

THE RAPTURE

**AND WHAT WE SHOULD DO
UNTIL CHRIST RETURNS**

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INTRODUCTION

As Senator John F. Kennedy campaigned for the presidency in 1960, he often used the story of a Colonel Davenport to conclude his speeches. Davenport was the Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives in the late 1700s. History records that when the House was in session in 1789, the sky above Hartford grew so black one day that many members feared the end was near. Resisting the calls for an immediate adjournment, Davenport said, “The Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. Therefore, I wish that candles be brought.”

Colonel Davenport’s response to the possibility of impending judgment makes one think he must have been a biblically literate Christian. His perspective—“to be found doing my duty”—reflects a proper understanding of what every Christian should be doing until Christ returns.

But what is “duty”? We have only to read the words of Christ’s parable in Luke 19 to answer that question. In the parable, a nobleman prepared for a trip to a distant city by putting his servants in charge until he returned. He gave each of them a sum of money and told them, “Do business till I come” (verse 13). Their responsibility was to take their master’s resources and do with them exactly what he would do if he had been there to “do business” himself.

The point of Jesus’ parable for the Christian is obvious: We are to do His business until He returns. Therefore, “duty” consists

of fulfilling the commands He gave us, His servants, before He departed: Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20).

Every Christian has been given resources by the Master: spiritual gifts, natural talents, intelligence, creativity, physical ability, and material goods. Taking a cue from Colonel Davenport, we must ask ourselves, “If Jesus Christ returned today, what evidence would there be that I am doing my duty—doing the Master’s business with what He has given me?”

The Rapture and What We Should Do Until Christ Returns has been prepared to help you get ready for that day. The Bible teaches that the Rapture of the church could occur at any moment without warning. Therefore, we are to be ready every day—doing the Master’s business until He comes. In this resource, you’ll discover ten orders of Christ’s “business” and suggestions on how to accomplish them—enough to keep every believer busy until that day.



THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

One Sunday after morning services, my young grandson and I were driving to my house to gather with the rest of the family for lunch. There was a lot of new home construction at that time in an area near where we live. As we approached an intersection, my grandson was fascinated by the sign a young man was holding. The sign was large and had only two things on it: “NEW HOMES” and a big arrow indicating the direction to turn.

We drove just a bit farther and came to another young man standing at a corner with a sign identical to the first one we’d seen: “NEW HOMES” and a big arrow, presumably pointing to the same housing development. When we were almost home, we encountered a third sign—no teenage sign holder, just the sign. The holder had either decided to take a break or concluded he was done for the day because his sign was leaned up against the side of a car. The sign was standing on its end so that the arrow was pointing vertically toward the sky. I was struck by the spiritual irony of a large arrow pointing toward heaven accompanied by the words, “NEW HOMES”!

I immediately thought of Jesus’ words in John 14:2-3: “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

An article in the March 2007 issue of *National Geographic* magazine was all about the Orlando, Florida, area—home of Disney World and other attractions. It has become an example of the “urban sprawl” that characterizes so many major metropolitan areas today—areas filled with acre after acre of “McMansions.” The article notes

that “the size of an average American home has increased 63 percent over the past three decades.”

While we labor to increase the size of our earthly mansions, we sometimes forget that Jesus has promised that heaven has “many mansions” awaiting those who know Him. Does anyone really believe that the grandest of earthly dwellings should be preferred over one prepared in heaven?

The anticipation of moving into one of those heavenly dwellings should be prime motivation for every believer to live his life in anticipation of the Second Coming. Jesus’ coming to receive Christians to himself is the subject of Paul’s words in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Known to Christians as the Rapture of the church, Paul describes an event by which Jesus’ followers will be gathered to himself seven years prior to His physical return to earth to establish His millennial kingdom:

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

That event—being gathered to and received by Jesus Christ—is the first of Christ’s two-part return. The second part is when Christ’s

feet will actually touch down on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, when He physically comes back to set up the kingdom promised long ago by the prophets. Great earthly armies will have gathered together to destroy the people of Israel, and Christ will intervene to save them (Zechariah 14:3-4):

*Then the LORD will go forth
And fight against those nations,
As He fights in the day of battle.
And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives,
Which faces Jerusalem on the east.
And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two,
From east to west,
Making a very large valley;
Half of the mountain shall move toward the north
And half of it toward the south.*

When that happens, Israel will realize that the One who has saved them from physical destruction is the same One who came to save them from spiritual destruction many years before—again, just as the prophets foretold (Zechariah 12:10): “And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.”

And it is not only Israel who will see and mourn over the appearing of Jesus Christ in the clouds and then on earth. The whole world will recognize Him and realize who He is (Revelation 1:7): “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.”

Christians will be removed (raptured) from the earth in order that they might not go through the terrible tribulations that will occur for seven years (Revelation 3:10)—the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jeremiah 30:7)—prior to Christ’s return to judge the earth for its wickedness and rebellion against God (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8). It is when Christ gathers the church to himself that His promise in John 14:2-3, to come again and receive His disciples unto himself, will be fulfilled.

In addition to portions of 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is a central passage on the reality of the Rapture of the church. Many in the church at Thessalonica were despairing; they had been deceived into thinking that those Christians who had died were hopeless in their graves—that if they weren’t alive when Christ appeared, they would be left behind. But Paul writes to correct that false teaching. In 1 Thessalonians, he assures us that no saint, dead or alive, will miss the Rapture. And in 2 Thessalonians, he assures his readers that no saint will experience the seven-year Great Tribulation.

