

The Rapture - Part 3

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INTRODUCTION

My previous articles commenced a series on the rapture of the church. We began with the question, "What is the Rapture?" This question can best be answered by noting ten truths about the rapture from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. In previous articles, we saw that the rapture is an important doctrine and not something that can be marginalized or explained away as a secondary doctrine. We also noted that the rapture is an event that is distinct from the Second Advent of Christ. We now move to our third point.

THE CATCHING AWAY OF EVERY LIVING BELIEVER

Third, the rapture will involve the catching up of every believer to meet the Lord in the air. First Thessalonians 4:17 says, "Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord." The Greek word translated "caught up" is *harpazō*, which means to be seized or caught up by force. According to a leading lexicon, this Greek verb has the meaning of "to grab or seize suddenly so as to remove or gain control, *snatch/take away*."¹ In other words, those living believers on the earth at the time of the rapture will be removed by force from the earth in order to go into the presence of Christ.

Many criticize the doctrine of the rapture on the grounds that the word "rapture" is not found within the Bible. While it may be true that this word "rapture" is not found directly in the biblical text, the concept of the catching away of the believer is clearly found within the Bible (1 Thess 4:17). Theologians often use concise words or phrases to describe biblical concepts. If such vocabulary were not available, then communication would be cumbersome, if not impossible. Communication would involve the need to explain an idea every time the concept was being reused. If words representing ideas were not available in conveying ideas, a circumlocution would have to be used every time the same concept was employed in communication. A circumlocution is a round-about way of stating something. Thus, every discipline uses concise terms or phrases representing a broader truth. For example, lawyers use terms like "*res ipsa loquitur*, the rule against perpetuities, negligence, tort, living trust, establishment clause, four corners rule, the fruit of the poisonous tree," and so forth. Because those trained in the law know exactly what these terms mean, the concepts behind these terms need not be re-explained every time these ideas are conveyed. This reality is not just true in the area of law but in all disciplines or professions.

¹ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed.) (134). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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Theology is no different. Theologians frequently use expressions that represent biblical ideas. Sometime these specific terms are not stated in Scripture although the broader idea is certainly found there. For example, although the word "Trinity" is not found specifically within the biblical text, the concept of the Trinity certainly is found within Scripture's pages. No one would challenge the biblical validity of the Trinity just because we cannot locate the word Trinity itself in the Bible. All note the concept of the Trinity is scriptural while the term Trinity simply capsulizes and represents a broader spiritual truth that would take many words to adequately explain. For that matter, the word "Bible" is not mentioned within the Bible. Yet no one disbelieves the Bible just because this specific word is not found within the Bible. All acknowledge that the word Bible represents a broader idea, namely, the 66 books of Scripture encompassing God's inspired Word. All of this equally applies to the truth of the rapture. Although the word rapture is not found in Scripture, like the word Trinity or Bible, the word represents a broader scriptural notion that is taught within the Scriptures.

If the word rapture is not found within the Bible, then from where do we get this word? When the Greek word *harpazō* or "caught up" (1 Thess 4:17) was translated into Latin in Jerome's Latin Vulgate, the Latin word *repere* was used. When this Latin word was then translated into English, the word "rapture" was employed. This English word "rapture" became commonly used to describe the biblical concept of the catching away of all living believers at the Lord's return in the clouds. In other words, the English word rapture comes from translating the Greek word *harpazō* into Latin and then into English. Thus, when someone challenges the validity of the rapture on the grounds that the word itself is not found in the New Testament, an appropriate response would be to refer to the Latin copy of the Bible where the word rapture can be readily and easily observed.

In sum, not only is the rapture an important doctrine and an event that is distinct from the Second Advent of Christ, but it will also involve the catching up of every believer to meet the Lord in the air.

(To Be Continued...)