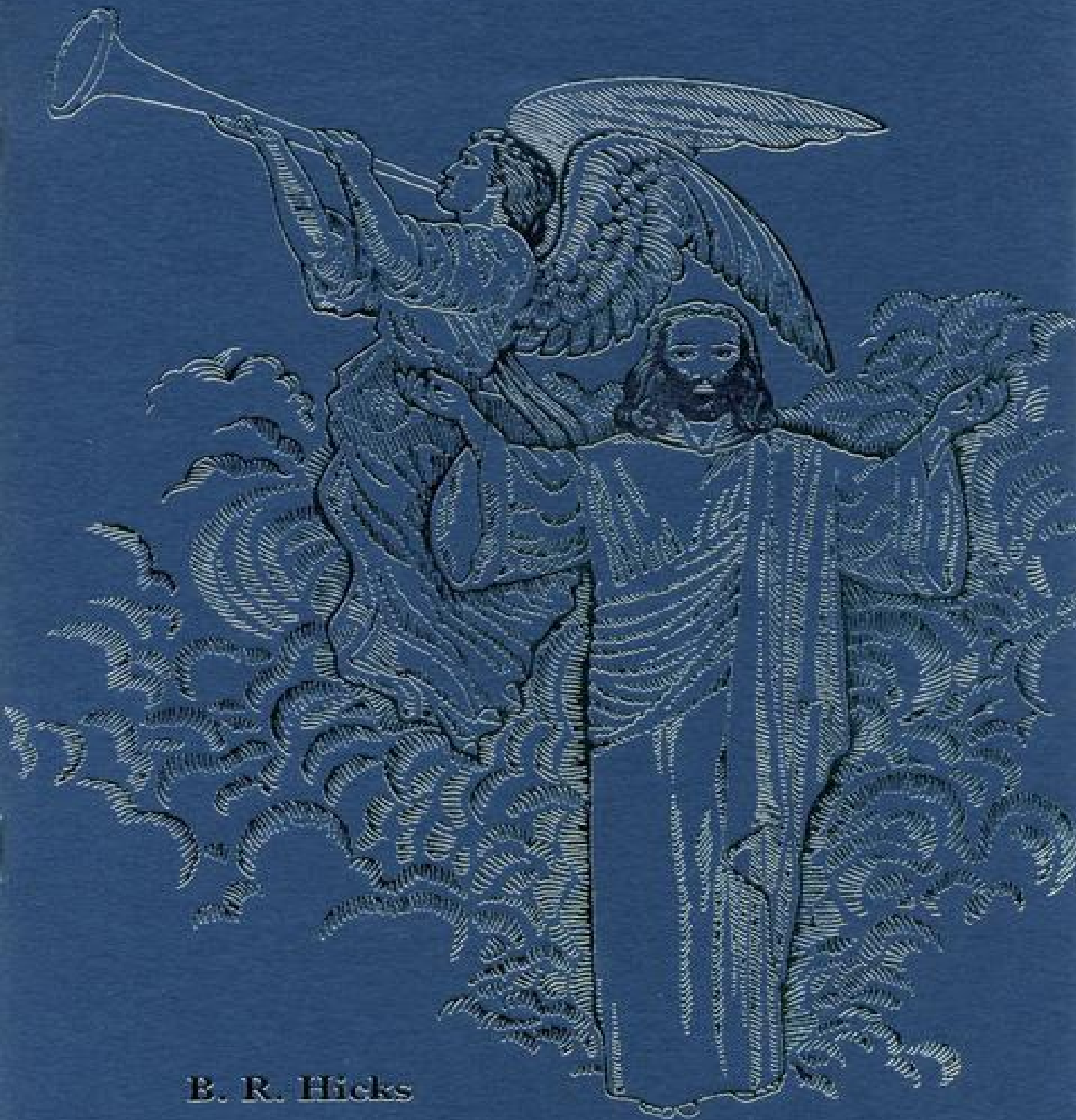


The Rapture



B. R. Hicks

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by B. R. Hicks

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**The Coming Of The LORD
In The Clouds To Catch Away
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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 (I Thessalonians 4:16,17).