In 1992, a well-known women’s fashion chain launched a perfume called “Rapture”—a “bold blend of freesia, jasmine, orange blossom and amber.” While that certainly sounds like a lovely fragrance, I can tell you that it bears no resemblance in pleasure to that which awaits the followers of Jesus Christ who are “raptured” from the earth to meet Him in the air. Leaving earth and entering the domain of heaven will be an experience like no other. The word “rapture” comes from a Latin word that means seize or snatch, and has been used to describe the event about which Paul teaches in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Paul’s topic is timely. Do you have a relative, friend, or ancestor who died in Christian faith? Almost every Christian alive today does.

Therefore, Paul's words about "those who sleep in Jesus" should be a message of comfort to every Christian's heart. The fact that "rapture" today usually refers to joy or ecstasy is appropriate. There will be no greater joy than when believers meet their Lord face-to-face when He returns for them.

The Careful Preview of the Rapture (4:13-14)

Theologian Dale Bruner wrote about a conversation he had with a friend who was a pastor. The friend was hard at work preparing for his Sunday sermon when his little daughter bounded into the room and said, "Daddy, can we play?"

The pastor replied kindly, "I'm awfully sorry, sweetheart, but I'm right in the middle of preparing this sermon. In about an hour I can play."

His daughter replied, "Okay, when you're finished, Daddy, I am going to give you a great big hug."

Her father thanked her as she turned to leave—but was surprised when his little girl came running back to his desk and threw her arms around him and gave him a huge hug. When he asked her why he had gotten a hug now instead of when he was finished with his sermon, she said, "Daddy, I just wanted you to know what you have to look forward to!"

Do you know what you have to look forward to when Jesus comes to embrace His church—and those who died in faith? A future of hope and promise in this life is based on the clear teaching of Scripture concerning the coming Rapture.

Dispelling the Believers' Ignorance

Someone once asked innocently, “What is the largest Christian denomination in the world.” The answer he received was shocking, but it may be true: “The Ignorant Brethren.”

The apostle Paul’s words to the Thessalonian church were these: “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren . . .” (verse 13). Paul continually wrote letters and taught in person to communicate the truth to growing Christian churches. The Thessalonians were plainly despairing over the fate of their departed loved ones. They needed the searchlight of truth to cut through the darkness of despondency—and Paul was writing to give it to them. He was going to tell them what they did not know. There can be no hope in ignorance—“people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6).

Describing the Believers' Death

Paul refers to deceased Christians as those who have “fallen asleep” (verse 13). The word he uses could refer to sleep in its normal sense, like when we sleep at night, or it could also be used metaphorically for death (John 11:11; Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1 Corinthians 15:6, 18, 20). And that is the way Paul uses the word here. He did not want the Thessalonians to “be ignorant” about the fate of their Christian loved ones who died prior to the return of Jesus for His church.

In his book *Where Is God When It Hurts?* author Philip Yancy tells about a unique funeral custom observed by a certain group of African Muslims. At the time of burial, the casket of the deceased is surrounded by family and friends. They stare quietly at the corpse without a word—no singing, no tears, no flowers. A small mint candy is handed to everyone. When a signal is given, each person puts the candy in his mouth to dissolve. When the candy is gone, each person

is reminded that life for the deceased is finished. For this group of Muslims, life simply dissolves at death. There is no life after death, no eternal life, no nothing. And certainly no hope. Paul did not want the Thessalonians—and he does not want you—to be “as others who have no hope” (verse 13).

That hopelessness is what Paul seeks to dispel with his words to the Thessalonians. Death for Christians should be viewed as a temporary sleep from which they will be awakened when Christ returns for them. Indeed, our word “cemetery” comes from the Greek word *koimeterion*, from the verb *koimao*, to fall asleep. A *koimeterion* was what we would describe today as a hotel or motel—a place to sleep before continuing your journey. Instead of a wake-up call from the front desk, believers in Christ will be awakened by the Lord himself when He returns for them.

Why should Christians have hope in the Rapture of the church? Paul gives the answer in verse 14: “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.” First Corinthians 15 teaches us that if Christ didn’t rise from the dead, then “those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (verse 18). On the other hand, because Christ was raised from the dead, so will those who are His also be raised. Christ has become “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (verse 20). The resurrection of believers at the Rapture is what takes the sting out of death (verse 55).

The Certain Promise of the Rapture (4:15)

In A.D. 100, a Roman engineer named Julius Sextus concluded that “inventions have long since reached their limit, and I see no hope of further developments.” In 1873, the surgeon to England’s Queen Victoria declared that the abdomen, chest, and brain would never

be touched by human hands. In 1949, a computer scientist named John von Neumann said, “It would appear we have reached the limits of what it is possible to achieve with computer technology.” The chairman of General Motors, Roger Smith, said in 1986 that by the year 2000 we would live in a paperless society. And in 1995, leading technologist Bob Metcalfe predicted that the Internet would reach its peak that year and utterly collapse in 1996.

We have learned not to always believe those who predict the future. And those who first read Paul’s words about the dead in Christ rising to meet Him in the air, and the living believers following them, might have been forgiven for being initially skeptical. After all, there was nothing in the Old Testament about the Rapture, nor did Jesus mention it. In fact, not until Paul wrote his letters was this event made known. So where did he learn this truth? Directly from God himself: “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord” (verse 15).

The Rapture was a divine revelation to Paul, possibly conveyed in the experience he described in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4. Or perhaps he learned it during his post-conversion years of isolation and study. It should come as no surprise that Paul was given truth that no one had been given before. The mystery of the Rapture (1 Corinthians 15:51) is not the only mystery of which Paul was the initial recipient (Ephesians 3:2-6; Colossians 1:27). Indeed, it is for our comfort that it was revealed to him.

