

“Ignorance is NOT Bliss” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

Early Edition was a popular television program in the 1990s that featured a young man who received the next day’s newspaper a day ahead of time. Because he always knew the future, this man’s task in each episode was to save people from a tragedy or problem he had read about in tomorrow’s paper. So if he knew a building was going to burn, he tried to keep people from entering it. Or if someone was going to be hurt by an act of violence or an accident he tried to prevent the encounter from taking place.¹

If you own a Bible, you have an “early edition” of future events. By reading God’s prophetic Word, you can know God’s plan for all eternity. Perhaps you’re thinking, “I’m not interested in prophecy and all that end times gobbledygook.”² To which I would reply, “Do you long to have hope?” By hope I mean absolute confidence and peace in your present and future circumstances. Hope is one of the great characteristics of Christian reality. At the start of the letter (1:3), Paul tells us that hope produces perseverance. If there is no hope in the church, there will be no perseverance, and no perseverance will mean the demise of local churches.³ Fortunately, there is good news: *God provides hope in a hopeless world*. In 1 Thess 4:13-18, Paul shares two convictions that we can count on.

1. Hope in your resurrection (4:13-16). In this first section, Paul promises us that if we have placed our faith in Christ, we will one day be resurrected. In 4:13 Paul reveals a problem: **“But we do not want you to be uninformed,⁴ brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.”** The word “but” introduces a new subject but also connects to the previous paragraph. The restlessness of disorderly believers (4:11-12) was, in part, caused by an incomplete understanding of the resurrection of the body.⁵ The Thessalonians rightly understood that Christ was going to return; however, they had not considered the possibility that some of their loved ones and friends would die before it occurred.⁶ They, therefore, plunged into deep grief. Doubts filled their minds as to the status of these prematurely deceased believers. All sorts of questions were going through their minds: “What will happen to our loved ones who die before Christ returns? Will they miss out on the resurrection? What about those of us who are alive when Christ returns? Will we receive our resurrection bodies then or later?”

In light of these questions, Paul educates these believers about the status of their brothers and sisters who have passed away. In 4:13, he states the purpose of this entire passage with the phrase “so that⁷ you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.” Is Paul being cruel and heartless here? No! It is not wrong to grieve over the death of a loved one. Jesus Himself grieved over the death of Lazarus (John 11:35) and He knew full well He was going to bring him back to life. Paul merely says that when death comes we should not grieve hopelessly but mourn with hope. Our attitude toward death is a distinguishing feature that witnesses to the reality of the gospel. This is yet another example of leading a “quiet life” (cf. 4:11).⁸

One day when I was ten years old, I walked into my parents’ bedroom, pushed open the pocket door to the bathroom, and saw my mom sobbing with unspeakable grief. She told me that her dad had died without believing in Christ. The horror of that moment marked my young life. I will go to my own grave with this memory. It devastated me! Now fast forward with me 23 years to a hospital room in San Jose, CA where my mom watched her mother pass away. While my mom cried, this time there was also hope and gratitude in her tears. You see, my mom had the privilege of leading my grandma to faith in Christ when she was 62 years old. In these two deaths, I saw in stark contrast the difference between the way the world grieves and the way followers of Jesus grieve. As far as my family knows, my grandpa is in hell because he rejected Christ. On the other hand, I am confident that my grandma is at home in heaven and will come back with Jesus someday. For you see, when believers die it is not “goodbye,” but only “good night.” We will see them again when Jesus returns. *God provides hope in a hopeless world*.

Now I recognize that you may not want to think about death today. One of the things that Christians and non-Christians have in common is that we don't like to think about death. 52% of unchurched adults say they never wonder if they will go to heaven after they die.⁹ Death is usually the last thing we want to talk about; it makes us squirm and feel uncomfortable. And yet, life being what it is, we cannot walk away from it.¹⁰ Where is your hope found? If it's not found in Jesus Christ, you are without hope. You may have happiness, but you do not have hope. There is no hope apart from Christ. If you put your hope in your church, you will be disappointed. If you put your hope in your friends and family, they will fail you. If you place your hope in your job or your money, you will be disillusioned. Only Christ offers permanent, eternal hope. Today, at this very moment, will you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin? Will you stop trying to be "good enough" to please God? Instead, will you trust in the only One who can meet God's expectations? The Lord Jesus Christ offers you eternal life as a free gift if you will simply ask Him for it. *God provides hope in a hopeless world.*

