

The Rapture - Part 5

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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 from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 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 further observed that the rapture will involve the catching up of every believer to meet the Lord in the air, and that the rapture will involve a reunion between living and deceased Church-Age believers. We now examine several more points from 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. These verses say:

Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will 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 imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY. O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" The sting of death is sin, and the power 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 toil is not in vain in the Lord.

A Resurrection

Fifth, the rapture will be a resurrection (1 Cor. 15:50-54). A resurrection is the opposite of death. Death involves separation. When people die the immaterial part of them that is designed to live forever (Eccl. 3:11) called the soul (*psychē*) separates from the body or material aspect (Matt. 27:51; Acts 7:59). By contrast, a resurrection involves a reunion. When a person is resurrected their soul-spirit or immaterial aspect is placed in a glorified or resurrected body.

Apparently, the Corinthian church was questioning the reality of future resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12). The whole concept of bodily resurrection probably seemed incompatible with Greek philosophical dualism (Acts 17:32a), which taught that the physical world is evil and only the spiritual world is good. Such an

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aberrant belief system prompted Paul to explain the significance of the resurrection and its implications. Paul does so in 1 Corinthians 15, which has often been labeled as the "resurrection chapter." Here, Paul touches upon the rapture (1 Cor. 15:50-58) since this event represents the time in history when all Church-Age believers will receive their resurrected bodies.

The Old Testament had already clearly revealed that there would be a future resurrection of both the saved and unsaved (Dan. 12:2). This truth is often alluded to in the New Testament (John 5:28-29; 11:23-24; Acts 24:15). Paul's use of the word "mystery" (1 Cor. 15:51) will be discussed in a future article. For now it is sufficient to say that his use of this term indicates that the rapture represents the time in history when all Church-Age believers will receive their resurrected bodies. This rapture or resurrection will be a reality for both living (1 Cor. 15:51) and deceased (1 Cor. 15:52) Church-Age believers.

Why is such a resurrected body necessary? The answer to this question relates to the fact that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. The perishable must be exchanged for the imperishable. That is, the mortal must be exchanged for immortality (1 Cor. 15:50, 53-54). In other words, our bodies as they currently exist are not fit for eternity with God. While our current bodies are often dominated by the sinful nature (Rom. 6:6; 8:23), heaven is holy (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). Although our present bodies, as they have been effected by the curse, are temporal and dying (Gen. 3:19; 2 Cor. 4:16), heaven is eternal. One need only compare a modern day picture of oneself to a picture from an old high school year book in order to clearly see how the curse has negatively impacted all of our physical bodies. Our bodies are no more fit for eternity than they are for deep sea diving. In order to be prepared for such an activity, the body must be properly equipped with fins, an oxygen tank, mask, etc... Similarly, the body must be transformed and glorified. It must be resurrected in order to experience eternity with God. Church-Age believers will receive this resurrected body at the point of the rapture.

In sum, not only is the rapture an important doctrine, an event that is distinct from the Second Advent of Christ, an event that will involve the catching up of every believer to meet the Lord in the air, and a reunion between living and deceased believers, but the rapture will also be a resurrection.

(To Be Continued...)

