

**The 7-Fold Excellencies of the Mystery:
“The Catching Up (or Rapture) - The Mystery Resurrection/Translation”**

Review:

We have been greatly blessed by our heavenly Father through the revelation given by our apostle, the apostle of the Gentiles, Paul. A major focus of that revelation concerns the Rapture or Catching Up into heaven of the Church which is His Body. This is the FIFTH EXCELLENCY OF THE MYSTERY REVELATION GIVEN BY PAUL FOR THE CHURCH WHICH is HIS BODY. We will look today at the culmination of this teaching as found in 1 Cor. 15, the greatest teaching found in the Bible on the subject of the resurrection of the body, but also, as we shall see, on the Rapture of the Body of Christ.

As we began our study of Paul’s revelation of the mystery as it relates to the Catching Up (or, Rapture) of the Church which is his Body, we first looked at 1 Thess. 4. There we saw that false teachers had corrupted Paul’s teaching to the Thessalonians regarding the Rapture.

It seems that they had contradicted Paul’s by teaching that the members of the Body of Christ who had died would not be included in the Rapture at all but would have to wait until the second coming for their resurrection. Or, perhaps they were teaching that the Rapture teaching of Paul should not be taken literally and that it had already occurred with the implication that the believers were already in the Tribulation Period. We cannot be sure what they were teaching. But Paul’s teaching here demands that we take his revelation literally as we shall see, I trust.

Then, in our next fellowship, we continued to dwell in 1 Thess. , now in chapter 5. There we found details regarding the dispensational context of this Upward Calling or Rapture. We saw how the Prophecy regarding the Tribulation period and the promises given to the remnant of Israel for that time were so different from what Paul had already taught these believers.

And last time we were privileged to dwell in Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 2, continuing the dispensational perspective and showing how understanding God’s plan for the Church depends on Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth.

The Thessalonian believers were well schooled in the prophetic scriptures that

reveal in great detail that Satan will in the Tribulation period work out much lawlessness, to the degree that he will unveil the central figures of the Great Tribulation, the Beast and the False Prophet, both of which are energized by the Dragon or Satan or the Devil. These all exhibit lawlessness in all of its dimensions. But in this chapter in 2 Thess, Paul reveals something new, something never revealed before, what he calls the sacred secret concerning the working of Satan as the counterfeit Christ or antichrist TODAY. He reveals there something critically important to understand regarding “The Man of Lawlessness”, and his working today in the Dispensation of the Grace of God. This he calls a mystery because it was previously not revealed and could not have been.

Paul introduces this truth for the Body of Christ with these words:

2 Thess. 2:1-2

1 Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and [by] our gathering together unto him,

2 That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

- **So, the Rapture, the next event on the historical horizon for the saints of this grace dispensation, is used here in these two verses as the foundation of the exhortation to the saints in Thessalonica.**
- **It is “his coming” and “our gathering together unto him” that are the basis of Paul’s correction here to what the false teachers had been teaching these believers.**

Then, we last time looked carefully at the verses following since these make so crystal clear the teaching here and convey so well the power of this exhortation in the first two verses.

By way of review, I will make only a few comments now on several of these verses:

Verse 3 of 2 Thess. 2:

3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for [that day shall not come], except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

- **So “The Day of Christ” cannot begin until the “[the] falling away” occurs first. We dwelt here for some time in our last fellowship, considering what this “falling away” here in verse 3 is about?**
- **Considering the context here, it does not make any sense for this to be a doctrinal apostasy as so many have been taught down through the ages, since looking for this or expecting this could in no way be a comfort to the Thessalonians as is Paul’s intention as expressed in verse 2.**
- **The word (“apostasia”) literally means: a “standing apart” or “departure”. Is this not in fact the Rapture of the Body, the Catching Up into heaven’s glory? I believe that is exactly what that the apostle is writing about here.**

Verse 7:

7 For the mystery of iniquity [lawlessness] doth already work: only he who now letteth [will let], until he be taken out of the way.

