

Will ALL the Saints be caught up when the Lord comes?

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Table of Contents

"They that are Christ's"	2
"The Redemption of our body."	4
"A glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."	5
"In the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump."	6

We answer this question with a decided YES. In doing so, however, we are quite aware that not a few earnest believers would reply NO, and that this contrary assertion is made with Scripture quotations alleged to support it, and urged with a large degree of argumentative skill.

Controversy, however, is not the object of this paper, but rather a simple declaration of some reasons for the faith that is in us in relation to this matter.

Everywhere and increasingly *the children of God* are ranging themselves on the side of those who believe that Christ *is* coming and coming *soon*; so that the expectation of a near fulfilment of 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18 is very general. It is not surprising, therefore, that the question before us should be eagerly debated; it is obviously of burning importance in view of the imminence of our Lord's return.

The Scripture already alluded to is the special passage which brings before us this tremendous event, and the three distinct actions of which it is composed are clearly discernible.

1st. "THE LORD HIMSELF SHALL DESCEND FROM HEAVEN *with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.*"

2nd. "And THE DEAD IN CHRIST SHALL RISE FIRST."

3rd. "Then WE WHICH ARE ALIVE AND REMAIN SHALL BE CAUGHT UP *together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.*"

The delightful result and conclusion of this threefold action is given us in the words, " And so shall we ever be with the Lord."

The three actions are perfectly clear. DESCENSION. RESURRECTION. TRANSLATION.

The three parties to this great threefold operation are equally clear and explicitly stated. We have:-

The descent of the LORD HIMSELF.

The resurrection of the DEAD IN CHRIST.

The translation of WE WHICH ARE ALIVE AND REMAIN *together with the dead in Christ.*

There is no reservation, no qualifying condition, no thought of some inner selection in any of the three.

The Lord Himself. — Not an emanation from Himself, not a putting forth of His power as apart from His presence; not a deputation of angelic beings, nor even the archangel himself.

The dead in Christ. — Not some of the dead in Christ; not the dead in Christ who are of the church as distinct from saints, who lived before Christ came; not the dead of outstanding faithfulness, the "Elijahs" of history as distinguished from the "seven thousand" whose faithfulness consisted in the negative virtue of not bowing the knee to Baal.

"We which are alive and remain" — Not some of use presumably a very few; not those of us who are overcomers according to Revelation 2 and 3; not those who are "watching," and "looking for Christ." The "WE" is the Christian "we" qualified and limited by the one and only condition, not that we watch and serve, but that we are alive and remain.*

{*Let no one overlook the importance of watching and serving and overcoming. We emphasise these things later. We speak here simply of what this Scripture says, and what it does not say.}

Bearing these simple and obvious facts in mind we venture to characterise the importation of any such qualifications and reservations into the passage as a bold and questionable proceeding — a contention only to be allowed hearing if it could be proved that a further and later revelation from the Lord to His apostle exists which shows clearly that the passage is to be read in any such limited manner. Other Scriptures allude to the "Rapture," i.e. the catching away of the saints, but this is the one passage that fully unfolds it, and we start therefore by observing that it contains no hint of a partial or selective rapture. Those to be rapt are described in terms which embrace *all* Christians.

Let us now apply another test to this question. There are, as we have stated, other Scriptures which allude to the coming of the Lord *for* His people, as distinguished from His coming *with* them in glory — such as John 14: 3, 1 Corinthians 15: 23, and 51, 52. There are also other parts of the truth of God which bear upon it so that it becomes a case of fitting in what one has learned as to the Rapture with other truth clearly revealed. God's truth is like a complete and perfect arch in which each stone is of such a shape that it corresponds to, and fits in with its fellows on either side. Now what is the correct shape for that stone in the arch of truth that we call "the Rapture?" Should it be cut down to narrow limits and confined to a select number of very faithful believers who attain to a standard of holiness, the degree of which is known only to God? Or does it stand connected with God's grace rather than our faithfulness and therefore carry the expansiveness of that grace imprinted upon it, and embrace *all* the children of God?

We will summarise our answers to these questions under four heads.

