

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18
WALK IN HOPE!
PART 2

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to I Thessalonians chapter 4 as we continue our study in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. As we began our study in I Thessalonians chapter 4 we saw how Paul has changed his focus from doctrine, what God has done to what we are to do.

This is how we are to walk as Christians and if we negate this, then it does not matter how much knowledge of the Scriptures we have, our witness will not be there. We need to take the Word of God, which has been opened up to us by the Spirit of God, and apply these things to our lives.

In a sense, this is where the rubber meets the road. And if you think about it, that just makes sense. You can have the best car in the world, best engine, beautiful in appearance, and yet, if the wheels of the car don't touch the ground, the car is basically useless!

The same is true for us as Christians, as I have said. We need to live what we say we believe or our words are empty when we speak of Christ. If we are not living what we say we believe why would anyone else want what we have? They wouldn't!

And Paul opens up I Thessalonians chapter 4 by telling us we are to walk in holiness! That should just make sense. The Lord wants us to know how to control our bodies and it is not done through worldly ideas but by submitting to the Holy Spirit. God's will for our lives is our sanctification, that we are set apart by Him and our lives bring glory to Him!

And the key here is that we would abstain from sexual immorality! That was a problem back then and it continues to be a problem today. The flesh is an ugly monster though. The reason being is that the more you feed it the more it will want to eat. And as much as people are feeding their flesh today, as you look at our society that is trying to find satisfaction, they are not satisfied.

Satan has come to destroy lives and in regard to sexual relations, he destroys families, destroys relationships! But for Christians, Paul said, **“For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.”** I Thessalonians 4:7. Thus, may we live accordingly!

Next, Paul spoke of walking in love and it is that *AGAPE* love or that unconditional love that is not from man but from God. We can’t love that way apart from God and what a witness our love is to people!

In fact, Jesus said in John 13:34-35, **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”**

Our love for people is not based on how nice they are, how they treat us, but it is based on God’s love for us and thus, it is a love that gives in spite of what the other person does! And if you don’t know what this is all about, Paul says, **“... you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.”** I Thessalonians 4:9.

Look to God, see His love for us, and then you go and love others that way.

Then Paul spoke of us walking in honesty! That should just make sense. If we are representing Christ in this fallen world, people should see that we are honest, that we work hard, that we care for one another!

Paul put it like this in I Thessalonians 4:11-12, **“that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.”**

May we walk in honesty and shine brightly for Jesus!

Last time we began looking at Paul’s fourth point in this section and that is we are to walk in hope! What is interesting here is that this hope is not based in this world getting better and better. It is not based on me getting that awesome job, or marrying that ideal person, or making all kinds of money!

This hope is based on the fact that the Lord is coming back for His Bride, the Church and we call it the Rapture!

And as we began this study we saw that Paul does not want anyone to be ignorant about this fact, that there is a Rapture of the Church, that we will meet the Lord in the air! And we only got through verses 13 and 14 of I Thessalonians chapter 4 last time.

This morning we will continue looking at this topic of hope and the Rapture and when we finish up looking at these verses we then will go back and I will share with you some ideas regarding this event, what people say about it and what the Scriptures have to say next time! We will look at prophecy and how it relates to what Paul has spoken here regarding the Rapture, where it fits in on God’s prophetic timeclock!

I do realize that for some of you, end time prophecy is not that important to you. In fact, in many churches they don’t even teach about end times, what is going to happen because they don’t see it as important.

I think that is a dangerous place to go and I think you are missing out on some very important information that the Lord wants us to know, to understand. You see, why would 28% or more of the Scriptures be prophetic in nature if this was not important or God did not want us to really read this? Folk's, the Lord did not include this for us to ignore. He put it in here so that we would know these things, we would be aware of them and we could warn others of what was coming.

One writer put it like this in regard to the importance of prophecy. He wrote,

. . . I found that teaching from the prophetic portions of Scriptures on a consistent basis has three very practical effects on the lives in a congregation: (1) It stimulates believers to realize the urgency of evangelizing to the lost; (2) it increases their vision for worldwide missions; and (3) it spurs them toward holy living in an increasingly unholy end-times world.

- Tim LaHaye; Thomas Ice; Ed Hindson, *The Popular Handbook on the Rapture*, p. 12

That is why I go verse by verse through the Bible because if over 28% is prophetic in nature, then we will cover these things and understand what is going on in the world.