In 4:14, Paul gives his first reason why we can have hope. He writes, **"For if [since] we believe that Jesus died and rose again,¹¹ even so God¹² will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus."** The inevitable result of believing that Jesus died and rose is the hope that He will return. In other words, the return of Christ is as certain as His death and resurrection.¹³ Our hope for the future is grounded in the certainty of the past.¹⁴ This verse is also clear that those who have "fallen asleep in Jesus" will return with Him.¹⁵ The term "asleep" is a euphemism for death (4:13, 14, and 15).¹⁶ The Bible never uses the term "asleep" or "sleep" when referring to unbelievers—only the passing of believers. "Sleep" explains what happens to a Christian's body at death, NOT his spirit or soul. The Bible never teaches that a Christian's soul goes to sleep upon death. Soul-sleep is a false doctrine that is taught by Jehovah Witnesses or Seventh-day Adventists. The soul of the dead is unconscious in reference to this world¹⁷ but wide awake and fully conscious of the world to come.¹⁸ Stephen's spirit went to be with the Lord, but his body fell asleep (Acts 7:60). After death, the thief on the cross was with Jesus in Paradise (Luke 23:43). When a believer dies, his or her spirit goes immediately into the presence of Christ. Paul wrote in 2 Cor 5:8 that "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." The moment a Christian dies, that person's spirit leaves the body and is immediately with the Lord. The body, not the soul, sleeps in death. This is why the New Testament writers use the term "sleep" or "asleep" for believers. If you are a Christian, you will not taste death for even a nanosecond. Before the doctor has a chance to pronounce you dead, you will be in the Lord's presence. *God provides hope in a hopeless world.*

In 4:15-16, Paul shares the second reason why we can have hope. In 4:15 he writes, **"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 not¹⁹ precede those who have fallen asleep."** Most likely this "word of the Lord"²⁰ was given in one of Christ's appearances to Paul (cf. Acts 18:9-10).²¹ Paul states that those believers who make up the church of Jesus Christ will rise together when Jesus returns. Those who are asleep will meet up with their spirits, while those who are alive will rise and be given a new glorified body. The bottom line is this: We all are simultaneously given new bodies. I like to think of it like this: Those who are asleep in Jesus have caught an earlier train to their final destination of glory. Today we are standing on the station platform, and who knows, we may be on the next one!²²

Paul explains himself further in 4:16 where he discloses the details of Christ's return: **"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."** The return of Jesus will occur with three sounds: Christ's shout, the archangel's voice, and the trumpet of God. The word "shout" is a military expression and it indicates a command or an order that is given.²³ It is as if the troops are standing at ease and the command issued is, "Come to attention!" This voice will wake the dead.²⁴ We don't know the specific content of the command; however, in biblical times whenever the king was coming to a village, the town crier ran ahead and shouted, "The king is coming! The king is coming!" In the same way, the King of Kings will make His entrance known to the entire world.²⁵

The second sound is the archangel's voice. Daniel 10:13 implies several archangels, but the Bible only mentions one, Michael (Jude 9). Michael is most likely the leader of the holy angels. Since he and the other angels have been commissioned to protect God's people (Dan 12:1; Heb 1:14), it may be that he is present to protect God's people from Satan and his forces as they pass through his domain.²⁶

The final sound is the trumpet of God. The archangel and trumpet of God are united by the conjunction "and" so that the archangel is represented as sounding God's trumpet.²⁷ Since the days when Israel was camped down at Mount Sinai, trumpets were used to call God's people together for assembly (Num 10:2). This trumpet blast summons the church to gather in heaven (cf. 1 Cor 15:52).

There are two different views regarding these sounds: One is that these sounds are only heard by believers; another view suggests that these sounds are heard by everyone. I prefer the latter view because I think this makes it more difficult for Oprah and others to explain away the rapture. Seriously, these three descriptions sound rather public, don't they? It is likely that unbelievers will be aware that something unique, supernatural, and amazing is taking place; however, they will not understand its meaning and significance.²⁸

Paul is clear that dead believers will rise before living believers (cf. 1 Cor 15:52). Yet, not just any person will rise from the dead but only those who are "in Christ." The Bible never claims that Old Testament saints are "in Christ." The "dead in Christ" refers only to those believers who have died since the ascension of Christ. Paul is addressing Christians who have died in the church age.²⁹ He was comforting those Thessalonians who had lost loved ones by saying, "Death is not as final as it seems. Your loved ones have not missed out on the coming of the Lord. In fact, they will be the first ones to receive their brand-new bodies."³⁰ This answers the Thessalonians' concerns. No one who has placed his or her faith in Jesus Christ will in any way miss out on His return. *God provides hope in a hopeless world.*

[Why should you hope in your resurrection? Why should you have confidence that God will raise your loved ones who have believed in Christ? God's Word authoritatively says so!]

