

Changed in the Twinkling of an Eye

📖 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

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What I have discovered in studying the three major rapture passages systematically, is that while each is consistent with the others, each also reveals a unique aspect of the rapture that the others don't reveal. John 14:1-3 is the first major rapture passage. It is seminal to all the others. Jesus was preparing His disciples for His departure out of this world. They were disturbed about this announcement. Therefore, He comforts them with a new doctrine; I will come again and receive you to Myself. Taken in its most obvious sense, the disciples would have thought Jesus would come back for them while they were still alive to take them where He was going; to the Father's house, which is heaven. Interestingly, there is no mention of any signs of His coming for them, such as the signs in the Olivet Discourse that are listed as preceding His Second Coming to earth to establish the kingdom. Nor is there any mention of them having to taste death. Therefore, there was a very real possibility that He might come within their lifetime and somehow translate them. Then comes 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, the second major rapture passage. Here we have something added to the picture in John. What was added related to a number of the Thessalonians being persecuted and killed. Since they died before Jesus came, where are they? What will happen to them? The new revelation given to Paul is that they immediately went into Christ's presence. On the day of the rapture they would be raised first. Then those who remained and were alive on that day would be caught up with them so they would always be with the Lord. 1 Thess 4:13-18 is consistent with John 14:1-3, but it adds fresh revelation concerning those who die before He comes. Then comes 1 Corinthians 15:50-58, the third major rapture passage. It adds something to John 14 and 1 Thess 4. What was added was that those who remain and are alive when He comes will be changed into resurrection bodies in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. That really was not revealed clearly in either of the previous revelations. So this was something new and it's our topic today; the translation of those who are alive and remain at His coming. This too provides comfort as the previous passages. One major comfort is the very fact that those who are raptured do not have to live through Tribulation judgments in order to make it to the rapture. That is, the rapture seems to be from context, pre-Tribulation. Walvoord said, "First Corinthians 15 confirms what is uniformly true in all the rapture passages, that not a word of warning is ever given concerning a preceding tribulation."¹ "Silence about a tribulation following the rapture is understandable if the rapture occurs first, but if the great tribulation precedes the rapture, it would have been cruel for the apostle to hold out the hope of the coming of the Lord for them

when, as a matter of fact, it would be impossible unless they survived the tribulation."² It's by looking at the rapture itself and the contexts the rapture passages are found in together that points us in the direction of being pre-tribulation, that is, the rapture taking place before the tribulation. And next week we will look at a few passages that show that we are not destined for wrath in the tribulation and that the wrath begins with the day of the Lord and therefore we are raptured before the day of the Lord.

Today let's take a look at 1 Cor 15:50-58. For those of you who have followed my ministry closely, you know that I have taught these verses differently than I will today. I once taught that the change here, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, referred to the change of believers living at the end of the millennium so that they were put in resurrection bodies before they go into the eternal state. That is an interesting idea because that is still an outstanding problem, but I have repented of that view and I need to state why because it is a strong argument. But teaching pastors change their views over time, upon closer examination, and I now think this refers to the rapture. The short reason why is that in 15:51 the pronoun "we" has convinced me. Paul is making application of the resurrection doctrine to himself, including one generation of Church age believers. This is the same type of thing we saw last week in 1 Thess 4:15 and 17, where Paul said, "we who are alive and remain" using "we" to include Himself as one who might be alive when Christ descends in the air. So, I think verse 51 is referring to the generation of the Church that is alive at the rapture. That's the short reason. The long reason is that in 15:23 there is an order to the resurrection that involves church age saints and is picked up again later in 15:50ff. 15:23 says, "But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death." If you read that it all sounds very sequential and like it will occur very quickly. But we know it's already been delayed 2,000 years. So what Paul is doing is telescoping everything from Christ's resurrection to the end of the millennial kingdom. When the Bible telescopes things it means that it is like looking at events as through an old seaman's telescope. He might be looking through his telescope and extend it suddenly so that he sees something much farther away but the field of view has narrowed so that he missed some things in between. That is what happens in 15:23ff. We see up close the resurrection of Christ, then the telescope is extended suddenly and we see the resurrection of the Church at His coming, which is at the rapture, and then the telescope is extended again suddenly and it takes us all the way to the end of the millennium when Christ's kingdom is handed over to the Father. Lots of events were not seen in between. That's known as telescopic, a common prophetic feature in the OT and NT. I think that 15:50 is returning to the topic of our resurrection at Christ's coming for us at the rapture. He's resuming a prior topic, not starting a new one about millennial saints. And further, in verse 58 he is encouraging us to live every moment in light of Christ's coming for us at the rapture. That's an admonition for us, not millennial saints. So, that's the long reason why I now think this passage is about the rapture and not saints at the end of the millennium is because of the overall context applying to us.