The Chronological Program of the Rapture (4:16-17)

Tradition has it that Sir William Curtis, an alderman who became the Lord Mayor of London, once called for a toast to the “three R’s” of education: “readin’, ritin’, and ’rithmetic”—publicly displaying his

own lack of education in the process. The “Three R’s” were picked up and have been used since as a summary of the essence of education.

If you want to display your eschatological literacy (eschatology is the doctrine of future events), you can summarize the Rapture under the following “Four R’s:” return, resurrection, rapture, and reunion.

The Return

Verse 16a: “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.”

Jesus Christ himself—not His angels, His Spirit, or His apostles—will come for His church. This is just as the two angels spoke to the apostles when Christ ascended into heaven: “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). That means it will be personal, physical, and visible. And it will be audible. There will be “a shout,” the “voice of an archangel,” and the sound of “the trumpet of God” (verse 16b). These will be sounds like nothing ever heard on earth before.

The Resurrection

Verse 16c: “And the dead in Christ will rise first.”

The second “R” in the chronology of the Rapture is the resurrection of those who have died in Christ. The Bible calls this “the first resurrection” (Revelation 20:5-6).

Consider carefully the words of William Barclay, a great British commentator on the New Testament: “If a man has lived in Christ, and died in Christ, even if he is dead, he is still in Christ. That means that between Jesus Christ and the man who loves Him, there

is a relationship which nothing can break. It is a relationship which overpasses death. Because Jesus Christ lived and died and rose again, so the man in Christ shall live and die and rise again. Nothing in life or death can ever separate him from Christ.”

The dead in Christ get “first” priority when Jesus comes back for His own!

The Rapture

Verse 17: “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up.”

That’s it—the Rapture of the church. The original Greek verb is *harpazo*, or *rapio* in the Latin. The Greek verb contained at least these four elements.

1. To carry off by force. This suggests that nothing—Satan’s opposition—will stand in the way of Christ retrieving His own.
2. To claim for oneself eagerly. Christ has purchased us with His own blood and will be eager to claim that which is His.
3. To snatch away speedily. This calls to mind Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15:52—that the Rapture will occur “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” There will be no preparation, no warning. It will happen in the blink of an eye. I pray that you will not be one of those who look around and discover that those “crazy Christians” have suddenly vanished off the face of the earth.
4. To rescue from the danger of destruction. This refers to the promise Christ made that His church would be kept from “the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world” (Revelation 3:10).

The Reunion

Verse 17: “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

Family reunions are wonderful—hugging and embracing those we haven’t seen in ages. But there is a reunion coming the likes of which earth has never seen. But it won’t happen on earth; it’s going to happen in the air.

The dead in Christ will rise from their graves first. Then those Christians alive at the time of the Rapture will follow immediately—“caught up together with them in the clouds.” Christian friends and family members will be reunited in a moment of time, and they will all enter heaven together in their brand new, glorified bodies.

There are going to be three grand reunions that take place that day. First, dead bodies will be reunited with their spirit that has been in heaven with Christ since the time of death. Second, deceased and living believers are going to be reunited. And third, all believers are going to be united with the Savior who died for them that they might spend eternity in the presence of God.

I heard a story from a previous generation about an old farmer who, along with his wife and son, made their very first trip to the big city. At first they just walked around, staring up at the tops of the tall buildings. When they got over their amazement at all the things they had never seen before, the wife went into a department store while the farmer and his son went to the bank—the tallest of all the buildings. As they walked into the lobby, they were stopped in their tracks. A large, elderly woman was standing facing two steel

doors in the wall of the lobby. Suddenly, the two doors pulled apart and the woman entered a small room, the two steel doors closing behind her. The farmer and his son stood there watching a dial over the doors sweep over to the right, pause, and then begin sweeping back to the left. Suddenly, the doors opened for a second time and a beautiful young woman came walking out of the little room. The farmer turned to his son and said, “You wait right here. I’m going to get your mother and run her through that thing!”

Unfortunately, that old farmer was about to discover there was nothing in the elevator that would transform his wife into a more gorgeous woman. But there is something coming that will transform every Christian who has ever lived into the image of their Savior: the Rapture of the church. Christ will return, the dead will be raised, the living will follow them into the air where a glorious reunion will take place. And we will be changed: “We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

The Comforting Purpose of the Rapture (4:18)

I have a confession to make—a pet peeve to reveal. When I hear Christians, especially pastors and leaders, say they don’t spend any time studying or preaching the prophetic portions of the Bible, I have to pray for patience. They say it’s all too complicated—pre-Trib, mid-Trib, post-Trib; amillennial, premillennial, postmillennial—that it’s not practical to daily life.

What's the point of trying to understand it all when God is going to work it out the way He wants anyway?

Paul answers those questions in verse 18: "Therefore comfort one another with these words." What words? The words he wrote to them about how the dead in Christ will rise to meet their Lord in the air and how those alive in Christ will follow. Now, I ask you: What is more practical than words that comfort? And what is more comforting to those who have lost Christian friends and loved ones than the fact that they will someday be reunited with them and avoid the judgment that is yet to come upon this earth?

I sometimes will use this very passage of Scripture—1 Thessalonians 4:13-18—for my text at the graveside portion of a funeral service. When family and friends surround an open, dark chasm in the ground into which their loved one is about to be lowered and covered with dirt, it is an emotionally wrenching moment. I have experienced it hundreds of times in my decades as a pastor. And I have learned that there is nothing more comforting to those who are burying a loved one than what Paul says in this passage: "Even so God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."

