

Don Hargrove
Faith Bible Church
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Personal Study through the Bible-19 (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

When the Reformers broke with the Roman Catholic Church, they declared total confidence in what they called the *perspicuity* of Scripture. What they meant by that technical term was the clarity of Scripture. They rightfully maintained that the Bible is basically clear and lucid—believers do not need a priest or anyone else to understand the basic message of the Bible. One of the foundational principles of being a protestant is the belief that the Bible is simple enough for any literate person to understand its *basic message*. This does not mean that all parts of the Bible are equally clear or that there are no difficult passages; this is true for both the layperson as well as the pastor. While laypeople unskilled in the ancient languages and the fine points of philosophy, metaphysics, and exegesis may have difficulty with certain passages, the essential content of the Bible is easily understood. Furthermore, what is difficult in one part of Scripture is often stated more clearly and simply in other parts of Scripture.

There simply is no blessing like personally reading, understanding, and thinking about truths in your Bible—to “own” an understanding this way is priceless intellectually as well as spiritually. It not only provides first-hand knowledge of God’s living and powerful Word, it provides the foundation and framework for you to be able to get more out of more advanced studies by pastor-teachers. For what Scripture says about personal study of the Word, read Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:1-6; note the success promised in Joshua and the two alternatives in Psalm 1.

For our Thessalonian studies, I would like for you to read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 again. Note the transition from verse 16 to 17 where we are told that the resurrection of the dead in Christ will be followed by living Christians being “caught up” to meet the Lord. It appears that the time gap between the resurrection of the dead and the rapture of living believers will be momentary. The point here is that living believers will not have to wait for the bodily resurrection of Christian loved ones, for they will precede them.

The expression “caught up together” is the biblical source of the word *rapture*. The Latin translation of “caught up” is *rapturo*, from which the English word *rapture* is derived. This refers to the time when the living believer will be raptured or bodily removed from the earth to meet the Lord in the air. These believers, it may be us, no one knows, will never experience death. A whole generation of saints all over the world will pass into the immediate presence of the Lord without experiencing physical death.

Note the phrase in verse 17, “in the clouds.” While some believe the clouds are not literal and they refer to saints (read Hebrews 12:1), it is more likely that they are literal clouds. The Lord will return as He left; read Acts 1:9. There is no indication that the residents of the earth will actually be able to see church age believers raptured. At one moment in time an entire

generation of Christians will be caught up to be assembled to meet the Lord in the air. It is *not* going to be some gradual or floating-in-the-air process as illustrated in pictures like this:



After *immediately* vanishing from earth and meeting the Lord in the clouds in the air, the believer will be taken to the third heaven, into the immediate presence of God Himself. What a trip that is going to be! Read Christ's promise of taking us to be with Him in the third heaven in John 14:1-3. Note the comforting phrase, "so shall we always be with the Lord," in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. From this time on, where the Lord is, so will be the church age believer. What comfort! There will be no separation either physically or spiritually, nothing but perfect fellowship and perfect harmony. We will also be with our loved ones in Christ forever. This is one of the reasons Paul can say that they "do not grieve as do the rest who have no hope" (4:13)

The rapture takes place before the tribulation. After the tribulation, the Lord will return to the earth, this is called the second advent. Note how He comes and who is with Him; read Rev. 19:11-16.

In 'Ehyeh,

Pastor Don Hargrove