The lead into our verses in v 50ff are vv 48-49, the nature of the resurrection body. What will the resurrection body be like? An interesting topic. Basically, Paul says that just as we have been outfitted with an earthen body fit for life on this earth so in the resurrection we will be outfitted with a heavenly body fit for life in heaven. So, the body is designed for an environment. In 15:50 Paul is telling us why this heavenly body is necessary. Why? Because **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God**. What's the **kingdom of God**? The **kingdom of God** is the kingdom that Messiah will establish on earth at His Second Coming. It's not here now. It is revealed in this chapter to have two phases in verses 23-24; a phase when Christ rules and then a phase when Christ hands over the rule of the kingdom to the God and Father. I think the **kingdom** is being viewed in both of its phases here. I think it's a general reference to the future kingdom. Paul says **flesh and blood cannot inherit this kingdom**. That necessitates that we be resurrected, put in heavenly bodies fit to **inherit the kingdom**. What does it mean **inherit the kingdom**? It means enter **the kingdom** to reign. Our destiny is to reign with Christ for the 1,000 year kingdom. Of course, we can't reign in our earthly bodies because we still have a sin nature. As long as we have a sin nature we are prone to injustice and unrighteousness. So we have to be outfitted with a resurrection body that doesn't have a sin nature. Imagine that we are one day going to enter into a phase of our life where we will never sin again, we won't even desire to sin, we will only do righteousness, and only desire righteousness. That is a great truth. Paul's point is that our resurrection is necessary because of the ruling function we will serve in the kingdom.

Now parallel to that the end of verse 50 says, **nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable**. Of course, **the perishable** is parallel to **flesh and blood**, they both refer to the earthly body. **The imperishable** is parallel to **the kingdom of God**. Once the **kingdom of God** comes with the Second Coming of Christ it will never perish. It has two phases, one for a thousand years and the other for the rest of eternity, but once the kingdom comes it will never perish. So these are parallel expressions and the word **inherit** joins them both; **flesh and blood does not inherit** and **the perishable does not inherit**. **Inherit**, in this case, means enter so as to reign. And so verse 50 is simple; believers in this age have to be resurrected in order to reign with Christ in the kingdom. Why would this be pertinent to the Corinthians? Because some of the Corinthian's were rejecting the resurrection. Paul's argument is that if there is no resurrection how exactly are we going to reign with Christ in the kingdom? We can't reign in these perishable bodies. We wouldn't do a very good job. So we must be raised.

In 15:51 Paul says, **Behold, I tell you a mystery**. And you should know, when you see the word **mystery**, what that means. A **mystery** is something concealed, now revealed. That's the simplest way to remember it. Some truth that has been concealed in the OT, hidden in God and inaccessible by any means, but now revealed in the NT. There are ten mysteries in the NT; eight of them are divine and two are satanic. We studied five of the eight divine mysteries because they all relate to the Church; the Church is Jew and Gentile in one new man, the individual believer is indwelt by Christ, the church is the bride of Christ, each local church is a lampstand with a guardian angel, and this mystery right here. Verse 51, **We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed**. This mystery is not resurrection. The OT already revealed resurrection. But the mystery is that not all will have to fall

asleep before being resurrected. It's the mystery of translation, being instantly transformed from a perishable body to an imperishable one. **Sleep** is just a euphemism for death, just like in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, so we have something parallel between these passages. There Paul referred to those who will not sleep as those who remain and are alive at Christ's coming. And he said they would be caught up. But there was still a question about what would happen to them when they were caught up? Would they have to die or not? Would they be resurrected or not? We're not really told. The OT set us up for this truth by the examples of Enoch and Elijah. They are precursors to the rapture doctrine. Enoch walked with God and was not, for God took him. He was just caught up off the earth. Did Enoch have to die? No, Enoch was, in a sense, raptured. But was Enoch resurrected? He can't have been because Christ is the first resurrected from the dead. What about Elijah? Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind. Did he have to die? No. Was He resurrected? He can't have been. But they do prefigure the rapture in the sense that they set up our thinking for the rapture doctrine. That way our thinking processes would be prepared for accepting the rapture and resurrection as it is taught in the NT. Of course, some Christians who don't really read their Bible object to this saying, "The Bible says, it is appointed for all men to die and then face the judgment." So you can't have one generation not tasting death but being resurrected. But that's not what the Bible says. The Bible says, "it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." There is nothing in there about all men having to die. Enoch and Elijah did not have to die, yet, they may come back as the two witnesses in the future tribulation, but we don't know for sure. So that's not a valid objection. And here we are told that not all of us will have to die. **we will not all sleep**. Paul even included himself as one who could be a part of the group that did not have to sleep. In other words, there's the concept of imminence again. It could happen in any generation, as far as we are concerned, There are no timing indicators preceding it. There are no signs that must precede it. It can just happen. And if Paul thought it could happen in his generation I think it's safe to say that it could happen in our generation. We just don't know. Wouldn't it be great to be the generation that did not have to taste death? Now what would happen to us if we did not have to taste death? Well, Paul says, **we would all be changed**. That's what they like to put on the nursery walls. "They may not all sleep, but they shall all be changed." The word **changed** is from *αλλάσσω* and means "to make something other or different, *change, alter*." Our bodies will be changed, altered. They will change from an earthly body to a heavenly body. Of course, it's talking about a translation. That is the mystery. This was never revealed in the OT. And note something special: **All** believers **will be changed**, not just the super-saints, not just the really devout, not just those looking for His coming, but **all** believers. The only condition for being translated is being a believer and being alive when Christ comes for us. And wouldn't that be great! Wouldn't it be great to not have to die? This is a great truth. **We** are not all going to die. I don't know about you but I don't want to have to die. I'd prefer to skip that part if I can. That is what this is saying. One generation will get to skip it. They'll just be translated.

