

STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES OF GOD – BY ERIC D. SMITH

CHAPTER 6 - THE MYSTERY OF THE RESURRECTION

“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” - 1 Corinthians 15:50-52

Most people refer to the event that Paul discusses here as *the rapture* of the Church. Although Paul never uses the Greek word for *rapture* in any of his writings, as he teaches this subject to the Church at Thessalonica, he does refer to believers being caught up to meet Jesus in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). What Paul teaches is the same concept of a rapture that is being taught in churches today.

Paul is revealing a mystery to the believers at Corinth about something that is promised to happen at a future date. In order to understand much of this, I will briefly review some of the Greek words that are used here to describe this mystery. In verse fifty, Paul parallels flesh and blood (our bodies) with the word *corruption*. The Greek word Paul uses for corruption is *phthora*. *Strong's Concordance* defines this word as “decay, or that which is subject to corruption or is perishable”. We realize that our fleshly bodies are perishable. When our bodies are placed in a grave, the flesh will decay and return to the dust (Genesis 3:19).

Paul then parallels inheriting the Kingdom of God with inheriting incorruption. The Greek word used for incorruption is *aphtharsia*. *Strong's Concordance* defines this word as “incorruptibility, unending existence, or immortality”. While our fleshly bodies have limited “shelf life” upon this earth, our resurrected bodies will have an unending existence. Our life upon this earth has been compared to a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away (James 4:14), and compared also to grass that flourishes and then dies (Psalm 90:5, James 1:11). While our time on this earth is short, eternity lasts forever. The most important thing that you can do upon this earth is to make sure you are ready for the rapture of the Church.

Questions, Discussions and Notes

1. Although Paul never used the word *rapture* in his teachings, did he ever speak of the concept?
2. How did Paul describe in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 what people often refer to as the rapture of the church?
3. What will be happening to the believer's body according to the mystery Paul is referring to in 1 Corinthians 15:50-52?
4. How long will our incorruptible bodies last?
5. What are some of the things that our earthly bodies have been compared with and give the scripture reference to each comparison.

In 1 Corinthians 15:51, Paul declares, *“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.”* Paul reveals to us the doctrine of the resurrection, or the changing of our bodies from something that can decay to an immortal body that will live throughout eternity. The Greek word that he uses for sleep is the word *koimao*. *Strong’s Concordance* defines this word as “to put to sleep, to slumber, or to die”. The Greek word literally means to lay out prostrate, such as to rest for the night or to lay out for burial. Fourteen out of the eighteen times the word *koimao* is used in the New Testament, it refers to death. When Paul says that we *“shall not all sleep”*, he is telling us that the change that is going to occur will happen to some people before death comes to them. The change that Paul is instructing us in is going to happen to the *“dead in Christ”* and to those that are still living. The change will transform a human body from something that is capable of decaying to something that will never decay or die.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 tells us, *“For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”*

When Jesus tells of how two individuals will be working in the field and one will be taken and the other left (Matthew 24:40), realize that the coming of the Son of Man and the gathering together of His Church will be so quick that we will not have time to prepare our souls for His coming as the event happens. We must be ready every day. Matthew chapters twenty-four and twenty-five warns us of signs of the end times and how some will not be prepared for His return.

6. Will only the dead be changed (their body transformed or resurrected) according to Paul’s teachings?
7. Explain why the word *sleep* in the New Testament could be misunderstood?
8. On pages 56 and 57 of the book, the author defines the words *prevent* and *caught up*. Explain each of the terms in the context of the scripture.
9. Why must the believer be ready each and every day for the coming of the Lord?