

A CRITIQUE OF THE RAPTURE DOCTRINE BASED ON 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-5:3

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Abstract

The study is an exegetical critique of the Rapture doctrine from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:3. The Rapture doctrine, as popularly propounded in today's Christianity, speaks to a secret two-stage return of Christ. By keeping the context in view, however, it can be shown that this interpretation misrepresents the message Paul sought to convey. The text emphasises one public return of Christ, bringing together deceased and living believers, reassuring rather than escapist theology. By examining some 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:3 the study will show how the Rapture doctrine was developed through sensationalised interpretation rather than careful biblical exegesis. The teachings of Paul emphasize hope, involvement, and corporate responsibility to counter the escapism of Rapture theology. The study engages in historical background, textual analysis, and theological implications of Paul's eschatological teaching to advocate for a biblically faithful understanding. This approach challenges popular but unsubstantiated claims, affirming a unified resurrection and judgment that align with the broader scriptural narrative. The study concludes with practical applications, encouraging vigilance, hope, and spiritual readiness among believers, aligning their lives with the eternal perspective articulated by Paul.

Keywords: Rapture doctrine, biblical exegesis, eschatology, 1 Thessalonians, resurrection

Introduction

The Rapture doctrine is widely accepted in contemporary Christianity and is often considered essential to eschatological beliefs. This study critiques this doctrine through an exegetical analysis of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:3, where Paul addresses the Thessalonian church's concerns about deceased believers. A close examination of this passage will show that the Rapture doctrine lacks scriptural support. This approach will demonstrate that Rapture theology is not only unbiblical but also misrepresents Paul's original message to the early Christians in Thessalonica.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:3, Paul reassures the Thessalonians about the resurrection of those who have died in Christ, stressing that their hope remains united with that of living believers. Rather than suggesting a secretive or two-stage event, as Rapture proponents argue, Paul presents a singular, public return of Christ, which includes both the living and the dead. Terms such as "caught up" have been misinterpreted to support an escapist theology that promotes withdrawal from worldly responsibility. As noted by Shiao Chong, Paul intended to comfort and unify believers, not to

instil fear or encourage disengagement from earthly life.¹

This paper will further examine how Rapture theology originated from interpretations driven by sensationalism rather than careful biblical exegesis. Many proponents of the doctrine rely on out-of-context or vague passages, ignoring the broader scriptural narrative of God's plan for creation. Such interpretations not only distort Pauline theology but also promote a detachment from the world, undermining the church's mission to address societal issues. By reclaiming a faithful interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:3, this study will highlight a more biblically sound eschatology that emphasizes hope, engagement, and responsibility over fear and escapism.²

The Rapture Doctrine

The doctrine of the rapture is a significant eschatological belief within certain branches of

¹ Shiao Chong, "What's Wrong with the Rapture?," The Banner, January 18, 2011, <https://www.thebanner.org/columns/2022/09/whats-wrong-with-the-rapture>.

² Stephen D. Morrison, "Is the Rapture Real?," Stephen D. Morrison, March 23, 2014, <https://www.sdmorrison.org/rapture-real/>.

Christianity, particularly among charismatic groups. It refers to the event in which both living and deceased believers in Christ are said to be "caught up" to meet Him in the air. This concept is primarily derived from biblical passages such as 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. The term "rapture" itself is derived from the Latin Vulgate version of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 where the expression "caught up" is translated *rapturo*, reflecting the Greek term *harpazo* used in the New Testament.³ This term is used by dispensationalists to describe the belief that Christ will arrive unexpectedly and secretly in the sky to take the living saints and the resurrected bodies of the deceased saints off the earth. It is believed that this "Rapture" will take place immediately before the seven-year "Tribulation" era.⁴ Advocates claim that the unexpected absence of a mother, father, or kid will upset families. Street collisions between independent vehicles will occur (see bumper sticker: "In case of rapture, this vehicle will be unmanned"). There will be a man and wife in bed when she hears a commotion and turns to see him gone. Without pilots, planes will crash. The "Rapture" is portrayed as the Lord's unseen return for His saints, which leaves the remaining unbelievers in apparent turmoil and disarray.

