

STUDY SIX – WHAT PAUL SAID ABOUT THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH!

INTRODUCTION

“For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18)

The times in which we live are bizarre to say the least. Things are rapidly taking place around us that are unprecedented. The last of the last days have come, and lawlessness is on the rise, increasing with each passing day. And a day is soon coming when the Lawless One — the Antichrist — will be revealed to the world.

Later in this series of study, I will discuss the timing of the Antichrist's appearance, but before his long-forecast debut occurs, another event will take place that is called the rapture of the Church.

The rapture of the Church is the undeniable doctrine of Scripture that affirms there is a soon-coming event, at which time Christ will descend into the lower atmosphere above the earth, and "the dead in Christ" will be supernaturally resurrected. Also at that time, or immediately afterward — so quickly that it will be nearly imperceptible—Christ will supernaturally "catch away," or rapture, the authentic Church, those in Christ *"which are alive and remain."* He will snatch that remnant from harm's way at the very end of this present age. (See 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.)

People want to know at what point in the end-times timeline the rapture of the Church will occur, and we will eventually get to the answer to that question. But the apostle Paul's writing in First Thessalonians about the rapture of the Church itself is paramount, and that is where we will begin this study. So, before we dive into the subject of when — or the moment in time in which this glorious event will occur — we need to see that the rapture of the Church is one of the clearest-stated doctrines in the New Testament. Although people have different views about when it will occur (and I'm talking about pre-, mid-, or post-Tribulation, etc.), the reality of a future rapture of the Church is undeniable in Scripture.

PAUL WROTE THREE TIMES ABOUT THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

Paul wrote about this event in three of his epistles— including his first and second letters to believers in Thessalonica and one of his letters to believers in Corinth. Paul's reference in his first letter to the Thessalonians is quoted above. As for the reference in 2 Thessalonians, we can read verses 1 through 10:

“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.” (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2)

Paul also addressed the rapture of the Church approximately five years later after 2 Thessalonians when he wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians. Here is the quote of 1 Corinthians:

“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.” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

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In this study, we will primarily focus on what Paul wrote in First Thessalonians about this monumental event. Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians was likely his first epistle to write, and this is important, for it tells us that even at that early time in Church history, he was already expounding on the mystery of the Rapture.

Some may argue, "The word 'rapture' doesn't even appear in the Bible, so it's not really a New Testament doctrine." But you will see shortly that the word "rapture" does appear very clearly in the pages of the New Testament.

WE WHICH ARE ALIVE AND REMAIN UNTO THE COMING OF THE LORD'

In First Thessalonians 4:15, Paul wrote, *"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep."*

The words "alive and remain" are so important that Paul repeats them verbatim in verse 15 and again in verse 17. And in both verses, these words are the exact same, identical Greek phrase. Paul was making a statement so profound that he found it necessary to repeat it twice in this passage verbatim.

THOSE WHO ARE ALIVE

Let's begin with the word "alive" that appears in verse 15 and again in verse 17.

In both verses, the word "alive" is translated from the words *hoi zoontoi*, a plural form of the Greek word *zao*, which not only means to be alive, but here, it conveys the meaning of those who are fully alive, robust, thriving, vibrant, and vigorous. It doesn't refer only to those who are merely physically living — rather, it pictures those who are spiritually living, spiritually robust, spiritually thriving, spiritually vibrant, and spiritually vigorous. This description contrasts with those who are physically alive, but who are not spiritually alive and vibrant.

The use of this particular Greek word tells us that Christ is coming for those who are spiritually engaged. He is not coming for those who merely have a form of godliness, but for those who are, as one expositor states, the living ones or the vibrant ones.

Forgive the redundance, but this particular Greek wording emphatically does not portray people who are simply physically alive, but of those who are so engaged in their faith that they are spiritually alive, spiritually robust, spiritually thriving, spiritually vibrant, and spiritually vigorous. What does this mean for those who are not spiritually engaged? I'll answer that in the pages to come.

The fact that the Greek depicts those who are spiritually alive, spiritually robust, spiritually thriving, spiritually vibrant, and spiritually vigorous informs us prophetically that there will be a fully alive and vibrant people of God at the time of the Rapture.

These will be those who stand by the Word of God, who know the power of the Holy Spirit, and who radiate the glory of God.

THOSE WHO REMAIN

Paul then added that he was specifically referring to those who "remain," coming from a compound of words: *peri* and *leipo*. The word *peri* means around, and it depicts a circumference or an outer edge, and the word *leipo* pictures what is left over. The King James Version translates the word as "remain" — but pay attention, for this Greek wording specifically depicts the remaining outer remnant of a garment, a fragmented, left over, end piece of a garment, or a residue. It denotes a smaller amount that is left over from a larger original piece.

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Paul was a brilliant linguist who knew exactly what these words meant as he penned them. Their use clearly implies that only a remnant of authentic believers may be existing at the time of the rapture of the Church. Those who remain will be a faithful remnant who endured, remained faithful to the end, and survived the storms of life - and possibly persecution —yet they kept the faith.