"They that are Christ's"

First then let us turn to 1 Corinthians 15: 23, 24. The great theme of this chapter is resurrection and not rapture, but since, as we have seen in 1 Thessalonians 4, the resurrection of the saints — the first resurrection — is but preliminary to rapture, this verse bears very evidently upon our theme.

The apostle here bases his reasoning upon the great established fact of the resurrection of Christ. He shows it to be a fact carrying within itself a pledge of the future resurrection of men, but every man in his own order.

He enumerates the order.

1. CHRIST, the firstfruits.
2. *"They that are Christ's,"* at His coming.
3. *"Then the end"* — when death the last enemy shall be destroyed. In connection with the

resurrection of the wicked dead matters are left indefinite, as in this passage the resurrection of the saints is the great theme.

The description of those who stand in the second order or rank, is however, quite definite and clear, They are described as those that are "Christ's."

Our first observation is that here again there is no hint of anything partial. At His coming those who are His shall be raised, no more and no less. No select and therefore partial resurrection is taught here.

But further, reading this verse in the light of the context, and especially of verses 45 to 49 of the chapter, we gather that there is more in the expression "they that are Christ's" than the thought of *possession*. There is also the thought of *community or oneness of life and nature*.

Read verses 45 to 49 very carefully. Adam and Christ are contrasted. The first Adam a living soul but natural and earthy. As fallen he reproduces himself in many generations but always according to that original law of creation expressed in those words ten times repeated in Genesis 1 "after his kind." There is no evolution to a higher and different order. The twentieth century man is but Adam the first, after his kind, a living soul but natural and earthly still.

Christ, the last Adam, is "a quickening, [i.e. a life giving] spirit" He is spiritual, the Lord from heaven and consequently heavenly, and those who are of Him are after His kind. There is — Oh wondrous truth! — community of life and nature. They, too, are heavenly, and in resurrection at His coming are to bear the image of the spiritual and heavenly Man.

In the light of this, what a wealth of meaning is enfolded in that last clause of verse 23. When Christ comes He will raise those that belong to Him, not merely because they are His possession, but because also they are of His life and nature. He possesses much, the angels of His might, for instance, of which this latter statement could not be made.

Consider yet a little further what this means. In a corner of a large engineering workshop there lies. let us suppose, a considerable heap of metal filings. Several barrow loads have been flung there in a haphazard way, regardless of their nature, and the result is that filings of steel and lead lie thoroughly mixed. Who now can disentangle them? If even a dozen men were set to work with their fingers it would prove a hopeless and heart-breaking task.

But stay, there is a very simple method of disentanglement. Let that powerful electric magnet travel in the direction of the heap until it is directly over it. You know what will happen. The steel filings feeling the force of its attraction will be suddenly quickened and raised to the magnet. The lead filings will remain on the earth inert as before.

But suppose that in the course of weeks the heap has often been saturated with water — what then? Why then, the water which may have washed the lead filings until they shine more brightly has rusted the steel until they do not shine at all. Now then, will the process with the magnet be altered or reversed? Will *bright* lead filings be attracted and the more rusty steel ones left behind? Not at all. There is a certain oneness or affinity of nature between the magnet and the steel which no superficial rustiness can eradicate and between the magnet and the lead there is a total lack of such affinity for which no brightness can compensate. *Nature*, and not surface condition is the decisive factor.

"They that are Christ's at His coming." He, the heavenly Magnet, will exert His resurrection power and they who are of Himself, of His life and nature and therefore His possession, will hear His voice and rise to be with Him for ever. Each of the rising millions will be "true steel" if we may so say,

though not by any means all will have escaped contracting a good bit of the rust of this defiling world while passing through it. No worldling will be there. Lead-like, they will remain unmoved until "the end." They belong to the third rank or order and not to the second.

We affirm then that this short sentence in 1 Corinthians 15: 23, involves the resurrection of *all* Christ's at His coming, and that the supposition of a partial rapture violates this marvellous revelation of community of life and nature between Christ and His own as given in verses 45 to 49.