Historically, the rapture doctrine emerged relatively recently within Christian theology, gaining prominence in the early 19th century. John Nelson Darby, a key figure in the development of dispensationalism, is often credited with formalizing this belief around 1830. He proposed that Christ's return would occur in two distinct phases: first, a secret rapture of believers before a period of tribulation, followed by a visible second coming to establish His kingdom on Earth. Johnny Ramsey cited John Darby, the father of dispensational dogma, who claimed that evil men would pass through four passages with "unequalled tribulation" and that the true Church would be exempt from it. These passages include Jeremiah 30:7, Matthew 24:21, Daniel 12:1, and Mark 13:19. However, a careful study reveals that these passages are not entirely

accurate. Jeremiah's verse identifies the time of Jacob's trouble as Babylonian captivity, Daniel's reference to Seleucid domination, and Matthew 24:21's passage about "great tribulation" being fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. The reference to Mark 13: 19 is a parallel verse to Matthew 24:21.⁵ The term "tribulation" is used twenty times by Christ and the apostles in the New Testament to describe the hardships, difficulties, and persecution that a devout Christian would face in this life. In Matthew 13:21, our Lord explained that some people might "fall away" due to hardship and suffering in the well-known parable of the Sower. Paul said that "much tribulation" accompanied entering the kingdom of the Master in Acts 14:22, following the pebbles bouncing off his head at Lystra.

Does the Bible teach there will be a Rapture? Is there a Biblical basis position? Absolutely not! Although it is said to be the Latin counterpart of *harpadzo*, which means "caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, the word "rapture" is not used in the Bible. "It is not found in the Bible," Lindsey acknowledged, adding that the term "translation" is as appropriate.⁶ However, the English New Testament does use the word "translation." According to Paul (Colossians 1:13, ASV), God "delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love." Therefore, an unbeliever is removed from this world and placed in Christ's kingdom when he obeys the gospel, is pardoned for his sins, and is accepted into the Church of Christ. The concept that the phrase alludes to Christians being "raptured" from the physical Earth to meet Jesus in the air is at odds with this usage.

According to Edwin Crozier, there are variations in modern Rapture theory typically regarding the expected time of the Rapture. Many believers in the Rapture hold that the world is moving toward the event known as the Great Tribulation, often based on certain interpretations of passages like Matthew 24:29 and Revelation 7:14. This

³ John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom: A Basic Text in Premillennial Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1959, p.248).

⁴ Dave Miller, *End Times* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetic Press, 2023).

⁵ Johnny Ramsey, "The Rapture and the Tribulation," in *Premillennialism, True or False?*, ed. Wendell Winkler, THE FIRST ANNUAL "FORT WORTH" LECTURES Conducted by The Brown Trail Church of Christ Bedford(FortWorth), Texas (Montgomery, AL: Winkler Publications, 1978).

⁶ Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970).

period is believed to last seven years, culminating in the glorious return of Christ. At that point, they expect Jesus to establish His kingdom on earth, ruling for a thousand years - a view shaped by specific readings of various prophetic passages in Scripture. However, these interpretations are often considered to be misunderstandings of the biblical text.⁷ At a point during the Great Tribulation, Christ will return in the air to "Rapture" His church. In this event, Jesus will raise all the deceased saints and transform the living believers into imperishable, spiritual bodies, taking them up to be with Him for eternity. The rest of the dead will remain in their graves, and the living who do not belong to Him will be left behind on earth.

The various interpretations of the Rapture differ primarily in the timing of the event in relation to the Great Tribulation. Some, known as post-tribulationists, believe the Rapture will occur after the Great Tribulation. Others, referred to as mid-tribulationists, hold that it will take place during the middle of this period.⁸ However, the majority, called pre-tribulationists, believe the Rapture will happen before the Tribulation begins. Despite these differences, all Rapture theories agree that at some point, Jesus will summon the saints to join Him, leaving others behind on earth. Following this, Christ will return in His Glorious Appearing to establish His kingdom, where the saints will reign with Him on earth for 1,000 years. Modern Rapturists, therefore, view Christ's Second Coming as occurring in two stages: first, Christ returns in the air to Rapture His church, and then, in the second phase—the Glorious Appearing—He returns physically to establish His kingdom on earth.⁹

Historical Context of 1 Thessalonians

The Apostle Paul travelled to Thessalonica on his second missionary journey, in about the year 51 AD. Thessalonica was an ideal place for mission work since it was the capital of Macedonia; a commercially active harbour town which had attracted many Jewish people; and it

was located on the highway that connected Rome with the East. The presence of a synagogue in this Greek city no doubt influenced some of the pagan citizens. Luke gives the following outline of Paul's work in Thessalonica:

"Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women" (Acts 17:1-4 ESV).

