

## THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

### 1 Thessalonians: Discipling Afflicted New Christians

#### Part VI: Encouraging Afflicted New Believers By Teaching The Premillennial, Pretribulational Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

##### I. Introduction

- A. New converts to Christ often need much encouragement because they lack the knowledge of Scripture so necessary to explain and handle the seemingly overwhelming trials they can face, cf. Hebrews 5:11-14.
- B. When the new Thessalonian converts saw some of their number die, they feared these dead would miss Christ's return for living believers, John F. Walvoord, The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation, 1976, p. 95.
- C. Thus, Paul revealed the doctrine of the rapture will occur for living **and deceased** Christians in a way that equips us today to encourage new Christians in teaching the rapture is **premillennial** and **pretribulational**:

##### II. Encouraging Afflicted New Believers By Teaching The Premillennial, Pretribulational Rapture.

- A. To encourage troubled new Thessalonian Christians who feared those of their group who died would miss the blessing of Christ's return, Paul wrote that he did not want them to be ignorant about God's plan for believers who "are asleep," a euphemism for death, Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to 1 Thess. 4:13.
- B. Christians are not to grieve at the death of their own like the pagan world that had no hope beyond death (1 Thess. 4:13b), for since we Christians believe Christ died and rose again (1 Cor. 15:12-19), even so those Christians who "sleep in Jesus," or who physically die in spiritual union with Christ, will God bring with Christ when He returns for living Christians, 1 Thessalonians 4:14. This truth verifies Paul's claim in 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 that a believer's soul goes to be with Christ in heaven the instant he physically dies!
- C. So, Christians who stay alive will not be glorified before dead Christians are glorified, 1 Thess. 4:15 NIV.
- D. Paul then explained the sequence of events of this rapture event, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17:
  1. First, Jesus Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with God's trumpet call, and He will stop and temporarily wait in the clouds of the sky, 1 Thess. 4:16-17.
  2. Then, the souls of deceased Christians who have returned from heaven with Him (1 Thess. 4:14b) will continue on down to the graves of their bodies, and they will be bodily raised from the dead in glorified bodies, and ascend back to the clouds where Christ waits for them, 1 Thess. 4:16-17; 1 Cor. 15:51-53.
  3. Third, we Christians who are alive will be changed and caught up to the Lord, and the whole Church from Pentecost to the rapture will then forever be united with each other and with Christ, 1 Thess. 4:17.
  4. This entire "rapture" event will occur in a split-second of time according to 1 Corinthians 15:52a!
- E. Paul wrote that news of this event should be used by his readers to comfort one another, especially in light of the death of believers in their local Thessalonian church, 1 Thessalonians 4:18 with 4:13!
- F. Of value to us, these points on the rapture teach the Premillennial, Pretribulation Rapture view as follows:
  1. First, since Christ does not return to earth in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, but awaits glorified Christians in the clouds of the air, 1 Thess. 4:17, the rapture must **not** occur at the **end** of the Great Tribulation when Christ's feet touch the **earth** to reign (Zech. 14:1-4; Acts 1:9-12), but **sometime BEFORE** that time!
  2. Second, since Paul encouraged new Christians to comfort each other at the death of fellow believers with his words on the rapture (1 Thess. 4:13, 18), he could **not** have meant the rapture would come **in** the **Tribulation Period** when the antichrist will be brutally slaying believers! Otherwise, Paul's readers should have been glad that the deceased would avoid such a time, not needing comfort regarding them, but then also dread their own future without being comforted by Paul's word! (Ibid., Walvoord, p. 104)
  3. Thus, Paul's 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 teaching upholds the **Premillennial, Pretribulational Rapture view**: Christ will take the Church out of the world **before** the Tribulation Period **begins**, taking the Church to heaven with Him until the terrible Tribulation ends. Then, Christ with His glorified Church will return to the earth to rule in His thousand year Messianic Kingdom! (Jude 14-15; Rev. 19:7-20:6)

***Lesson:*** Paul settled the fears of new converts concerned that dead Christians would miss the rapture by explaining the rapture would occur for dead and living Christians. In so doing, he revealed the rapture would be Premillennial and Pretribulational, an encouraging truth for new converts in our errant day.

***Application:*** (1) May we edify each other in proclaiming the Premillennial, Pretribulational Rapture of the Church! (2) When Christians die, may we comfort one another with 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.