2. Hope in your reunion (4:17-18). In this second section, Paul says we can be certain that Christ will come for us and we will be reunited with Him and our fellow believers. In 4:17 he writes, "**Then we³¹ 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.**" This verse teaches there is a Christian generation that will not experience death. Like Enoch and Elijah in the Old Testament,³² some believers will bypass death and be taken directly to heaven. The phrase "caught up" comes from the Greek verb *harpazo*, which means "to grab or seize suddenly."³³ This word is used of Paul being taken into heaven (2 Cor 12:2, 4). It is also used of Phillip being snatched after baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:39). This word is also where we get the term "rapture." When the New Testament was translated into Latin (i.e., the Vulgate), the scholars rendered *harpazo* as the Latin verb *rapturo*. It is just a short step then from the noun form *raptura* to the English word "rapture."³⁴

Paul writes that we will be raptured or "caught up" with the Lord and His people in the clouds.³⁵ When you look up into the sky and see the clouds, what do you think of? If you're like me, you instantaneously think of the fact that Jesus could crack the sky and return at any moment. Last night, I was sitting on my porch swing with my nine-year-old son, Justin. We were going through a discipleship workbook. He was reading aloud and I was gazing at the clouds above and I couldn't shake the thought that Jesus could return at that very moment. Whenever we look up into the sky and see clouds, we should be reminded of the reality of Christ's return. Interestingly, "clouds" are often used figuratively in the Bible to refer to the presence and glory of God.³⁶ It is best in this passage to understand the clouds as referring to the visible presence and glory of the Lord.³⁷ Thus, at the rapture, it is the glorious Lord Jesus who appears and brings the saints³⁸ into the presence of His glory.³⁹ *God provides hope in a hopeless world.*

How will the rapture happen? 1 Cor 15:52 teaches that the rapture will take place “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” The Greek word for moment is the word from which we get the English word “atom.” For years, the atom was thought to be the smallest, most irreducible part of matter. They’ve now split the atom, but the point is still made that the time it will take for Christ to rapture His church is infinitesimally small. The twinkling of an eye is the time it takes for your eye to catch light, which is a lot faster than a blink. We will be changed and given our new bodies instantly.⁴⁰ Stop for just a moment and blink your eyelid. The return of Christ will be quicker than that! One moment you’re baking cookies, the next moment you’re flying like Superman. One second you’re eating pizza, the next you’re in the air. One minute you’re in the shower, the next you’re being blown dry at 30,000 feet. Just like that. We will be here one moment and gone the next. Paul then says we shall be with the Lord forever...and ever...and ever. *God provides hope in a hopeless world.*

As I have implied, this passage suggests that Paul believes Christ could return at any moment.⁴¹ In other words, there are no other signs that need to be fulfilled before Christ returns. This view is often called the pre-tribulation rapture (i.e., before the tribulation). In brief summary, the pre-tribulation position believes that Jesus Christ could rapture His church into heaven at any time. Immediately following this event, the judgment seat of Christ will take place.⁴² While this is going on in heaven, the tribulation will begin on earth. This will last for a period of seven years. At the conclusion of the seven years, Christ will return in power and glory and set up His kingdom in Jerusalem for a thousand years (i.e., the millennium). During this time He will fulfill the Old Testament promises He made to Israel. Once this is complete, the eternal state will be ushered in. This view is certainly not held by all Christians,⁴³ yet at this time in my study, I believe this view is the best position. Although there are problems with the pre-trib position and every other position, I believe the pre-trib position has the least amount of problems. Practically speaking, the pre-trib position allows me to expect Jesus Christ to return at any moment. This motivates me to be holy because I never know when my Master will return. However, I am also humble enough to recognize that I could easily be wrong in my interpretation of Scripture. Every year, I teach eschatology to college students at Ecola Bible School. The longer I teach this subject, the more I realize how little I know. The danger with the end times is many people know just enough to be dangerous. Thus, we must all be careful not to become proud and divisive in our understanding of the end times. We must hold our eschatological views loosely. As Yogi Berra once said, “Predictions are tricky—especially when they involve the future.”⁴⁴ Even though I am pre-trib, I am preparing to endure tribulation. You could say that this is playing the end against the middle, but I see it as the wisest way to live the Christian life. Expect Jesus Christ to return at any moment, but be prepared to suffer greatly before He comes.