According to Luke, Paul worked in the synagogue of Thessalonica for just "three Sabbath days." Since that is the only reference Luke gives to the length of time Paul was able to spend in that city, one might conclude that the Thessalonian church received less than a month of instruction from the Apostle. But most commentators draw a different conclusion, namely that Luke is merely indicating the amount of time Paul taught in the local synagogue before the unbelieving Jews closed the door to him. After that occurred, they felt that Paul continued to work in the area for perhaps several months. They note that the congregation grew to include a great number of Greeks who were former idol worshippers (cf. I Thessalonians 1:9, " ... ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;"). The congregation began with a nucleus of a few Jewish Christians, but it soon became predominantly Gentile.

The sudden triumph of the work in Thessalonica was not due to the persuasiveness or magnetism of men but to the power of the Gospel. This does not mean that Paul and his co-workers were listless or lazy. They worked "night and day" to distinguish themselves from the array of travelling philosophers who passed through the

⁷ Edwin Crozier, "Does The Bible Teach The Rapture?," Franklin church of Christ, April 24, 2005, <https://franklinchurchofchrist.com/blog/does-the-bible-teach-the-rapture-by-edwin-crozier-042405/>.

⁸ Ramsey, "The Rapture and the Tribulation."

⁹ Jim McGuiggan, *The Kingdom of God and the Planet Earth*, 1978, p.62.

city seeking only fame and fortune, and to set an example for the members of the congregation who were inclined to quit working, sit back and watch the sky for Christ's return (I Thessalonians 2:9, II Thessalonians 3:8). Yet despite his own "labour and travail" Paul gave all the credit for the success of the work to the Holy Ghost and the power of the Gospel:

"Because our gospel came to you not only in word but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit... For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come." (I Thessalonians 1:5-6, 9-10).

As we read those lines, two other things come to our attention. First, Paul's reference to "*much affliction*" and second, his emphasis on the *return of Christ*. "Affliction" in the form of Jewish pressure against the Gospel message had begun already while Paul was there. Most of the city's Jews had refused to listen to Paul's instruction. The situation was volatile. They were not like the Jews of Berea who "received the word with all readiness of mind" (Acts 17:11). Luke reports that the Jews of Thessalonica developed such a furiously jealous attitude toward the work of Paul and Silas that they threatened the church with hired muscle and legal pressure:

"But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have

come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea..." (Acts 17:5-10).

Nor did these opponents of the Gospel give up easily. After Paul had slipped out of the city they followed him to Berea, 50 miles away, and forced him to leave there also (Acts 17:13-14). Therefore, we can understand Paul's deep concern about the affliction the Thessalonians still might be receiving from these unbelieving Jews. Would the church stand fast? Timothy was sent to find out (I Thessalonians 3:1-5). The report that he brought back guided Paul in writing this first letter. It was to be a letter of encouragement and instruction.

One of the main elements of instruction in the letter is the doctrine of Christ's return. Eleven of its 89 verses are devoted to it. Why did Paul stress this doctrine? One purpose might have been to encourage the Thessalonians in their affliction. Like Christians elsewhere, and like Christ before them, they were experiencing some of the wrath of man now; but because of Christ, their returning Savior, the real wrath to come would not touch them (I Thessalonians 1:10; 2:14-16).

Another reason for stressing the doctrine of Christ's return was to instruct them further. The information on eschatology that Paul had given them while he was there (II Thessalonians 2:5) needed some repetition and elaboration. This is understandable since most of the Thessalonians were recent converts from a heathen Greek background. It is assumed they had been accustomed to dismal pagan funerals and hopeless heathen thoughts about death and the future. When Timothy returned from Thessalonica with his report he undoubtedly mentioned that the church was having difficulty discarding some of these old heathen concepts. The members of the church dearly hoped to see

the return of Christ and when instead they saw their loved ones dying before that return, they were deeply disturbed. So Paul writes to instruct them again about Christ's return and to assure them that their Christian relatives and friends who had fallen asleep in Jesus not only would be raised from death, but raised at the very instant of Christ's coming. Thus, all believers, regardless of their present condition, would see, hear and even participate in the joy and glory of that unparalleled, triumphant event. Christians have found this paragraph of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians particularly valuable and reassuring. Walter Westphal observes that it is frequently read at funerals and the ancient church.¹⁰

