

Who Will Be Caught Up When the Lord Comes?

by Arno Clemens Gaebelein

Arno Clemens Gaebelein preaches about the doctrine of the first resurrection and the coming of the Lord for His saints, emphasizing that this revelation is found in the New Testament through the Apostle Paul. The church, as the body of Christ, will have a definite end on earth as revealed in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, bringing praise and joy to believers. Gaebelein addresses the question of who will be caught up to meet the Lord, refuting teachings of 'partial rapture' and emphasizing that every true believer, regardless of knowledge or spirituality, will be caught up when the Lord comes. He highlights that the first resurrection is a result of God's grace and not a reward for faithfulness or conduct.

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Transcript

who-will-be-caught-up-when-the-lord-comes.pdf" txtUrl: "/pdf-text/text/a/arno-clemens-gaebelein---who-will-be-caught-up-when-the-lord-comes.txt" thumbnailUrl: "" hasTranscript: true oneLinerSummary: "The first resurrection is a free gift of the grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ, and every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ will be caught up when the Lord comes." sermonType: "expository" topics: - name: "Rapture Theology" slug: "rapture-theology" - name: "Eternal Salvation" slug: "eternal-salvation" bibleRefs: - text: "Romans 5:1" bookId: "ROM" chapter: "5" verse: "1" - text: "1 Corinthians 15:23" bookId: "1CO" chapter: "15" verse: "23" - text: "Ephesians 2:8" bookId: "EPH" chapter: "2" verse: "8" - text: "1 Thessalonians 4:13" bookId: "1TH" chapter: "4" verse: "13" outline: - heading: "The Doctrine of the First Resurrection" - heading: "The End of the Church on Earth" - heading: "Who Will Be Caught Up When the Lord Comes?" - heading: "The First Resurrection is a Free Gift of Grace" - heading: "The Unity of the Body" - heading: "Scriptural Proofs" - heading: "The apostasy and the revelation of the Antichrist cannot come till the church is taken from the earth" - heading: "All

believers will appear before the judgment seat of Christ" - heading: "Many other Scriptures declare the same truth" faq: - q: "Will all true Christians be caught up or only a few?" a: "Every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ will be caught up when the Lord comes." - q: "Is the first resurrection a reward for faithfulness and right conduct?" a: "No, the first resurrection is a free gift of the grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ." - q: "Will believers who are ignorant of the truth of God be caught up?" a: "Yes, believers who are saved by grace, even if they are ignorant of the truth, will be caught up." - q: "Is the first resurrection a prize for a holy, consecrated, faithful conduct and life?" a: "No, the first resurrection is a gift of the grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ." - q: "Will all believers be taken up when the Lord comes?" a: "Yes, every believer will share in the first resurrection and be caught up when the Lord comes." quotes: - "To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise." - "We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is." - "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son (in resurrection on the day of His coming for His Saints) that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren." applicationPoints: - "Believers should not worry about their worthiness to be caught up, but rather trust in the free gift of the first resurrection." - "The first resurrection is not a reward for faithfulness, but a gift of the grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ." - "Every believer will share in the first resurrection and be caught up when the Lord comes." keywords: - "first resurrection" - "rapture" - "partial rapture" - "church" - "body of Christ" - "glorification" - "grace" - "faithfulness" - "right conduct" - "ignorance" - "salvation" - "judgment seat of Christ" - "apostasy" - "Antichrist" ---

The doctrine of the first resurrection and the coming of the Lord for His saints is nowhere taught in the Old Testament; it is altogether a New Testament revelation. As it is so well known, the Apostle Paul, who received from the Lord the revelation concerning the church, the one body, received also directly from the Lord the revelation concerning the glorious removal of the church from the earth. As the church had a definite beginning, so she will have a definite end. This end of the church on earth is made known in 1 Thess. iv: 13-17. To read these familiar words and meditate on them, as we have already done in the preceding chapter, and to realize a little of what it all means, fills the heart with praise and joy unspeakable. Oh, for that shout, that assembling shout from the glorified Head to His own members! The dead in Christ shall rise first, then we which are alive shall be caught up together with them in clouds. The clouds will be the chariots of glory which take us into His presence. Then we shall meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. This coming of the Lord for his saints is the blessed Hope, the Hope of the Church, our Hope.

