

**The 7-Fold Excellencies of the Mystery:  
“The Catching Up (or Rapture) - The Essence of This Sacred Secret”**

**Our Theme Verses:**

**[READ ] 2 Tim. 2:15-18**

**15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.**

**16 But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.**

**17 And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus;**

**18 Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.**

**Review:**

**As our theme verses here indicate, perhaps greater than any other, the Pauline teaching concerning the Rapture, the Blessed Hope, is a dispensational teaching. Therefore we should not be surprised that the apostle of the Gentiles uses the word “mystery” in his teaching regarding it. In our last fellowship we finished our teaching on what I have been calling the SIXTH EXCELLENCY OF THE MYSTERY REVELATION GIVEN BY PAUL FOR THE CHURCH WHICH IS HIS BODY. Today we will bring together into one overarching TRUTH these four dimensions of that teaching. And Paul’s teaching on this subject is so critical for us today as we are also living in a time when indeed “every wind of doctrine” is being promoted by so many.**

**When Paul wrote the words we shall reconsider again in this fellowship, his grace ministry had been threatened by the compromises of many false teachers that had been following him from city to city. They were the gnostics and Judaizers of that day. Most likely they had taught that the Rapture teaching of Paul should not be believed, or, more subtlety, just not taken literally. According to that view (shared, by the way, with most who have named the name of Christ historically) the Rapture had already occurred, but only spiritually. The implication of this was that the believers were already in the Tribulation Period (and, perhaps also in the Kingdom, both at the same time!). Although we cannot be sure what their doctrine was in detail, however, our conviction remains that Paul’s teaching here requires at the very least a literal interpretation as does most of the word of God.**

**So, as a matter of profound correction to what the false teachers had been promoting, Paul provides this dispensational teaching concerning the Rapture in these letters, 1 Thess. 4 & 5; 2 Thess 2, and finally, 1 Cor. 15. These chapters will provide our outline today, each chapter providing an essential component of the teaching concerning Our Excellency #6: The Catching Up (or, the Rapture):**

- 1. This Teaching Provides The Foundation of Our Encouragement (1 Thess. 4)**
- 2. This Teaching is Dispensational at Its Heart (1 Thess. 5)**
- 3. This Teaching Requires Right Division for Its Understanding (2 Thess. 2)**
- 4. This Teaching Includes the Revelation of a Sacred Secret, even Our Blessed Hope, the Rapture (1 Cor. 15)**

**So, in order “that we might not be ignorant” in any way, and that this teaching might be crystal clear in our minds and that this teaching might abide in our hearts in all simplicity and power, we shall continue today in this great subject.**

**I. This Teaching Provides The Foundation of Our Encouragement (1 Thess. 4)**

**[READ ] 1 Thess. 4:13-17**

**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.**

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

**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 precede [precede] them which are asleep.**

**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:**

**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.**

- The teaching here is underscored well by these final two verses. This phase of the rapture - the translation of all living believers into heaven's glory will not “precede” the resurrection of those who have gone on before. Indeed, our reunion in the air will be BOTH with the**

***Lord himself AND with our loved ones who have gone before.***

- ***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 literally and perhaps even soon (explain).***
- ***“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 a personal and blessed way to refer to those who had already died or would die as time passes. As is written here, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus ensures the resurrection of all of those who have “slept in Jesus”.***
- ***Praise God for such a comforting truth to be eagerly anticipated. Amen.***

***[Your comments / questions?]***

***We continue in 1 Thess. 5 and saw the simple teaching made clear that our proper understanding of what God is doing in this dispensation requires Right Division.***

## ***II. This Teaching is Dispensational at Its Heart***

***[READ ] 1 Thess. 5:1-5***

***1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.***

***2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.***

***3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.***

***4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.***

***5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.***

**[READ ] 1 Thess 5:6-11**

**6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.**

7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

**9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,**

**10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.**

**11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.**

- *The apostle had already taught them well regarding the Rapture and the Times & Seasons that would follow, the 7 year period of “Jacob’s Trouble”, the Tribulation period (for example, in Jeremiah’s prophecy, many other Old Testament prophecies, our Lord’s earthly teachings, and, of course, and in the book of Acts).*
- *For the inhabitants living in that still future and often prophesied day, the false teaching of the peace and the safety (propagated by Satan’s emissaries) would be compelling. Note that the “they” versus the “we” or “you” distinction is kept throughout this section to make it crystal clear that Paul was not including any of the Thessalonian believers here as he writes of the darkness and trials of that day.*
- *“Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.” We see that this is a GRACIOUS EXHORTATION based on the most certain truths as he has revealed so clearly here. This was not therefore an exhortation that the believers should watch carefully for the signs of the times that they might endure to the end. Rather, it was an exhortation to REST in the grace granted to them!*

