

Although the intermediate state of the deceased Christian is in many ways better than anything we experience on earth, it is far inferior to the ultimate state for which God has destined us, when we shall have our resurrection bodies, as Paul explains elsewhere:

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. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality (I Corinthians 15:51-53).

Paul comforts the Thessalonian believers by assuring them that their fellow Christians who have died will not lose the opportunity to greet Christ at His coming. He says that Christ will bring with Him those who have died (verse 14). Their souls will come with Him.

In verse 15 Paul declares that those who remain alive when Christ returns (and it is interesting to note that Paul still hoped that he himself might be living when Christ would come back), will not have precedence over those who had previously died. When the King James Version of the Bible was issued, the word "prevent" (derived from the Latin word meaning "come before") was regularly used to mean what we mean today by the word "precede." Verse 16 says that when the Lord descends from heaven with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, the dead in Christ shall rise first. They will receive incorruptible bodies, and those who are then living will also participate in this glorious transformation (I Corinthians 15:51-53, quoted above.)

Immediately after this event verse 17 tells us that all the true believers in Christ will be caught up together into the clouds "to meet the Lord in the air." Nearly three hundred years ago the famous Bible commentator, Matthew Henry, called this great event "the Rapture of the Church,"