Verse 18 is the main point of this passage. Paul concludes this passage with this command: “**Therefore comfort one another with these words.**”⁴⁵ Notice what Paul doesn’t say: He doesn’t say, “Therefore, make charts based on these words,” or “Write theology books based on these words.” He doesn’t say, “Set dates, sell your possessions, run to the hills, and form a Christian militia.” Nor does he suggest that we should go our merry way without paying any further regard to these future events.⁴⁶ Rather, Paul commands us to “comfort one another.” Most English versions prefer the translation “encourage” (NET, ESV, HSB, NIV) over “comfort” (NASB, NKJV). I opt for this rendering as well. “Comfort” is an aspect of the overarching word “encourage.”⁴⁷ We are to encourage one another with the reality of our future resurrection and reunion.

Last night, my children did an outstanding job cleaning up after dinner. When they finished, I encouraged them. Instantaneously, I was reminded of a chant I have taught my children, “Encourage one another... encourage one another... encourage one another.” I told them that I am going to use this chant in my sermon tomorrow. My oldest child, Joshua, said, “Dad, you’ve already used that one or two times.” I said, “That’s the point, Joshua. I have to continually remind our church to encourage one another.” So will you heed the words that I continually repeat to my children? Repeat after me: “Encourage one another... encourage one another... encourage one another.” This is a biblical command from the Lord Himself!

So how can we encourage one another today?

- **Encourage believers in the face of death.** When you interact with believers who are fearful of death, reassure them that the moment their heart stops beating they will be in the presence of Jesus. In the midst of sin, suffering and grief, encourage one another. Don't give pat theological answers. Feel the other person's pain. Wrestle with their questions and doubt. But in the end, encourage them with the return of Christ.
- **Encourage biblical stewardship.** When a fellow believer makes sacrifices for the kingdom, seek to affirm this brother or sister. Let this person know how much you respect his or her decisions. Affirm their sacrificial use of time, talents, and treasure. When a believer gives of his or her finances, encourage that person that they are laying up treasure in heaven (Matt 6:19-21). If a believer prioritizes serving in the local church, remind that person that their labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor 15:58).
- **Encourage reaching out to the lost.** If time is short and hell is hot, we have a responsibility to share Jesus Christ with those who need Him. When you see or hear about a brother or sister sharing Christ, build up that believer. Remind that person that there are only two things that are eternal: God's Word and people's souls. Let them know that they may be used by God to bring an eternal soul to glory.
- **Encourage worship.** Many Christians assume that a lifestyle of worship is only for those who are the sensitive, sappy types. Yet, the truth is believers will be worshipping Christ for all eternity. Therefore, it is wise for us to start practicing now. Those that worship God NOW will be more at home in eternity. And those who worship God now will find that all of these other activities naturally take care of themselves.

The return of Jesus Christ is sure, it's wonderful, and it could happen anytime. It's like a telephone answering machine that tells you, "I'm not home now, but when I return I will call you." If the person we have called is reliable, we can expect a return call even though we don't know whether it will be five minutes or five hours before it comes.⁴⁸ Jesus is coming back! It could happen at any moment. Whatever you are going through right now, as painful as it may be, it is only temporary. In a very short while, you and I will be resurrected and reunited with Christ and our loved ones. In the midst of battles with sin, suffering, and Satan, *God provides hope in a hopeless world*. May we hope in this promise because it is our only hope.

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Scripture References

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
1 Corinthians 15:47-58
2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10
Philippians 3:20-21
John 5:24-29; 11:21-27
John 14:1-3
1 John 2:28-3:3

Study Questions

1. What was the general attitude about death in my family growing up? Who was the first person I was close to who died? How did this person's death affect me? What else has shaped my view of death and dying? How have I responded when I have lost a non-Christian loved one in death? What was the difference when losing a Christian loved one?
2. The Bible teaches that the moment a believer dies he or she goes immediately and directly into the presence of Christ. Read 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 and Philippians 1:21-23. How does this comfort my fears and uncertainties? Paul anchors the Christian's hope in the death and resurrection of Jesus. According to 1 Corinthians 15:14-19, what are some of the consequences if Jesus did not truly rise from the dead?
3. Could Jesus return today? Why or why not? How is this reality affecting my life today? What one area of my life do I need to relinquish control of? Who will I share this with? Is there a relationship I need to make right before Christ's return? What will I do today to make contact with is individual?
4. Is there someone in my life who is currently going through grief? How can I offer comfort to this person? What, if anything, should I say? What can I do to show the love of Christ? Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. Who has recently comforted or encouraged me with God's truth? Did I express my gratitude to this brother or sister? Read Hebrews 10:23-25.
5. Do I have a balanced understanding of the end times? Am I prone to dogmatism, pessimism, escapism, or sensationalism? If so, how can I return to a biblical balance? Are my views based upon Scripture, the opinions of others, experience, or personal preference? How can I ensure that I do my best to seek the Scriptures when deriving my theological convictions on the end times?

