

# Caught Up

1 Thessalonians: 4:17-18

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## Why don't we hear more about the rapture in our churches?

- We are living in the age of scoffers (2 Peter 3:3)
- They might have to talk about the Tribulation and that's scary.
- Most Christians are amillennial... the rapture will initiate the Eternal State and that has to be a long way off.
- There is controversy about the timing of the rapture so it is best to avoid it all together.
- Date setters have made the rapture a forbidden topic.
- Apostasy of the church... people just don't dig into the Bible.

## 1 Thessalonians 4:17-18 – (NIV)

<sup>17</sup> After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

<sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.

## v17 – What does it mean that we will be *caught up* to be with the Lord in the air?

The verb translated **caught up** here means to seize, or to carry off by force.

- This passage is the basis for the doctrine of the *rapture*, the catching away of believers to be with Jesus. The word *rapture* is not in the ancient Greek text, but comes from the Latin Vulgate, which translates the phrase **caught up** with *rapturus*, from which we get our English word *rapture*.

In Greek, the phrase **to meet** was used to describe the official welcoming of honored guests.

## How will the rapture be a fantastic supernatural event?

Paul speaks of Christians flying upward, *caught up... in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*. We wouldn't believe this unless the Bible told us it were so, not any more than we would believe that God became a baby, that He did miracles, that He died on a cross, rose from the dead and that He lives in us.

- Paul's language here is straightforward and free from figurative speech so there is no missing his intent.

- The Apostle's declarations here are made in the practical tone of strict matter of fact with literal details... there is no room here for allegory.

## Are there any clues here to the timing of the rapture?

Not in this passage... the timing of this event is a matter of debate among Christians.

- The *pre-tribulation* rapture position believes believers are **caught up** before this final seven-year period.
- The *mid-tribulation* rapture position believes believers are **caught up** in the midst of this final seven-year period.
- The *pre-wrath* rapture position believes believers are **caught up** at some time in the second half of this final seven-year period.
- The *post-tribulation* rapture position believes believers are **caught up** at the end of this final seven-year period.

## How important is the timing of the rapture?

It is a disputable matter (Romans 14)... not something we should break fellowship over.

- It will impact to what extent you prepare for the future... weeks of potential birth pang disruptions or years of Tribulation.
- One's stewardship of what God has blessed us with is subject to our own personal convictions.

## Where else do the Thessalonian epistles indicate that the *pre-tribulation* rapture position is correct?

- 1 Thessalonians 1:10 shows believers waiting for the return of Jesus. The clear implication is that they had hope of His imminent return, not the expectation of an imminent great tribulation.
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 assures us that believers who died would experience the rapture. If Paul believed Christians would go through the Tribulation, the dead in Christ would be *more fortunate* than the living Christians who might have to endure it.
- 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10 comforts Christians enduring hardship, promising them a coming *rest*. But if Paul knew the church was destined to be in the Tribulation, it would have been more appropriate to warn them about the suffering ahead, rather than the promise of a coming *rest*.

There are other indications like the case Andy Woods makes for the *apostasia* of 2 Thessalonians 2:3 being a reference to the rapture of the church as a physical departure from the earth rather than a spiritual falling away from the faith. The context does indicate that it is another term for the rapture of the church...

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 – *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. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition*

While the Bible does say there will be apostasy before Jesus returns (1 Timothy 4:1), it is not necessarily a sign of His soon coming because there have always been times of apostasy during the Church Age.

### **What are the implications of always being with the Lord?**

This is the great reward of heaven — to be with Jesus. Death can't break our unity with Jesus or with other Christians.

- It implies *continuation* because it assumes you are already **with the Lord**.
- It implies *hope for the dying* because in death we shall still be **with the Lord**.
- It implies *future confidence* because after death we are **with the Lord**.
- It implies *advancement* because we will one day **always** be with the Lord.

### **v18 – What should we do with this information about the rapture of the church?**

*Therefore comfort one another:* Paul did not tell them to *take* comfort, but to *give* comfort. In the way God works, we always *receive* comfort as we *give* it.

### **How should the truth of the return of Jesus for His people be a comfort?**

This only makes sense if the catching away of the previous verses actually delivers Christians from an impending danger.

- If the catching away only brings humanity to God for judgment, there is little comfort in these words.

### **Will there be a partial rapture?**

There are some believers who hold that only faithful Christians will be taken in the rapture, with unfaithful Christians left on earth to suffer through the tribulation. The problem is that the Bible does not support this.

- The passages which describe the rapture apply universally to all Christians, mature and immature, faithful and disobedient.
- Verses like Romans 8:1 and 1 Thessalonians 5:9 tell us that God does not pour out His wrath on Christians. There is no biblical evidence for a partial rapture. Every believer will be taken to heaven in the rapture.