This is applicable truth! These are not religious platitudes! They are prophetic words of Scripture that could not be more apropos for those who are facing, or will face, death. And that includes 100 percent of us. I continually find that these words

of Paul's are the most pointed, the most realistic, and the most comforting in Scripture to those believers who are not sure when and how they will next see their loved ones who precede them in death. Paul knew that prophecy—truth about God's plan for the future—is comforting. Everyone wonders what will happen in the future, whether it's tomorrow, at the end of our life, or the end of the world. In talking about another aspect of prophecy—the Day of the Lord when Christ physically returns to earth—he says the same thing: “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

We may not know exactly what's going to happen tomorrow, but the purpose of prophecy is to comfort us about the big issues in life: death, the end of the world, and the struggle between good and evil. We win! And because we are God's in Christ, His victory is ours as well.

The world's largest Christian denomination—The Ignorant Brethren—could become steadily smaller by reading and studying the prophetic words that Paul wrote. Paul took it upon himself—“But I do not want you to be ignorant”—to provide the truth we need to live in security about death and Christ's care for His own. What a shame not to live in the light of his words!

The Conclusion in Light of the Rapture

Pastor Chuck Swindoll worked in a machine shop for four-and-a-half years alongside a man named George. George was a born-again Christian who loved the Lord, and especially loved the prophetic portions of Scripture. Chuck would often hear him singing hymns

during the day: “In the Sweet By and By” and “When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder.”

Late one Friday afternoon, about ten minutes before quitting time, Chuck asked George why he wasn't getting cleaned up—getting ready to clock out to go home for the weekend. “I am ready,” George said. “Let me show you something.” George proceeded to unzip his grimy coveralls and reveal the cleanest, neatest clothes you could imagine. He had been ready to go home all day. When the whistle blew, all he had to do was step out of his dirty coveralls, punch out on the clock, and he was gone. It was George's final words that stuck with Chuck Swindoll: “You see, I stay ready to keep from gettin' ready—just like I'm ready for Jesus!”

Are you ready for Jesus? Are you living in such a way that you don't have to get ready? Because Jesus is coming for His church at a time that no one knows, it is imperative for every Christian to be looking and living for the Lord.

We Should Be Looking for the Lord

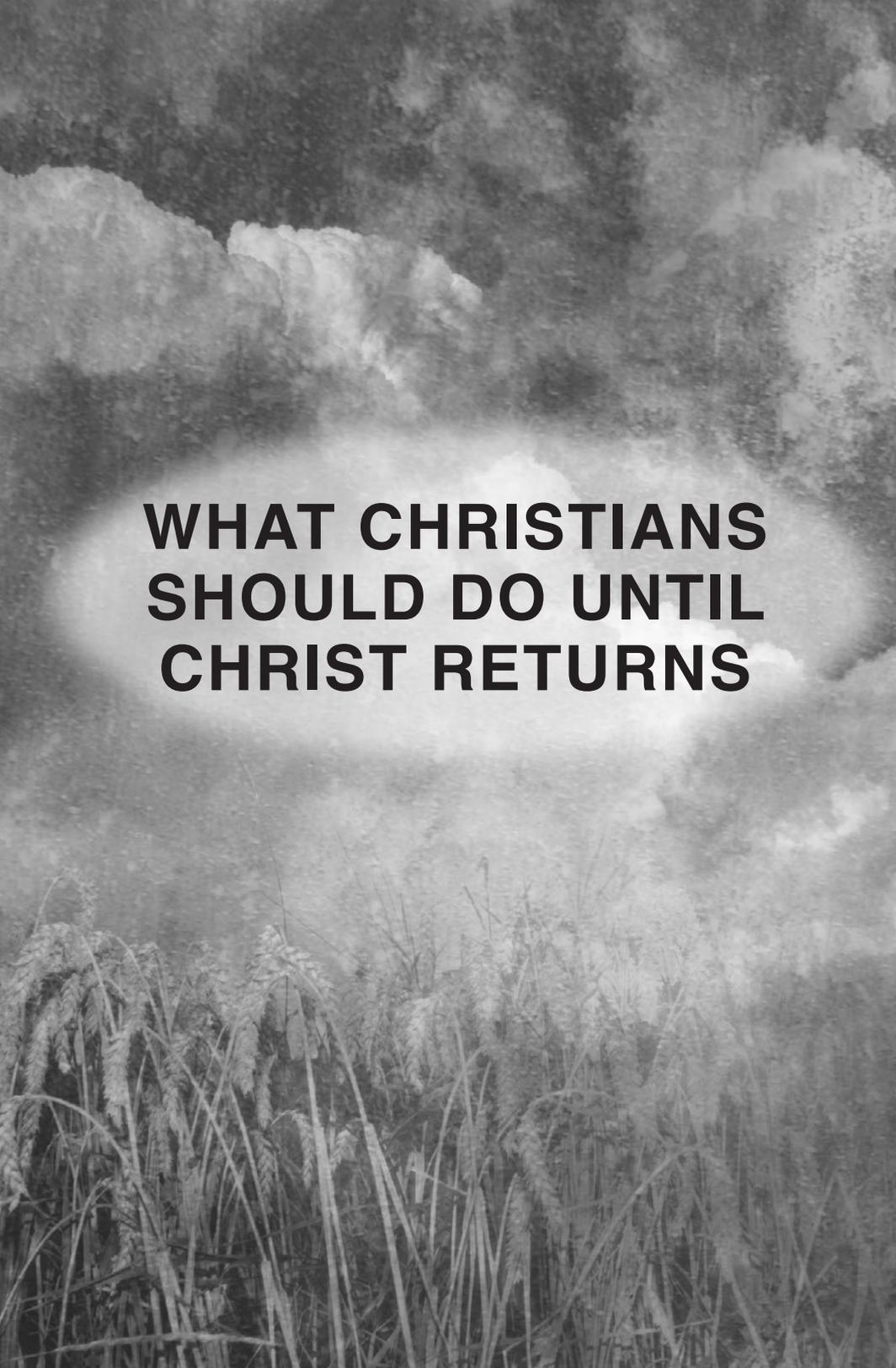
There are two reasons you should be looking for the Lord. First, as we have seen, the Bible says that He is coming with as much conviction as it says anything else. The Bible says it, and that settles it—and I hope you believe it. Second, when you are looking for someone—anticipating and expecting their arrival with great longing and joy—it makes your reunion with that person all the more sweet when he or she arrives.