We are to occupy ourselves next with the question, who, when the hour arrives, will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Will all true Christians be caught up or only a few? This is an important question, important because that blessed event may come at any time. There is, in our days, a decided increase of teachers who teach what has been termed a "partial rapture." According to some of these teachings only those who believe that the Lord is coming, and who wait for His coming, who have a correct knowledge of His Second Coming, will be taken, and others who had not light on dispensational teachings, but were equally sincere, will be left to pass through the tribulation. Others again declare that only those will be caught up who attained to a certain spirituality. What is termed "a higher life experience" is, according to these, necessary to share in the rapture. Only "consecrated" Christians will be taken up who are loosened from earthly things. This teaching is found mostly among Christian believers, who are much occupied with themselves, their experiences, and who do not know the blessed position the believer holds through grace in Christ. Then there are numerous groups of people, some of them perfectionists, who are scattered from Maine to California, from North to South and who claim that only the 144,000 will be caught up, and that those who hold these teachings, or, possess their peculiar experience, will belong to that company. These

people forget that the 144,000 in Revelation are of Israel. Some of the so-called "Pentecostal people," now split up in different sects, have imposed another condition, that of speaking in a strange tongue. There is still another view, or rather new presentation of the partial rapture, which seems to have unsettled some believers. We have received a number of letters from students and others have come to us and asked us about it.

According to this view only those will have part in the first resurrection whose love and conduct after their conversion have made them worthy of it. We shall quote from a volume which teaches this:

"By the first resurrection Christ exercises His power; when, as we shall presently see, those only, whose love and conduct after conversion have caused Him to deem them worthy, will come forth from the dead, to form the complete church and to act as members of the Heavenly Kingdom.

"By the final resurrection of all the remaining dead; when those who have been saved, but did not attain to the First resurrection, will be raised to life: and those who have rejected the Saviour will come forth for judgment. This resurrection does not take place until the close of the millennial reign, that is, until at least a thousand years after the First resurrection."

According to this the first resurrection is a reward for faithfulness and right conduct. One has to attain a worthiness, what measure of it is not specified, and could not be specified by anyone. The complete church will be formed by those who are faithful. The other believers who were truly saved, and also indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but less faithful, will see no resurrection till the great White Throne is set up. That this is altogether unscriptural need not to be further explained. No believer, who is saved by grace and hence is a member of Christ, will ever appear before the great White Throne. The second resurrection is of the wicked dead.

The author then goes to the Epistle to the Philippians and tries to show from the third chapter that the first resurrection is a prize. Especially is it the word of the Apostle in the tenth and eleventh verses he explains as supporting his false theory. We will let him speak in his own words:

"But what was the goal towards which Paul was thus directing his efforts? 'If by any means,' he continues, 'I may attain to the select resurrection out from among the dead.' In other words, his aim was to be numbered with those blessed and holy ones who shall have part in the first resurrection. But we must note, that he had at the time, no certain assurance (*italics ours*) that he would compass the desire of his heart. * * * Just before his death, however, it was graciously revealed to him that he was one of the approved."

Speaking on the thirteenth and fourteenth verses of the same chapter in Philippians, he says:

"Here Paul again urges the fact, that, devoted as he was to his Master, he had as yet no absolute certainty of attaining to the first resurrection."

The worst statement on this line in the whole book is the following:

"The upward, or heavenward, calling is, of course, contrasted with the earthly calling of Israel. And its introduction here is sufficiently startling for those who have been taught that simple belief in Christ will win heaven for them, and membership in the Lord's body. For Paul unmistakably affirms that these high privileges are a prize and not a gift, and are accessible only by the gate of the First Resurrection--a gate through which, after all his sacrifices and labors and sufferings for Christ, he was not yet absolutely sure

that he would be permitted to pass."