To avoid misunderstanding we again remark that the statement of verse 23 is made of *resurrection* and not *rapture*, but inasmuch as the rapture of the saints is the act which puts the final touches to God's resurrection plan they cannot be disconnected. Nor can it be seriously maintained that at His coming the Lord will deal with His living saints upon principles diametrically opposed to those which operate as regards the sleeping saints. If there is a selection of the one there must be a selection of the other or *vice versa*

"The Redemption of our body."

In the second place we may cite certain Scriptures which refer to the coming of the Lord for His saints without explicitly mentioning the rapture. The allusions they make to this great event are however of great value in helping to determine its nature. Such Scriptures are Romans 8: 23; Romans 13: 11; Ephesians 1: 13, 14; Ephesians 4: 30; 1 Thessalonians 5: 8-10; 2 Thessalonians 2: 13; 1 Peter 1: 5, 13.

Let these passages be carefully read with their context and it will be seen:-

1st. That each contains an allusion to the coming of the Lord as the hope of the saint and the grand terminus to which he is moving.

2nd. That the character imprinted upon the coming of the Lord in its relation to believers is not that of judgment, or law, or merit, but is expressed in such words as "redemption" "salvation" and "grace."

This is a point of primary importance and is therefore worthy of careful examination. The first of the above Scriptures may be taken as representative of the others. "We," *i.e.* the children of God having the first-fruits of the Spirit, "even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."

The allusion to the coming of our Lord in this passage is quite unmistakable. The earlier part of the epistle has laid the foundation for it. The Christian is discovered to be a man who is justified from his guilt, and also freed from the dominion of sin and from condemnation by the cross of Christ, which dissociated him from Adam that he might be in Christ; and the Spirit of Christ is seen to be in him.

As regards his soul, his spirit, a full redemption has reached him, what remains then but that at the coming of the Lord his body too shall be redeemed, that set free, spirit, soul, *and body*, he may step into "the liberty of the glory of the sons of God." This redemption will be effected by the changing of our bodies of humiliation and their fashioning like Christ's body of glory (see Phil. 3: 20, 21.) In reading these two verses note that the Lord Jesus Christ accomplishes this great work when He comes from heaven, not as Judge, nor Arbitrator, but as *Saviour*.

Now, let us emphasise that word REDEMPTION. It gives us in one word the *character* which everywhere in Scripture is stamped upon the coming of the Lord *for* His people. Subsequent to that coming there is the judgment seat of Christ and His glorious appearing. Responsibility, reward or loss,

and judgment are as clearly stamped upon these. This is a distinction ever to be borne in mind.

Now, we assert, without fear of contradiction, that redemption is everywhere in Scripture connected with *mercy* and not with *merit*. It has to do with the grace of God and not with the faithfulness of man.

It is therefore a fact of decisive importance that what will reach the saints at the coming of the Lord for them, according to 1 Thessalonians 4: 16, 17, is the *redemption* of their bodies. It renders it perfectly certain that the raising of dead saints, the changing of living saints and the rapture of both classes to be for ever with the Lord is an act of grace and not an act of judgment. No wonder that when contemplating the rising apostasy of the last time Jude should speak of the Lord's coming, the true avenue of escape for the saints, as *mercy*. "Looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Verse 21.)

It remains now to apply the foregoing facts to the question before us. When the Lord Jesus Christ comes as Saviour to redeem the bodies of His saints, will this crowning mercy extend to all, or only to a few of greater watchfulness or higher attainments than the rest? Which shape is to be given to this "Rapture" stone in the arch of divine Revelation if it is to agree with this truth? Is it possible that God extends to us redemption, as to our souls on the ground of His grace, and then as to our bodies awards it on the ground of our deserts? — so that failure as to watchfulness and the like may defer the redemption of our bodies for ages and until occasions of which Scripture gives no hint.

We reply unhesitatingly. — It is *not* possible. To teach a partial or selective rapture on the ground of our faithfulness is to teach that God begins redemption on the "grace" principle and finishes it on the "works" principle, and such teaching is in its essence the error of the Galatian believers.* We may well ask the question of such teachers that Paul asked of these: — "Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Gal. 3: 3)

{*That we have not stated the case unfairly in the above statements is evidenced by the fact that a leading exponent of selective rapture uses such words as these: — "*Rapture is a judgment act...* That cannot fall in the Day of Grace which withdraws from the world the witnesses to grace, it is not the last act in 'this Day,' but the first in 'that Day': rapture falls in the sphere of judgment, and so is a reward according to works, not a privilege attached to grace." (*Rapture* by D. M. Panton. Italics the author's)}

"A glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."