If you are not looking for the Lord, you are not living in the light of truth. And when Jesus appears, you will greet Him not like an intimate friend but like a distant memory from your past.

We Should Be Living for the Lord

Did you know there's a connection in life between looking and living? And that applies to the return of Christ for His church. If you are looking for the Lord, you will be *living* for the Lord. And the opposite is true as well. Here's how much I believe in the power of prophetic truth: There would be a lot more followers of Jesus Christ living for the Lord if more of them were looking for the Lord. I pray that will become true in your life.

Don't forget: The verses we have just studied are like a sign pointing toward heaven that says, "NEW HOME!" May you be one of the followers of Christ who lives in a heightened state of expectation that Christ will come—maybe today—to receive you unto himself and take you home.



**WHAT CHRISTIANS
SHOULD DO UNTIL
CHRIST RETURNS**

WE ARE CALLED TO FELLOWSHIP

Refuse to Neglect the Church

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10:24-25

Imagine an employee of a company who never shows up for work. He enjoys the benefits and loves the status of his position but somehow never finds time or reason to get involved in “the business.”

There are Christians like that—glad to be going to heaven and appreciative of sermons and special holiday services. But they’re really not a part of the ongoing “business” of the church. That lifestyle betrays a misunderstanding of fellowship, or what the Bible calls *koinonia*. Fellowship is less about coffee and doughnuts than about oneness and commonality. For a Christian not to be 100 percent involved in the work of the church is like an eye deciding to remain closed six days of the week. It’s not what eyes were designed to do.

Every Christian is called and equipped to make the church healthy and successful. It’s what true fellowship is all about.

Why Is It Important for Christians to Assemble in God's House?

- **Commitment**

We are to be committed to Christ and His church. Our commitment is reflected in our tithes, attendance, and involvement in ministry (Psalm 37:5-6).

- **Accountability**

Church provides a place for the accountability, guidance, and counsel from the body of Christ (Philippians 2:1-4).

- **Knowledge**

Through the teaching of God's Word, we learn the basic truths of our faith and deepen our understanding of Scripture (Psalm 119:130).

- **Support**

The church works together to support all of its members, to meet the spiritual and physical needs of its people, and to reach those in the community who do not have the means to help themselves (Ephesians 4:11-13, 16).

- **Service**

Church gives us the opportunity to show God's love by being involved in specific areas of ministry where we can give our time and talent to serve God and others (Romans 12:4-13).

- **Worship**

We are to worship God individually but also corporately as a body of believers. Worship takes many forms: singing, praying, praising, responding, and giving God the best we have to offer (1 Kings 8:54; 1 Chronicles 13:8; Psalm 100:4-5).

- **Fellowship**

At church we meet together as the family of God and develop relationships with other Christians (1 Corinthians 12:12-26).

- **Giving**

God has instructed us to tithe. Through our local church, we give our finances to carry out the work of the Lord (Leviticus 27:30; Malachi 3:10; Luke 6:38).

WE ARE CALLED TO HUMILITY

Respond to Life Spiritually

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Colossians 3:1-4

In the business world, people don't always play nice—or fair. When profit is the primary motive, people can act unkindly, even unscrupulously.

Profit in the kingdom of God is defined differently from profit in the world. The Bible says we become spiritually rich by humbling ourselves in the service of Christ and others. And especially when we are mistreated. The world's response is to throw up its defenses at the first sign of unfairness or inconvenience. But God says not to retaliate. Rather, we are to entrust ourselves to the one who is our shield, rewarder, and the ultimate judge of all men. God opposes the proud but exalts and gives grace to the humble.

The church's work will prosper as Christians clothe themselves with the humility of Christ and entrust themselves to God in every circumstance.

How Should Christians Respond Spiritually to Others?

- **A Radical Response to Insult**

We are to have a radical response to evil, demonstrating God's love to those who have hurt us. When faced with personal insult, we are to turn the other cheek. God wants His people to be tough enough to endure persecution. By absorbing some pain, we can often put a stop to more. If we are in Christ, we're not going to respond the way the world responds. When insult comes our way, we look for a way to respond in love (Matthew 5:38-39).

- **A Radical Response to Injustice**

Christ calls us to maintain an attitude of love, no matter how unfair circumstances may seem. If we get into a dispute in which an injustice takes place, we ought to give more than what justice demands (Matthew 5:40).

- **A Radical Response to Inconvenience**

When we are asked to do something that inconveniences us, we are to take on a servant's attitude. Servanthood takes great strength, much greater strength than demanding our own way. And it is that strength which will cause people to notice something different in our lives (Matthew 5:41).

- **A Radical Response to Inadequacy**

Sometimes we may feel surrounded by the inadequacies of others. A radical Christian responds spiritually to these inadequacies. The

Christian life is totally different from the behavior of the world. We are to forgive, consider others' circumstances, and not demand our own way (Matthew 5:42).