According to this teaching the Apostle, who had received apostleship not of men but from the Lord, whom he saw in glory, the Apostle to whom was committed the Gospel of the Glory of the blessed God and to whom was made known the mystery of the Church, and that all believers are members of that body, this great Apostle and instrument through whom God gave the greatest revelation, did not know himself that he belonged to the body. He did not know it in spite of his sufferings and labors; he had to suffer some more, and only when he wrote Second Timothy had he a special revelation that he had labored and suffered enough. How ridiculous and more than that, insulting to the work and the Word of our Lord Jesus Christ! And if it were true what this book teaches, how dreadful it would be for almost every believer, for but few, if any, labor and suffer as Paul did, and we could have, even if we did, no assurance concerning our membership in the body and our share in the first resurrection, except by special revelation. But such a special revelation is nowhere promised in the Word.

We shall return after a while to the argument of Philippians.

But let us give the answer to the question, "Who will be caught up when the Lord comes?"

Every person who fell asleep in Jesus belongs to the company which is mentioned in first Thessalonians, "the dead in Christ shall be raised first," and every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, who lives when the assembling shout comes from the air, will be caught up in clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And if believers, as it is the case, were ignorant of the coming of the Lord, had absolutely no knowledge of the fact and therefore did not wait for Him, they will nevertheless be caught up. Let us make the statement as strong as we possibly can. Supposing the Lord came tonight to take His own out of the earth. Let us suppose a person who lived a very wicked life, but an hour before the Lord comes believes in the Lord Jesus Christ and is saved and accepted in the Beloved, made a partaker of the heavenly calling. This one saved by grace, though ignorant of the truth of God, would be caught up like the oldest, most matured Saint who loved His appearing for many years. Think of the dying thief. He pleaded "Remember me when thou dost come into thy kingdom." The assurance comes back to him, who could do no works to gain a prize, who was so ignorant in all spiritual matters, "To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise." When the Lord comes with the assembling shout the body of the thief, saved by grace, as well as the body of Stephen, whose is a martyr's crown, and Paul's and every other one who was saved by grace will be raised up and we, meaning every saved one together with them, will be caught up.

But let us prove this statement by the only authority we have, the Word of God. Let the Scriptures give an answer to the simple question, "Is the first resurrection and to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air the prize for a holy, consecrated, faithful conduct and life, or is it a free gift of the grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ?" The answer to this from the Scriptures is clear; it is put in every epistle as the result of grace and not as the reward for faithfulness and service. To cite all the New Testament passages which acquaint us with the wonderful truth of what grace has called us to and made us in Christ Jesus would fill page after page, and if we would ponder over them and search in its blessed depths under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, would fill our hearts with "joy unspeakable and full of glory." How clear it is seen in Romans. In the fifth of Romans we read of the blessed results of justification. It is not a question of doing from our side, but it is God's doing, for everyone who believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ. Peace, perfect peace, towards God. Every believer has it with God in virtue of the blood of the cross. There peace was made. The second, access by faith into this grace, wherein we stand, and the third result of justification, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. And this hope of the glory of God is nothing else than what we have

in the first epistle of John, "We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is." Read also Romans viii:29, 30, "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son (in resurrection on the day of His coming for His Saints) that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called, and whom He called, them He also justified and whom He justified, them He also glorified." Justification and glorification are inseparably connected. They cannot be severed. Both are from the side of God, the result of the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has justified and God has glorified. The glorification begins when our Lord leaves the Father's throne and comes into the air to meet those whom the Father has given to Him. Not one will be left behind. And who are they whom the Father has given to the Son? Everyone who believed and came to the Son.