**[Your thoughts / questions?]**

**III. This Teaching Requires Right Division for Its Understanding (2 Thess. 2)**

**[READ ] 2 Thess. 2:1-3**

**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.**

**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;**

- *The basis of encouragement for the believer is found here in verses 1 & 2. Verse 1 uses the “coming” and the “gathering together unto him”, the most Blessed Hope, as the future promise to be firmly grasped onto by faith, certainly NOT a future apostasy from the faith, which would be so very different. Again, as in 1 Thess. 4 & 5, it is the truth of the Rapture, the next event on the horizon, that is used to encourage the saints here and we ourselves.*
- *Note the wording in verse 2, “at hand”, “as that [or as if] the day of Christ were already at hand”. This literally means “present” and is translated that way in most places. This also lends support to the view that the false teachers had taught that the rapture of the church had already occurred clearly in some non-literal sense. And that would be quite troubling indeed, would it not? But the apostle proclaims here that the day of judgment, the day of Christ, is most certainly NOT already present!*
- *The Day of Lord, a time of great judgment, is NOT what is being anticipated here, neither figuratively or literally. Rather, it is his Coming, His return for us believers: “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and [by] our gathering together unto him”.*
- *Similarly, now, here in verse 3, it is the “departure” from this world that is used as the basis for exhortation. Realizing that the “falling away” here is in fact the departure or the Rapture is very helpful to keep in mind here. The KJV was in the minority in translating this word “falling away”. The Coverdale, the Tyndale, and the Geneva Bibles all translated it as “departure”. The fact of the Rapture was to be held so firmly in mind that there should never be a turning away from it no matter what came.*

- ***So, be encouraged, brethren, the coming of the Lord is nigh!***

**IV. This Teaching Includes the Revelation of a Sacred Secret, even Our Blessed Hope, the Rapture (1 Cor. 15)**

***In this great chapter, Paul begins with the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. He continues with the resurrection of those who are Christ's at his coming. What we have here are the orders of resurrection according to PROPHECY.***

***[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 (or the "last") 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.***

***Now the apostle continues and reveals the orders 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.**

- ***Note well here that 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, in fact, one that was near and dear to the hearts of these believers, which he calls here “A “MYSTERY” or a “Sacred Secret”.**

**Verses 50 & 51 are the keys here to our understanding concerning the doctrine of the Rapture. 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 here in this chapter.**

- **This teaching is here set forth quite simply:**
  - **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 that 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, healings, both physically and spiritually, and earthly blessings without number.**
  - **V. 51a - “51 Behold, I shew [or am showing] you a mystery” - This is a present tense here and I think this is so important.**
    - **This “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, and cannot be called a mystery here. So what is this mystery or sacred secret? 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.*

- *An explanation follows: "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed". According to the teaching of prophecy, one would endure to the end and enter alive in these natural bodies into the promised Kingdom. Those who died would of course be resurrected in the Kingdom. Not so for us, the apostle reveals here. For we are all to be caught up together with resurrected bodies to meet Christ in the air and shall all INHERIT ETERNALLY OUR HEAVENLY PROMISES THEN.*

**Conclusions (and Exhortations):**

*So, we have clearly seen here that the timing of the Rapture of Christ's Body is clearly PRE-TRIBULATIONAL. Nothing could be clearer from what Paul has written in these letters.*

1. *1 Thess. 4: Paul exhorts all believers to rest in the grace of God and "in the coming of the Lord", not in the promise of trial and tribulation and of signs and wonders signifying the soon return of the Lord in all of his wrath and fury.*
2. *1 Thess. 5 & 2 Thess. 2: The character of these times of grace and their spiritual abundance must be contrasted with the period of the great Tribulation --- THIS IS ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL.*
3. *1 Cor. 15: Our entry into heavenly glory will occur at the Rapture, whether we have died already or not! This is not so for Israel and its Kingdom / earthly hope. But it is our Blessed Hope indeed. So shall we ever be with the Lord! Amen.*
4. *And, 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. Christ's death for our sins, his shed blood, his burial, and his bodily resurrection have ensured it. "And so shall we ever be with the Lord!"***

***THE FINAL QUESTION: Are we resting in this truth of the Blessed Hope today? It is next on our timeline, our horizon, according to these clear teachings, the revelation of the mystery, the sacred secret regarding our upward calling, and our most blessed hope.***

***Be bold. Stand on this precious word of truth! Be blessed as you do so.***

***May we all, as Paul, testify with these words:***

6 "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." ***2 Tim. 4:6-8***

***Amen.***