- **Now, having revealed the time sequence of the Rapture with the Tribulation Period following as verse 3 clearly states, Paul now finishes his great revelation here by revealing another dimension to the “Mystery Revelation”.**
- **This sacred secret in verse 7 is that in this current dispensation of grace there will be a working of Satan using signs, wonders and miracles somewhat like those of the Tribulation Period but in a limited form and in some ways very different from what will occur then according to Prophecy. At that future time Satan will use these Messianic signs to confirm himself as the Christ (but he will be really, the anti- or substitute Christ).**
- **So the teaching here is that the details prophesied for the Great Tribulation are clearly revealed in the scriptures and since they are in no way what is happening today, we have no reason to believe false teachers who say we are already in the Tribulation, and in some non-literal way, we have “missed” the “resurrection”, namely, the Rapture itself.**

The apostle continues with the contrasting details regarding the Great Tribulation itself. This is to underscore the argument he is making, that they had not seen any of these things, so why believe that the Rapture had already occurred?

So, though the believers then (and now) are not in the Tribulation Period, and, because of the Rapture as our Blessed Hope we never shall be, he has also revealed that there is a previously unrevealed working of Satan today through signs, wonders and miracles. So they (and we) must not be deceived by this working of Satan to lead astray the people of God. Those miraculous working are, quite simply, the working of Satan and not of Almighty God.

[Your comments / questions?]

Now, let's go on now to carefully examine what is perhaps the most excellent revelation of all regarding the Rapture Doctrine, what was written by the apostle in his first letter to the Corinthians in Chapter 15. There we find, in the heart of that revelation, A Mystery revealed in verse 51: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed".

I. The Orders of Resurrection -- According to Prophecy

As you all know, the major subject of chapter 15 is the resurrection of Christ himself and the gospel of the grace of God which is based on that gospel (verses 1-11). The apostle begins to develop the revelation further in verses 12-19 by showing how fundamental the resurrection of Christ is to our faith. Then from these general statements regarding resurrection, in verses 22-25 he outlines the "orders" of resurrections for the different segments of God's people down through the various ages and the dispensations:

[READ] 1 Cor. 15:22-25

22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. 24 Then [cometh] the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. 25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.

We see here, in verses 22-28, revealed the orders of resurrection according to PROPHECY. There is the first resurrection, the 1000 year kingdom, and finally the second resurrection. The first is for believers only and the second is for unbelievers only. But all are to be raised eventually, “but each man in his own order”. The order is very important to the Lord God.

But Verse 23 requires some explanation, doesn't it? The words “they that are Christ's at his coming” are often interpreted as meaning all believers of every dispensation -- including us. That is the view of most who are anti-dispensational and largely non-literal in their interpretation of Scripture in general and these teachings regarding the Rapture of the Church as well.

But as we shall see here, Paul's focus will not be in the rest of this chapter on the “coming” for the Jewish saints at the end of the Great Tribulation period, but on this entirely different “coming”, the “coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering unto him” as we saw in our last fellowship in 2 Thess. Chapter 2 and verse 1.

But here in this great chapter on resurrection in general and Christ's resurrection in particular (and great that revelation is) the major focal point of Paul's revelation in this section is found in the verses following, especially in verses 45 and following.

[READ] 1 Cor. 15:45-49:

45 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam [was made] a quickening spirit.

46 Howbeit that [was] not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.

47 The first man [is] of the earth, earthy: the second man [is] the Lord from heaven.

48 As [is] the earthy, such [are] they also that are earthy: and as [is] the heavenly, such [are] they also that are heavenly.

49 And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

- **“a quickening spirit” - speaking of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus**

- *This is important. You will remember that we spent much time here in relation to the Fifth Excellency, the Mystery revelation concerning the Church which is His Body*
- *See Phil. 1 for the details on this. Christ has become for us an inexhaustible supply. This is his resurrection life provided as our life, our eternal quality of life.*
- *“The image of the heavenly” - So we see here that the common teaching that says we are already “in the image of God” is not really true after all. That image was lost in the fall, but it will be regained. When? At the rapture, of course!*

II. The Order of Resurrection -- According to The Revelation of the Mystery

[READ] 1 Cor. 15:50-53

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.

51 **Behold, I shew you a mystery;** We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal [must] put on immortality.