With that said, let's begin reading in I Thessalonians chapter 4, beginning in verse 15 and see what the Lord has for us as we look at this topic: ***WALK IN HOPE!***

I THESSALONIANS 4

VERSES 15-16

What Paul opens up with here in I Thessalonians 4:15 is important for us to understand. He said, "**For this we say to you by the word of the Lord . . .**"

Please understand that this teaching on the Rapture of the Church is not something that Paul came up with on his own. Paul tells us that the Lord gave him this teaching, it is not based upon his authority or teaching but upon the Lord!

And this phrase, “**the word of the Lord**” is speaking of a new revelation of God that was given to Paul. The New Living Translation puts this verse like this, “**We tell you this directly from the Lord . . .**”

In fact, Bruce tells us that this phrase was often used in the Old Testament and “was regularly conveyed through the lips of prophets” and that “Paul and Silvanus were themselves acknowledged to be prophets.”

I do realize that this may be difficult, but the Scriptures don’t teach about the Rapture of the Church until Paul reveals it to us. Are there types or pictures in the Old Testament regarding the Rapture of the Church? I believe there are but unless Paul shared this with us, we would never come to the conclusion that the Church was going to be Raptured. In fact, we don’t even know of the Church being around until we get to the New Testament!

Let me give you one example to show you what I mean in regard to how we can misinterpret Scripture because we are taking things out of context.

In Matthew 24:36, in a section known as the Olivet Discourse, Jesus said, “**But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.**”

Now many feel that this is speaking of the Rapture of the Church because we know when the Lord is coming in His Second Coming. It is 3½ years after the Abomination of Desolation or the time the Antichrist enters the rebuilt Temple and demands to be worshiped as God.

And in regard to the Rapture, we don’t know the day or hour so this has to be speaking of the Rapture, right? Not necessarily!

First of all, who is Jesus speaking to here in Matthew chapter 24, the Jews or the church? He is speaking to the Jews and the coming Tribulation Period and His return!

But, we have been taught that this verse is speaking of the Rapture of the church. Why? Because, like I have said, no man knows the day or hour that it will take place. Thus, it seems to fit, but that is not the context of the text!

Think about it. If this is speaking of the Second Coming of Jesus and not the Rapture then why does Jesus say no one knows the “**day and hour**” of His Second Coming when in reality the Scriptures tell us that it is 3½ years after the abomination of desolation, as I have said?

And in regard to the Rapture we do not know the “**day and hour**” but we do know the seasons. So how can this be?

First of all, when Jesus spoke these words the Tribulation Period had not started so they could not count off the days from when the abomination of desolation occurred until the coming of the Lord. No one knew the day or the hour and we still don’t today.

Secondly, keep in mind the things that will be taking place during the Great Tribulation or those last 3½ years before the Lord returns.

As you look at the events that take place during the end of the Tribulation Period you can easily see that people are not counting off the days for the return of the Lord, they are just trying to survive.

One more point here and that is this. Don’t we see in the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus’ First and Second Coming in the same verse, not separated? You bet we do!

So why can’t that be the case here? Jesus is speaking to the Jews, then to the Church, and then again to the Jews here in Matthew chapters 24 and 25?

We don't see that in the New Testament. What was hidden in the Old Testament is revealed to us in the New Testament. And the reality is, the church was a mystery until it was revealed to us in the New Testament, and so too was the Rapture of the Church.

So, I believe that the Lord is speaking to the Jewish people not about the Rapture but His Second Coming here in Matthew chapters 24 and on through 25.

Remember – Context! Context! Context!

So, this teaching on the Rapture has been revealed to Paul by the Lord and we can trust it! I realize for some, this is very shaky ground, this Rapture of the Church.

But please understand this. This is based on the solid foundation of the death, the resurrection of Jesus and now this revelation to Paul by the Lord Jesus Christ!

Paul said in I Thessalonians 4:14, **“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.”** The death and resurrection of Jesus!

And then, what we read here in I Thessalonians 4:15, **“for this we say to you by the word of the Lord.”** And this is speaking of the revelation to Paul by the Lord Jesus Christ regarding this event we call the Rapture!