Notes

¹ Tony Evans, *The Best is Yet to Come* (Chicago: Moody, 2000), 15.

² It is worth noting that for every prophecy on the first coming of Christ when He was born as a babe in Bethlehem, there are eight prophecies on the second coming of Christ. This truth is central to the Word of God. Statisticians tell us there are 1,845 OT references to Christ's return. A total of 17 books out of a possible 39 give it prominence. When we move across to the NT, the figures are no less impressive. Of the 260 chapters in the NT, there is a minimum of 318 references to Christ's return. That comes out to about one verse for every 30 verses in the whole NT. Sam Gordon, *Hope and Glory*. Truth for Today (Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2005), 152-53.

³ David Jackman, *The Authentic Church* (Great Britain: Christian Focus 1998), 117.

⁴ This is a common phrase in Paul's writings (Rom 1:13; 11:25; 1 Cor 10:1; 12:1; 2 Cor 1:8).

⁵ See also 1 Cor 15:20-58.

⁶ Since Paul was only able to spend a short time in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9), these new believers had many questions.

⁷ Gk. *hina*, a conjunction introducing the purpose, aim, or goal.

⁸ G.K. Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 130.

⁹ Church Leaders Intelligence Report 08/06/08.

¹⁰ Gordon, *Hope and Glory*, 156.

¹¹ The death and resurrection of Jesus is the irreducible minimum of the gospel. A person cannot become a Christian without believing these two great truths (see Acts 2:23-24; 3:14-15; 5:30; Rom 4:25; 8:34; 14:9; 2 Cor 5:14-15; and Rev 1:8).

¹² Keathley III notes, "God is emphatic in the Greek text and lays stress on the idea that this is nothing less than the miraculous work of God through the Son of God Himself." Hampton Keathley III, "The Comfort of His Coming" (1 Thess 4:13-18): *An Exegetical and Devotional Commentary on First Thessalonians* (www.bible.org).

¹³ This phrase is a first-class conditional sentence in Greek in which, assuming for the sake of argument the reality of the first clause, the truth of the second clause necessarily follows. Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 135.

¹⁴ Jackman, *The Authentic Church*, 119.

¹⁵ Paul has just said that dead believers are asleep. If they were simply buried in the ground awaiting the resurrection, how could Christ bring them back from heaven with Him when He returns? You can't come back with someone unless you're already with him. But Paul clearly said that sleeping things will come back with Jesus when He returns.

¹⁶ Surprisingly, the word *koimao* ("sleep") is only used by Paul elsewhere in 1 Corinthians (7:39; 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51). "Cemetery" (*koimeterion*) comes from *koimao* and means "a place of sleep."

¹⁷ See Job 7:9-10; Eccl 9:5-6; Isa 63:16.

¹⁸ See Luke 16:19-31; 2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:21-23; Rev 7:15-17.

¹⁹ Note the emphatic use of the strong Greek double negative *ou me* ("never—no never").

²⁰ The "word of the Lord" is a technical expression in OT literature, often referring to a divine prophetic utterance (e.g., Gen 15:1; Isa 1:10; Jonah 1:1). In the NT it occurs 15 times: 3 times as *rhema tou kuriou*; Luke 22:61; Acts 11:16; 1 Pet 1:25 and 12 times as *logos tou kuriou*; here and in Acts 8:25; 13:44, 48, 49; 15:35, 36; 16:32; 19:10, 20; 1 Thess 1:8; 2 Thess 3:1. As in the OT, this phrase focuses on the prophetic nature and divine origin of what has been said. See NET Study notes.

²¹ Richard Mayhue, *First and Second Thessalonians*. Focus on the Bible (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1999), 121. Stott argues, "But whenever Paul uses this phrase 'the Lord's own word' elsewhere in his other writings it refers to something Jesus himself taught." John R.W. Stott, *The Gospel and the End of Time: The Message of 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 99. Consequently, post-tribulationists like Beale argue that Paul has in mind Matt 24:30-49. Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 136-137.