Now in 15:52 Paul continues, **in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye**. This is a rate of change issue. In chemistry, there are rates of chemical reactions. These rates can be modified with heat or enzymes. Well, this

change is going to take place rather quickly. This word **in a moment** is *ατομω*. We get the word "atom" from it. The etymology of this word is a- which is a negation, and -tom" which means "to cut," so *not to cut*, or something that cannot be cut. And the rate of change is the thing that cannot be cut. We measure rate of change in time and the whole point is that the time it takes for the change cannot be cut in half. We talk about limits in mathematics; namely the limit of infinity. This is the idea that numbers can be cut in half, 4, cut into 2, 2 into 1, 1 into $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{2}$ into $\frac{1}{4}$ and each time you make that cut it gets closer to 0. But theoretically you can never get to 0, can you? You just keep cutting a number in half. Since you can never get to zero they invented the concept of limit of infinity, which is a non-number. So let's just say, for ease of discussion, some number that can't be cut in half. Where you reach that I don't know. But it is strikingly like what Paul is saying here. It will happen so fast that the amount of time it takes is immeasurable, probably no time is what Paul is saying. It's so fast it won't take any time at all.

The next phrase is **in the twinkling of an eye**. This is a rate of event issue. The word **twinkling** is *ριπη* and means "rapid movement." Your eye, if it is scanning a room moves across in clicks. It's different than when your eye is following a moving object, that's a smooth movement. But if you are just scanning your eye will move in clicks that are extremely rapid, so rapid that you never even lose focus of the objects in the room. The neurobiology of the eye is incredible. And this movement is extremely rapid. It's talking about that sudden jolting speed. In other words, the change here will take place with sudden speed, so sudden nobody is going to see it. It's that fast. **In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.**

Now everybody latches on to the next statement, **at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed**. They latch onto it because it says **trumpet** and we've already seen a trumpet last week in 1 Thess 4:16, a trumpet in Matt 24:31 and a trumpet in Rev 11:15. So they see all these trumpets and they want to consolidate several of these into one trumpet. And from that comes either the mid-trib rapture or the post-trib rapture. They're trying to get the trumpet of 1 Thess 4:16 and 1 Cor 15:52 into a timing scheme such as Matt 24 or Rev 11. What's interesting is that both Matt 24 and Rev 11 can be put in a timing scheme. So if you can link 1 Thess 4:16 and 1 Cor 15:52 into one of those then you have the time of the rapture. If you link them to Rev 11 then the rapture is mid-trib, if you link them to Matt 24 then the rapture is post-trib. And that is essentially what some people have done. Let's think about that for a minute. If I do that, if I link 1 Thess 4:16 and 1 Cor 15:52 into one of these timing passages, what immediately goes away? Imminency. The rapture cannot happen at-any-moment because there are other prophesied events that must happen before it can happen. It doesn't matter if I link them into Rev 11:15, at the mid-trib, or Matt 24:31, at the post-trib, either way the anti-Christ has to rise on the world stage as a major world power first, he has to sign a treaty with the nation Israel first, the temple has to be rebuilt first and the Jews have to be offering sacrifice first. In that scheme all of those things must happen before the rapture can happen. But if I do that where is my focus now? What am I watching for? I'm watching for the anti-Christ. He is the forerunner of the real Christ. But if I'm looking for him who am I no longer looking for? Christ. And who does the NT say I should be looking for? Christ. Titus

2:13, "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus..." Heb 12:2, "...fixing our eyes on Jesus..." Col 3:2, "Set our mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory." Our focus is to be on Christ. But if we see the rapture is mid-trib or post-trib then our focus is on the anti-Christ who must come before Christ. It's the wrong focus. It's not consistent with the rest of the NT and it destroys imminency, the idea that Christ could come at-any-moment. In order to maintain imminency, mid-trib and post-trib authors re-define imminency. They say we define it wrong and they are making a correction. But our point still remains. Paul thought it could come in his lifetime. That is why he keeps saying "we." He didn't know when it would come, he didn't know that it would come in his lifetime. but he held out that it could come. That's our point. So mid and post-trib just don't fit with other passages.