It is in that rich unfathomable epistle to the Ephesians, where we read God's gracious purpose towards everyone who believes in Christ, accepted in Him, blest with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ. We would have to go through all the precious words in the opening chapters, where we learn more fully than elsewhere that it is all the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. "Even when we were dead in sins hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved). And hath raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus; that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." Now we are there by grace. God see us there in Christ and bye and bye we shall be there actually. It is clear from a number of passages that when the Lord comes for His Saints all believers without any distinction, whether they are full grown in knowledge, fathers, young men or babes in Christ, will be taken because they are Christ's and God's grace has put them there. This is not only clearly seen in 1 Thess. iv:13-18, but also elsewhere. "For our commonwealth is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; Who shall change our body of humiliation, that it might be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself" (Phil. iii:20, 21). But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterwards they that are Christ's at His coming, * * * Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed (1 Cor. xv:23, 51). It is clear that all means the whole company of believers.

But there are other scriptural proofs that all believers will be taken up when the Lord comes. One is the unity of the body. "For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body" (1 Cor. xii:12 and 13). It is clear then that all believers are members of the one body. The teaching in the above cited paragraphs is an open denial of the truth revealed of the church as the one body. "There is one body and one Spirit even as ye are called in one hope of your calling" (Ephes. iv:4). This one body, of which every believer is a member, will be joined to the glorified Head, it will be one joining and one presentation of the assembly. Now, if only certain believers are caught up and another number passeth through a part of the tribulation, and still another company is taken later and other believers will not be raised at all till the great white Throne is set up, the revealed truth of the one body, its organic unity and vital connection with Him in glory is completely set aside.

Furthermore, the apostasy and the revelation of the Antichrist cannot come till that body, the church, is taken from the earth (see 2 Thess. ii). The appearance of the final Antichrist therefore demands the complete removal of the one body. A remnant of believers, members of the one body, left in the earth during the great tribulation would still hinder the revelation of Antichrist and postpone it. The Saints in the tribulation are not members of the one body, but they are Jewish believers. The next chapter will enter into this more fully.

Again, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." This is the Bema in the air. All believers will have to appear before Him to receive approval or disapproval (not salvation or condemnation). Now, if they are all to appear before that seat in the air on the day of Christ--they must all have been taken up. When He comes at the end of the tribulation He comes with all His Saints. Many other Scriptures might be quoted which declare the same truth, Every believer will share in the first resurrection and be caught up when the Lord comes.

There are two passages which are generally quoted to support the teaching of a partial rapture. The first is taken to support the theory that it is a question of worthiness, and the second passage is claimed to make clear that only those will be caught up who look for the Lord.

Luke xxi:36 is the first passage. "Watch ye therefore and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all the things that shall come to pass and to stand before the Son of Man." Our Lord spoke these words in connection with the prophecies concerning the end of the age when the earth and the heavens shall be shaken and when He will come as Son of Man in a cloud with power and glory. The title of our Lord, Son of Man, gives us His relation to the earth. When He was here in His humiliation He was Son of Man, when He comes in exaltation He comes as Son of Man. Nowhere is it said of the members of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ that they will stand before the Son of Man. The exhortation is one which concerns the Jewish remnant, the 144,000 in the Book of Revelation. They will be in the earth during that time of trouble and with them it will be the question of faithfulness to the end to be accounted worthy to stand before the Son of Man. The disciples whom our Lord addressed in these words represent in type that Jewish remnant.

Hebrews ix:28: "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." This passage has been made to prove that only those who wait for Him will be taken up. The whole passage shows the three appearances of the Christ. He appeared on the earth to put away sin by sacrificing Himself. He appears now in the presence of God for us. He will appear the second time. This is unquestionably the glorious appearing spoken of in Titus ii:13, "The glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." He who appeared and He who appears in the presence of God will be the same who comes back to the earth. Of course when He actually returns from heaven into the habitable earth, as the firstborn, bringing many sons to glory (all His saints with Him) there will be such who wait and look for Him and to them He comes for salvation, and these are the believing Jews. Of this we read in Isaiah xxv:9: "And it shall be said in that day, Lo this is our God; we have waited for Him and He will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation." The passage does not teach that only such will be caught up who believe in His coming and look for Him.