Thus far we have considered the question from a more or less individualistic point of view, let us now in the third place, consider the matter, as we are entitled to, in connection with that which God has established of a corporate nature; *i.e. the church*. Each believer should recognize that beyond the privileges and responsibilities that are his in his individual capacity there lies the fact that he is a part of a corporate body established by the Lord Himself, with privileges and responsibilities in that corporate capacity. The epistle which most dwells upon this side of the truth is that to the Ephesians.

The Ephesian epistle has a good deal to say to us concerning "the church": that is, the assembly of the called-out-ones, — those called out of the world for Christ between the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit baptized believers into one body, and the Rapture which terminates the present period. The church in the epistle is spoken of under the figure of a *temple*, a building fitly framed together (Eph. 2: 20-22); a *body*, which is the body of Christ (Eph. 1: 22-23; Eph. 3: 12-16); and a *bride* or wife (Eph. 5: 25-27.)

Here, then, the believer is considered as a little part of a great whole; and that whole not a mere collection of units, an organization, but rather an *organism*.

Consider this matter attentively, for it is to be feared that in regard to it many Christians indulge in loose and careless thinking, — if indeed they think of it at all. The church then is a body of an organic nature so that the human body can be referred to as a figure of it.

Permit an illustration. A schoolboy returns from his games swinging a bag of marbles. They are many in number, and different in size and quality. Most are of the commonest kind, some are of brightly coloured glass, here and there is one cut from bloodstone, and one perhaps, his chiefest treasure, is an agate. The capacious bag keeps all together and forms them into a certain artificial "unity." By all too many Christians the church is conceived of as an organization by which the diverse mass of individual believers is held together, after the pattern of that bag of marbles.

The divine thought is very different. The church is a building "fitly framed together"; every part interlocked and in structural connection. It is a body "fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth." Here the figure is even stronger. It is not merely structural unity but organic unity; just as the same life-blood flows through every part of the human body and the one head is the; seat of all direction and control. Finally the church is to be presented by Christ to Himself as a bride to her husband, "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." After the rapture, and after the saints have individually passed before the judgment seat, this presentation will take place preliminary to the appearing in glory. (See Rev. 19: 6-9).

How does the idea of a partial and selective rapture fit in with this great truth? *Not at all*. It would be consistent enough if the church were like that bag of marbles. It were easy enough for the little lad to insert his hand and snatch forth the agate, the bloodstones, or even the glass marbles and leave the poor common ones behind; but to remove the strongest or most ornamental of the "living stones" from the structure, or the most vigorous and useful members from the body, leaving behind in either case but a mutilated wreck, is an unthinkable procedure, even if we had not the clear assurance already quoted that when Christ presents the church to Himself it will be *whole, complete, and without blemish*.

It will have *no spot, i.e.* no defect of any sort. *No wrinkle, i.e.* no sign of age or decadence, "nor any such thing," *i.e.* no other defect of any imaginable nature. Could language be stronger or more sweeping? How impossible to make it agree with the idea that only select individuals of the many composing the church are to be rapt by the Lord into His presence when He comes. In that case He would indeed present to Himself mutilated fragments rather than a church without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.

We believe then, that the truth as to the church forbids the reading into 1 Thessalonians 4: 16, 17, of any such qualifications as the theory of a selective rapture demands.

"In the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump."

In the fourth place let us return to 1 Corinthians 15: 50-52. They immediately follow and are closely connected with the verses concerning the earthly race of the first Adam and the heavenly race of the last Adam to which attention has already been drawn.

This is a passage of the utmost importance to our subject, for firstly it states with great exactness the procedure in connection with the first resurrection; and secondly it explicitly refers to that procedure in relation to the *living saints*, supplying a detail of which no mention is made in 1

Thessalonians 4: 16, 17, viz., that we, the living shall be changed into bodies of glory before being caught up to be with the Lord. This *change* from a "flesh and blood" condition into a condition of incorruption and immortality is the main theme of the passage.