The Rapture

What is the “Rapture”? Will every Christian believer be in the Rapture? How does a person prepare for the Rapture? When will this event take place? What will be the results of this phenomenal happening? What follows the Rapture on God’s Calendar of Events?

These are questions that people need answers to today! God’s Clock marks the hours allotted to man in the measured amount of space which God calls *time*, and the hands on His Clock are pointing to the last hour man has left. Sometime during this hour, the time of the Rapture will take place. It could happen anytime!

God’s Holy Word is not only a revelation of His Son, Jesus, but it is also a prophetic message to man so that each person might be prepared in his heart for everything that will happen, from meeting his Creator at death, to being prepared for Jesus’ soon Coming in the clouds, personally, for those who are ready.

Although the word “Rapture” does not appear in the Bible, the Scriptures refer to the time of the LORD Jesus Christ’s Coming in the air to catch away His Bride and the Wedding Party. It is this long-awaited event that Christians everywhere refer to as the “Rapture.”

God’s Word makes it abundantly clear that this event will take place:

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 (I Thessalonians 4:16,17).

Since the Bible says that the LORD is *coming back*, it is apparent that He *went away*. After His Resurrection, He ascended into Heaven in His own personal Form. As He ascended, the Disciples stood watching Him. Jesus passed through the material Heavens up to the Throne of God where He assumed His position at the Right Hand of God the Father. He will remain seated there until He, personally, returns. The Angels told those who watched Him disappear into the clouds that He would return in like manner.

And when he had spoken these things, **while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.** And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, **shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven** (Acts 1:9-11).

In other words, Jesus Christ will reappear *in the clouds*. He will personally descend through the Heavens with the same Resurrection Glory with which He ascended. There will be one significant difference, however. When He returns, He will share His Resurrection Glory with all who are watching and longing for His appearing.

The Scripture says, “We shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” The Resurrection Glory of the LORD Jesus Christ will reach out to those who are prepared and watching for His Coming and will change them. This will be the only time that men on the Earth will escape Death. All other people have to go through Death and the grave.

Death will lose its power in more than one way on that day, for in Glory and Power the bodies of dead believers also will be raised to become new glorified houses for their spirits and souls. Resurrected Saints of God will stand up in their glorified bodies while their whole being — body, soul, and spirit — magnifies Jesus Christ Face to face! If a man had a thousand tongues, he could never sufficiently praise Jesus for the glorious hope of seeing Him Face to face. All of life’s trials, heartaches, and persecutions will seem as nothing on that glorious day! Those who have believed on Him will see the One Who died for them on the cruel Cross and be able to thank Him for His great Love. Because He loved mankind, He was willing to be a Sacrifice for all of man’s sins.

The Scripture further states that Jesus Christ will descend from Heaven with the shout of triumph! His shout will

resound with pomp and Power, for it will contain all the Authority of the mighty King and Conqueror over sin, Death, Hell, and the grave. Jesus died to redeem man fully: spirit, soul, and body. At the present time, the spirits and souls of believers are in the process of *being* redeemed. On the day of the Rapture, Jesus Christ will finish the work. He will redeem the body from Death, corruption, weakness, and dishonour, and raise it up in the likeness of His own glorious Body. No wonder Jesus will descend with a shout of triumph and victory. Death will have to obey the Voice of the Victor!

When the LORD Jesus Christ descends in all His Glory and Power, He will be accompanied by a host of Angels whose leader will be the Archangel Michael. It will be Michael's voice that will announce the King's approach and that will call Heaven and Earth to remembrance of God's Covenant of Blood that has redeemed fallen man's spirit, soul, and body.

Although there may be other Archangels, Michael is the only one mentioned in God's Word. The word *archangel* means to be first in rank. In Daniel 10:13, Michael is mentioned as being one of the chief Princes in the angelic realm. Even the Angels had a season of testing by the Devil to see who would overcome in the Heavens, just as mankind has been tested on Earth. It is clear from his position and rank that Michael was one Angel who defeated the Devil in his attempt to lure the Angels away from serving God.