²² Gordon, *Hope and Glory*, 163

²³ Gordon, *Hope and Glory*, 163.

²⁴ The word *keleusma* ("shout") is only used here in the NT. See only LXX use in Prov 30:27.

²⁵ Two other times in the NT the Lord Jesus raised people with a shout (John 11:43; 19:30; cf. Matt 27:50).

²⁶ Perhaps the shout will be similar to Rev 4:1 or John 5:28-29.

²⁷ Satan is referred to as the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph 2:2), and God's people will be passing through these dangerous regions.

²⁷ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of I and II Thessalonians*. Reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1955), 116.

²⁸ Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 160. Thomas exclaims, “The King is coming unexpectedly, personally, suddenly, visibly, audibly, and spectacularly.” Robert L. Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” In *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelin and J.D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 122.

²⁹ Dan 12:1-2 predicts the resurrection of the righteous dead of OT times as well as the righteous martyrs of the Tribulation at the second coming of Christ (Rev 20:4-6). Believers of the church age will already have been changed and raised at the Rapture. The unsaved dead are left in their graves. They will be raised at the Great White Throne judgment 1000 years later, see Rev. 20:5).

³⁰ Robert Jeffress, *As Time Runs Out* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 58.

³¹ The fact that Paul used the pronoun “we” in 4:15 and 17 suggests that he expected to be alive when the Lord returned.

³² See Gen 5:21-24 and 2 Kgs 2:9-11.

³³ BDAG s.v. *harpazo* 2b “to grab or seize suddenly so as to remove or gain control, *snatch/take away*” (Matt 11:12; Acts 8:39; 2 Cor 12: 2, 4; 1 Thess 4:17; Rev 12:5).

³⁴ While the word “rapture” does not occur in our English translations of the Bible, the sense of the word is surely there. The word “Trinity” does not appear in the Bible either, yet no informed Christian denies its truth.

³⁵ This is one of the primary differences between the rapture and the Second Coming. At the rapture, Christ never sets foot on the earth; at the second coming, “His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east” (Zech 14:4).

³⁶ E.g., Exod 14:19-24; 16:10; 19:9, 16; 20:21; 40:34-38).

³⁷ F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. Word Biblical Commentary series (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 102.

³⁸ In Rev 19:8, when the church returns with Jesus to earth, she has already been clothed in fine linen, a picture of her rewards for good works. Thus, in this context the church is going to heaven to appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

³⁹ Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 162.

⁴⁰ Evans, *The Best is Yet to Come*, 136-37.

⁴¹ Theologians call this the doctrine of the imminent return of Christ. “Imminent” means that it can happen at any moment. As Christians, we do not look for signs, nor must any special events transpire before the Lord can return.

⁴² See Rom 14:10-12; 1 Cor 3:9-15; and 2 Cor 5:10.

⁴³ The various rapture views are laid out in the chart below.

1	The Pretribulation Rapture	The rapture will occur before the tribulation period begins.
2	The Partial Rapture	Faithful Christians will be raptured while those who are unfaithful will be left to go through the purging of the tribulation.
3	The Midtribulation Rapture	The rapture will occur at the midpoint of the tribulation.
4	The Prewrath Rapture	The rapture will occur five-and-a-half years through the tribulation, when the wrath of God begins to be poured out on the earth at the seventh seal.
5	The Posttribulation Rapture	The rapture will occur at the end of the tribulation right before Christ’s second coming.

⁴⁴ Larry Dixon, *Doctalk: A Fairly Serious Survey of All That Theological Stuff* (Ross-shire, England: Christian Focus, 2002), 341.

⁴⁵ Thomas observes, “They would be comforted by: (1) the fact of these events; (2) their certainty; (3) their order, with the dead being resurrected for; (4) the expectation of reunion; (5) the irreversibility of these event; and (6) the eternal prospect of these events.” Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” 124.

⁴⁶ God didn’t reveal these things to satisfy our curiosity to solve puzzles, but to help us follow Jesus confidently. The important thing is that we should be ready when Jesus comes.

⁴⁷ For all of Paul’s uses of *parakaleo* in 1 Thess see 2:12; 3:2, 7; 4:1, 10, 18; 5:11, 14; cf. 2 Thess 2:17 and 3:12.

⁴⁸ Tony Evans, *Who is This King of Glory?* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 116.