Who this remnant is that Paul is describing is qualified by the word "alive." The remnant who will be raptured are those who are spiritually alive, spiritually robust, spiritually thriving, spiritually vibrant, and spiritually vigorous. The Greek words Paul used in First Thessalonians 4:17 for the word "remain," again, literally mean the remaining ones, the surviving ones, or those who are left. So this could indicate a remnant of all those who have ever been saved —or possibly a small number of believers who are left on the earth.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

In First Thessalonians 4:15, Paul wrote, ... We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep." The word "asleep" is translated from a form of the Greek word *koimao*, which pictures the sleep of death. Thus, the word "asleep" describes the physical dead bodies of those who have previously died in the faith. As a phrase, these words in the Greek text are emphatic, and it indicates first things first. In other words, we who are spiritually alive and engaged in the faith at that moment will be second in line to be miraculously transformed and caught up — after the dead in Christ are raised first.

TO BE ABSENT FROM THE BODY IS TO BE PRESENT WITH THE LORD

In regard to the death of believers, Paul wrote in Second Corinthians 5:8, *"We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."*

In this verse, Paul used the words "absent" and "present" to describe the experience of a Christian after physical death. The word "absent" is translated from a form of the word *ekdemeo*, which in this verse pictures one who has made an exit from home. By using this word, Paul communicated that when a real believer dies, he exits his body, which had been his temporary, natural human home. But Paul also declared that at that moment of death, a real Christian is instantly present with the Lord.

The word "present" is a form of the Greek word *endemeo*. By using this particular word, Paul declared that when a person dies in the faith, his human spirit makes an exit from his natural human home — his body — and immediately finds himself — his spirit - at home with the Lord.

As we've already seen, at the moment of Christ's descent into the lower atmosphere of the earth on the cusp of His rapture of the Church, those on the earth who are spiritually living, spiritually robust, spiritually thriving, spiritually vibrant, and spiritually vigorous at that time will not be the first to experience transformed bodies. First, Paul said the dead bodies of those who have died in faith will be raised and changed — and then, next in line, those who are spiritually living, spiritually robust, spiritually thriving (that is, the remaining remnant who have endured) will immediately afterward be caught up into the air with their bodies supernaturally transformed as they join those who were just resurrected before them!

THE LORD SHALL DESCEND FROM HEAVEN

But Paul elaborated even further in First Thessalonians 4:16 when he wrote, *"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven...."*

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When Paul wrote in First Thessalonians 4:16 that the Lord shall "descend from heaven," he meant Christ Himself will make a move from the highest heavens to the air above the earth — and when He does so, He will come with a dominating and subjugating force. At that moment, He will rouse the dead in Christ, He will snatch those who are actively engaged in faith, and He will begin the process of dominating and subjugating evil powers as the worst of the worst times ensue on the earth for a season — during the Great Tribulation — on God's prophetic timetable.

JESUS WILL MAKE A MOVE FROM HIS HIGHLY EXALTED POSITION IN THE HIGHEST HEAVENS

In Ephesians 1:21, Paul wrote that God exalted Jesus *"far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."*

In Greek, the word "above" is a translation of the Greek word *huperano*, which means high above or far above, and it refers to both rank and dignity. In the context of this verse, it means that no one in the universe has a higher rank, name, or position than Jesus Christ! And to affirm Jesus' highest position above all, Paul then added the word "all." The word "all" is a translation of a form of the Greek word *pas*, which means anything and everything. By using the words *huperano* and *pas* together, Paul excluded any misunderstanding or doubt regarding his message. Jesus Christ holds the highest and most exalted position in the entire universe or any known world or sphere. He is literally, supremely "above all." But then Paul began to specifically describe the exact categories that Christ is above.

First, Paul stated that Christ is "above all principality..." The word "principality" is from a form of the Greek word *arche*, and it denotes rulers of the highest Level. Paul was declaring that Christ's exalted rank is far above all human rulers and all angelic beings. Both the natural and the spiritual realms are under the dominion of Jesus Christ, and there is absolutely no one in any realm more highly exalted than Him.

Paul then mentioned Christ's superiority over "powers." The word "powers" is the Greek word *exousias*, a word that describes those who have received delegated power, and it is therefore often translated authorities. This word refers to people who hold public office and wield authority entrusted to them by their superiors or by way of an election. Paul was hereby declaring that although such individuals yield substantial power and influence in the affairs of the world, their authority pales in comparison to the authority and highly exalted position of Jesus Christ.

Next, Paul wrote that Jesus is exalted above all "might." This word "might" comes from a form of the Greek word *dunamis*, a word that denotes explosive power but was regularly used to describe the full strength of a military force. By using this word, Paul was emphatically declaring that Jesus is exalted in His authority and power even above all the military forces that exist in the world.

Then, as if this list is not already complete enough, Paul added that Christ is supreme above all "dominions" The word "dominions" is translated from a form of the Greek word *kuriotes*, which means lordships. It could refer to any world system - political, financial, or any system of any type. Thus, Paul was announcing that there is no system anywhere in the world that is more high-ranking than the Lord Jesus Christ!