The Book of Jude refers to the Archangel Michael as a warrior, a contender. He is the Commander-in-Chief of God's Angelic Army, to be exact. Jude 1:9 records the information that God sent the Archangel Michael to resurrect the body of Moses (Scriptures prove that Moses was resurrected in advance because he stood on the Mount of Transfiguration with Elijah and Jesus). Although Michael was obviously victorious, the Devil, in his perverse way, disputed with him over releasing Moses because the Devil did not want to let Moses go prematurely. God is Sovereign, though, and directs the Devil in any way that He chooses. In His Omniscience, God knew that the Devil would try to keep Moses' body, which tells us why God sent His Archangel. Knowing that the Devil also will put up a real battle on the day of the Resurrection, God will send Michael with Jesus when He comes in the air to catch away the overcomers who are ready for His return.

From the beginning of a believer's walk with God, the Devil wages new battles against him. Even though the believer has accepted Jesus Christ as the Saviour of his soul and has rejected the Devil as his master, the Devil never gives up, but continues to tempt and entice him. The Devil hopes to get the believer to return to his kingdom of darkness. If the Devil wages such a battle over the spirits and souls of men, it stands to reason that he will fight one last time to keep the bodies which he thinks he has trapped in Death. But Jesus will bring His Commander-in-Chief Michael and His angelic army to withstand the Devil.

Last, Jesus is coming, not only with a shout and the voice of the Archangel, but also with the Trump of God. The Trumpet that sounds will awaken the bodies asleep in the dust of the Earth and will summon the living, prepared saints of God.

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** (I Corinthians 15:51,52).

This is *not* the Last Trumpet Judgment, as some suppose. This Trumpet heralds Resurrection Life, not judgment on a Christ-rejecting world, as is seen during the period of the Tribulation. This, rather, is a *Trumpet of Redemption* or a Silver Trumpet since *silver* is used in the Word of God as a picture of Redemption.

In the tenth chapter of Numbers, two silver trumpets are mentioned. Studying these Scriptures explains the ministry of the Silver Trumpet at the Coming of the LORD, for the Old Testament types and shadows are invaluable in making it possible to understand the present and future. In the case of the silver trumpets, one trumpet was used to call the assembly together, and the other was blown for an alarm, signaling the beginning of the journey of the camps. In verse ten of this chapter, God told Israel that when the trumpets blew, she would be remembered before Him. So the blowing of the silver trumpets insured God's continued care by reminding Him of His Covenant of Blood with Israel. She was always safe from her enemies when the trumpets were blown. Likewise, when Jesus Christ comes in the air, the blowing of the Silver Trumpet will remind God of the Covenant of the Blood of His Son at Calvary that purchased redemption for each one who believes on His Name. On that day, He will redeem His people completely — body, soul, and spirit.

The first blast of the Silver Trumpet will awaken and gather the dead in Christ. The mortal body that was sown as a natural, corruptible, weak, and dishonourable seed in the Earth, will be raised up a spiritual, incorruptible,

powerful, and honourable body or house in which the spirit and soul will abide. The natural body is flesh and blood. Its frame is bone tied together with muscles and ligaments. Its covering is skin. A man's natural body is a corruptible frame and form whose end is dissolution, rot, and fading back to dust. But the spiritual, eternal, resurrected Body will be of unfading celestial substance, filled with the Glory of God, fit for the celestial world and eternal inheritance.

When a grain of corn is planted, its body is quite different from the body of the mature stalk of corn that is raised up in its place. Likewise, the natural body that is planted in a grave is quite different from the spiritual Body that will be raised up in its place.

The Body that will be raised on Resurrection Morning will be a Body clothed with Glory. The degree of Glory in which the Resurrected Body will be clothed is determined by the degree of spiritual growth achieved by the person by the time of his death. This is what makes a person's spiritual growth in this life so important. The choices the believer makes in this life determine the eternal Dress he will wear, and they determine the eternal Place in which he will dwell.

The Apostle Paul explained the different degrees of Glory-Clothing the resurrected saints of God will wear.

There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial *is* one, and the *glory* of the terrestrial *is* another. *There is* one **glory** of the **sun**, and another **glory** of the **moon**, and another **glory** of the **stars**: for *one* star differeth from *another* **star** in **glory** (I Corinthians 15:40,41).

Man's present mortal body is vile at its best. It had its origin from the earth. It is supported, fed, and nourished from the earth, and will return to the earth through humiliation and rottenness. But on the day of the Rapture, the vile bodies of the saints of God will be changed like unto the Glorious Body of Christ.