So please don't say that this was Paul's idea, or like many like to say today, it is a modern idea invented by John Darby! Not at all. This came from the Lord and Paul establishes that fact up front, which is important, for many even today deny the teaching of the Rapture of the Church.

As Clarke tells us, “In no place does the apostle speak more confidently and positively of his *inspiration* than here; and we should prepare ourselves to receive some momentous and interesting truth.” How true that is.

Now let's look at what Paul goes on to say in verse 16. He wrote, **“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.”**

Who is coming back? The **“Lord Himself”**, Jesus Christ! Where is He coming from? He is coming **“from heaven.”** How will He announce His coming for His Bride? He will announce His coming for His Bride, the Church, with a **“shout.”** He will announce His coming for His Bride the Church **“with the voice of an archangel.”** He will announce His coming for His Bride the Church **“with the trumpet of God.”** Then what will happen? **“The dead in Christ will rise first.”**

Lots of information there so let's break it down and see what Paul is saying here and then we will deal with the next verse that speaks of those who remain, what will happen to them!

But first, let's deal with this first group of people, those who have died knowing Jesus, those who are saved! Paul, in I Thessalonians 4:15 speaks of them being asleep or **“those who sleep in Jesus”** and the idea is that they have died and gone to be with the Lord They just have not received their resurrection bodies yet, that will happen during the Rapture.

Let me also say this. There is no such thing as “soul sleep” or that when you die right now you just go into a state of being asleep. How can I be so sure? Because the Scriptures tell us that and they make it very clear, very easy to understand.

Paul said in II Corinthians 5:8, **“We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”**

Once our EEG or our brain waves go flat, there is no brain activity, we are clinically dead, although machines can keep us breathing. But at that point of a flat EEG our spirit and soul go to be with the Lord!

You see, the problem for us is that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of Heaven because it has been corrupted. Then what is going to happen? We are going to be changed, in a moment, as fast as you can imagine, and we will receive our new bodies at that time of the Rapture!

Listen carefully to what Paul said in I Corinthians 15:50-58 regarding this change that will take place in our lives. He wrote, **“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 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. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”**

Paul is speaking of these present bodies, the ones we have now cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. It is not that some might, but none of these bodies of flesh that we indwell today will inherit the Kingdom of God!

But God is going to change these bodies, transform them just as a caterpillar changes into a butterfly! You see, these bodies will be material but not flesh and blood!

Folks, this is a glorious truth, not that we are all going to die one day, but we will be raised up in glory. It is the hope of every Christian.

We see this expressed in the epitaph Benjamin Franklin wrote for himself and is engraved on his tombstone in the cemetery of Christ's Church in Philadelphia. It reads: "The body of Franklin, printer, like the cover of an old book its contents torn out and stripped of its lettering and gilding, lies here food for worms. But the work will not be lost, for it will appear once more in a new and more elegant edition, revised and corrected by the Author." Amen to that, can't wait for the upgrade!

And in I Corinthians 15:51 Paul once again speaks of "**a mystery**" and that mystery has to do with the Rapture and receiving our glorious bodies. It was something that was hidden in the Old Testament, but, like we saw here in I Thessalonians 4:15, this was revealed to Paul by the Lord Jesus Christ!

The word that Paul uses for "**mystery**" in the Greek is MUSTERION (moos-tay'-ree-on) which speaks of something that was once hidden and is now revealed. It is not something that Paul came to know through his learning but a revelation from God that Paul wants the Corinthian believers and us to know.

And in this event, known as the Rapture, Paul once again tells us that both the dead and the living will be raised or they will receive they resurrection bodies for their spirit and soul to dwell in! This will happen instantaneously for all believers, those who have died and gone to be with the Lord and those who are living at the time of the Raptur!

And I want you to see how quickly this event will take place. This is not something that will last minutes, or hours, or days, or months, but instantaneously we will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, all of us!

That is what Paul says here in I Corinthians 15:52, this will take place in a **“moment”** which is the Greek word ATOMOS (at'-om-os) which is the smallest conceivable quantity. You can't divide it any further.

Not only will this occur in a moment but also in **“the twinkling of an eye!”**

Think of it like this. The twinkling of an eye can be the time it takes for light to hit the surface of the eye till it hits the retina.