But then, to make sure that he had included everyone and everything, Paul added, "...And every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Ephesians 1:21). In one sweeping statement, Paul declared that Jesus is Lord overall. He is superior to rulers (*arche*), elected leaders (*exousia*), military powers (*dunamis*), and all worldly systems (*kuriotes*). Jesus Christ is literally Lord over all!

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Paul then victoriously adds in verse 22 that God "hath put all things under his Jesus'] feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church." The word "under" is a translation of the Greek word *bupotasso*, which was a military term meaning to dominate or to subjugate.

It described forcibly subduing a conquered people and putting them in their place. The use of this word in this verse means that Jesus Christ - through His death on the Cross, subsequent resurrection, and ultimate ascension on High — has literally put every foe that has ever existed or ever will exist under His feet.

But wait! There's more we need to understand about Jesus' highly exalted place.

But in Second Thessalonians 4:15, Paul wrote that a moment is coming when Jesus, in all His exalted rule and authority, will move directly down from Heaven - swiftly from His enthroned position — and He will do it with a dominating and subjugating force. With that dominating force, He will release, or resurrect, the dead bodies of the righteous and rapture — "catch away" - the Church.

At that moment, Jesus will end one era and set in motion the powerful process of righting all wrongs and putting things in order on the earth. And in First Thessalonians 4:16, Paul said this event will begin with a shout!

THE LORD WILL DESCEND WITH A THUNDEROUS SHOUT!

In First Thessalonians 4:16, Paul wrote, *"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout..."*

According to this verse, a "shout" will be heard as Christ descends into the lower atmosphere to resurrect the dead bodies of those who died in Christ and rapture the Church, transporting this faithful remnant from the earth into Heaven. The Greek text implies this "shout" will be from Christ Himself.

The Greek word "shout" is translated from a form of the Greek word *keleusma*, which does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament. It is a word that was specifically used to describe an order, a command, or a loud shout that was intended to arouse horses, charioteers, bounds, hunters, rowers, and masters of ships to prepare for action and for war. It means to muster the troops to action. It is an imperative call to action that summons troops to break camp and get ready to move, and this thunderous call beckons other forces to action.

This Greek word translated "shout" portrays a war shout. The fact that Jesus will come with a shout means it will be time for some to break camp and move upward, while others will be moved into combat positions to start battle. Those who break camp and move upward will be the dead in Christ, as well as those who are fully alive and remain at that moment. In John 5:28, we are told that the dead will arise at the voice of Christ — surely this is the shout that Paul was speaking of in his words to the Thessalonians!

For example, we know that at the sound of His shout, Christ will raise up those who died in faith, and He will also "catch away" His saints who are alive and spiritually engaged. And as we will see, soon afterward, there will ensue a time of tribulation on the earth while the Church in Heaven celebrates the Marriage Supper and stands before Christ's Judgment Seat.

But that summons is not the end because still more will transpire after the time of that seven-year tribulation period....

At the time of Christ's return to resurrect the bodies of the righteous dead and to rapture the faithful remnant of the Church, the ultimate Commander-in-Chief will Himself give a "shout" that rouses the dead from their graves and catches away those who are alive and still in faith. And all Heaven's armies and troops will be summoned into combat positions for what is about to unfold. It will be Christ's way of

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rousing those who died in faith and catching them up into the air - and snatching up His faithful ones similarly — for the battle of the ages.

When this event occurs, it will set off what the Bible calls "The Day of the Lord." The Day of the Lord is an expression used throughout Scripture to describe the time frame immediately following the resurrection of the righteous dead and the rapture of the remnant Church. As soon as this event is complete, a day will occur — a seven-year period — in which God will deal with the wicked and pour judgment upon the earth.

THE VOICE OF THE ARCHANGEL

But in First Thessalonians 4:16, Paul went on to say, *"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel..."*

This verse says that in addition to Christ's commanding shout, there will also be heard the voice of the archangel. The word "voice" is from the Greek word *phōnē*, which indeed describes a voice, sound, or noise, but it also means to whirl and depicts the sound of wind, wings, or rushing water. It pictures the sound of a massive multitude or an overwhelming sound. Paul does not tell us if every person on Earth will hear this sound, but God's people and all the hosts of Heaven will hear it. The mighty voice of the archangel will also be a part of the process of rousing all God's troops to full attention and calling them to action!

Paul said this massive voice would come from the "archangel." Although Paul does not say which archangel this is, it is generally believed by scholars to be the archangel Michael, who is referred to in Jude 9, Revelation 12:7, and Daniel 10:13.

Thus, we find that at the time of this event, the voice of a mighty archangel will also be heard and will galvanize Heaven's troops to action; summon the dead bodies of the righteous from their graves; and alert those who are spiritually alive, robust, thriving, vibrant, and vigorous — the remaining remnant of believers who have endured and are still around at the time of this event - that the long-awaited moment has arrived to meet the Lord in the air! This angelic voice will also sound the proclamation that a battle of the ages is about to commence.