For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, **the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body**, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself (Philippians 3:20,21).

The resurrected and changed saints will be like Jesus in that they will have Glorified Bodies, but they will have different degrees of Glory. As Paul said in First Corinthians, the fifteenth chapter, the variety of Glories manifested in the bodies of the resurrected dead will be comparable to the glories of the sun, moon, and stars. For example, the sun is the brightest of all the heavenly lights, as far as they relate to this Earth. The moon is second in brightness. Then, there is the light from the stars, and even they differ in brilliance and glory. God's Word says, "So also is the resurrection of the dead."

In verse thirty-nine of the same chapter, God also makes a distinction between the different kinds of flesh and their statures. Men, beasts, fishes, and birds are classified as different kinds of flesh. The other differentiation God makes is between the glories of the sun, moon, and stars. Likewise, there will be a difference in the statures and the Glories of the resurrected dead. Although all overcoming saints will be resurrected with Glorified Bodies, some will shine as Stars, in all their different degrees of light; some will shine as the Moon and others as the Sun. The brightest of all the Resurrected Glories will be the Glory of the Bride of Jesus Christ who will shine forth with the full stature of Sun Glory radiating from her. Those in the Bride of Christ will be the overcoming saints who will have grown to full, mature spiritual stature while on Earth. Their Glory will shine as the Sun because they will have grown into the Fullness of the Stature of the Son of Righteousness. The lesser lights represent the degree to which other overcomers will have grown in the Stature of Jesus Christ.*

In a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, the second blast of the last trump will change *the living* who are prepared and watching for the LORD's return. The living must be changed in order to be able to enjoy the happiness that God, in His Wise Design, has planned for them. They, too, must put on immortality. The changed living and the resurrected dead will meet the LORD *in the air to be with him forever*. Jesus *does not* come to the Earth at this time. He "catches away" or Raptures a prepared people, and they meet Him in the air, above the darkness and iniquity of this present world. The LORD and His people, who are triumphant over Death and the grave, will enjoy rapturous, victorious fellowship forevermore.

What an opportunity Christian believers have! They can prepare themselves to be raptured with the resurrected saints and thus escape from the terrible troubles that will transpire between the time that Jesus comes in the Clouds and the time that He returns to Earth.

Because all these things surely will come to pass, every person should be striving daily to lay aside everything, and trying to separate himself from anyone, that would hinder him from walking in the Light of the LORD's Truth when it comes into his heart. Nothing is more important than being prepared for that glorious day. Never again will the overcoming saints of God have to suffer strife, envy, malice, jealousy, and resistance to the Truth. They will be forever with the LORD, and to be with Him will mean peace, joy, and bliss forevermore. Only then will man know what true happiness is.

Just how does a believer become a prepared person so that he does not miss this glorious event? God's Word clearly instructs a person in what to do, if he desires to know the Truth. Jesus Himself exhorted His followers to be prepared for the *day* that was to come upon the entire population of the Earth. He spoke the following words:

And [1] **take heed to yourselves**, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. [2] **Watch ye therefore**, and [3] **pray always** that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man (Luke 21:34-36).

Clearly, Jesus was warning the people of a *day* that would come for which they needed to be prepared. He said the *day* would come as a snare or a trap that would be sprung upon *all* the people on the Earth. From His Words, it is obvious that only those who listen to His warning will escape the snare. Many will be taken unaware, as animals blundering through a forest are unmindful of the hunter's hidden trap.

God does not treat men as animals. He tries to reach their understanding and reasoning, so He warns those who will listen and heed His Word. Jesus' Words to the wise are: "Take heed to yourselves." And, "Watch ye therefore, and pray always."

"Take heed." This means to hold the mind towards self, to pay attention to, to be cautious about, to attend or have regard for. A person must be aware of the condition of his own self if he is to overcome his faults and failings.

Man's biggest enemy is *self* which continually works and connives for two things in life: its own will and its own pleasure and satisfaction. Left alone to go its own way, self continually feeds on the faults and failures of others while it ignores its own. This causes spiritual indigestion and brings on heart disease. Self also condemns others' sins, but condones its own. But Jesus, Who knew man's proclivity for self-justification, said, "Take heed to *yourself*." Jesus said that to follow Him would mean self-denial. It means denying *ourselves* the easy road of self-gratification and taking a hard look at what really motivates us. Man's motive should be to please the Creator and Saviour of mankind.