- *Now, the central teaching in this section is no longer on “Christ the Firstfruits”, nor, on “Those that are his at his coming.” The apostle has now moved to another subject which he calls here “A “MYSTERY” or a “Sacred Secret”*

Verses 50 & 51 are the keys here to our subject of the Rapture. What is this sacred secret here revealed? To answer this question we must explain how our resurrection (or translation/transformation, if we should be alive when he call us home) is quite different from the resurrections of the different groups previously revealed in this chapter, all of which were contained in the revelation of Prophecy and not contained therefore in the revelation of the Mystery defined later in the chapter.

- ***This teaching may be set forth as follows:***
 - ***v. 50 - “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.”***
 - ***Paul writes here in verse 50 that flesh and blood CANNOT inherit the Kingdom. But previously, in the Prophetic Revelation given to Israel, it was revealed that it COULD! It is this distinction is what makes this resurrection revelation a sacred secret!! AND WE SEE AGAIN HOW CRITICAL IT IS TO RIGHTLY DIVIDE, DISTINGUISHING THE TRUTH FOR THE BODY FROM THE TRUTH FOR ISRAEL.***
 - ***This is a major difference with the promise given to Jewish believers down through the ages regarding the coming Kingdom. Their hope had always been that they might endure to the end and see their earthly hope fully realized. This would involve national deliverance, healing, and earthly blessings without number.***
 - ***BUT OUR HOPE IS SO DIFFERENT AS IT IS A HEAVENLY HOPE, AND NOT AN EARTHLY HOPE!***
 - ***V. 51a - “51 Behold, I shew [or am showing] you a mystery” - This is a present these here and I think this is important to notice. The “mystery” or “sacred secret” is not the resurrection of the body itself. For that had been revealed as the hope for believers from the beginning, so it cannot be called a mystery here. You may look at Job 19:25 for example, but there are many, many other equally clear teachings concerning this to be found in Scripture.***
 - ***So what is this mystery or sacred secret then? Now, consider these words very carefully. Paul just revealed the mystery or secret in the previous verse, didn't he, when he wrote that “flesh and blood” cannot inherit the kingdom of God.***

- **Verse 51a - “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed”. What had been revealed before concerning the future hope of believers (with a Kingdom hope, for example), is so different than what is revealed here concerning the mystery revelation for the church, his body. According to that previous revelation, one would endure to the end and enter alive in these bodies into the promised Kingdom. Those who died would of course be resurrected in the Kingdom. Not so for us. For we are all to be caught up together with resurrected bodies to meet Christ in the air and shall all INHERIT ETERNALLY THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM THEN, praise the Lord.**
- **THIS IS THE SIMPLE TRUTH OF IT: AT THE VOICE, AT THE CALL, AT THE SHOUT, WE SHALL ALL SEE OUR HEAVENLY HOPE FULLY REALIZED. CAUGHT UP INTO HEAVEN’S GLORY TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR TOGETHER WITH ALL THOSE THAT HAVE GONE BEFORE. SUCH A GLORIOUS HOPE. SUCH A BLESSED HOPE.**

III. Conclusions (and Exhortations):

So, we have clearly seen here that the timing of the Rapture of Christ’s Body is clearly PRE-TRIBULATIONAL. THIS IS EASILY SEEN WHEN WE HAVE EMBRACED BY FAITH THESE KEY TEACHINGS:

1. **The character of these times of grace and their abundance must be contrasted with the period of the great Tribulation --- THIS IS ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL.**
2. **Specifically, the working of God through our weaknesses, while fully revealing God’s working according to the riches of His grace, is characteristic of this dispensation.** This must be contrasted with false signs and wonders and the visible working of Satan through his surrogates, Antichrist and the False Prophets, during the Tribulation. In short, signs and miracles today ARE NOT in any way proofs that it is God working. Satan is working the same to deceive any who would take him at his word rather than the Lord God at his Word! Amen.

3. The expectation of the fulfilment of our heavenly hope at the rapture must be contrasted with the establishing of Israel's earthly hope in the Kingdom.

*For all of the above reasons, the rapture or catching up of the Body of Christ into heavens glory and the fulfillment therefore of our heavenly hope **MUST PRECEDE** the beginning of the time of Jacob's Trouble, the Tribulation Period.*

THE FINAL QUESTION: Are we resting in truth of the Blessed Hope today?