

The Rapture of the Church

INTRODUCTION

The Rapture is the Great Blessed Hope of the Christian. We have been promised that Christ is coming back to gather God's children together to be with Him forever. There are, however, so anti-rapture movements brewing in the Christian community, so it is important to defend this sound, biblical doctrine.

Those who question this belief would charge us, like the Bereans, to be willing to search the scriptures and find out the truth for ourselves. (Acts 17:11) I whole-heartedly agree! In fact, I have done so, and found that the rapture is a blessed event that is clearly set forth in scripture. Always be careful when you read someone else's work to make sure their application of scripture is sound. Do so when you read this, and do so if you have read the anti-rapture materials.

I have written this to address many of the faulty arguments in these texts, but have tried to make it flow well even if you have not read these materials. The most dangerous thing about works like the one I am addressing is that they contain enough truth to capture your attention, enough scripture to make it look legitimate, but enough slant to deceive you. It holds all the same pitfalls as the works of the Mormon Church or the Watchtower Society. We need to get back to scriptural truth.

THE TERM "RAPTURE"

First, let me clarify that the word "Rapture," just like the word "Trinity," does not occur in scripture. However, just as the doctrine of the trinity is true, so is the doctrine of the rapture. These are simply words we have come to use to express ideas found in scripture.

THE NEW HEAVENS AND EARTH

Next, I want to make it known that there will be a new heavens and earth. Ephesians 3:21 is falsely quoted to mean that this world is eternal because, in the KJV it uses the phrase "world without end." However, this is a faulty translation. The original Greek more accurately is translated as 'forever and ever' or 'from age to age.' Most other translations, old and new, translate it this way, including the NIV, ASV, NKJV, Darby's, Young's Literal Translation, and many, many more. However, the scripture does clearly state:

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."
(Matthew 24:35, Mark 13:31, Luke 21:33, KJV)

There is even scientific evidence that suggests the very atoms that make up this universe are not eternal and will eventually break down after the passage of time. God did not create this world or this universe to be eternal. He has promised new heavens and a new earth:

"For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind." (Isaiah 65:17, KJV)

The Rapture of the Church

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (2 Peter 3:9-13, KJV)

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.” (Revelation 21:1, KJV)

While some have tried to claim that these scriptures only refer to a cleansing of the world from sin, the scripture is clearly referring to a new universe. Also, the fact that God promises new heavens is a problem for this theology. If he is referring to Heaven, it cannot be made any more righteous than it already is, and if he means the physical heavens, only the earth and those who live in it were cursed because of sin. (See Genesis 3.) If this interpretation was correct, it would require a promise of only a new earth.

PHYSICAL BODIES AND SPIRITUAL BODIES

One key portion of the anti-rapture argument has been that we have a separate physical body and spiritual body. This is a misunderstanding of scripture.

Man was created in the image of God. (Genesis 5:1) Part of this nature is that, just as God is 3 in 1 (Father, Son, and Spirit), we too have a ‘3 in 1’, or ‘triune’ nature. This is referenced in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-

“I pray God your whole *spirit* and *soul* and *body* be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (*emphasis mine*)

We are made of these three parts: the body in which we dwell, the spirit that communes with God, and the soul, which is the essence of who we are. However, when we die, we are separated from our bodies:

“Then shall the dust return to earth and it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

We also know that we are promised that, at the moment of death, we are with the Lord:

“Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight :) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.” (2 Corinthians 5:6-9, KJV)

Clearly, at death we are separate from the body and our spirit dwells with God. But it is clear that we are absent from the body. While some argue this is only the physical body, we have already established that the soul and body are two very different things.

The Rapture of the Church

Here is what the Bible says about spiritual bodies:

“So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44)

The physical body is sown in death, and it is raised as a spiritual body. There are not my words. They are the words of St. Paul.

Again, some scripture has been misapplied to support a different view. They say that verse 40 of this same chapter, which mentions terrestrial bodies and celestial bodies, shows that these are two different bodies and there is no transformation. While this argument is already weak and barely worth mentioning, it shows how loosely scripture is applied. The very next verse shows a completely different meaning that that used by the anti-rapture position:

“There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory.” (verse 41, KJV)

Paul was referencing the bodies in the physical heavens verses the physical earth to say this is how different things will be when you have a spiritual body. The corruptible physical body that is sown will not compare to the incorruptible spiritual body we will reap:

“So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption”. (verse 42, KJV)

Whether we are dead or alive, all of us who are in Christ will reap a spiritual body in exchange for the physical at the rapture.

THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

This brings us to the rapture of the church:

“Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 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. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” (1 Corinthians 15:51-53, KJV)

This scripture stands clear in its meaning, so the anti-rapture movement, as it so often does, finds itself in the position of trying to explain away the scripture. They try and fail of course, because God’s Word stands forever. If you have to explain away the scripture, you are likely on the wrong side of a doctrinal issue.

Their argument is that, since we will ALL be changed, this cannot mean a rapture since this would mean saints and sinners. They further claim that this will happen just before the judgment, so that righteous and unrighteous can be judged in the body.

Again, their problem is contextual. First, this scripture is written to the Corinthian church. In this context, a reference to “we all” means all of us as believers. To further demonstrate, read verse 22:

The Rapture of the Church

‘For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.’

If we interpret “all” to mean “all mankind,” we have just said that everyone will be saved! Why bother proclaiming the gospel?

Context is further a problem for this argument, as you can see by continuing on to read verses 54-57:

“So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This putting on of the incorruptible body is further described as victory over death, the grave and even sin! If this scripture applies to all people instead of all believers, you are again saying that everyone will be saved and the proclamation of the gospel is useless.

No matter how hard anyone tries to explain away this doctrine in exchange for something easier to swallow, the scripture speaks for itself:

“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 them which are asleep. 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: 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.” (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, KJV)

Again, trying to explain away scripture, the anti-rapture movement says the “clouds” refers to the “cloud of witnesses” in Hebrews 12:1. While they have the same roots, clouds in this scripture are always translated as a literal cloud, while the word for cloud in Hebrews is used only once, in that instance, and refers more accurately to a fog or vapor and is used here metaphorically. The point is that they are separate words with separate applications.

Then they take the word air and completely misinterpret its meaning. They take its root word (meaning a word from which it is derived), and since the root word refers to breathing, they use the following line of ‘logic’: The word air must mean breathing, so its referring to the breath of life in your body; they say this means our soul, and they falsely believe, as we’ve already addressed, that the soul is the spiritual body. So this is a reference to dwelling in our spiritual body when we die.

The problem is that the root word is only a related word, not the same word. For example, in English, the word “love” is the root word of “lovely,” and while they are related, they have totally different meanings. The same is true here.

The word for air here is aer (pronounced ah-A-er), and means air or atmosphere. What’s the point of all this? We will be ‘caught up’, or ‘seized’, into the literal air and literal clouds, to literally meet the literal Christ and literally be with him forever! The Bible means what it says!

The Rapture of the Church

THE TIMING OF THE RAPTURE

One final consideration is the timing of the rapture. The anti-rapture movement contends that there is no rapture, and Christ will only be seen at the second coming to judge the earth. Scripture says differently.

In Revelation 4:1-2, John is symbolic of the church:

“After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was *as it were of a trumpet* talking with me; which said, *Come up* hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. And *immediately* I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.” (KJV, *emphasis mine*)

Here we see the symbolism of the church being caught up in the rapture: a voice like a trumpet symbolizing the trumpet call of God, the call to come up, and immediately he was caught up into heaven- *in the twinkling of an eye*. Only then does the Great Tribulation occur.

Further scriptural proof is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-7.

“Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.” (NIV)

First, we see that the rapture will not happen until the man of lawlessness is revealed. In other words, the anti-christ. When he comes to power (v.4), we will be gathered together to the Lord (v.1). It further reasons that the church is the one who holds him back (v. 6-7). Some believe this is the Holy Spirit who will withdraw his presence, but since he is omni-present and God cannot deny His own divine nature (2 Timothy 2:13), this cannot be the case.

So follow the scripture instead of arguing with it: when the anti-christ comes to power, true believers in Christ will be gathered together in the rapture. With the body of Christ out of the way, the anti-christ will be free to rule during the Great Tribulation.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Christ is coming for those who follow him, and it could be any day or any hour. The good news for those who don't believe this is that, if you are truly living for Him, you still get to come. The most important lesson to learn from this debate is to study the whole Bible, and read it in context.