

Week11: Eschatology II

The Rapture and the Second Coming

Theme: The Meaning and Order of the Rapture and the Second Coming according to Paul

Key Texts: 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, 1 Corinthians 15:50–58, Philippians 3:20–21

1. Overview of Paul's Eschatology

- 1) Within the framework of the “already and not yet”, the Second Coming marks the final consummation.
- 2) The rapture and the Second Coming are not separate events but two aspects of a single event.

2. The Meaning and Misunderstanding of the Rapture

- 1) The term “rapture” does not appear in the Bible; it comes from the Greek word *harpazō* meaning “to snatch up” (1 Thess. 4:17).
- 2) Some eschatological systems (e.g., Dispensationalism) divide the Second Coming into two stages:
 - (1) A secret rapture before the tribulation
 - (2) A public return after the tribulation
- 3) Paul does not make such a distinction: he speaks of one return and one gathering.

3. The Nature of the Second Coming (Parousia)

- 1) A visible and cosmic event:

“The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command” (1 Thess. 4:16).
- 2) The resurrection of the dead and the transformation of the living will occur simultaneously (1 Cor. 15:51–52).
- 3) The rapture is a welcoming procession to meet the returning Lord (1

Thess. 4:17)

- 4) Just as citizens would go out to meet a royal visitor and accompany him into the city.

4. The Purpose and Impact of the Second Coming in Paul's Teaching

- 1) Glorious transformation of the saints: "transformed to be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:21)
- 2) Final salvation and fulfillment of God's kingdom rule
- 3) The Second Coming is the hope of the Church and the final stage of redemption.

5. Paul's Exhortations

- 1) Be watchful and sober(1 Thess. 5:6): The exact time is unknown, so believers must live in readiness.
- 2) A message of comfort, not fear: "Encourage one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:18)
- 3) A life waiting for the Second Coming is marked by faith, love, and hope(1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8)

6. Conclusion: The Second Coming as the Hope of Glory

- 1) The rapture and the Second Coming are unified, not separate events.
- 2) Paul emphasizes that the return of Christ will complete God's redemptive work in glory.
- 3) False eschatologies(e.g., secret rapture, pre-tribulation escape) can lead believers astray.

A return to biblical, Pauline eschatology is essential.