



THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

*BEHOLD! I TELL YOU A MYSTERY. WE SHALL NOT ALL SLEEP,
BUT WE SHALL ALL BE CHANGED, IN A MOMENT, IN THE
TWINKLING OF AN EYE, AT THE LAST TRUMPET.*

(1 CORINTHIANS 15:51-52B ESV)

*FOR THIS IS THE WILL OF MY FATHER, THAT EVERYONE WHO LOOKS
ON THE SON AND BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD HAVE ETERNAL LIFE,
AND I WILL RAISE HIM UP ON THE LAST DAY.*

(JOHN 6:40 ESV)

THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH—1 THESSALONIANS 4:13–18

I. The **PURPOSE** of the biblical teaching of the rapture is to bring hope to believers, 4:13.

- (1 Thessalonians 4:13 ESV) But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.
- A. Informing our brothers and sisters in Christ with the biblical teaching of the rapture displaces sorrow and distress with hope.
- i. Believers have hope.
 - (Romans 15:13 ESV) May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.
 - (1 Timothy 1:1 ESV) Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope.
 - (Titus 2:13 ESV) Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.
 - ii. Believers are not like unbelievers who have no hope.

In contrast to the position of hope of the believer, unbelievers have no hope and so they rightfully grieve and are sorrowful.

B. Those who believe in Christ do not die but sleep.

- (John 11:25–26 ESV) Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

C. Sleep, as used here, is a doctrinal term and not merely a euphemism.

To soften the meaning of sleep in this context as merely a euphemism for dying like “passed away” would be to entirely miss the point of Paul’s instruction.

Sleep, as used here, is a biblical truth regarding the privileged position of the believer in Christ in contrast to the “no hope” position of death and judgment of an unbeliever.

The believer who lives in the sorrow and

heaviness of heart of an unbeliever who has no hope should seek the Lord that he or she may be able to believe his word and trust him to act in his tender mercies and love and goodness toward him or her.

THE “NO HOPE” POSITION OF UNBELIEVERS ...

- (Ephesians 2:12 ESV) Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.
- (Revelation 2:11 ESV) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.
- (Revelation 20:6 ESV) Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.
- (Revelation 20:14 ESV) Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.
- (Revelation 21:8 ESV) But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

CONCLUSION: We should assure believers of their hope in Christ but be careful to not give false assurance to unbelievers who do not have hope.

II. The **HOPE** we receive from the biblical teaching of the rapture is based on the Gospel—the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, 4:14.

THE GOSPEL

- (1 Thessalonians 4:14 ESV) For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.
- (1 Corinthians 15:1–4 ESV) Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in

vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that **Christ died for our sins** in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that **he was buried**, that **he was raised** on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

MacArthur ... The blessed hope of the Rapture is not based on the shifting sands of philosophical speculation. Nor is it religious mythology, a fable concocted by well-meaning people to comfort those who grieve. The marvelous truth that the Lord Jesus Christ will return to gather believers to Himself is based on **three unshakeable pillars**: the **death** of Christ, the **resurrection** of Christ, and the **revelation** of Christ. [MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2002). *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (p. 127). Chicago: Moody Press.]

A. **We believe** that Jesus died.

B. **We believe** that Jesus rose again.

C. **LOGICAL SEQUENCE -> Then believe** that God, through Jesus, will bring us to himself.

- (John 14:1-3 ESV) Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 **And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.**

III. The **SOURCE** of the detailed teaching of the rapture is a word from the Lord himself, 4:15-17.

- (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 ESV) **For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord**, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

A. The detailed teaching of the rapture is by a word from the Lord.

MacArthur ... Paul's teaching on the Rapture was not his own speculation but direct revelation from God. The phrase this we say to you by the word of the Lord has the authoritative tone of an inspired writer revealing what God has disclosed to him. [Ibid. (p. 130).]

B. These are the stated facts of the rapture in this text given to us by "a word from the Lord."

- We who are alive will not precede those who have fallen asleep.
- The Lord himself will descend and signal his coming with a three-fold announcement.

His coming is announced with a cry of command, the voice of an archangel and the sound of the trumpet of God.

- The dead in Christ—believers who are asleep—will rise first.
- Those who are alive at this time will be caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air.

Harpazō [ἀρπάζω] (caught up) refers to a strong, irresistible, even violent act; to be taken by force, catch; to be snatched; to be or become seized or grasped hastily or eagerly; often in order to be taken away; suddenly caught up; snatched up. The Greek verb ἀρπάζω implies that the action is quick or forceful, so the NET supplied the adverb "suddenly" to make this implicit notion clear.

Harpazō [ἀρπάζω] – other Scriptures ...

- (Matthew 11:12 ESV) From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent **take it by force**.
- (Matthew 13:19a ESV) When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and **snatches away** what has been sown in his heart.
- (John 6:15 ESV) Perceiving then that they were about to come and **take him by force** to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.
- (John 10:12 ESV) He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf **snatches them** and scatters them.
- (John 10:28-29 ESV) I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will **snatch them** out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to **snatch them** out of the Father's hand.
- (Acts 8:39 ESV) And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord **carried Philip away**, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.
- (Jude 23 ESV) Save others by **snatching them** out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

CONCLUSION: *The Rapture is a very powerful and decisive action by our Sovereign Lord by which he will snatch believers up from this world to be with him forever.*

THE TIMING OF THE RAPTURE ...

(1) God will keep true believers from the “hour of trial”—the tribulation.

- (Revelation 3:10 ESV) Because **you have kept** my word about patient endurance, **I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world**, to try those who dwell on the earth.

Patient endurance ... *ὑπομονή* [*hypomone*] cheerful (or hopeful) endurance, constancy; patient continuance (waiting); steadfast waiting for; constancy; sustaining, perseverance; *endurance in the NT is the characteristic of a man who has not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings.*

(2) God will spare true believers from the outpouring of his wrath.

- (1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 ESV) For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and **how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God**, 10 and to **wait for** his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus **who delivers us from the wrath to come.**

The “report” concerning the Thessalonian believers **gave witness to their authentic faith in their conversion**—“turned to God from idols”—**and in their daily living**—“wait for his Son from heaven.” The promise to be spared from the outpouring of God’s wrath on the earth at the tribulation is for true believers only; not for pretenders, and not for mere professors.

- (1 Thessalonians 5:9 ESV) For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION: *The rapture of the Church must come before this outpouring of God’s wrath and judgment. Believers will be taken up to meet Christ, and the tribulation period will immediately follow.*

C. The rapture is the bodily resurrection and the transformation of the dead in Christ and the alive in Christ.

- (1 Corinthians 15:50–57 ESV) I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the

imperishable. 51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. **We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed**, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” 55 “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

IV. The COMMISSION of the biblical teaching of the rapture is to comfort and encourage one another with these words, 4:18.

- (1 Thessalonians 4:18 ESV) Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Encourage/comfort ... *παρακαλέω* [*parakaleō*]: To call to one’s side, to call near, call for, summon to address, speak to, comfort, to console; to encourage, strengthen; to alleviate sorrow or distress; give emotional strength to. **Verb form of word used in John 14:16 for the Holy Spirit.**

- (John 14:16 ESV) And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another **Helper**, to be with you forever.

Helper ... *παράκλητος* [*parakletos*] ... summoned, called to one’s side, esp. called to one’s aid; an advocate; one who pleads another’s cause; in the widest sense, a helper; a person who acts as a spokesperson or representative of someone else’s policy, purpose, or cause; especially before a judge in a court of law.

**THEREFORE ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER
WITH THESE WORDS.**