

High Peaks Bible Fellowship

The Resurrection of Church-Age Believers (1 Thessalonians [4:13-18](#))

Know the truth so that you will not behave like unbelievers (1 Thess. [4:13](#))

- Literally the text reads, "Now, NOT do we desire you not to know." Paul understands how important it is that believers KNOW correct doctrine. Ignorance or misunderstanding about the doctrines of the faith can lead to distress and agony.
- The Thessalonians' question could be worded like this: "If the rapture involves living Christians, what happens to the ones who have already died?" Because of their misunderstanding about this doctrine they were behaving like the pagan Gentiles who have absolutely no hope for what happens after death.
- Pagan Greek and Roman culture provided no assurance concerning the afterlife. But Paul had given them Old Testament truth as well as new revelation specifically for the Church age.
- Paul's teaching had its foundation in the words of Christ in the upper room (John [14:2-3](#)). Prior to the Second Coming, Jesus would remove Church-age believers from the earth and take them to be with Him in heaven.

The Seven Resurrections in Scripture

1. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is the first resurrection (see Matt. [28:1-7](#); Mark [16:1-11](#); Luke [24:1-12](#); John [20:1-18](#))
2. Shortly after the resurrection of Christ, some other tombs were opened and several "holy people" were raised (see Matt. [27:50-53](#))
3. The resurrection of Church-age believers before the beginning of the Tribulation period (see John [14:3](#); 1 Thess. [4:13-18](#); 1 Cor. [15:50-53](#))
4. During the Tribulation, God's two witnesses will be raised (see Rev. [11:11-12](#))
5. The Tribulation martyrs will be resurrected so that they can rule and reign with Christ (see Rev. [20:4-6](#))
6. Old Testament saints will be resurrected to enter the millennial kingdom (see Dan. [12:1-2](#); Isa. [26:19](#); Ezek. [37:13-14](#))
7. At the end of the millennial reign of Christ, the final resurrection will consist of all of the unbelieving, wicked dead. They will be found guilty at the Great White Throne judgment and cast into the lake of fire (see Rev. [20:11-15](#))

The resurrection of Church-age saints is based on the resurrection of Christ (1 Thess. [4:14](#))

- SINCE we believe the doctrine of Christ's resurrection, we also believe in the corollary resurrection of those who belong to Christ.
- Notice that Paul gives this prophecy in clear, plain, straightforward language. It is not couched in symbolism or mystery -- it is clearly meant to be understood.
- At the believer's death, the body and soul are separated -- the body is buried in the ground, but the soul goes to be with the Lord in heaven (see 2 Cor. [5:8](#); Phil. [1:23](#)). Here we see Jesus bringing with Him the souls of dead believers so they can be united with their resurrection bodies.

Paul gives them the truth -- the "Word of the Lord" (1 Thess. [4:15](#))

- Here Paul does not quote from the Old Testament Scriptures -- he cannot do so since the Old Testament did not reveal the Church age. Paul is giving new revelation about the Church age, and specifically about the resurrection of believers at the end of the Church age.
- Some Church-age believers will actually be alive to witness this event! There is nothing that must happen before this event occurs -- it is imminent and can happen at any time.
- Paul answers the Thessalonians' question here -- the dead believers will actually be resurrected before those who are living.

The Lord will descend only so far, then we will rise to meet Him (1 Thess. [4:16-17](#))

- The Lord Jesus does descend, but only as far as the atmosphere of the earth ("the air" -- "the clouds"). The meeting takes place above the earth. This is NOT the Second Coming of Christ to establish the millennial kingdom.
- "A shout" = a military term meaning to summon -- used for the purpose gathering people together.
- "The voice of (an) archangel" = one of the leaders of the heavenly host.
- "A trumpet of God" = 1 Cor. [15:52](#) also mentions a trumpet sounding as believers are transformed.
- The dead in Christ = these are believers from the Church age -- the ones placed into the Body of Christ by the special work of the Holy Spirit during the dispensation of the Church.
- Notice the direction of travel: they will rise. The movement is from the earth up into the air and on into heaven. Here is a description of the promise of John [14:3](#) coming to fulfillment.
- After this resurrection, the flesh will be no more for these Church-age saints. We will be able to spend eternity with the Lord. In another place Paul calls this the "blessed hope" of the believer in this age (see Titus [2:13](#)).

Contrasts between the Rapture and the Second Coming

RAPTURE	SECOND COMING
Christ comes in the <i>air</i> <u>for</u> His own	Christ comes to the <i>earth</i> <u>with</u> His own
Translated Church-age believers go to heaven	Translated believers return to earth
Christians taken to the Father's house (heaven)	Christians come with Christ to establish an earthly kingdom
No judgment on the earth	Christ judges the inhabitants of the earth
Imminent -- could happen at any moment	Cannot occur until many events have transpired
Time of joy and reward for believers only	Time of mourning and judgment for earthly humanity
Occurs before the "day of wrath" (Tribulation)	Occurs after the Tribulation
No mention of Satan	Satan bound for 1000 years
Only Christ's own will see Him	Every eye will see Him
The Tribulation will shortly begin	The Millennial Kingdom begins
Not predicted in the Old Testament	Clearly predicted in detail in the OT

Correct doctrine has the power to comfort and encourage believers (1 Thess. [4:18](#))

- Believers do not need to fear death because we know this truth about what comes afterward. The "second death" (lake of fire) will never touch us -- we will be with the Lord forever!

Points of Application:

- In order to avoid the distress that comes from believing something that is not true, we need to clearly understand the truths of God's Word. Living a calm, quiet depends upon this.
- God does not want us to live like unbelievers. There are many areas of our lives that should be noticeably different from those in the world around us.
- We can look forward with joy to a wonderful reunion in heaven with those who have gone before us. We worship a truly powerful God who is able to change our earthly bodies into incorruptible resurrection bodies in the blink of an eye.
- The Lord's coming in the clouds for His Church is imminent -- it could happen today! Jesus keeps His promises!
- Not only can we share the good news of the gospel message with unbelievers around us, we also have the good news of the rapture to share with believers! What a marvelous comfort and encouragement this is!

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Our primary purpose is to uphold the truths of the Word of God.

I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15)

Our primary responsibility is to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-12)