Living this kind of radical lifestyle brings Christ into our lives, our homes, our churches, and our workplaces. It creates opportunities to share the Gospel with others.

WE ARE CALLED TO LOVE

Relate to One Another in Love

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13

Love is a word whose true meaning has been lost, or at least confused, by its overuse in the world. We love pancakes, sports, movies, pets, and restaurants. But would we sacrifice ourselves for them?

Love in the church of Jesus Christ is not a preference, longing, or feeling. It is action springing from an unconditional, willing choice to do the best we can to enhance the life or situation of another. In fact, Jesus said that the greatest demonstration of love is when someone lays down his life for another. Therefore, in principle and to some degree, true love is always a sacrificial act. When we love others, we choose to put them ahead of ourselves—just like Jesus did when He loved us at Calvary.

Jesus reminded His disciples that love was to be the church's distinguishing characteristic. The more we love, the more the work of the church prospers.

How Does the Christian Relate to Others in Love?

- **Patience (1 Corinthians 13:4)**

Patience is the quality of love that allows a person to be inconvenienced or taken advantage of, and yet not be upset or angry because of it. It is the man who is wronged and who has it easily in his power to avenge himself but will never do it. Patience also describes a love that refuses to give way to anger or resentment. This kind of love does not disappear when frustrated or angered. Consider these questions:

- Do I become irritable, reflect anger, or have a quick temper?
- Do I know how to sit still and wait my turn?
- Do I often give way to sarcasm when I have been hurt, when I am tired, or when I am annoyed?
- Do I want to retaliate when someone hurts me?
- Can I accept a fellow believer for who he is and realize that he, too, is moving in the direction of becoming Christlike?

- **Kindness (1 Corinthians 13:4)**

Kindness is the power that moves us to support and heal someone who can offer nothing to us in return. Kindness is the power that moves our self-centered egos toward the weak, the ugly, and the hurt in order to invest in the personal care of others with no expectation of reward. Kindness is the victory over idle selfishness and comfortable self-pleasing. Consider these questions:

- Do I offer to help before I am asked?
- Do I speak to others with a pleasant tone in my voice?

- ❑ Have I become numb to the needs of others?
- ❑ Do I say “thank you for being my friend,” and “I’m glad we’re in the same family”?
- ❑ Am I quick to recognize, appreciate, and say thank you for all that someone does, even the little things?

Love without distinction. Love without calculation. Love without procrastination. Just love.

WE ARE CALLED TO UNITY

Refrain from Judging Others

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

1 Corinthians 4:5

Thousands of men and women serve as judges in this world from the highest levels of government to local municipalities. There are even judges on television shows who arbitrate minor claims between parties in conflict.

When judges have an official capacity, and power exists to enforce their rulings, they serve well. But when individuals, without authority or power, take it upon themselves to judge others, resentment and discord are the result. Just as a company in business cannot operate profitably when it has many bosses, neither can the church do its work when Christians set themselves up as judges of others. God has appointed His Son to be the ultimate judge of all creation. When tempted, we are to reserve judgment until He assumes His throne.

The church's work will prosper when Christians follow this ancient axiom: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

Why Should Christians Refrain from Judging Others?

- **Judging Requires that One Have All the Facts**

When we put ourselves into the position of judging others, there are things about their motives and environment we cannot possibly know. Only God can judge the hearts of men. He has full understanding of every person's circumstance. God knows everything. He sees the whole picture. We don't (John 7:24).

- **Judging Reflects One's Own Sins**

It is often true that if someone has a particular criticism of someone else, it's because they struggle in that same area. When we have a judgmental spirit, we tend to criticize our own weaknesses. We give ourselves away, for people see in us the very problems we claim to condemn (Matthew 7:4).

- **Judging Retaliates Against the One Who Judged**

Judging is not only a bludgeon; it's a boomerang. We have to be willing to live at the same standard by which we judge. Be aware that when we judge others, we start a process that comes back to haunt us (Matthew 7:1-2).

- **Judging Reverses the Order of Priority**

We are to judge our own lives carefully rather than going easy on ourselves and criticizing others. All too often, a person with a critical spirit turns things upside down. They judge others harshly while overlooking their own weaknesses (Matthew 7:5).

- **Judging Retards the Correction of One's Own Problem**

When we focus on the problems in someone else's life, there is little time to work on areas of our life that need correction. A critical person seldom recognizes his own shortcomings, only those of others (Matthew 7:3).

God gives each of us a choice. We can either criticize or we can minister.

WE ARE CALLED TO MINISTRY

Recommit Yourself to Ministry

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

2 Timothy 4:1-2

When we see a sign in front of a church that says, “Minister: John Doe,” it sends the wrong message to members. Such a sign should read, “Ministers: Every Member.”

Christian ministry is best defined as acts of service in the name of Christ for the purpose of accomplishing His mission in the world. If the manager of a company went away for a month, every employee would have a responsibility to fulfill—a ministry to perform. With Christ “away” at the present time, every member of His church has work to do—a ministry to perform. Just as Christ came to earth to accomplish the Father’s ministry, so Christians go into the world to accomplish Christ’s.

The ministry of pastors is to equip the members to do the work of Christ in the church and the world. Every member has a ministry that is waiting to be accomplished.

Why Should the Christian Be Committed to Ministry in Action?

- **The Immensity of the Church**

It is impossible for one person to accomplish all the tasks of church ministry. Your pastor alone cannot effectively minister to all the needs of your congregation. Each member should be actively involved in church, using his gifts to build up the body of Christ. This is the church as God designed it to be (Romans 12:4).