Bear in mind the context: — Christ risen is the pledge of all resurrection (1 Cor. 15: 20.) At Christ's coming those who are Christ's will be raised (1 Cor. 15: 23). They will be raised in bodies of incorruption, glory and power, in spiritual bodies (1 Cor. 15: 35-44.) They will bear the image of the heavenly Man, "the Lord from heaven" inasmuch as they are of His lineage, partaking of His life and nature (1 Cor. 15: 45-49.) Now if "we," the living saints, are to share in the incorruptible kingdom of God which will be the portion of the raised saints, something is necessary. Hence the revelation of the secret of 1 Cor. 15: 51, 52.

"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."

We quote the words in full, for the passage is one and indivisible though its continuity is somewhat broken by its being divided in our Bible into two verses at a point where a comma occurs.

In it, a few important things stand out plainly: —

1. The "we" is used in the broadest Christian sense.
2. We shall *all* be changed not merely a select few.
3. We shall all be changed *instantaneously* — in a moment in the twinkling of an eye.
4. We shall all be changed instantaneously *on the same occasion* — *i.e.* the last trump.

Here, then, we have as clear a pronouncement as possible on this momentous question. The rapture, *i.e.* the act of the catching up of the saints in their changed condition is not mentioned. But the fact that it is the change preparatory to the rapture makes it certain that what is stated here of the change is equally true of the rapture. And what is revealed to us is that ALL the living saints will be INSTANTANEOUSLY changed into glorified bodies WHEN A CERTAIN DEFINITE POINT OF TIME — THE LAST TRUMP IS REACHED They will NOT be changed and raptured in detachments.

That definite point of time will be the moment of manifested victory — a victory given to us even now, not through our faithfulness, but through our Lord Jesus Christ. It will be reached then on the same ground — not as 'a reward for supreme faithfulness and watchfulness and therefore the portion of a few, but as a display of the grace and power of the Lord Jesus.

This Scripture, we repeat, clearly negatives any idea of successive and partial changes and raptures such as is taught to-day.

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Let us now summarise what we have gathered from Scripture.

1. Rapture is not a judgment act but the crowning act of grace. It is the finishing touch of the great redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

2. By it the Lord from heaven will take to Himself His heavenly ones, — those who are His, of His nature, and this does not allow of the thought of a selection being made.*

*It is a fact that after the rapture the Spirit of *God will* raise up other saints, some will suffer martyrdom and be subsequently raised. (see Rev. 20: 4.) This does not in the least militate against what

we assert, viz., that when Christ comes He catches up *all* those who are His *up to that moment*.

3. The rapture is not exactly the rapture of the church, for all believers from the beginning will doubtless be included, yet *the church* will be rapt. It is a living organism and to suppose that only some members will be taken, does violence to this truth of Scripture.

4. In the great Scriptures which refer to the coming of the Lord *for* His people such as John 14: 3; 1 Thessalonians 4: 15-17; 1 Thessalonians 5: 9, 10; 2 Thessalonians 2: 1; no hint is given of any such partial rapture as is suggested, and one such scripture — 1 Corinthians 15: 51, 52 — as we have seen explicitly and formally denies it.

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We are quite aware that there are Scriptures which at first sight may seem to deny what we have advanced. The same thing could be said of practically every truth of Scripture. A passage or passages can be produced which if superficially read seem to deny it. Such a passage in connection with our subject is Hebrews 9: 27, 28. He appears the second time unto salvation to "*them that look for Him.*" The context however shows that here the allusion is to the High Priest of Israel gone within the Holiest with the blood of sacrifice, and the people without looking for His reappearance which would give them the assurance that atonement had been made. Everywhere in Hebrews we find these allusions to, and contrasts with, Old Testament types. This Scripture does not refer in any exclusive or even definite way to the rapture. It deals with His appearing in general terms such as will cover the godly remnant of Israel, who will await Christ when the church is gone. It is true of course that *every* Christian looks for Christ, though often with but little intelligence as to His coming.