To refuse to take heed to the real condition of *ourselves* means that, inevitably, spiritual heart trouble will kill us; never can an unheeding person be ready for the Rapture! Neither can he stay alive spiritually. An improper spiritual diet will clog the spiritual heart just as surely as the wrong natural diet clogs man's heart of flesh. A Christian needs to watch for the symptoms of spiritual heart disease so that he can change his way of living. Jesus listed the main symptoms so that everyone can be aware of his true condition. The Word of God is a mirror to show a true reflection of what a person is.

The first symptom of spiritual heart disease is being overcharged with surfeiting. The word *surfeiting* means a headache (as a seizure of pain) from drunkenness, a glut. Constantly feeding on the faults and failures of others in the spiritual realm produces a spirit of surfeiting in the natural realm, too. When the battery of a car is overcharged, it keeps the car from functioning properly. When man's heart is overcharged (burdened, weighted down, bursting with surfeiting) the same thing is true; he does not act right. His lack of control over his spiritual diet causes him to be excessive in his natural appetites. If he wants to please Jesus, a person cannot be excessive in his eating and drinking habits.

A follower of Christ must deny the self and refuse to allow his heart to be overcharged with seeking the satisfaction of carnal things. It may happen that a gluttonous mind will even cause people to think about food as they are praying. The Devil uses any human weakness to draw attention away from God. Christians ought to control their natural habits so that they do not interfere with their spiritual habits. God meant for man's heart to be charged with longing for Him, not food and drink and other excesses. He desires to fill man's heart with the Word of God and the Spirit of God. A person's thoughts and actions will manifest what is in his heart. No one can be ready for the day of Jesus' returning if he does not take heed to *himself*. A sick, overcharged spiritual heart will lead ultimately to spiritual Death and will cause a person to be unprepared for the day of the Rapture.

The second symptom of a sick heart is drunkenness. The word *drunkenness* means to be overcome or intoxicated with alcohol or emotion. An intoxicated person's mind becomes stupefied and his senses become dull. Other things besides liquor can intoxicate also. The excess use of sweets, starches, coffee, tea, and other caffeinated drinks can produce the same intoxicated feeling as strong drink. Fasting and prayer are the remedy for this ailment of the spiritual heart. If people are not taking care of the problem of overeating and drinking, they will be in no condition to watch for the LORD's return, which they are commanded to do.

Then, too, people can be drunk on emotions. When the mind is drunk on love of people, places, or things, it feels no need to study and pray daily before the LORD. Emotions out of control also dull the senses, and a person cannot reason logically. For example, if a man becomes drunk on a lustful emotion, he becomes dulled to all sense of responsibility toward his home, toward his spouse and his children, and he behaves with the same intoxicated indifference as the drunk in the gutter. When the mind is drunk on envy, it can drive a person to say and do devastating things. Being drunk on strong drink, food, or emotions is not going to let the mind be aware of the crucial, spiritual things in life. People need clear heads to reason, to study God's Word, to pray, to fast; only then will they be prepared for *that day*.

The third symptom of spiritual heart disease is to be overcome by the cares of this life. The word *care* means grief, distress, worry, anxiety, solicitude, to part, to share. Jesus warned His followers to take heed to themselves lest the cares of life should cause their hearts to be overcharged with work, with fretting and worrying about material acquisitions, about tomorrow, or anything else that would continually distract them from personal time in the Word of God and prayer. The cares and responsibilities of this life are like a sponge, ever ready to soak up the time that belongs to God for the study of His Word, for prayer, for praise, for faithful attendance in the house of the LORD. The fears, anxieties, and worries of this life will prevent a person from watching for the Coming of the LORD. One way to know that the heart is unprepared for *that day* is that it constantly is filled with fear and worry about earthly, carnal things.