- **The Diversity of the Church**

People have a wide range of needs. You might be the only person in your church who has experienced the same circumstances as the man at the end of the pew. Who will reach out to him if you don't? The body of Christ is so diverse and changes so rapidly that it is imperative you look for opportunities to strengthen and encourage others in your congregation (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

- **The Interdependency of the Church**

In spite of our uniqueness, we are connected. In fact, not only are we connected, we are dependent on one another. Every member must be doing that which God has called him to do. Overall, we have far too many people who are healthy but just don't see the need or relevance for being involved. And, if we are not involved, we are missing the connection (Romans 12:5).

- **The Responsibility of the Church**

We are responsible before God first and others second to use that with which we have been entrusted. If we are going to minister

to those in the body of Christ who need encouragement—not to mention those in our culture who are weak and searching for the relief for their souls only Jesus can give—we have to get involved! Otherwise, we are playing church instead of being the church (Romans 12:6).

WE ARE CALLED TO EVANGELIZE

Reach the Lost

Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.

Jude 1:21-23

While we might not agree with all the methods used by corporate advertisers, their motivation is legitimate and their actions needed: Tell people about products that are available.

There is a misconception in Christianity that God alone is responsible for “advertising”—for getting the gospel of salvation to those who need it. But when Jesus left the earth, He put His disciples in charge of marketing—going into all the world and preaching the Gospel to all creation. And the apostle Paul reaffirmed that commission when he asked, “How shall they hear without a [human] preacher?” It is the responsibility of every follower of Christ to “gossip the Gospel” (as the early church put it) wherever they go. Whether boldly and formally or quietly and informally, evangelism is the church’s business.

The church only grows when someone who doesn’t know the Gospel hears it from someone who does.

What Is the Search and Rescue Mission for the Christian?

The primary plan in Jesus' heart when He instructed His disciples is still the primary plan in His heart for the Christian today. The last command of our Lord was His first concern: to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. This is The Charge of the Light Brigade (Philippians 2:14-16).

Sharing the Light

- **Prominence of Light**

We are to be conspicuous in our witness to the world. Instead of trying to shine the light a little bit, we are to shine the light as brightly as we can. The farther the light shines, the more souls will be rescued and come to know the Savior (Luke 8:16).

- **Purpose of Light**

A light-bearer's life isn't intended to be a commercial for his or her own holiness, but a source of illumination that causes people to see Christ in a lost world (Matthew 5:14, 16).

- **Price of Light**

When we become a part of the Light Brigade, it costs us something. We give up ourselves for the purpose of God. Reaching souls takes time, effort, and commitment—none of which is too great a price for rescuing lost souls (Luke 11:33-36).

- **Praise of Light**

When we let our light shine, doing what God has called us to do, unbelievers will notice our lives and respond to the Gospel. As we live for Him, we cause people to recognize the Source of our lives (John 8:12).

WE ARE CALLED TO OBEDIENCE

Remain Steadfast

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

James 5:7-8

Corporate marketers know that too many choices create passivity in shoppers. The more options people have, the less committed they become.

We live in a world of unlimited spiritual, mental, and material options. Thus the idea of remaining totally committed to Christ is increasingly unattractive when circumstances make it uncomfortable. Christians today need to remember Peter's words when some of Christ's followers turned away: "Where else shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life." When it comes to the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, there is only one choice: Jesus. And for that reason, He deserves every Christian's steadfast obedience and active loyalty. Passivity, not to mention disobedience, is a sign that other options have become tempting. But can they save for eternity?

Christian obedience springs from a heart that knows it will forever be indebted for what Jesus Christ has done.

What Do Christians Need in Order to Remain Steadfast in the Lord?

- **Equipped Minds**

This is the time. More than ever before, we need men and women thoroughly equipped with Christlike minds, ready to do battle in the spiritual arena. The battle is raging, and we risk losing if we do not have champions for God who are determined to be equipped in the disciplines of the Gospel (Matthew 10:18-20; 2 Corinthians 10:4-6).

- **Established Hearts**

As we wait for our Lord's return, we are to be proactive! In fact, we are to "establish [our] hearts" (James 5:8). This literally means to make our hearts firm. In other words, it is our duty to develop a "no retreat" attitude no matter what circumstances we face before the Lord's return.

- **Expectant Lives**

Even though the battle Christians face can seem like a lost cause, God has not called us to walk around in defeat. The important thing we must always remember is this: Christ has already defeated Satan at the Cross. Satan's power is limited, hedged in by the sovereign God. The events we face on earth may be difficult. And as we move closer and closer to Christ's return, circumstances will only get worse. But God has already written the final chapter! If we read His Book, we will remain steadfast until His victorious coming (John 16:33).

WE ARE CALLED TO RIGHTEOUSNESS

Renounce Sin in Your Life

*And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears,
we may have confidence and not be ashamed before
Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous,
you know that everyone who practices
righteousness is born of Him.*

1 John 2:28-29

To accomplish their work and stay in business, corporations must operate within a legal, if not moral, set of boundaries. That is, they must conduct business in a “right” fashion.

In a similar way, the church of Jesus Christ is called to do its work in a “righteous” fashion—according to the standards of the Head of the organization, Christ himself. To operate outside the standards of the Owner invites cooperation from Satan, the chief competitor (enemy) of God’s church. To live and work righteously means repenting from sin in all its forms. For even one Christian to reserve one small part of his heart for unconfessed sin is to sow the seeds of weakness and carnality in the whole church. Because the Head of the church is righteous, His work must be done righteously.

When Christ returns, He will be looking for works of righteousness accomplished by clean hands and hearts.