### **Doesn't the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13 support the partial rapture idea?**

The five virgins whose lamps did not have any oil are not symbolic of believers being left behind; rather, it is describing unbelievers being left behind.

- The key is verse 12 where Jesus says to those left behind, "Truly I say to you, I do not know you."
- Those whom Jesus knows are believers in Him, whether vigilant or not (all 10 virgins were sleeping).

The essential element in the parable is the oil in the lamps, oil being symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Those who have the Holy Spirit living in their hearts will be taken in the rapture because they are truly Christians.

- Those who profess faith in Christ, but who do not possess His Spirit, will be left behind.

### **What is the concept of a secret rapture?**

Secret rapture is a term frequently used as a pejorative by those who deny the idea that the rapture of the church is separate from the second coming of Christ.

- Those who believe the rapture and the second coming are one and the same event often use the term secret rapture in derision.
- Those who believe this are generally amillennial... denying the millennial reign of Jesus thinking His return immediately ushers in the Eternal State.
- Most are also preterists... thinking all prophecies of the return of Jesus have been fulfilled in history. For example, they interpret Revelation to be allegorical (has some spiritual meaning and not to be taken literally).

### **Will babies and young children be taken in the rapture?**

The Bible does not specifically say what will happen to babies, infants, and children when the rapture occurs. But, given the concept of age of accountability, all children up to that point will be taken.

### **Is the concept of an age of accountability biblical?**

The age of 13 is the most commonly suggested for the age of accountability, based on the Jewish custom that a child becomes an adult at the age of 13. However, the Bible gives no support to the age of 13 being a set age of accountability. The age at which a child can distinguish right from wrong and becomes capable of choosing Christ likely varies from child to child.

The passage cited most often in support of an age of accountability is 2 Samuel 12:21–23. The context is that King David committed adultery with Bathsheba, with a resulting pregnancy. The prophet Nathan was sent by the Lord to inform David that, because of his sin, the Lord would take the child in death. David responded by grieving and praying for the child. But once the child was taken, David’s mourning ended. David’s servants were surprised to hear this. They said to King David, “What is this thing that you have done? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept; but when the child died, you arose and ate food.” David’s response was, “

*While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who knows, the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live.’ But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.”*

David’s words might indicate that infants who die are safe in the Lord. David could have simply been referring to the fact that his child was in the grave, but he seemed to be comforted by the knowledge.

- The peace he felt suggests that he believed he would see his baby son again (in heaven).

### **Was Christ’s death on the cross sufficient for all of mankind?**

1 John 2:2 – Jesus is “*the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*”

This verse is clear that Jesus’ death was sufficient payment for all sins, not only the sins of those who come to Him in faith. The fact that Christ’s death was sufficient for all sin would allow at least the possibility of God’s applying that payment to those who were never capable of believing.

- God’s extending grace to those who cannot believe would seem consistent with His character.

God is loving, holy, merciful, just, and gracious... Whatever God does is always right and good, and He loves children...

Matthew 19:14 – *Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*

### **Did John Darby invent the doctrine of the rapture in the 1830s?**

Many cite Darby as the source for the rapture doctrine claiming it should be dismissed since it is a relatively recent interpretation. Darby certainly did popularize the doctrine of the rapture but this does not mean he came up with it on His own.

- There is overwhelming evidence that Premillennial views of the rapture dominated the first three centuries of the church.

In his book, *Dispensationalism Before Darby*, Dr. William C. Watson wrote:

*The early church fathers overwhelmingly believed in the return of Christ to set up an earthly millennium.*

Author and defender of the faith, Justin Martyr (AD 100-165), affirmed a strong belief in...

*“the premillennial return of Christ and the resurrection of the righteous before the beginning of the thousand-year kingdom.”*

In Jonathan Brentner’s book, *The Triumph of the Redeemed*, he documented Premillennial beliefs in the following key early church theologians:

- Papias (AD 70-163)
- Irenaeus (AD 130-202)
- Tertullian (AD 155-240)
- Lactantius (AD 240-320)

<https://harbingersdaily.com/debunking-popular-lies-about-premillennialism/>

### **Why did it take so long before the doctrine of the rapture became popular again?**

Progressive revelation...

Daniel 12:8-9 – *Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, “My lord, what shall be the end of these things?” And he said, “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.*

Martin Luther restored literal interpretation of the Scriptures in the Protestant Reformation of 1517 but he held on to the allegorical interpretation of end-times studies began with Origen (185-254) and popularized by Augustine (354-430).

- It took some time as more people in the church became biblical literate before they applied the literal hermeneutics of the Reformation to eschatology.

### **What applications come to mind from this passage?**

- The rapture is biblical; all who deny it are biblically illiterate.
- All Christians will be raptured, even those who deny it.
- All children and babies will be raptured regardless of their parents’ being Christians.
- The pre-trib rapture timing view is the most biblical.