How fast is that? Let me put it into perspective for you. Light travels at 186,000 miles per second, which means it would take 1.5 seconds for light to travel from the earth to the moon. The moon is some 239,000 miles away from the earth!

So then, in the twinkling of an eye the light would reach only one foot off the surface of the earth. Thus, no one will see it happen, it will be instantaneous, but they will feel the effects of the Rapture!

We must be changed and we will. And keep in mind that this sting of death has been removed. I realize that we all have lost loved ones and it did sting, it hurt, so what is Paul saying here?

Let me explain it like this. “A little girl was having a picnic with her daddy. Deathly allergic to bee stings, she became terrified as a bumblebee buzzed overhead. Seeing the bee, her father caught it and held it in his hand for a few seconds before letting it go. As it buzzed around once more, the little girl cried, ‘Daddy, Daddy, why did you let the bee go.’ Rather than explain it, the father chose to simply open his hand to show his daughter the stinger embedded in his palm.” You see, the sting of death was removed!

That is what Jesus has done for us. He has removed the sting of death for when we die in Christ or sleep in Jesus we are with the Lord. Our victory is in Christ and we await the day when we will receive our new bodies, our resurrection bodies!

Also, we see this in John 14:1-3 where we are told, **“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”**

Understand that John is writing to the church and I believe that Jesus is speaking of Him coming back for His Bride, the Church and giving us a new home for our spirit and soul to dwell in at the time of the Rapture!

Jesus is preparing a new house for us, a mansion. You see, these bodies of flesh are temporary dwelling places for our spirit and soul to dwell in. And, just like a tent, they wear out, break down, fall apart and thus, Jesus is not only preparing a new home for our spirit and soul to dwell in but He is coming again to receive us to Himself so that we will always be with Him!

Now for these Thessalonian believers, there might have been some concern with the idea that those who have gone to be with the Lord were going to miss out on something, but that is not the case. All Christians will participate in the Rapture.

As Hiebert wrote, “The living will have no advantage over those fallen asleep; they will not meet the returning Christ ahead of the dead, nor will they have any precedence in the blessedness at His coming.”

So, with a shout of authority and as He speaks forth, as the trumpet sounds the dead in Christ will rise first, they will get their resurrected bodies. And I believe this voice of an archangel is the Lord's voice, not Michael, the only archangel that is mentioned in the Bible. Jude 1:9) The Lord calls His Bride, the Church home to be with Him!

Morris put it like this, "It is even possible that he does not mean that an archangel will actually say something, but simply that the voice that will be uttered will be a very great voice, an archangel type of voice."

And as you read this it seems that Paul felt the Lord could return at any moment and he wanted these believers to understand that and wait in the hope of His return! And thus, as one writer put it, "More feasible is the solution that sees Paul setting an example of expectancy for the church of all ages. Proper Christian anticipation includes the imminent return of Christ." (Thomas)

And as Lazarus was raised from the grave as Jesus called him out, so too will the dead in Christ be raised up and we shall all be caught up to be with the Lord when the Lord gives a shout!

And this ancient Greek word for "**shout**" is the same word that is used for the commands that a ship captain makes to his rowers or a commander speaking to his soldiers. As Morris points out, "Always there is the ring of authority and the note of urgency."

Now some see this "**trumpet of God**" or this "last trumpet" (I Corinthians 15:52) being the last of the seven trumpet judgments spoken of in Revelation chapter 11.

Thus, there are those who believe that the Rapture does not take place until sometime after the 3½ year mark of the seven-year Tribulation Period. But that is not what this trumpet that is spoken of here in I Thessalonians is speaking of, not at all.

And we will dig into when I believe the Rapture occurs in another study, because again, if you get this wrong, you end time theology will be off. I believe it is before the Tribulation.

Notice the differences between the trumpet of I Thessalonians chapter 4 and the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15. “The subjects are different: here it is the church; there a wicked world. The results are different: here it is the glorious catching up of the church to be with the Lord; there it is further judgment upon a godless world. Here ‘the last trump’ signals the close of the life of the church on earth; there the ‘seventh’ trumpet marks a climax in a progressive series of apocalyptic judgments upon the living on earth.” (Heibert)

So, this is not the seventh trumpet judgment spoken of in Revelation chapter 11. This trumpet is to call us home, to call an assembly, not speaking of judgment!

