

**The 7-Fold Excellencies of the Mystery:
“The Catching Up (or Rapture) - The Foundation of Our Encouragement”**

Let's Begin with a Blessed Verse Concerning the Rapture of the Church which is His Body:

[READ] Tit. 2:11-13

11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,
12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;
13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;

Today we are privileged to move ahead in our “The 7-Fold Excellencies of the Mystery” series. Indeed, this is a grand subject, the “catching up”, or the “rapture” of the church, the Body of Christ. There are a number of scripture passages in Paul’s letters where we could begin, for this is a major subject of Paul’s letters. But a logical starting place is with Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 4 and that is where we will focus today. So you know exactly where we continue, Lord willing, we then plan to go to 1 Thess. chapter 5, 2 Thess. 2 and finally, to finish up our study in several weeks in that greatest of chapters on resurrection, First Corinthians, Chapter 15. This will provide us with a full teaching concerning this most essential truth.

So many today (and indeed so many throughout the entire dispensation of God’s unlimited grace), have tried to minimize or ignore Paul’s writing here and to instead include the church which is His Body under or within the revelation given to Israel by the prophets, by our Lord himself in the gospels, and by the Twelve apostles. This has led to much confusion. Worse, it has in effect “stolen away” the Blessed Hope from so many of His Body Church. The Rapture Teaching, as we shall see in our fellowship around this truth here, and in our next sharings here, Lord willing, is a critical part of the “mystery” or “sacred secret” teaching revealed through Paul, and are not found in other parts of God’s revealed word.

And, as we shall see, this Pauline teaching will not only correct these errors relating to the future plan and work of God but also be a great encouragement, if we will take to heart what is written here.

Review (last time)

- ***In our last fellowship we closely examined 2 Cor. 3 which contrasts the giving of the Law of Moses in comparison with the provision of God's grace as preached by Paul to the Gentiles.***
- ***Firstly, Paul wrote there of Moses and the giving of the Law. He draws a very profound analogy there in which he writes:***
 - ***That there is a correspondence between between the revelation of what God was doing at that time through Moses in the giving of the Law and the mask on Moses face which he wore as he came down from the mount.***
 - ***That mask, he wrote, was to shield the people from seeing that the glory on Moses face after meeting with the Lord God on the Mount was rapidly fading away. Paul writes there that the fading of that glory clearly signified that the Law just given was temporary and therefore imperfect with something different and much better coming later.***
 - ***His face was covered therefore to shield the children of Israel from the knowledge of the plan of God for Israel regarding that Law just revealed.***
 - ***So we see the God-given interpretation of Ex. 34 and that it is quite different from many interpretations we may hear today.***
- ***We then saw the application of that analogy to the revelation of the grace of God and the current dispensation of grace though Paul. But this is done in a two fold contrast!***
 - ***Instead of the passing of the glory being hidden as with Moses, and being written on tablets of stone, Paul declares that in this dispensation God has revealed through Paul his revelation full and unveiled in the face of Jesus Christ and that he had and is continuing to show his glory through that revelation.***
 - ***FURTHERMORE, AND MOST GLORIOUSLY, we writes (and this is his main point there in chapter 3, the God has deposited even the resurrected life of his own Son in ourselves though we are vessels of weakness indeed.***
 - ***We finished with the two verses at the end of the chapter, verses 17***

& 18 (and they are a great introduction to our great subject today):

2 Cor. 3:17-18

17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

- **So, as we concluded in our last fellowship, we might exclaim as Paul did in those verses just read -- “ALL THINGS ARE WORKING OUT SO GLORIOUSLY FOR US, AND ALL OF IT IS ACCORDING TO HIS MARVELOUS WORKING UNDER HIS FREE AND UNLIMITED GRACE.” For, to quote another key verse from chapter 4 and verse 17, God is working to accomplish in and through us A FAR MORE EXCEEDING (ὑπερβολή) “WEIGHT OF GLORY”!**

Today: The Sixth Excellency of the Mystery -- The Catching Up (or Rapture) -- The Foundation of Our Encouragement