And now, as so many believers seem to be troubled about the words of the Apostle Paul in the third chapter of Philippians we give a short word on that. The position of the epistle to the Philippians is significant. Ephesians speaks of the glories of the church, what every believer and the company of believers, the one body, is in Christ. Colossians acquaints us with the glory of Him who is the Head of the body, Christ. Philippians stands between the two and shows the believer in Christ with the life of Christ in him, living Christ and pressing towards the glory. It is the epistle of experience. In the third chapter the energy of this life in the believer is seen. Paul, of course, knew that he belonged to that glory. He had absolute certainty about the first resurrection. But this divine energy in him presses forward. It is in full harmony with what God's grace has made him. All in him wants to get there, where the grace of God in Christ had placed him once and for all. The life of Christ in him reaches out for that place and when he

says, "By any means," he gives us to understand nothing shall hinder him, may the cost be what it will, he wants to lay hold of all for which Christ has laid hold of him. He reaches out after that goal, Christ in glory, because he knew he belonged there.

Sir Robert Anderson gives a very helpful comment on Philippians iii:11 which we quote in connection with the above:

"If the commonly received exegesis of this passage be correct, we are faced by the astounding fact that the author of the Epistle to the Romans and of the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians--the Apostle who was in a peculiar sense entrusted with the supreme revelation of grace--announced when nearing the close of his ministry that the resurrection was not, as he had been used to teach, a blessing which Divine grace assured to all believers in Christ, but a prize to be won by the sustained efforts of a life of wholly exceptional saintship.

"Nor is this all. In the same Epistle he has already said, 'To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain,' whereas, ex hypothesi, it now appears that his chief aim was to earn a right to the resurrection, and that death, instead of bringing gain, would have cut him off before he had reached the standard of saintship needed to secure that prize! For his words are explicit. 'Not as though I had already attained.'

"Here was one who was not a whit behind the chiefest Apostles; who excelled them all in labors and sufferings for his Lord, and in the visions and revelations accorded to him; whose prolonged ministry, moreover, was accredited by mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the spirit of God. And yet, being now 'such an one as Paul the aged,' he was in doubt whether he should have part in that resurrection which he had taught all his Corinthian converts to hope for and expect.

"Such is the exposition of the Apostle's teaching in many a standard commentary. And yet the passage which is thus perverted reaches its climax in the words, 'Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence we are looking for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of His glory.'

"'Our citizenship is in heaven.' Here is the clew to the teaching of the whole passage. The truth to which his words refer is more clearly stated in Ephesians ii:6, 'God has quickened us together with Christ, and raised us up with Him, and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ.' More clearly still is it given in Colossians iii:1-3, 'If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things on the earth. For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.'

"Ephesians and Colossians, be it remembered, were written at the same period of his ministry as Philippians, and in the light of these Scriptures we can read this chapter aright. To win Christ (v. 8), or to apprehend, or lay hold of, that for which he had been laid hold of, or apprehended (v. 12)--or in other words, to realize practically in his life on earth what was true of him doctrinally as to his standing before God in heaven--this is what he was reaching toward, and what he says he had not already attained.

"The high calling of verse 14 is interpreted by some to mean Christ's calling up His own to meet Him in the air (a blessing assured to all 'who are alive and remain unto the Coming of the Lord'), but this is not in keeping with the plain words: God's high calling in Christ Jesus, i. e., what God has called us (made us) to be in Christ.

"If the passage refers to the literal resurrection, then the words, 'not as though I had already attained,' must mean that, while here on earth and before the Lord's Coming, the Apostle hoped either to undergo the change of verse 21, or else to win some sort of saintship diploma, or certificate, to ensure his being raised at the Coming. These alternatives are inexorable; and they only need to be stated to ensure their rejection.

"One word more. If the Apostle Paul, after such a life of saintship and service, was in doubt as to his part in the resurrection, no one of us, indeed he be the proudest of Pharisees or the blindest of fools, will dream of attaining it."

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