The Word commands Christians to seek the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness, first; and all these things shall be added unto them (Matthew 6:33). Believers who are heedful, watching always for the Coming of the LORD, will put the LORD Jesus Christ first in their hearts and lives and seek God's Kingdom. Cares of this life will overpower our minds and consume our hearts with everything except spending time with Jesus Christ. Unless we establish our priorities in the beginning of our Christian life, our hearts and minds will become so overcharged with the cares of life that our senses will not perceive spiritual things. If Christians want to give God priority in their lives, they will seek Him regardless of the obstacles in their way, and they will seek Him in the midst of the most adverse circumstances.

Even ministers may not learn to put the Kingdom of God first in their personal lives. They can become so overcharged with the duties of the ministry that they may not take time to wait on God. When they go to their prayer closets, they can let the problems of the ministry and of the church press in and, then, allow them to take precedence over the needs of their own personal hearts and lives. Ministers must learn to empty their hearts of cares by putting the government of God's Work back on Christ's Shoulders, by laying the problems at His Feet so that they can seek the LORD for themselves. If ministers will take care of their own personal relationships with Jesus Christ first, the LORD will take care of the government of the ministry.

Never be so overcharged with cares, with so many things to do, Jesus said, that you have no time to wait on God for yourself. Take heed; do not be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness nor so overcome with the cares of this life that the day of the LORD's Coming will catch you in a snare, a trap, and you will be left behind!

Jesus' second admonition to the wise was, "Watch ye therefore." The word *watch* means to be sleepless, to keep awake. The Word of God is not referring to natural sleep but to the spiritual dullness of the heart and the unawareness of the mind of the halfhearted Christian.

How can we know that our hearts and minds are watching for the LORD? Are there some signs that a person is *not* watching, or that he *is* watching? Four primary things that prove a person *is* watching are listed in the thirteenth chapter of Romans:

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to [1] **awake out of sleep**: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore [2] **cast off the works of darkness**, and let us **put on the armour of light**. Let us [3] **walk honestly**, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying: But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and [4] **make not provision for the flesh**, to fulfil the lusts thereof (Romans 13:11-14).

The number one thing is to be awake! Number two is to dress properly. Number three is to walk honestly; and number four is to make correct provisions. If a person is doing these things, he can *know* that he is watching for the Coming of the Bridegroom. The Bride will be ready; the Book of Revelation states this as a fact. There *will be* a prepared people watching, waiting, and longing for His Return. Will you be one of the ones spoken of in this Scripture?

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his **wife hath made herself ready** (Revelation 19:7).

Will you be ready for the LORD's soon Coming? The first thing to do is to awake out of the sinful conditions that exist in your life. The following conditions will keep you from being ready: carnal slothfulness and negligence of spiritual duties; feelings of security that make you feel everything is all right when it is not; a spiritually dead attitude toward the Word and Prayer; disinterest in the eternal welfare of your own soul and the rewards that God has for it; lack of interest in other souls' spiritual welfare. If a person is awake, he will be watching for any and all of these attitudes to crop up, and, then, he will deal with them. An awake person constantly expects the LORD's return. The Sun of Righteousness has arisen; it is a new day. There is much work to do. As Christians see the LORD's imminent return, they also are aware of the perilous times of the day. There are enemies and snares on every hand. Being awake is the first sign that a person is fulfilling God's Command to WATCH!

The second sign that a person is watching is that he will be putting off the night clothes of darkness and putting on the day clothes of Light.

The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore **cast off the works of darkness**, and let us **put on the armour of light** (Romans 13:12).

Darkness is foreign to God's Nature. The word *darkness* means misery, ignorance, imperfection, sin. These are things that cloak a person in darkness. They are like garments that come between a person and Light. They act as shields to keep one's understanding darkened. If a Christian is to be like Jesus, he must take off his cloak of darkness, or in other words, he must cast off his ignorance, misery, and sin. Many times a person would rather retain his ignorance than to accept the Light because the Light will reveal those unChristlike attitudes in him to which he clings. God will place each person in situations to show him the sinful thoughts and attitudes in his mind, but human nature will cause him to draw the cloak of darkness about himself while he tries to put the blame on the Devil or on his brother or sister in Christ. A man's carnal nature loves its cloak of darkness and finds that it fits so comfortably, like an old shoe. God's Word says, "It is time to rip off your cloak of darkness and watch for the coming of the LORD."