Text Analysis

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 discusses the resurrection of believers:

Verse 13 "But we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, lest you grieve as the rest do who have no hope." Our text begins in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, where Paul states his purpose for the remarks to follow. His goal is to give hope to Christians whose (believing) loved ones have recently "fallen asleep." This phrase "fallen asleep" is a euphemism for death, implying that believers who have died are simply resting in peace until Christ's return.¹¹ He knows that some of the brethren are troubled about this. Perhaps they fear that their departed loved ones will not be included in Christ's Kingdom when he comes again. Certainly, they fear they will never see them again. Therefore, Paul takes up this subject once again, so that they will no longer grieve as unbelievers do, but instead enjoy a lively hope of being reunited with their Christian family and friends—soon.

Verse 14 "For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised again, even so God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus." Paul reassures the Thessalonian believers by establishing a

foundational belief regarding the death and resurrection of Jesus, stating, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again." This assertion underscores the central tenets of the Christian faith, emphasizing that Christ's resurrection guarantees the future resurrection of those who have died in faith. The phrase "even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" indicates that those who have died (referred to as "sleeping") are not lost but are in a state of rest and safety through their union with Christ. Paul uses the term "sleep" to convey a peaceful state rather than a finality, suggesting that death for believers is temporary. This passage highlights the intimate connection between Christ and His followers, assuring them that God will reunite deceased believers with Christ at His return, thereby providing comfort amidst their grief over lost loved ones.

Verse 15 "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep." This statement underscores a key revelation that believers who are alive at Christ's return will not have an advantage over those who have died; rather, the deceased believers will be resurrected first. The phrase "by the word of the Lord" indicates that this teaching is divinely authoritative, emphasizing its significance in addressing the Thessalonians' concerns about their deceased loved ones (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Paul's use of "coming" (Greek: *parousia*) aligns with his teachings in other letters, such as 1 Corinthians 15:23, where he describes a sequential resurrection: Christ as the firstfruits, followed by those who belong to Him at His coming. This reinforces the idea that all believers—both living and dead—will share equally in the promise of resurrection, countering any notion of a secretive Rapture that privileges the living over the dead. Also, in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, Paul reiterates the gathering of believers at Christ's return, further emphasizing a unified event rather than separate phases. Thus, 1 Thessalonians 4:15 serves as a crucial reminder of hope and equality in resurrection for all believers.

Verse 16 "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first." Paul reassures the Thessalonian believers that

¹⁰ Walter Westphal, "An Exegetical Study of I Thessalonians 4:13-18 with Reference to the Rapture" (1977, p.1), <http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/979/WestphalThessalonians.pdf?sequence=1&isAllo wed=y>.

¹¹ Richard Niell Donovan, "1 Thessalonians 4:13-18," *Sermon Writer* (blog), 2024, <https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary-old/1-thessalonians-413-18/>.

the Lord will descend from heaven with a loud command, the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God, marking a climactic event where "the dead in Christ will rise first." This passage emphasizes the personal and visible return of Christ, contrasting with interpretations of a secretive rapture. The phrase "dead in Christ" highlights that only those who have died in faith will partake in this resurrection, aligning with Paul's earlier assertion in 1 Corinthians 15:54 that the mortal bodies will be transformed into immortality. The imagery of the trumpet is significant, echoing Matthew 24:31, where angels gather God's elect, reinforcing the communal aspect of this event. Paul's assurance serves not only to comfort but also to clarify that death does not separate believers from the hope of eternal life, as seen in the resurrection pattern established through Christ's own death and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20).¹²

Verse 17 "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord." Paul assures the Thessalonian believers that those who are alive at the return of Christ will be "caught up" together with resurrected believers in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. This phrase "caught up" (Greek: *ἁρπάζω* *harpazo*) suggests a sudden and powerful seizing, emphasizing the immediacy and divine authority of this event, where living believers will join those who have died in Christ, thus fostering a sense of unity among all believers (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). The imagery of meeting the Lord "in the air" indicates a transitional space rather than a permanent dwelling, aligning with other scriptural references such as Matthew 24:30, where Christ's return is depicted as visible and public, contrasting with interpretations of a secretive rapture. Furthermore, this passage resonates with 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, which describes the transformation of living believers at the last trumpet, reinforcing that both the dead and living will experience resurrection and glorification together, ultimately leading to eternal communion with Christ.

