

08-15-10

Series: The Resurrections

The Resurrections (18)

What Happens to Christians Who Die?

([1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#))

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[Matthew 28:1-10](#)

(Continuation from 08-08-10)

The Doctrine of the Resurrections

([1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#))

The Thessalonians' *ignorance about the Rapture* caused them to grieve. It was to give them hope and to comfort them that Paul discussed that momentous event, giving a fourfold description of it: 1) its pillars, 2) participants, 3) plan, and 4) profit.

So far we have looked at: 1) The Pillars of the Rapture: 1. The Death of Christ, 2. The Resurrection of Christ, and 3. The Revelation of Christ. Now let us look at the revelation of Christ.

3. The Revelation of Christ

[1 Thessalonians 4:15a \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁵ **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 not precede those who have fallen asleep.**

Paul's teaching on the **Rapture** was not his own speculation but direct revelation from God. The phrase **this we say to you by the word of the Lord** has the authoritative tone of an inspired writer revealing what God has disclosed to him.

[1 Thessalonians 4:15a \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁵ **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 not precede those who have fallen asleep.**

Some argue that "**the word of the Lord**" was something Jesus said while He was here on earth. But there are no close parallels to the present passage in any of the Gospels. Nor is there any specific teaching in the Gospels to which Paul could be alluding.

[1 Thessalonians 4:16 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁶ **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.**

Although the Lord talked in the Gospels about a trumpet and the gathering of the elect, the differences between those passages and the present one outweigh the similarities, as *Robert L. Thomas* notes:

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“Similarities between this passage in [1 Thessalonians](#) and the gospel accounts include a trumpet ([Matthew 24:31](#)), a resurrection ([John 11:25-26](#)), and a gathering of the elect ([Matthew 24:31](#))...”

[1 Thessalonians 4:16 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁶ 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.

[Matthew 24:31 \(NASB\)](#)

³¹ And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

[John 11:25-26 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,

²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Yet *dissimilarities* between it and the canonical sayings of Christ far outweigh the resemblances...

Some of the differences between [Matthew 24:30-31](#) and [1 Thessalonians 4:15-17](#) are as follows:

[Matthew 24:30-31 \(NASB\)](#)

³⁰ "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.

³¹ "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

[1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁵ 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 not precede those who have fallen asleep.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ Then we 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.

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- (1) In **Matthew** the Son of Man is coming on the clouds,... in **1 Thessalonians** ascending believers are in them.
 - (2) In the former the angels gather, in the latter the Son does so personally.
 - (3) In the former nothing is said about resurrection, while in the latter this is the main theme.
 - (4) **Matthew** records nothing about the order of ascent, which is the principal lesson in **Thessalonians**.
- ("**1, 2 Thessalonians**," in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 11 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979], 276-77)

Nor is it likely that Paul is referring to a saying of Jesus not recorded in the Gospels (cf. **Acts 20:35**); he does not state or imply that he is directly quoting Christ's words.

Acts 20:35 (NASB)

³⁵ "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Further, in **1 Corinthians 15:51** Paul referred to the **Rapture as a mystery**; that is, a truth formerly hidden but now revealed.

1 Corinthians 15:51 (NASB)

⁵¹ Behold, **I tell you a mystery**; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed,

That indicates that Jesus did not disclose the details of the **Rapture** during His earthly ministry.

(He referred to the **Rapture** in **John 14:1-3** in a general, nonspecific sense.)

John 14:1-3 (NASB)

¹ "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.

² "In **My Father's house** are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.

³ "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that **where I am**, *there* you may be also.

Paul's teaching on the Rapture was new revelation, possibly given by God through a prophet (such as **Agabus**; **Acts 21:10-11**) but more likely directly to Paul himself.

Acts 21:10-11 (NASB)

¹⁰ As we were staying there for some days, **a prophet named Agabus** came down from Judea.

¹¹ And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "**This is what the Holy Spirit says**: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"