

### Order of Rapture 1 Corinthians 15:51–58

As we age, it becomes painfully evident that this earthly body has many foibles. The fragility of our body manifests itself in many ways. We are all on a journey that will ultimately lead to death (unless the Lord intervenes with the Rapture). For the believer, death is something that we should be looking forward to because it is a release from this tired, weak, and frail body. Although dying can be very painful, death is what gives us relief from the pains of this world. Our future is certain, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Paul tantalizes us with just enough information so that we will look forward to our eternity with the Lord, and at the same time he give us encouragement and purpose for us to live another day on this sin-filled world as we serve Christ. We may grieve the passing of loved ones who are believers, but we also take comfort knowing that they are much better off and that we will one day be with them in eternity.

As Paul writes to the Corinthians, he is trying to raise their sights beyond this world. They had become worldly in their thinking. Paul was working to make them think on things above, not on things of this world, to think spiritually, not carnally (1 Corinthians 3:1–4; Colossians 3:1–2).

#### **Changed body** (verses 50–52)

Paul informs us that we will be changed at the Rapture. We get some detail of this change in two passages of Scripture; 1 Corinthians 15:50–55 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. It should be obvious that in order to live outside of this earth that our bodies will need to be changed. This is why flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. We will go from perishable to imperishable, from mortal to immortal. The bodies we now have are only temporary shells that will be upgraded at the Rapture (Philippians 3:21).

The Rapture will be done in a very orderly and deliberate manner. It will affect two different groups; the living and the dead. Those who have passed on before us have a physical body, but do not have their final body. Our body is compared to a tent (2 Corinthians 5:1–4). Just as a tent is a flimsy dwelling, our bodies are flimsy and weak. However weak it may be, we were designed to have a body and therefore we strongly desire to have a physical body. Dead believers are in Paradise waiting for their final body and destination. They are not in an unconscious, sleeping state as some teach, rather they are with the Lord fully aware of what is happening (2 Corinthians 5:6–8; Luke 16:19–30). This was true of Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration (Matthew 17), and of Paul when he was caught up into the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2–4). Interestingly, Paul found heaven so comfortable and natural that he couldn't tell whether or not he was in the body or not. Even though these dead believers are fully aware of what is around them, they do not have their glorified bodies. They are in what theologians call the intermediate state.

We are given very little information about what this intermediate state is like. We do know that these believers will be reunited with their changed bodies and will serve Christ for eternity in the heavenly realm (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Corinthians 6:3). According to 1 Thessalonians 4:14–16 those who have died will be brought back with Jesus Christ at the Rapture, their bodies will be raised to be united with their souls, and they will be changed to be given the ability to live for eternity.

Any believer who is alive when Christ comes to gather the believers together will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:52) and then they will be caught up to meet Jesus Christ and the other Body believers in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Notice that the living believers are brought up to meet the dead believers “in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). The dead believers are brought from Paradise into the

earth's atmosphere so that they can receive their bodies and then we are brought together with them, and our bodies are then instantly changed into one that is incorruptible and eternal.

### **The last trump** (verse 51)

There are many people who identify the trump (the sound of a trumpet) with the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15–19. Others understand this trump to be separate and distinct from any trumpet in Revelation. Some actually interpret the last trump to be a reference to Donald Trump as president. Even casual Bible student know this is a ridiculous interpretation. Those who have discarded the idea that there will be a literal seven-year Tribulation generally combine the last trump of 1 Corinthians 15 with the last trumpet mentioned in Revelation 11:15. They are usually categorized as Covenant Theologians. Those who see 1 Corinthians 15:52 as a special trump for the church are usually called dispensationalists.

I believe the best way to evaluate these trumpet passages is to understand that God's program for Israel is separate and distinct from His program for the Church, the Body of Christ. When Paul states that he is telling us a mystery (1 Corinthians 15:51), it is not about being resurrected since that had already been revealed (Daniel 12:2; John 6:39–40; 11:24). The mystery that Paul was speaking about is what happens to members of the Body of Christ at the Rapture. These specific details have nothing to do with the nation of Israel, who are waiting the Second Coming and the inauguration of the Millennial Kingdom. The last trump that Paul mentions signals the end of God dealing with the Church and His soon resumption of dealing with Israel as a nation, including the seven-year Tribulation, the Second Coming, and the Millennial Kingdom. Verses which speak of a trumpet sounding while God is dealing with Israel are found in Matthew 24:31 and Revelation 11:15. These are trumpets of God's judgment, not of Him calling us upward to be with Him.

By comparing the Rapture with the Second Coming it becomes plain that the two events are very different. For instance, we will meet Jesus Christ in the air while they will meet Him in the earthly kingdom (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Zechariah 14:4). At the Rapture the unbelievers are left while at the Second Coming the unbelievers are taken (Matthew 13:28–30). There is nothing that needs to happen before the Rapture, but there are unfulfilled prophetic events that need to take place before the Second Coming (1 Thessalonians 4:17-Paul expected to be raptured; Matthew 24:4–14). The Rapture is something to look forward to as a source of comfort (1 Thessalonians 4:18), while the Second Coming is one of judgment (Matthew 25:31–30). There are many more differences that separate the Rapture from the Second Coming.

The last trump must be understood as a trump for the Church, the Body of Christ. It should then become clear that it is called the last trump because it marks the end of God working with the church. Once the church is called home, God will once again focus on finishing His program with the nation of Israel to fulfill every last prophecy given to Israel. While God is fulfilling the rest of Israel's program there will be seven trumpets of judgment with the final trumpet heralding in the promised earthly Kingdom.

### **Working for the Lord** (verse 58)

Paul ends this entire chapter on the resurrection with some very practical advice. Since we can be assured that there is life after death we need to sit firmly in that doctrine and not move from it (Colossians 1:23). We are also to excel in working for the Lord, which can only be done by understanding Scripture, rightly divided. All work done for Him is work done through Him and therefore it will produce fruit and have eternal spiritual results (Colossians 1:9–10).

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