Verse 18 "Therefore comfort one another with these words." This exhortation follows

¹² Daniel R. Hyde, "1 Thessalonians 4 & the Truth about the 'Secret' Rapture," Word by Word, April 29, 2024, <https://www.logos.com/grow/nook-1-thessalonians-4-rapture/>.

Paul's teaching on the resurrection of believers, emphasizing hope amid grief. He reassures the Thessalonians that deceased Christians will be resurrected and reunited with the living at Christ's return (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17). This comfort is rooted in the belief that death is not final for believers, echoing themes found in John 14:1-3, where Jesus promises eternal dwelling with Him. Moreover, 1 Corinthians 15:54-57 reinforces this by declaring victory over death, affirming that believers can find solace in their future hope together with Christ.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3, Paul shifts focus to "the day of the Lord":

Verse 1 "But as for the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. Verse 2 "For you yourselves know quite well that the day of the Lord is coming like a thief in the night. Verse 3 "When they say, 'Peace and safety,' then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape." Paul addresses the Thessalonian believers regarding "the times and seasons" of the Lord's return, indicating that they are already well-informed about these matters. He emphasizes that the "day of the Lord" will come unexpectedly, akin to a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2), which echoes Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24:43 and Revelation 3:3. This suddenness serves as a warning for vigilance among believers, contrasting with the false sense of security felt by those in darkness (1 Thessalonians 5:3). Paul reassures Christians that they, as "children of light," will not be caught unprepared, reinforcing their identity in Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:4-5).

What Is Wrong With the "Rapture?"

Is there a Bible basis for the "Rapture" doctrine? The answer is No! Will there ever be such a thing as the "Rapture?" Absolutely not! Is there a conflict between the "Rapture" teaching and the plain teaching of the Bible? Absolutely! Please notice some of the things wrong with the teaching of the "Rapture" as presented by McCoy.¹³

1. The concept of the "Rapture" seems to involve multiple comings of Jesus, which

¹³ V. Glenn McCoy, "What Is the Rapture?," La Vista Church of Christ, November 16, 2005, <https://www.lavistachurchofchrist.org/cms/what-is-the-rapture/>.

raises concerns. First, proponents suggest He comes to take the righteous away for seven years. Then, they propose He returns seven years later to reign in Jerusalem for a thousand years. After the millennium, they claim He will return once more to raise and judge the wicked. However, Jude 14-15 portrays Jesus coming to execute judgment on the ungodly, which suggests that, according to the "Rapture" theory, yet another coming would be required for this final judgment. How does all this fit with Bible teaching? The answer is, not at all. The Bible says that when Jesus comes, he will execute judgment "upon all," not some now and some later, but all at one time. His coming will not be in stages with years between the comings. "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 14-15).

2. The proponents of the "Rapture" say that only a part of humanity will see Jesus when He comes the second time. Only the righteous dead and the righteous living will see Him. The remainder of the living will not see Him for at least seven years. Those among the unrighteous dead will not see Him until the thousand-year reign is finished. This cannot possibly be correct because Revelation 1:7 states that when Jesus comes "Every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him."
3. The "Rapture" conflicts with Matthew 25:31-46. Unlike the "Rapture" theory, Matthew 25 has "all the nations," the wicked and the good being judged at the same time in the same judgment. The "Rapture" has some of the dead being raised while others are left in the grave. However, the Bible says that Jesus will come to judge all the living and dead, the wicked and the good, all in the same judgment. There will be a great separation. The wicked are placed on the left and the righteous on the right. Those on the left will be sentenced to punishment in hell, while those on the right will get to

enjoy the bliss of heaven. There is no room in Matthew 25 for a "Rapture" period, or the "great tribulation," or the thousand years between the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked. Paul states in II Timothy 4:1: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom." Paul said that Jesus will judge those who are living and those who are dead at His coming. Matthew 25:31-46 tells us that the judgment will contain both the righteous and the wicked. Therefore, all the wicked who are dead, as well as those who are living, will be judged. At the same time, all the righteous who are living as well as those who are dead will be judged. In contrast, the "Rapture" has Jesus coming with no universal judgment, with only part of the dead being raised, while others are left in their graves.

