 1 John 2:28; 3:2-3; Rev. 22:10,12).

7. The Second Coming of Christ will be in two distinct stages:

	The Rapture	The Revelation (Second Coming)
1	<u>Pretribulational</u> (Rev. 3:10)	<u>Posttribulational</u> (Rev. 19:11-21)
2	Christ will <u>come in the air</u> (1 Thess. 4:16)	Christ will <u>come to the earth</u> , His feet touching the Mt. of Olives (Zech 14:4)
3	A coming <u>for</u> the saints (John 14:1-2; 1 Thess. 4:15-17)	A coming <u>with</u> the saints (Matt. 25:31; 1 Thess. 3:13; Rev. 19:14)
4	<u>Saints</u> (dead and alive) will be <u>caught up</u> (“raptured”) from the earth to meet the Lord in the air and taken to heaven (1 Thess. 4:16-17)	<u>Saints</u> already on earth will <u>remain on the earth</u> (no Rapture) to be ushered into the Millennium (Acts 15:16; Rev. 5:10; cf. Matt. 6:10; chap. 24)
5	Produces <u>comfort and hope</u> (1 Thess. 4:18)	Produces <u>fear and judgment</u> (Matt. 24:27-31; Luke 21:20-28; Rev. 6:15-17)
6	<u>Mystery</u> truth revealed only in the New Testament age (1 Cor. 15:51)	<u>Central</u> in OT prophecy but clarified in the NT (Jer. 30:7; Zech 14:1-3; Matt. 24:30; Col. 3:4)
7	Bodies of church saints <u>glorified</u> (1 Cor. 15:51-58; Phil. 3:20-21) and brought to heaven for seven years (1 Thess. 4:17)	Bodies of tribulation saints left in <u>mortal</u> state to continue to live on the earth in the millennium (Matt. 25:31-34)
8	<u>Imminent</u> , no signs needed (1 Thess. 4:16)	<u>Not imminent</u> but preceded by spectacular signs in the heavens and on the earth (Matt. 24:29-31; Luke 21:25-28; Acts 2:19-21; Rev. 1:7; Rev 6-19)
9	Primary purpose is <u>deliverance</u> of the saints from this world (1 Thess. 1:10)	Primary purpose is <u>judgment</u> of unbelieving (Matt. 25:31-46)
10	<u>Invisible</u> and private as only believers see Christ and since God sends a powerful delusion through the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:11)	<u>Visible</u> and public since “every eye shall see Him” (Rev. 1:7)
11	Fulfills a promise to the <u>Church</u> where Jew-Gentile distinctions do not exist (1 Thess. 4:15; cf. John 14:1-3; Eph. 2:11-16)	Fulfills promises to <u>Israel</u> of covenants made in the Old Testament (Gen. 12:1-3; Ps. 89; Isa. 11:11-14; cf. Rom. 11:26-27)
12	Evil begins to <u>increase</u> (2 Thess. 2:1-12)	Evil is <u>suppressed</u> (2 Thess. 1:7; Ps. 37:9-10)
13	<u>Church</u> removed (1 Thess. 4:13-18)	<u>Satan</u> removed (Rev. 20:1-3)
14	Christ shown as <u>Head</u> of the Church and all things (Eph. 1:10, 22; 4:15; Col. 1:18; 2:10)	Christ vindicated as <u>Messiah</u> to Israel (Zech. 14:3-4; cf. Acts 1:6 with v. 11)
15	Judgment seat of Christ for <u>believers</u> follows (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:13)	Judgment of <u>Israel and Gentiles</u> follows (Ezek. 20:34-38; Matt. 25; Zech. 14:4; cf. p. 160)
16	The <u>Lord</u> is at hand—imminency (Phil. 4:5)	The <u>kingdom</u> is at hand—afterwards (Matt. 24:14)
17	Nature subsequently <u>ruined</u> (Rev. 6–16)	Nature subsequently <u>restored</u> (Rom. 8:19-22; Isa. 11:6-9; 35:9; 65:25)

Practical Implications of the Rapture

How should your belief in Christ's future return change the way you live now?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Knowing that at the Rapture we'll see Christians who have died prevents us from hopeless grieving.

Once we are with the Lord we'll *never* be separated from Him—and that's encouraging (vv. 17-18)!

1 Corinthians 15:35-49

We'll receive a new body at the Rapture so we shouldn't be absorbed with "body worship" now.

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Christ's return will show that he defeated Satan, so this gives us victory over sin now (15:54-57).

Our future hope stabilizes us now (15:58).

Christ's sure return motivates us to diligent service since it's not done in vain (15:58).

2 Peter 3:1-9

The more scoffing about his return we hear, the more encouraging it should be for us (3:1-4).

The longer it takes for Christ's return, the more his patience is shown towards us (3:8-9)

2 Peter 3:10-18

The destruction of all we can see should motivate us to invest in the things we can't see (3:10-13).

The judgment of the earth should motivate holy living (3:11, 14).

Knowing the Day of the Lord is coming gives us wisdom that protects from false teaching (3:15-17).

Questions on the Thessalonians

1. Review how the Thessalonian church was planted in Acts 17. How long did this take? What doctrines did Paul teach them? Do you generally teach these doctrines to new believers?
2. What do you think is the heart of 1 Thessalonians (what is the key passage that summarizes its theme)? Why is it this passage and not another?
3. Which passage in 2 Thessalonians summarizes the book? How do you know?
4. How did their lack of a good theological foundation cause problems in Christian behaviour in these epistles? How have you seen this in churches today?