

Rapture as a turning point for believers

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Current events have raised many questions about the future of the world, the church and the Israel. In this explosive, ever-changing atmosphere, it's only natural for people to wonder about Christ's return and with it the Rapture. There is an expectation that Jesus will come very soon to rapture His people to heaven.

According to a Newsweek poll, 55% of Americans "think that the faithful will be taken up to heaven in the Rapture". Over half of American believe in the event commonly called "the Rapture". THE RAPTURE IS THE NEXT GRAND EVENT ON GOD'S PROPHETIC CALENDER.

The three main passages that describe the Rapture of the church are: (a) John 14:1-3 (b) 1-Corinthians 15:50-57 (c) 1-Thessalonians 4:13-18

Those who object to the Rapture often point out that the word *Rapture* is not in the Bible. It is a fair concern. However, the word *Trinity* is also not in the Bible or even the word *Bible* for that matter. Yet we believe that these things are very real.

The term Rapture is derived from 1-Thessalonians 4:17 which reads "We who are still alive and remain on the earth will be *caught up* in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever". The phrase "caught up" is in Greek "*harpazo*", which means "to snatch, to seize or to take suddenly and vehemently".

Harpazo appears thirteen times in the New Testament: Matthew 11:2 & 13:19; John 6:15; 10:12,28 &29; Acts 8:39; 23:10; 2-Cor12:2 & 4; 1-Thess 4:17; Jude 1:23 and Revelation 12:5

In these passages, *harpazo* is variously translated as "take by force", "snatch" or "caught up". In Acts 8, the Spirit "snatches" or transports Philip from one place to another that was twenty miles away. Again in 2-Corinthians 12, Apostle Paul describes

being “caught up” to heaven in the presence of the Lord. In Revelation 12:5 *harpazo* refers back to the Ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven (Acts 1:9-11).

The English word Rapture is derived from Latin. In the 4th Century AD, the great scholar Jerome translated the Greek New Testament into Latin. In 1-Thess 4:17, Jerome translated the Greek word *harpazo* into the Latin word *raeptius*. The Latin word *rapio* means “to seize, snatch or seize away”. This word was eventually brought into English as *Rapture*.

So, while it is true that the word Rapture does not occur in most English translations, 1-Corinthians 15:51-55 and 1-Thessalonians 4:17 clearly contain the concept of a snatching away of living believers to meet the Lord. The rapture could just be called “the snatching away of the believers/church or “translation of the believers/church”. or “harpazo of the believers/church”. The Choice is you, but I would like to call it Rapture of the church.

Now anticipating the Rapture should change the way we live. According to the Scriptures, understanding the Rapture should have at least 3(three.) life-changing influences on believer’s lives.

1. The awaiting of Rapture must have a Converting Influence on believers hearts.

None of us knows how much time is left for us on this earth, either personally or prophetically. We have no guarantee we will see tomorrow. Prophetically, Christ could come at any moment to take His bride—the church to heaven. With life’s brevity in mind, the most important question for every believer is whether he/she has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior.

In Philippians 3:7-11, Apostle Paul reveals his heart and the essence of Christianity. Paul’s greatest longing was to know Christ and to experience His personal presence and companionship in a more intimate way. Nothing else in Paul’s life even compared to this passionately earnest desire.

In fact, everything else was like worthless “rubbish” (V8) compared to knowing Christ better. In his pursuit of deeper relationship with Christ, Paul’s highest aims were:

1. To know Christ intimately as a person, as well as
2. Understand His ways,
3. Experience His companionship,
4. Comprehend His nature and
5. Develop His character as revealed in God’s Word.

True knowledge of Christ involves:

- (a) Listening to and studying His Word,
- (b) Applying and experiencing the Word . *It requires:*
- (c) Following the Holy Spirit’s guidance in faith and obedience. *It means:*
- (d) Identifying with Christ’s character, concerns and purposes.

Think about this; Apostle Paul was not writing about the time he became born-again. He had been Christian for nearly 3 decades/30 years, at the time he wrote this. He had traveled the world and has been used of God as few men ever had or ever will be. Yet here he was still seeking to know Christ more(V10). We need to make sure, we are Rapture Ready!

2. The awaiting of Rapture must have a Caring influence on believers hearts.

Just a simple reading of Revelation 6-18 reminds us of what is in store for this earth after the Rapture. Scripture also describes the eternal horrors that await those who die without trusting Christ. The Bible brings us face-to-face with what is at stake for those who don’t know Christ as their savior.

2-Corinthians 5:20 reminds us of our calling during this present age: “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God”(NASB).

Those who have already responded to the message of God’s grace & forgiveness through Christ know the world’s future, and we are Christ’s ambassadors, representing Him & His heart to the perishing world. We should care deeply about those who are

still lost, willingly give of our material resources to help spread the gospel message, and regularly ask the Lord for opportunities and boldness to share the good news of Christ. A clear understanding of the Rapture should exert a strong influence on every believer to care about the lost before time runs out.

3. The awaiting of Rapture must have a Cleansing Influence on believers hearts.

A proper understanding of the Rapture should produce a life of holiness & purity. Focusing the mind & heart on Christ's coming can powerfully motivate our efforts towards living a pure life. A very important passage from the scripture support my argument. In 1-John 3:2-3, we read "Beloved, now we are children of God and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when he appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as he is. And every one who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself/herself, just as He is pure".

How can we be riveted by the Rapture and live an impure life? 1-John 3:3 says it can happen. Fixing our hope on Christ & His coming is a purifying hope. We are to live as if Jesus could come at anytime, and if this becomes real to us, it will transform our lives. There is a very important message/warning for us in Hebrews 9:28. "...Jesus will only appear to those who are waiting for His coming...". Now compare this with Matt 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God".

My dear beloved believers, intentionally live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of our great God & Savior Jesus Christ as Titus 2:12-13 urges us to.

Even Apostle Peter in his 2nd epistle chapter 3, verse 14 warns us of being found in Him in peace, spotless & blameless. (read verses 10-14). In an immoral, sinful society like ours, what could be more important & down to earth than personal purity? Living a godly life everyday is the essence of a walk with Christ.

In closing, I would like to appeal to all who are listening to me:

Let's be watching servants, realizing that Christ could return at anytime. Let's be energetic & excited about serving the Lord. Let's be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord—knowing that our toil is not going to be in vain in the Lord.

In the language of Luke 12:35-36, "Let's be dressed ready for service and keep our lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when He comes & knocks, we can immediately open the door for Him.

Remember! In the present time, working & waiting is the Christian Characteristic of believers. Let us live each day to please the Master. May the Triune God help us in this mission, assignment and undertaking.....Amen.