

Rapture**1 Thessalonians 4:9—18**

Paul has just finished emphasizing the importance of walking properly in order to please God. According to verse 3 it is God's will for the Christian to be sanctified by walking in the Spirit. This is done by continually renewing the mind, feeding it on Scripture by meditating on all things that are true, good, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report (Philippians 4:8). The mind being renewed will be transformed so that it will no longer be conformed to the things of this world but will be in total submission to God so that He will be able to use you to bear fruit (Romans 12:1—2; Galatians 5:22—23). This is God's will for the believer's life.

You've probably heard the expression he's so heavenly minded that he's no earthly good. It's actually more accurate to say it the other way around: He's so earthly minded that he's no heavenly good. This is why Paul finished his discussion of sanctification with some very practical applications. There really is no such thing as being too heavenly minded because we should continually be looking heavenward as we live our lives. Being heavenly minded does not absolve our responsibilities on this earth. If all God desired was our salvation then we would have been caught up as soon as we were saved. That does not happen and is proof that God has a purpose for each believer on this earth. There are two things we are to accomplish, one is to bring the message of reconciliation to world (2 Corinthians 5:18—20) and the second is to build up fellow believers, being members of each other (Romans 12:5; 14:19; Colossians 3:13—17).

The natural result of sanctification is love for others (Fruit of the Spirit). This is why Paul speaks to the Thessalonians about this in verses 9—12. In fact, instructions on how to live with each other are given after sanctification passages in Romans 12:1—18; Ephesians 4:22—32 and Colossians 3:1—17. We are able to judge where we are spiritually by how we treat our fellow believers.

The Rapture defined (verses 13—18)

The word Rapture is not found in the Bible. It comes from the Latin word *rapturo* for caught up or snatch away (1 Thessalonians 4:17). The Greek word used is *harpazo* (Strong's G726) and is used in Scripture of Satan plucking the seed that was sown (Matthew 13:19); the wolf plucking out the sheep (John 10:12); no man can pluck believers out of God's hand (John 10:28—29); catching away of Philip from the eunuch (Acts 8:39); soldiers taking Paul by force from the angry crowd (Acts 23:10); Paul being caught up into paradise (2 Corinthians 12:2—4) and Jesus Christ being caught up into heaven (Revelation 12:5).

Just like the words trinity and incarnation the word Rapture is not in the Bible, however, these words do describe a biblical concept. The word Rapture has the idea of being snatched away. In the case of believers, we will be snatched up into heaven at the end of this Mystery program for the Church, the Body of Christ.

Common interpretations**No Rapture**

The Rapture has many different interpretations. There are many believers who say there is no Rapture, only a Second Coming. They say the Rapture was a made-up concept by John Darby in the early 1800s. Jesus Himself said that He would return to earth and set up His kingdom. There is no room for the doctrine of the Rapture in Jesus' teachings. These same people say 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is misinterpreted and misapplied. These verses, they say, are only about the dead believers being raised back to life before Christ's Second Coming thus giving comfort that we will be reunited. Verses we use for the Rapture they would say merely expand on details about the Second Coming. These teaching will be expanded upon in future lessons with an emphasis on the pre-Tribulation Rapture.

Partial Rapture theory

There are a few who believe that only Christians who are watching and waiting for the coming of the Lord will be caught up before the beginning of the Tribulation. See Luke 21:36 (Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.) and Revelation 3:10 (Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.) This premise splits the Body into those who are holy and those who need to be made holy. Paul makes it clear that we are all saints (1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1). We are not under condemnation (Romans 8:1) and are already seen by God as being seated in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). The Body of Christ is always presented as a unified group who will all be treated as one in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27—28). There is absolutely no scriptural evidence that the Rapture will be given as a reward to those who have made themselves holy enough. We do not need to perform works to earn our way to heaven.

Mid-Tribulation Rapture

Another more common idea is that the church will be caught up in the middle of the Tribulation. It is at this point that the Abomination of Desolation occurs with the anti-Christ setting himself up in the temple as God (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15). This last half of the Tribulation is called the Great Tribulation and is seen as the wrath of God being poured out on the earth (Matthew 24:21). This time of great wrath is also seen in Revelation 6:17 and marks the middle of the Tribulation.

Those who believe this theory do not see the entire Tribulation as being God's wrath. According to Daniel's prophecy, there are only seven weeks yet to be completed (one week of years) (Daniel 9:24—27). Jeremiah 30:3—8 speaks of the Lord bringing Israel back into the land to bring His wrath against them. According to Ezekiel 20:34—38 God will bring Israel back into the land to show them His fury. This has to be done before the mid point of the Tribulation because at that point Israel will be scattered again (Matthew 24:15). Then notice in verse 41 God will once again gather believing Israel into the land and give it to them permanently in the Millennial Kingdom. The whole Tribulation is marked out as a time of God's wrath. However, we in the Body of Christ are promised not to go through this wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10). This wrath of the Tribulation is a purification of Israel (Malachi 3:2—3; Zechariah 13:9) and has nothing to do with the church because we are already purified (Romans 8:1; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 5:25—27).

Post-Tribulation Rapture

Those who adhere to this theory say the Rapture happens at the end of the Tribulation. They understand the Rapture as being the first phase of the Second Coming. Believers will be caught up to be with the Lord and then immediately brought back down with Him to rule in the Millennial Kingdom. They argue that there will be saints in the Tribulation (Revelation 13:7) and that the resurrection of the dead is the first resurrection (Revelation 20:5), taking place at the end of the Tribulation.

However, as with the theories above, we will not be going through God's wrath because we are not under any condemnation (Romans 8:1). They also have a problem with the restrainer in 2 Thessalonians 2:5—10. The removal of the restrainer ushers in the anti-Christ. If the Holy Spirit is the Restrainer, He cannot be removed while the Body of Christ is still in the world because the Holy Spirit seals us unto the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30). If the restrainer is the Church, the Body of Christ, the same problem arises.

All of the above views come about because of a neglect to differentiate between the Prophetic program for Israel and the Mystery program for the Church, the Body of Christ. Clarity comes only when these two programs are separated. The following lessons will strive to separate these two programs and make the case for a Pre-Tribulation Rapture.

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