Now what I would do is link 1 Cor 15:52 to 1 Thess 4:16. Both mention a trumpet. 1 Thess 4:16 says "trumpet of God." 1 Cor 15:52 says **the last trumpet**. 1 Thess 4:16 says "the dead in Christ will rise first." 1 Cor 15:52 says **the dead will be raised imperishable**. Since they both speak of a trumpet and a resurrection I think those two passages are parallel. And while both Rev 11:15 and Matt 24:31 speak of a trumpet, neither speak of a resurrection. That is a major difference. In Matt 24:31 the angels are sent to gather living Israel to take them to their judgment preceding the kingdom. There they will either be granted entrance in their mortal bodies or they will be slaughtered and excluded. But there is nothing there about them being resurrected. In Rev 11:15 there is nothing at all about anyone being resurrected. It's just entirely absent. The reason people want to link 1 Cor 15:52 to Rev 11:15 is because Rev 11:15 is the seventh trumpet. Since the seventh is the last in the series of trumpet judgments, it must be the last trumpet of 1 Cor 15:52. I can see why people think that makes sense, but Paul didn't know anything about seven trumpets in the Book of Revelation. It was written 40 years after Paul died. It seems easier to just allow trumpets to have their ordinary meaning as signals of some event. They don't have to all signal the same event. In fact, as common as they are in Scripture, it is strange that people want to make them refer to the same event. The bottom line is that while there is merit in linking the trumpet in 1 Cor 15:52 to the one in 1 Thess 4:16, the reason is because of resurrection. Neither of the other passages has resurrection, and that is a major deficiency. Of course, there are many other problems trying to make these links, but all we're talking about here is the trumpets and resurrection.

1 Thess 4 told us that there would be a trumpet and the dead in Christ would be raised first. 1 Cor 15:52 adds, **and we will be changed**, that is, those who do not sleep, but are alive and remain at Christ's coming. Once again, Paul thought he could be a part of the group that was **changed**. This points to imminency, a precious doctrine that Paul believed. And if Paul believed it, Jesus believed it and I believe it. If it's good enough for them, it's good enough for me. He believed that he could be **changed** or translated from this mortal body to an immortal body.

15:53 explains, **For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.** The word **must** is $\delta\epsilon\iota$. It is a word signaling necessity. It is the very first word in the Greek sentence, meaning it is emphatic. It is wholly necessary for the **perishable to put on the imperishable**, and by parallel, the **mortal to put on immortality**. The reason was already stated in verse 50, so that we can reign with Christ in the kingdom. We cannot reign in these mortal, perishable bodies because they have the sin nature, the propensity to sin, and in the kingdom those who rule must rule with perfect justice and righteousness.

So there are your three major rapture passages. John 14:1-3 is the first and seminal teaching of the rapture. It teaches that Jesus is coming again and would receive the disciples to Himself. They clearly expected this to take place in their lifetime. 1 Thess 4:13-18 added new revelation regarding those who died before He came again. They are already with Him and will be raised first on the day He comes again. 1 Cor 15:50-58 added that those who were alive when He came again would be translated, instantly transformed into resurrection bodies in the twinkling of an eye. This will be an earth-changing event. Those on earth will be searching for answers at the departure of all believers from the planet.

Concluding, it is fully granted that none of these passages state the exact timing of the rapture. They don't state whether it's pre-trib, mid-trib or post-trib. But, in the context there is nothing about the tribulation, nothing about the anti-Christ, nothing about any global wars or famines or mark of the beast, nothing at all, and the most logical reason why is because the rapture is before all these things, its pre-tribulational. I'm just showing you the rationale behind the position. Next week we will look at some passages that say we are not destined for wrath and that the wrath begins with the revealing of the man of sin, which happens before the day of the Lord. The rapture is in one of the passages and this one passage is the passage that some have thought proves the pre-trib rapture. It is without question the most debated passage. So we will be cautious and we will investigate whether this passage sheds any light on the timing relation of the rapture to the Tribulation. Then we will go to the Revelation.

¹ John F Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation*, 132.

² *Ibid.*, 132.