Other passages may be cited from the Gospels, Matthew 24, 25, and the like. It is asserted for instance that the foolish virgins of the latter chapter figure unwatchful Christians who are left behind. That this is not so, verse 12 proves. The Lord answers, not "I used to know you but I have forgotten you" as Arminian theories might suggest: nor "I know you but on account of your unwatchfulness I decline for the present to recognize you," as these partial rapture theories would suggest — but simply "*I know you not.*" They were never, properly speaking, *His*; for of His own He says, "I know them." (see John 10: 27.) The foolish virgins had an outward profession but no real link with the Lord — they were *mere* professors.

Indeed nearly every Scripture brought to support the theory of selective rapture and to disprove the rapture of all the saints in such a pamphlet as that mentioned in the footnote to page 11 is dealt with on the erroneous principle of fastening upon real believers the solemn warnings and threatenings urged against mere professors of Christ's name.

As was the Old Testament type (see Ex. 12: 38; Num. 11: 4) so also was the New Testament antitype. Early in the church's history "the mixed multitude" became all too manifest, and so in the New Testament epistles we have many a searching question and warning designed to act as a home thrust to the conscience of any mere professor; — for instance, 1 Corinthians and Hebrews both refer to Israel, with her multitudes falling in the wilderness through *unbelief*, as a warning of what might happen to those in outward relationship with God if vital faith be lacking. (See 1 Cor. 10: and Heb. 3, 4) If people take up Christian ground God accepts them at their own valuation for the purposes of His holy judgment, and condemns them out of their own mouth like the wicked servant of Luke 19: 22.

This is a key to the understanding of much Scripture and needless confusion is introduced if it be not discerned.

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Lastly, let us emphasize that there is a consideration of great gravity for every *true* believer connected with the judgment seat of Christ and the millennial kingdom beyond. If the rapture is the closing and crowning act of divine grace, it nevertheless directly leads to each individual saint standing before the judgment seat of Christ, — which is the terminus and grand reckoning place of his responsibility — and ultimately to the kingdom, which is the place and season when and where the decisions of that judgment seat will be displayed. At that judgment seat we shall "receive the things done in the body" (2 Cor. 5: 10), which may mean receiving a reward or suffering loss (1 Cor. 3: 14, 15.) Into that kingdom we may gain an *abundant* entrance or the reverse (2 Peter 1: 11.)

How will it fare with us each in that day? The answer depends entirely upon the character of our lives here, upon our service and suffering for Christ and the measure in which our characters are formed after Himself.

This searching theme is beyond the scope of the present paper. We mention it as a necessary counterbalance to our minds in considering that which is wholly of grace. We need to hold the whole truth in an even balance.

The desires and intentions of many of those who diligently teach a selective and partial rapture we believe to be of the best. Feeling keenly the low practical condition of most of God's children they desire some startling truth to shake them out of their present apathy, and almost terrify them into lives of devotion and zeal and watchfulness; and in that which they advance they believe they have found the needed goad.

But have they? NO. The truth concerning the judgment seat of Christ and the coming kingdom if kept in its proper connection is indeed a mighty *incentive* to devotedness, but it is not and cannot be its main *motive*. Much less can such a mistaken view of the rapture be anything of the kind. The only possible foundation upon which Christian devotedness can rest is GRACE. *Grace* alone furnishes motive power. Not law, nor fear of incurring penalties, but grace teaches us how to live. As Titus 2: 11-13, puts it, "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

By the grace then that has saved you, Christian reader — the grace that will put the top stone to the work by landing you in glory with and like Christ at the blessed moment of rapture, we call upon you to awake from sleep and lethargy, and like Caleb, wholly follow your Lord. As an added incentive we remind you that your whole career here is to be scrutinised before the judgment seat with corresponding reward or loss in the coming kingdom. You have but one life to live! Be in earnest.

But let *grace* be the meat and drink of your heart that you may, like Elijah, have strength for your pilgrimage way to the appointed meeting place. Depend upon it, if when our Lord Jesus Christ appears in glory He comes "*with ALL* His saints" (1 Thess. 3: 13), He will not catch up less than *ALL* when previously He comes *for* them.