How Can Christians Be Set Free from Sin?

- **Relinquish Your Will**

Many try to continue living in sin. But a life of unconfessed sin only leads to the plague of guilt and alienation from God. When we realize we are being held captive by sin, there is only one way to receive freedom from the chains of bondage. We must relinquish our will, acknowledging our disobedience to God (Psalm 51:17).

- **Renounce Your Sin**

The only way we can get freedom from sin is to confess. This means to look at your sin the same way God does. Confession is painful and difficult, but it is the only way back to a holy relationship with God (Psalm 51:1-4).

- **Receive God's Forgiveness**

The great news of the Gospel is that we have a forgiving God. When we come to Him, open our hearts, and tell Him what's happened, God does hear us and forgive us. God takes confessed sins and buries them in the deepest sea (Psalm 32:1).

How can Christians avoid being taken captive?

- Recognize the possibility of temptation (1 Corinthians 10:12).
- Request God's help in advance (Matthew 6:13a; 26:41).
- Resist the devil and he will flee from you (James 4:7).
- Retreat from certain kinds of temptation (1 Corinthians 6:18, 10:14; 2 Timothy 2:22; 1 Timothy 6:10-11).
- Remove any means of sin far from you (Romans 13:14).
- Replace bad influences with good ones (Proverbs 13:20).
- Resolve to live on the high road (Colossians 3:2).

WE ARE CALLED TO COMFORT

Restore the Bereaved

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, 16-18

Most people have experienced the exercise of compassion in the workplace. Among all human beings, there is an instinctive ability to empathize with the pain of others.

How much more should that be true in the church of Jesus Christ! The greatest expression of compassion known to man is Christ leaving the royal courts of heaven to identify with sin-sick and suffering people in this world. Because of His example—setting aside

His own desires in order to heal the afflicted in God's creation—we can do the same. Indeed, the Bible says that we are to comfort others with the same comfort by which God has comforted us. We express true fellowship and unity as Christians by weeping with those who weep.

When we mistake sympathy for empathy, we feel sorry without reaching out. True compassion results in actions that comfort the wounded and restore the brokenhearted.

How Can a Christian Comfort a Grieving Comrade?

- **Hope**

Sometimes people say there is no real purpose in studying prophecy. But this is untrue. The great purpose in prophecy is that we might comfort one another with the hope we have in Jesus Christ. Yes, we sorrow at the loss of a loved one, but we don't sorrow as others who do not know Christ because God has promised us eternal life (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14).

- **Help**

What help can we give to grieving comrades? We can put arms of comfort around them, reminding them that their loved one is *home* with Jesus. We can find joy in the fact that on the day of Christ's return, all of God's saints will rise up to meet Jesus in the air and live eternally with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

- **Heaven**

After the Rapture, we will never know the meaning of the word "separation" again—ever, ever, ever! We will never be separated from our believing friends or loved ones, we will never be separated from almighty God, we'll never be separated from Jesus Christ His Son. So we shall ever be together with the Lord (John 14:1-4).

WE ARE CALLED TO REMEMBER

Remember the Lord's Table

*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.*

1 Corinthians 11:26

Corporate organizations have methods for staying true to their roots—for staying on mission. They continually ask themselves two questions: “What business are we in?” and “How’s business?”

If the church fails to look back regularly, it will lose its way as it looks forward. And the way the church looks back is by consistently celebrating Communion, or the Lord’s Table, together. In that service, the church is reminded of what the Founder and Head of the church accomplished by coming into the world—by His death, resurrection, and coming again. Approaching the Lord’s Table in a worthy manner means taking one’s personal spiritual pulse: “How is my part of the work of Jesus Christ? Am I being faithful to the Founder and His mission?”

Christians who excuse themselves from the Lord’s Table run the risk of forgetting the work to which they have been called.

Why Is It Important for the Christian to Remember the Lord's Table?

- **The Recollection—We Recall What Happened to Jesus**

When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we come together for the purpose of recalling what Christ did for us. Paul uses the term remembrance, which means to "re-live" the event, to consciously call to mind the occurrence. The bread and the cup are emblems we take in our hands for the express purpose of calling to mind what Jesus did in dying upon the cross. We need to call to memory His sacrifice on our behalf.

- **The Proclamation—We Proclaim that Christ Died for Our Sins**

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Every time we take Communion, we are preaching a sermon. Every time we partake in Communion, we are proclaiming Christ's death till He comes.

- **The Expectation—We Expect His Imminent Return**

The Lord's Table begins by looking backward at what Christ has done, but it also involves looking forward to the day when He will return. One day we will be united with Him in perfect fellowship. Our expectation is that He will come soon; and through communion, we remind ourselves of that fact.

CONCLUSION

If you suddenly learned that the Rapture of the church was going to take place later today, how would your life change? Specifically, would you try to make any fast adjustments in terms of the ten “calls” discussed in this booklet?

Maybe there’s a close friend with whom you’ve never shared the Gospel. Or a family member toward whom you owe an expression of love. Perhaps you’ve felt guilty about just warming the pew at church instead of accepting an invitation to work with the junior high kids. Maybe there’s been an issue of disobedience in your life for which you haven’t repented.

Hopefully what you’ve read here will serve as a reminder that when it comes to being ready for the Rapture, there’s no such thing as getting ready—there’s only living ready. When you hear Jesus’ shout, the archangel’s voice, and God’s trumpet (1 Thessalonians 4:16), you’ll know that you’re an eyeblink away from seeing your Savior’s face. Make sure you’re all about His business until He comes.

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable,
always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that
your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*

1 Corinthians 15:58