

The Rapture - Part 1

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INTRODUCTION

I remain astonished at the number of emails I receive from individuals who do not believe that the rapture is a biblical doctrine. Such people seem to have the idea that the whole rapture concept is manufactured by popular, sensationalistic prophecy teachers in their attempt to sell books and make money. Thus, they contend that this rapture doctrine has no biblical justification whatsoever. In order to demonstrate the rapture is truly a biblical doctrine, I am commencing a series of articles on the "Doctrine of the Rapture of the Church."

This series will have two major parts. First, we will focus on the "**what?**" question as we ask ourselves, "**What is the rapture?**" The two major passages we will use to answer this question will be 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. Second, we will focus on the "**when?**" question as we ask ourselves, "**When is the rapture?**" By "when?" we have no intention of assigning a date for the rapture. Such an effort would be fruitless since the Scripture fails to assign a specific date for this event. Rather, by "**when?**" we simply will try to answer the question "When will the rapture take place relative to the impending seven-year tribulation period?"

What is the rapture? In order to answer this question, ten truths about this important event will be discussed. The first four truths come directly from 1 Thess. 4:13-18. These verses say:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 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. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

THE RAPTURE IS AN IMPORTANT DOCTRINE

First, the rapture is an important doctrine. Many give the impression that the rapture is some kind of secondary doctrine that need not be given too much attention. We are often told that we should focus

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on the "big ticket" theological items such as the Virgin Birth, the Vicarious Atonement, the Trinity, Salvation by Faith Alone, and the Deity of Christ. Only after these doctrines are mastered should we then consider or contemplate the doctrine of the rapture. Along these same lines, many contend that the rapture is certainly not something that a new believer should give too much time or attention to.

Such thinking was foreign to the mindset of the Apostle Paul. Interestingly, the Thessalonians were new believers (1 Thess. 1:9). In fact, a very short period of time exists between Paul's planting of the Thessalonian church on his second missionary and his writing of the two epistles to them. There were no more than six months to a year between these two events. Thus, the Thessalonian epistles differ from Paul's letter to the Philippians where a little over ten years had elapsed between Paul's planting of the church at Philippi, on his second missionary journey, and when Paul finally wrote to that church during his first Roman imprisonment. The point in all of this is that although the Thessalonians were new believers, Paul never hid the doctrine of the rapture from them. On the contrary, he openly disclosed this teaching to them along with many other doctrines.

In his letter to the Thessalonians, before more fully developing the doctrine of the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul briefly mentioned this doctrine in 1 Thessalonians 1:10. Paul obviously believed that the rapture is a foundational doctrine because he mentioned it immediately after discussing other basic doctrines such as the Holy Spirit (1:5) and conversion (1:5, 9). He also mentions the rapture doctrine (4:13-18) just after and before discussing other basic Christian truths such as sanctification (4:3, 5:23) and the dimensions of man's nature (5:23). Evidently, in Paul's thinking, the rapture was just as important as these other truths and deserved the same level of treatment and understanding.

(To Be Continued...)