

Vicarious Sacrifice: Principles from 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17; Paul Commands Church at Thessalonica to Encourage Each Other Regarding the Rapture; Sorrow over a Believer’s Death Is Normal, but Is to Be Soon Replaced by Expectation of the Future Reunion; Knowledge of Eschatology Is Essential for Understanding Our Future in Phase 3: Facilitates the Advance to Sophisticated Spiritual life, Defense of the Soul against Fifth Columns, Attainment of Occupation with Christ; Conveyance of Escrow Blessings, & Preparation for the Evaluation Tribunal of Christ, 2 Cor 5:10; 1 Cor 3:11–15; Heb 11:1

Principles:

1. The temporal adverb “then” introducing the verse indicates that the Rapture is a two-phase process.
2. The use of the first person pronoun “we” that follows is one of several indications in Scripture that the Rapture is imminent.
3. Those who have already died physically will precede those who are “alive and remain.”
4. Once Group A ascends, it is immediately followed by Group B.
5. Both groups ascend upward in what Paul refers to as *harpázō*, translated “caught up.” These two ascended groups gather in the clouds to join a meeting with the Lord.
6. Both groups along with the Lord will then exit the universe at warp speed.
7. Both groups unite as one, where there will be a reunion with family and friends, and each and all will forever be with the Lord.
8. The prophetic future tense is a report back from the future that these things will occur.

1 Thessalonians 4:18 - Therefore comfort one another with these words. (NASB)

- (1) Paul has given the believers at Thessalonica a lesson in eschatology revealing their future transfer into heaven in resurrection body.

- (2) They have been informed that not only will their fellow believers who are physically dead be raptured, but they will actually precede those who are still alive and remain.
- (3) The delay between the groups' exit resurrections is infinitesimal to be sure, but the point is that the ones for whom the Thessalonians have concern are the ones that will be raptured first.
- (4) This doctrine should alleviate any concern they have about those that have gone before, so Paul orders them to "comfort one another."
- (5) "Comfort" is the present active imperative of the verb **παρακαλέω (parakalēō)**: "encourage, console, beseech."
- (6) This is not a touchy-feely suggestion. This is a direct command for these believers to quit their moping around and feeling sorry for the deceased.
- (7) The deceased are the ones that have the advantage. The imperative mood is designed to get them out of their lachrymose mentality and get back to doctrine.
- (8) The believers at Thessalonica are ordered to "encourage one another with these words."
- (9) "Words" is the instrumental of means of the noun **λόγος (lógos)**: "by means of doctrine."
- (10) What doctrine? Eschatology! Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has informed these people that he has looked into the divine decree and has reported back from the future that **(1)** the rapture *does* occur first for the deceased, **(2)** right afterward, it *does* occur for them, and **(3)** they will all be with the Lord forever.
- (11) (11) It is *epígnōsis* knowledge of eschatology that enables the believer to fulfill stage three of the sophisticated spiritual life.
- (12) (12) This is the level of spiritual maturity where an advanced inventory of biblical truth makes the believer invincible against the cosmic challenges from external and internal fifth columns.

- (13) (13) This is accomplished by occupation with Christ which is the tenth problem-solving device.
- (14) (14) This area of spiritual advance also places the mature believer in the Z-radical of the Equation of Hope. He is fully cognizant of the fact he has eternal life and the potential for escrow blessings in eternity.
- (15) (15) The advance in this status is provided by knowledge of eschatology. These are prophecies related to the Rapture, the Millennium, and the Eternal State that apply to the Church-Age believer.
- (16) (16) Passages that deal with the Parousia and Rapture inform the advanced believer of his imminent transfer upward to be with the Lord forever.
- (17) This knowledge gives him confidence that his continued submission to the thinking of the Judge insures the conveyance of his eternal escrow at the Evaluation Tribunal of Christ:

2 Corinthians 5:10 - We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad [cf. **1 Corinthians 3:11–15**]. (NASB)

- (18) Paul orders the believers at Thessalonica to encourage each other with doctrines of eschatology which are promises whose verbs are in the predictive/prophetic future tense.
- (19) Once believers grasp that prophecy is not a look into the future predicting what will occur, but a look back from the future reporting what does occur, then this verse becomes a reality:

Hebrews 11:1 - Now faith [πίστις (*pístis*)] in the Word of God¹ keeps on being the source from which we keep on receiving confidence, the evidence of things not being seen. (EXT)

¹ “Πίστις” is the holding fast, in patient waiting, to what Christ has done as high priest, and it refers retrospectively to Hebrews 10:39 where the context gave the nuance of steadfast faithfulness to God and His word of promise”

- (20) Understanding and believing that the Bible is telling you the truth about the future is the most comforting and encouraging information a person can have for keeping his soul stabilized in the combat that rages in the Invisible War.
- (21) The extreme importance of including eschatology in one's accumulation of doctrines in the eleven categories of systematic theology is addressed by Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer.

(Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998], 541).