

THE THESSALONIAN EPISTLES: DIRECTION FOR THE LAST DAYS

V. Explaining The Rapture Of The Church

(1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

I. Introduction

- A. Paul's epistles to the believers at Thessalonica addressed new converts out of raw paganism who faced persecution and false teaching, a recipe for spiritual defeat if they failed to get adequate spiritual insight.
- B. These needs are like what many believers face in today's world, so we view 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 that explains the rapture of all true believers in Christ, the true Church, for the benefit of new converts:

II. Explaining The Rapture Of The Church, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

- A. New converts to Christ often have questions or concerns about future events, and the new converts at Thessalonica worried that those believers who had died before Christ had returned to set up His Kingdom had perished and would not participate in that Kingdom. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to 1 Thess. 4:13-18)
- B. Paul addressed their concern by explaining the "rapture" of the Church, and we will use this passage along with others to address additional questions and concerns that have risen over the centuries for all believers:
 - 1. The apostle did not want his readers to grieve in anguish over deceased believers like the unsaved do because they have no hope, 1 Thessalonians 4:13. We as humans naturally grieve when loved ones die because we miss them, but that separation is not eternal for believers, what Paul explained in this passage.
 - 2. The "if" in 1 Thessalonians 4:14 KJV introduces a first class conditional statement in the Greek New Testament (*ei* in the protasis [the "if" clause] with the indicative mood of the verb "believe"), so it can be rendered "Since," affirming that we indeed believe that Jesus died and rose again. (U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 710; Dana & Mantey, A Man. Gram. of the Grk. N. T., p. 289) Thus, the reality of Christ's bodily resurrection is the basis for believing in the reality of the bodily resurrection of all who believe in Him!
 - 3. To settle his concerned readers, Paul asserted that we living believers will not "precede" (the KJV uses an old meaning to "prevent" that we now render as "precede," Ibid., Ryrie, ftn. to 1 Thessalonians 4:15) those believers who have died from being resurrected, for the dead in Christ will be raised before we are "raptured," so dead believers will not miss the Kingdom any more than will living believers, 1 Thess. 4:15!
 - 4. The mention of those who "sleep" in Jesus is a euphemism for physical death, not belief in "soul sleep" since deceased believers are fully conscious in the Lord's presence (Psalm 16:11). Thus, 1 Thessalonians 4:14 claims will God bring the souls of these deceased believers with Him from heaven to be raise from death (1 Thessalonians 4:16b). To explain, when a believer in Christ dies, while his body remains behind, his soul is instantly taken to heaven, 2 Corinthians 5:8. Thus, when the "rapture" occurs, God will bring all the souls of deceased Christians beginning at Pentecost in Acts 2 to the "rapture" **back** from heaven with Christ to be bodily raised from the dead in immortal, glorified bodies. (1 Corinthians 15:51-57)
 - 5. Christ Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will be raised first, 1 Thessalonians 4:16. They will ascend into the clouds in the atmosphere where Christ will be waiting for them, 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (implied).
 - 6. Then we believers who are still physically alive at this "rapture" event will have our bodies changed into immortal, glorified ones, and we will be "caught up" (The "caught up" verb in Greek is *rapturo* in Latin from which we get "rapture" in English; Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 704) with them to meet the Lord in the clouds, and from that point on and forever, we in the true Church universal as the "Bride" of Christ will always be with the Lord Jesus Christ, the "Bridegroom," 1 Thessalonians 4:17 with Revelation 19:7.
 - 7. John 14:1-3 adds the truth that the "raptured" Church will then ascend from the clouds in the atmosphere with Jesus Christ up to heaven to the place He has prepared for His "Bride," in His "Father's house." The Church will then be in heaven throughout the Great Tribulation Period that follows, and it will return with Christ at His Second Coming to earth and participate in the Millennial Kingdom, cf. Revelation 19:7-20:6.
 - 8. This "rapture" event all occurs in a split second of time, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52.
 - 9. Consequently, Paul directed that when a believer in our midst physically dies, we are to encourage and comfort one another with these words on the pretribulation "rapture," to set our hearts on the hope of being reunited with beloved deceased believers before the Great Tribulation and the Kingdom! (1 Thess. 4:18)

Lesson: *The pretribulation rapture of the true Church universal is a blessed hope for every believer in Christ.*

Application: *May we live in comfort anticipating the pretribulation rapture of the true Church universal.*