Introduction:

- ***There is hardly a subject (even today) that causes such interest for believers than this one, the Rapture of the Church.***
- ***Some ministries and many books have been launched directly out of this teaching -- the pre-tribulational rapture or catching up of the Church which is His Body***
- ***But, as of late, the tables have apparently turned. Now just the opposite is occurring, the ministries and books point elsewhere, to doctrinal inventions such as the mid-trib, pre-wrath view and others.***
- ***Many are also denying even the importance of this teaching, holding that since there is now such opposition to the pre-trib view, the matter cannot be important, since competent Bible teachers and successful pastors do not agree. They conclude from this that the Bible is not clear on this teaching which therefore cannot be that important. Believe what you want, therefore, and all will be well.***
- **Well, it shall not be, for apart from this critical part of the mystery or sacred secret revealed to the apostle Paul, believers shall continue to live in confusion and fear regarding the times we are living in today, and the**

significant benefit of knowing and embracing the Blessed Hope will continue to be missing in the lives of so many believers.

I. The Catching Up (or Rapture): The Foundation for Encouragement Given

The transforming teaching found in 1 Thess. 4 will be our focus today and it is our privilege to share it with you.

[READ] 1 Thess. 4:13-14

13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

- **Paul's purpose in writing was to confront false teachings regarding the Rapture; their ignorance was due to the false teachers, not a result of his failure to teach the believers in Thessalonica correctly when he was with them.**
- **He adds that without this corrected Rapture teaching we shall be like unbelievers who have no hope, that is, who do not have a TRUE Rapture hope as is so powerfully taught here. That is a most serious consequence indeed. QUESTION: Have you taken it to heart?**

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

- **This is a general promise based on the resurrection of the Lord FOR US and significantly, it is Christ's resurrection that is the foundational truth here.**
- **"Sleep in Jesus": Those believers who have already died (and many Paul would have been writing about here would perhaps also have been believers who had been martyred)! This is such an intimate and personal and blessed way to refer to those who had already died or would die as time passes.**
- **This is such a clear statement of this precious teaching of the apostle.**
- **"If we believe": This is not implying any doubt at all, rather it is like "since we believe" in the original language. This is a first class conditional in the Greek language.**
- **So Paul connects the Rapture teaching with the doctrine of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus! We might remember Romans 4:25 and 8:28-30 where this teaching is in the mind of the apostle as he writes.**

- ***And, this is all about God and his promises, ultimately, he is saying... we shall all be TOGETHER from the beginning, when our heavenly calling realized in the catching up into glory. This is essential to understand! Verse 13: “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren...”***

[Your thoughts / sharing / testimonies?]

#1: The Catching Up (or Rapture): The Foundation for Encouragement Given

II. The Catching Up (or Rapture): The Foundation for Encouragement Explained

[READ] 1 Thess. 4:15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [precede] them which are asleep.

- ***Here we have a clear statement of the facts concerning the Rapture (a prophecy regarding that specific day, the last day and moment of the life of the Body of Christ on this present earth). This is a statement that perfectly fits the context of false teachers that had compromised Paul’s teachings he had previously shared there.***
- ***The apostle highlights his teaching now with words signifying the divine authority whereby he is giving forth this revelation (so these are not merely his opinions, therefore): “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord”. So his teaching is critically important and is the “word” of the risen and ascended Christ. Amen.***
- ***We need to comment on the archaic word “prevent” - it really means “precede”. This would have been clear in the 17th century. This is not an incorrect translation, therefore, merely an archaic meaning not often seen today in our language. Even contemporary dictionaries though usually give as a secondary meaning “precede” with the intention to help (as spiritually, for example).***
- ***The teaching here is very concrete and simple. It addresses the situation at hand. False teachers had followed Paul from city to city teaching “doctrines of devils” (1 Tim. 4:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:18). One of these must have had to do with Paul’s revelation concerning the sacred secret of the catching up into glory of the church before the Tribulation began. It may have gone far further even perhaps***

denying that there will even be a literal rapture at all that is distinct from the general resurrection at the Great White Throne in Rev. 20:11.