4. The "Rapture" theory is in contradiction to the clear and positive teaching of the Lord in John 5:28-29: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." While the "Rapture" has multiple judgments, the Bible says that all humanity will be judged at the same time, the good as well as the wicked.
5. The "Rapture" does not fit the Bible teaching of the "last day." "This is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing but should raise it again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that everyone which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day. ... No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:39-40, 44). "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:54). "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). In John 5:28-29, Jesus teaches that both the

righteous and the wicked will be resurrected at the same time, during "the same hour." He connects this event with the final day of judgment, where everyone will face the consequences of their actions. This idea aligns with His broader teaching that the resurrection and judgment are unified events taking place on the last day. In contrast, the "Rapture" theory proposes a different timeline, suggesting a significant gap - sometimes spanning a thousand years - between the resurrection of the righteous and the judgment of the wicked. This separation challenges the clear message from Jesus, who emphasized the simultaneity of these events. As C.S. Lewis once remarked, "The world is a great sculptor's shop; we are the statues, and there's a rumour going around the shop that some of us are someday going to come to life." The moment of resurrection will be shared by all, regardless of their deeds.¹⁴

6. The "Rapture" conflicts with II Thessalonians 1:6-10: "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day." In this passage, Paul addresses two distinct groups. The first group consists of those who have faced persecution and suffering, representing the obedient believers. The second group includes those who neither know God nor obey the gospel. Paul also speaks of two outcomes: rest for the afflicted and punishment for the disobedient. Both the reward for the righteous and the punishment for the wicked will take place on "that day" when Jesus returns with His angels. Contrary to this, the "Rapture" doctrine teaches that the

wicked will not face their judgment on that same day, but rather a thousand years later. According to the Rapture belief, the righteous will be caught up in the air, while the wicked remain on the earth. This divergence highlights a difference in the timing of judgment between Paul's message and the Rapture doctrine.

7. The "Rapture" conflicts with II Peter 3:10-14: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which 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. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." This passage discusses the Second Coming of Jesus, which the Bible states will be marked by the earth and everything in it being destroyed by fire. However, proponents of the "Rapture" teach a different view. They claim that the earth will continue for seven years after Jesus' return, followed by His reign in Jerusalem for a thousand years. According to this belief, the earth will be renewed and serve as a resting place for those not counted among the select 144,000 who will be in heaven. This theory, however, contrasts sharply with the clear biblical teaching that the earth and all its contents will be consumed by fire at the Lord's return.

Practical Implications for Christians Today

1. Knowing that Christ will return and believers will be raised should instil a deep, abiding hope that sustains us through life's trials and gives meaning to our earthly existence.
2. When facing the death of a loved one, Christians can mourn with the sure hope of the resurrection, avoiding the hopelessness that unbelievers experience.

¹⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Special centenary ed (London: Fount, 1997).

3. The unpredictable timing of Christ's return demands that we live each day alert, avoiding complacency, and making the most of the time we have been given.

4. Accurate eschatological teachings, such as the biblical view of Christ's second coming as articulated in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:3, should be prioritized by churches. This will assist Christians in not being misled by widely held but false rapture beliefs and assist them in concentrating on the hope and readiness that Paul highlights.

5. Believers can offer profound consolation to those grieving lost loved ones by pointing to the glorious reunion that awaits Christ's return.

6. Prioritize spiritual readiness recognizing the brevity of this life and the imminence of eternity should motivate us to pursue holiness, deepen our relationship with God, and make the most of every opportunity to serve Him.

This passage calls believers to live with an eternal mindset, finding hope, comfort, and motivation in the certainty of Christ's return and the resurrection of the dead. By keeping these truths at the forefront, Christians can navigate the challenges of the present age with faith, purpose, and unshakable hope.

Conclusion

The teachings in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:3 provide profound hope and guidance for Christians regarding the realities of death, resurrection, and Christ's second coming. Paul's words reassure believers that death is not the end, but rather a temporary separation before the glorious reunion at Christ's return. The promise of resurrection offers comfort to those grieving lost loved ones, as they can mourn with the confident expectation of being reunited.

Furthermore, Paul's warnings about the sudden, unexpected nature of Christ's return call believers to remain vigilant and spiritually prepared. This sense of urgency should motivate Christians to live each day with an eternal perspective, prioritizing holiness, serving God, and encouraging one another as they eagerly await the consummation of their hope. By grasping the truths articulated in this passage, the church can navigate the complexities of the present age with unshakable faith, purpose, and the assurance of God's ultimate victory over sin and death.

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