

The Rapture Question?

Key Question: When does the rapture or coming of the Lord take place?

Key Texts: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 24-25; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58; John 14

Three Main Positions:

- a. Pre-Tribulational – Christ will come before the Tribulation to get his saints and then come back again later to make all things right
- b. Mid-Tribulational – Christ will come about half way through the Tribulation to rescue His saints from the worst part of the Tribulation and then come back again later to make all things right
- c. Post-Tribulational – Christ will come at the end of or after the Tribulation to get His saints and to make all things right

A couple of notes concerning these views: 1) All are views held by evangelical, conservative scholars, so it is not a matter of orthodoxy. The timing of the rapture is not a primary doctrine. The rapture is the primary doctrine, the timing is not as important as the fact that *Jesus is coming again!* 2) The positions above are sometimes confused with pre- or post- millennialism, a totally different thing. Some hear the prefix “post” and immediately think something negative (i.e., post-modernism). This, of course, confirms the caution of using theological labels or positions in preaching. It is far better to preach the text and avoid using theological labels (as much as possible) because they are loaded with so much baggage. This often results in confusion.

FCBC Position:

The position we take is NOT to fall into one of the above views. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 -5:11 doesn't give the *timing* of the rapture. The Thessalonians had two questions in this unit: 1) what about the dead in Christ? Will they participate in His coming? (4:13-18) and 2) When will He be coming; “Now as to the times and epochs” (5:1-11). The emphasis in 4:13-18 is on the comfort that the *coming* brings for the dead and alive in Christ, not the timing of the coming. The emphasis in 5:1-11 is on being ready when the Day of the Lord does come, not whether or not believers will be there. Our desire is to go no further than the text or to say no less than the text – please hold us to this! Uncertainty is fine as long as the text doesn't make something certain. Of course, it is not uncertain in God's mind and will! So, our answer is that the text doesn't say, so let's not be dogmatic on this issue. Most likely, all of us have leanings one way or the other and/or have a default position, but because of the lack of certainty, this seems to be an area of doctrinal diversity.

In light of the uncertainty that is present in this text as to the answers of the timing of these end time events, we note Leon Morris, a conservative commentator. His attitude demonstrates humility, honesty and integrity in dealing with this tough issue.

What he [Paul] says bears on another matter that is a source of dispute among evangelicals, namely, as to whether believers will be left on earth to pass through the great tribulation of the last days. The language of this section could be understood either way . . . But I fully recognize that other interpretations are possible, and suggest that it is not wise for any of us to condemn those who understand such passages differently” (Morris, 152).

This is how the FCBC elders feel on this issue. It is “Ok” to lean one way or another on this issue – excellent, godly, conservative scholars differ on the timing of the rapture. We want to be fair and honest and try to avoid speculation and conjecture as much as possible. We take the teaching responsibility seriously and desire to be faithful in handling the Word accurately. Please hold us to God's standard! As we see it, the importance of the coming of the Lord is not **when** he is coming, but that **He is** coming and are you ready!