In regard to this last trumpet Harry Ironside said that this last trumpet was a figure of speech that came from the Roman military.

When they were breaking camp the first trumpet blast meant “Strike the tents and prepare to leave.” Then, the second trumpet blast meant “To fall in line.” And the third trumpet blast meant to “March away.”

Thus, by calling this the last trumpet he could be saying that it is time for the church to “March away home to glory!”

Some believe the last trumpet could be comparing it to the last trumpet of the Feast of Trumpets. The last trumpet blast was given as the High Priest stood on the southwestern walls of the Temple and blew the trumpet, the shofar, so that it could be heard in surrounding fields.

When they heard that blast they would stop harvesting, even if there were more crops to bring in, and assemble immediately at the Temple for worship services.

At the Rapture, we are being called to the worship of God as we gather before His throne in heaven.

And lastly, this trumpet call is God removing His people from this earth prior to Him pouring out His wrath upon a Christ rejecting world. It is what Peter tells us in II Peter 2:9, **“then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.”**

Make no mistake about it, the day of judgment is the Tribulation Period and we are delivered prior to the start of that period of time!

Let me sum this up because it will then bring us to our next verse we are going to be looking at in I Thessalonians 4:17.

Paul is saying that the Lord is going to descend from heaven and give a shout, like the voice of an archangel and the trumpet of God will sound and those who are asleep in Jesus, those believers who have died knowing the Lord, being saved, will rise first. In other words, they will get their resurrected bodies at the time of the Rapture!

But what happens to believers who are alive when the Rapture occurs? Paul deals with that in I Thessalonians 4:17. Let's read on and see what he has to say about this controversial subject, the Rapture!

VERSE 17

As I went looking about those who reject the Rapture of the Church, I was surprised how many people not only reject it but are hostile to this idea!

Let me show you what I mean. We are told,

Although the Scriptures make it clear that Jesus is coming back, researchers found varying views on three aspects of end-time theology: the rapture, the Antichrist and the millennial kingdom.

Out of the 1,000 senior Protestant pastors surveyed, only a third (36 percent) believed in a pre-tribulation rapture where Christians disappear at the start of the apocalypse and those left behind suffer tribulation.

Thirty-six percent of pastors say the rapture is not literal, while almost 1 in 5 believe the rapture happens after the tribulation (18 percent).

- <http://www.charismanews.com/culture/56825-large-number-of-pastors-don-t-believe-in-the-rapture>

And there is more. From another web site, and this is from a Judeo-Christian Church who say that the biggest threat to Christianity is the pre-tribulation teaching of the Rapture of the church. This is what they wrote,

Think about it. If you make people believe that they are not going to face suffering, that they are “special” and will avoid all of the troubles that will engulf the world, then they are weakened as a result. They will not be ready. When the tribulation does begin and they’re still on this planet going through it, they will begin to question their own faith. They will not be prepared to fight against persecution. They will be more willing to be deceived in order to save their lives. They will be more open to deceptions of the Anti-Christ. They will be more likely to worship the false messiah to take his mark in order to buy and sell. They will see the formation of the one world government, the one world economy, and the single world leader and they will do so more willingly than those who have their eyes open.

This is arguably the greatest deception that Satan has pulled off thus far.

- <http://judeochristianchurch.com/biggest-threat-christians-teaching-pre-tribulation-rapture/>

So, there is much controversy over this subject and I think the reason being is that people have come up with their own ideas instead of just letting the Scriptures speak for themselves.

And please understand that just because I believe in the Rapture I don't also believe that we will be spared from the persecution from this world, as many like to say.

Not at all. In this world we will have persecution Jesus said, but it is a persecution of this world and not from the Lord. In the Tribulation Period, it is God's wrath being poured out upon a Christ rejecting world!

And to say that those who believe in the Rapture will be deceived by the Anti-Christ is foolishness. And if I was going to go through the Tribulation Period I would be looking for the Anti-Christ because he must come first before the Lord returns. But the Bible says we are to be looking for Jesus Christ, He is coming next and that is speaking of the Rapture!