- *But since Paul had taught the Thessalonian believers that the Rapture was before the beginning of the Tribulation and therefore before the beginning of the 1000 year Millennium, these teachers had caused great sorrow for those whose loved ones had already died. Since they expected the Rapture to occur imminently (explain), the promised reunion with those who had gone before would then be at least 1007 years future, a great amount of time indeed.*

[READ] 1 Thess. 4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

- *Now we see even more detail regarding this resurrection of the dead (and it is so simply but powerfully stated here): believers who have died will be first in the Rapture being raised gloriously even before the living!*
- *This would have been so comforting, meeting loved ones who have gone before ... and it would be so powerful a teaching for those who might themselves soon be experiencing extreme pressures through persecutions, peril, disease, or from other causes. Consider well how powerful this teaching is for those who have already suffered this loss of a loved one, perhaps generation upon generation even. You? Me?*
- **QUESTION:** *What is lost when this teaching is not properly understood, is denied or is rejected?*

[Your comments?]

[READ] 1 Thess. 4:17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

- *This teaching is now underscored with the two final verses, verses 17 and 18. The second phase of the rapture is being revealed here - the living believers translation **TOGETHER WITH MEETING OUR LORD JESUS!***

- ***So there will be no delay until the reunion with all of our loved ones who have gone on ahead, or before, even the ENTIRE BODY OF CHRIST including Paul himself!***
- ***And, the reunion in the air will be BOTH with the Lord himself AND with our loved ones who have gone before.***
- ***Praise God for such a comforting truth as we look forward I hope, with ever strengthening hope, waiting on him and listening for the shout!***
- ***As written here, we such a contrast to what has been revealed in God's word regarding believers living in the Great Tribulation, the N.T. gospels, and the Book of Revelation for much detail on that.***
- ***What a difference this will be in contrast to the circumstances of believers during the Great Tribulation period, as we shall see revealed in our next fellowship.***

[Your thoughts / sharing / testimonies?]

#1: The Catching Up (or Rapture): The Foundation for Encouragement Given

#2: The Catching Up (or Rapture): The Foundation for Encouragement Explained

III. The Catching Up (or Rapture): The Foundation for Encouragement Enjoyed

[READ] 1 Thess. 4:18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

- ***Now we must ask all who are part of this fellowship several questions (somewhat rhetorically, I admit, since we will not be waiting for any answers today -- and I believe the Lord God is asking us the same, but never rhetorically, I might add):***
 - ***How important do you think this revelation of the Rapture might have been for the Thessalonians? How important is this revelation of the Rapture for us, for you, for me?***
 - ***Has it changed our thinking? What should change in our lives having come to know this truth?***
 - ***What is the relevance of this teaching to the condition of the church today?***
 - ***Will you be bold to present this teaching, this distinctively Pauline teaching, to others as the Lord enables? Or, will you***

be silent or speak and act as if this teaching is not really important. Paul says it is. Will we take him and the Lord God at his word? May it be so.

[Your thoughts / sharing / testimonies?]

#1: The Catching Up (or Rapture): The Foundation for Encouragement Given

#2: The Catching Up (or Rapture): The Foundation for Encouragement Explained

#3: The Catching Up (or Rapture): The Foundation for Encouragement Enjoined

1 Thess. 4:13 *But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.*

Have hope, beloved!

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A Key Thought

- 1. Grace provides freely and therefore ensures the blessings that otherwise only full obedience would have earned. Therefore the apostle exhorts the believers always to REST in his sufficient grace. While under Law there is necessarily a different DYNAMIC. The believer MUST be always striving to live up to ALL of the law and therefore cannot really rest as we can under grace.**
- 2. The exhortations under Kingdom Law are to exchange worldly burdens for the burdens of the Lord. Remember the “come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” For it continues, “take my yoke upon thee”, doesn’t it? And what a burden that would have been as the gospels and the circumcision writings reveal so clearly.**