

## 1 Corinthians 15

According to Bell, “Together with I Thessalonians 4:13-18, I Corinthians 15:51-57 constitutes one of the clearest passages in the New Testament on the subject of the rapture of the church.”<sup>1</sup> Ladd adds, “The Rapture means two things: 1). Union with the Lord . . . 2). The second significance of the Rapture is the transformation of the bodies of living believers.”<sup>2</sup> And also, “The mystery of the Rapture therefore is not the truth that the Rapture is to occur before the Great Tribulation. It is the *fact* that the living dead will be bodily transformed at Jesus’ parousia and as a result of the transformation will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and so be ever with the Lord.”<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Walvoord addresses it this way, “In 1 Thessalonians 4, the question was whether those who had died in Christ would have the same benefits and experience as those who were translated. In 1 Corinthians 15, the question is whether those who are translated will have the same experience and benefits as those who have died and who are resurrected. The two passages together give a complete answer to the basic questions concerning the Rapture as an important prophetic event.”<sup>4</sup> And also, “that the resurrection and translation of the church is declared to be a mystery and, as such, is not included in any passage in the Old Testament dealing with the second coming of Christ . . . the fact that the translation of the church is not mentioned anywhere in the New Testament in a passage that clearly speaks of the coming of Christ after the Great Tribulation.”<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Bell, 292.

<sup>2</sup>Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 78.

<sup>3</sup>Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 80.

<sup>4</sup>Walvoord, 246.

<sup>5</sup>Walvoord, 248.

The context of 1 Corinthians 15 is Paul's teaching on the doctrine of resurrection. Within this overarching topic, he makes reference to a significant event occurring two separate times (*parousia* in verse 23 and the "mystery" of all Christians, both dead and alive, being *changed* (*allasso*), in verses 51 and 52). Starting at verse 20, Paul establishes the fact that Jesus Christ was the first whole, complete, normal, perfect human being (as Adam was before the Fall) that was bodily and supernaturally raised from the dead at his resurrection (*anastasis*). Verses 21 and 22 emphasize that death (both spiritual and physical) came into the world through the "first man," Adam's fall/sin, and therefore; all die as a result. However in Jesus Christ, the "last man," (the first one resurrected and representative of the first one restored to wholeness and completeness again); all may be restored to life again. In verses 23 and 24, Paul then shows there is an order to this resurrection of humanity. Vincent says this is the only New Testament use of the word "order." And it means, "use of a band, troop, cohort, standard series, process – band after band rises."<sup>6</sup> The order is: (1) Jesus first; (2) then, those who are Christ's at His coming (*Parousia*); and (3) then, comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father. Rea explains it this way, "The 'hour' of John 5:28, in which all that are in the tombs will hear the voice of the Son of God and will come forth, will include a thousand years or more. This long period will separate the resurrection of life—the first resurrection—from the resurrection of judgment. The literal interpretation of Revelation 20 forces the Bible student to this conclusion. The resurrection of the just (Luke 14:14), or the first resurrection (Rev. 20:5, 6), seems to have two or more phases. The New Testament passage which most clearly delineates this order is I

---

<sup>6</sup>Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publications, 1991), 275.

Corinthians 15:20-26.”<sup>7</sup> After the Millennium the “second resurrection,” will occur at the Great White Throne Judgement and consist of unbelievers—Revelation 20:11. Paul then goes on to talk about the resurrection body being different than the normal physical body with which all humanity was born into this world—heavenly, spiritual and imperishable versus earthly, natural and perishable. He specifically emphasizes that a new resurrection body is needed to inherit the Kingdom of God (Heaven)—v. 50.

Then, Paul focuses on how believers are to gain this new resurrection body to enter the Kingdom of God, in verses 51-53. He starts by using the word, “Behold” to get their attention and then continues by stating he is going to tell them a “mystery.” That “mystery” is the same as was written to the Thessalonians four to five years earlier, but couched in terms of the resurrection of the body. He says, not all Christians will sleep (die), but all will be *changed (allasso)*—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be *raised imperishable (egeiro)*, and we shall all (both newly resurrected Christians and those who are alive at that time) be *changed (allasso)*. Vincent makes an interesting point about “twinkling” at this juncture—that the word is only used in this context in the New Testament and generally indicates any rapid movement<sup>8</sup> (another inference to the rapid nature of the Rapture).

Even though *allasso* is used in this context, instead of *harpazo*, it is very clear that Paul is referring to the same event described in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17, as the Rapture of the Church. This is further supported by Paul’s use of similar language in Romans 8:10-23 (11, 23) and

---

<sup>7</sup>Rea, 23-4.

<sup>8</sup>Vincent, 3:286.

The Rapture of the Church: A Doctrine of the Early Church or a Recent Development of the Dispensational Movement?

Philippians 3:20-21 (21); where he also addresses the idea of *changing* or *transforming* the bodies of Christians into their heavenly resurrection bodies. Next, the remainder of the uses of *harpazo*, to see if it is consistently used as a unique term for the Rapture, will be explored.