Another web site had this to say,

I should admit from the outset that my own convictions concerning end-times events is pretty unformed. That being said, I have become unconvinced that what has become known as "the Rapture" is actually found in the Bible, at least in the way that I was taught growing up. In other words, I don't believe that the New Testament teaches us that Jesus will remove Christians from the earth prior to his final appearing (the Parousia). I'll try to briefly lay out why:

1 Thess. 4.13-18 is the classic “Rapture” text, and it is this text that is most often cited in support of the view. Some context: those within the young church at Thessalonica are worried that those who die (“fall asleep”) before “the coming of the Lord” will miss out on that event. The root of the problem was that they didn’t understand or believe in the resurrection of believers. So Paul explains that an event will take place that has the following elements:

1. Jesus will descend from heaven.
2. With a shout
3. In the voice of the archangel
4. With the trumpet of God
5. Then the dead will rise first
6. And then those left alive will be caught up into the air.

The big question is: Is this a **separate event** from the final “coming of the Lord”, or is this the **same event** as that coming? The “Rapture” view only works if it is a separate event. Even if we grant it that Paul does not make the answer to this question clear in this text, he does elaborate on this theme in 2 Thess. 2.1-12. There Paul has to deal with another problem: Apparently now some in the Thessalonian church have become worried that this “coming of the Lord” had already occurred, and that they had missed it. Paul must explain that a whole series of events have to take place prior to that event occurring, and because these events haven’t happened the Thessalonians’ worries are unfounded. It seems that based on the elements Paul lists “the coming of the Lord” is the same in both letters, and in 2 Thess. it clearly takes place after a series of events all usually associated by those who advocate belief in the “Rapture” with the Great Tribulation.

It is of course still possible that the events described in 2 Thess. take place before the “Rapture” but then some period of time after this event but the final Parousia comes later. This seems a bit artificial, however, and ignores the fact that the text does not seem to explicitly support so complex a chronology. It also seems to overcomplicate the central issue: resurrection.

The only other time Paul talks about the sounding of a trumpet in relation to resurrection is in 1 Cor. 15:50-58, and there it is the final resurrection by which death is finally defeated. It seems to me that all these passages have a rather straightforward meaning if they are all interpreted as the final Second Coming of Christ. There doesn't seem to be a good reason for reading them as a second event (the “Rapture”) that comes before a final event, and adding this event seems to needlessly complicate the thrust of the passage.

- <http://www.thetwocities.com/theology/eschatology/why-i-dont-believe-in-the-rapture/>

So, it seems like people have some very strong opinions regarding the Rapture and if it is real or something that was just made up much later on in the church. I am here to tell you that this is not made up but it is something that was revealed to Paul by the Lord.

Remember what Paul said in I Thessalonians 4:13, **“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.”**

Paul does not want us to be ignorant about this event, the Rapture and yet, look at what we are seeing today. Look at what we read in just a couple of articles, and believe me, there are many more web sites that put down, mock the Rapture and those who believe in it!

So, let's look at this a little closer and see what is being said by Paul through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit!

First of all, after the dead in Christ rise first, then, as they are being caught up to be with the Lord, we are told, **“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”**

I Thessalonians 4:17.

And when Paul tells us that we will be **“caught up”** he uses a Greek word, HARPAZO, and that word means to take by force, to seize. Of this Morris tells us, “There is often the notion of a sudden swoop, and usually that of a force which cannot be resisted” (Morris).

Also, in the ancient Greek, the phrase **“to meet”** was used as a technical term to describe the official welcoming of honored guests.

Now let me also say this because there are those who will say that the word ***“Rapture”*** is not found anywhere in the Scriptures. That is true, the word ***“Rapture”*** is not in the Bible.

Then where in the world does it come from? It was taken from the Latin Vulgate Bible, and the Latin word RAPTURUS is used for **“caught up.”** It is from that word we get our English word ***RAPTURE*** from.

So, if you are struggling with this word Rapture because it is not found in the Bible, thus, you don’t want to use the word “Rapture”, then call it the “great snatch away!” That is what the Greek word means but I like Rapture better! It means the same thing, we will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air instantaneously.

Thus, those who have died in the Lord will rise first, because they are six feet lower than us, just kidding, and we will all be gathered together to be with the Lord.

We will deal more with this issue of the timing of the Rapture but for those who say that this is speaking of the Second Coming of Jesus here in I Thessalonians chapter 4, there are many differences.

In Matthew 24:27-30, a passage that we all agree, I believe, deals with the Second Coming of Jesus, we are told, **“For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”**

Then, in I Thessalonians 4:17 we are told, **“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”**

Do you see the difference? I hope so. In the Second Coming we see Jesus appear in the heavens and every eye shall see Him as He returns to the earth to set up His Kingdom. No one meets Him in the air, but on this earth where He will judge the sheep from the goats and the sheep will enter into the Kingdom Age.

But here, in I Thessalonians 4:17 we meet the Lord in the air, we are gathered together with Him and we will be taken up into heaven until the Tribulation Period is over and we will then return with Him to establish His Kingdom on this earth where He will rule and reign for 1,000 years!

You see, there is a big difference between the Rapture of the church and the second coming of Jesus Christ; they are not the same event!

And please understand that Paul’s language here is so straightforward and free from figurative speech that there is no missing his intent.

Alford puts it like this, “The Apostle’s declarations here are made in the practical tone of strict matter of fact, and are given as literal details . . . Never was a place where the analogy of symbolical apocalyptic language was less applicable. Either these details must be received by us as matter of practical expectation, or we must set aside the Apostle as one divinely empowered to teach the Church.” Exactly!

And as we move into verse 18 of I Thessalonians chapter 4, I think you will clearly see that this has to be speaking of the Rapture of the Church, that we will be removed or it makes no sense. Let’s read on and you will see what I mean.

VERSE 18

Now, in light of all that we have read, if we were to go through the seven-year Tribulation Period, these words would not be comforting to us, would they?

Not to me! If we were to go through the time where God is going to pour out His wrath upon a Christ rejecting world, that would make no sense. Why would He pour His wrath upon His Bride? He wouldn’t!

And if you think about it, on the cross of Calvary He took the wrath that was due us. Thus, if we receive that kind of judgment, that means the Father judged us twice. Once when our sins were upon Jesus and then during the Tribulation Period. That makes no sense either!

And Paul would have ended verse 18 like this then, if we were to go through the Tribulation Period. “Guys, hang in there, it is going to get tough. Some of you will be beheaded for your faith. There is going to be all kinds of cataclysmic events in the heavens and the earth. The judgment of God is going to be very severe, so just hang in there. Good luck!”

But that is not what Paul said. He said, “**Therefore comfort one another with these words.**”

Then what is our hope that Paul is speaking of here? It is the hope of the return of Jesus for His Bride, our eternal union with Him is a source of great comfort.

I know, like I have said, some say it is escapism and Jesus did say that in this world we will have tribulation.

I have covered this but I want to make sure you are clear on this. You see, right now Satan and his forces are persecuting Christians all over the world. But in the Tribulation Period it is God’s wrath being poured out upon a Christ rejecting world.

In fact, we are told in I Thessalonians 5:9, this powerful point, “**For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.**”

The Amplified Bible puts this verse like this, “**For God has not appointed us to [incur His] wrath [He did not select us to condemn us], but [that we might] obtain [His] salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (the Messiah).**”

Did you hear that? Did you understand that. I think that is very clear!

Then why are so many confused? Because they are approaching the Scriptures with their own preconceived ideas and they have to make them fit what they want them to say, what they believe! And that is wrong!

And we are going to deal with this more in our next study, showing you why I believe that the Rapture of the Church could happen at any time, prior to the start of the seven-year Tribulation Period.

As I begin to close this morning I pray that you have a better understanding of what these words that Paul wrote mean. How they relate to us today.

And keep in mind that this is not our home. We are aliens and strangers just passing through, for our citizenship is in heaven and that is where we are called to go, to be with our Lord.

I love what Paul says in Titus 2:13, “**looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.**” That is what we are doing and in knowing He is coming back, in knowing we will be with Him, what should we do?

Paul told us what we are to do, and I am so thankful, “**Therefore comfort one another with these words.**” I Thessalonians 4:18.

As you look at this world, as you look at what is happening, how the love for people is growing cold, may we not be a people that are anxious, worried, terrified of what is to come!

Why should we not be worried? Because the Lord is coming back and we should be looking upward for our redemption is drawing near.

In other words, we are to comfort each other with the Word of God knowing that He is coming back for His Bride, the Church. Look up for our redemption is drawing nearer!

Thus, we should be comforted in that and as we are we can then bring the comfort of God to others in Christ! Thus, may we *walk in hope!*