A sincere Christian must watch for opportunities to discard his cloaks of ignorance, misery, imperfections and sins. Sometimes God puts Light before a person, but he refuses it because it did not come in a way which pleased him. If a man is not watching, he cannot cast off the works of darkness. No one can put on Light if he does not first cast off darkness. Light will not fellowship darkness. So it is imperative that a Christian watch because it is the Light of the Truth that will transform a believer into the Image of Jesus Christ. It takes the Blood of Jesus, the Fire of the Holy Ghost, and the Waters of His Name, Death, and Life to transform a person into Christ's Likeness, His Image, and His Spiritual Stature.

In His Word, God uses clothing as pictures of deeds, habits, thoughts, and feelings. When He says to cast off cloaks of darkness, He means to cast off the deeds and thoughts of ignorance, misery, and woe that conceal themselves in the secret chambers of a person's heart and mind and prevent him from continually watching for the LORD. Everyone who wants to be prepared for Jesus' return should abhor and detest ignorance and its accompanying sins because they are enemies.

Cease letting ignorance of the Truth lead you to indulge in sin lest the door of Eternity be closed to you at the Coming of the LORD. Watch so that you will not be left behind to go through the awesome Tribulation Period and the rule of the Antichrist.

If a person puts off the garments of the night, then he can dress up for the day in an Armour of Light. The Armour of Light to which the Scripture refers are the deeds of Truth and Love. Christians are soldiers in the midst of constant warfare with darkness; therefore, they need an Armour of Light. Without his Armour, a soldier of Jesus is undressed and unarmed against the temptations and assaults from the present, evil world.

In Ephesians, Paul made this statement:

For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: **walk as children of light:** (Ephesians 5:8).

Once, all believers were bound in Lucifer's kingdom of darkness, but after becoming believers in the Redeeming Blood of the Lamb, they translated into the Kingdom of Light. But even after redemption from the curse of sin and death, believers must shed their garments of darkness and ignorance which do not belong to the Kingdom of Light.

And **have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness**, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret (Ephesians 5:11,12).

Refuse, believer, to fellowship the unfruitful works of darkness, whether they are upon your own mind or someone else's. When a person is awake and watching, he is not going to be filling his mind with the things someone else is doing in secret or under cover. Gossiping is one way to fellowship darkness. If a person continues to gossip, darkness will start bearing fruit inside his heart; then, he will become miserable; he will lose his desire to pray; and he will lose his appetite for the Word; also, he will lose his joy and will feel like sitting down and quitting. Christian believers are *in* the world but not *of* the world. One does not have to fellowship the darkness of this world if he so chooses. A person gives himself to whatever he wants.

One sure way of settling into a sound sleep is to continue fellowshipping darkness. Such actions will lull a person into a cozy sleep so that there will be nothing inside him that will even desire to stand up and fellowship the Light. Jesus will not awaken a person who wants to sleep. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus tried three times to awaken the Disciples, but they refused to be awakened. Finally, Jesus said, "Sleep on now." He was not speaking of only physically sleeping but also of spiritually sleeping, which fault possessed the Disciples from the Garden to the Cross. Being spiritually asleep caused the Disciples to miss many lessons they could have learned had they been spiritually awake.

Believers need to put on the LORD Jesus Christ Who is Light, Life, and Love. They need to put on the Justification of Christ; the Righteousness of Christ; the Grace and Sanctification of Christ. Jesus Christ was ever awake in His earthly days to watch for the Will of the Heavenly Father.

You, too, need to put on Christ daily by studying the Word and praying to God. He will watch for you with His Light, Life, and Love to keep you until His soon Coming.

Being clothed daily with the LORD Jesus Christ is the second witness that a Christian believer is watching.

The third witness that a person is preparing himself for the Rapture is that he will be walking honestly in the day. Remember, the Scripture said, "Awake out of sleep:... cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us *walk honestly, as in the day*; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying." If a person is clothed with Light, it is easy to walk in the Light and not in the darkness of rioting, carousing, letting loose, reveling, or prostrating one's mind to the deceitful pleasures of darkness. To walk honestly in the Light is to refrain from walking in drunkenness, to abstain from all excessive indulgences of one's sensual appetites in public or in private.

Walking honestly in the Light includes avoiding the darkness of chambering and wantonness, or in other words, not breaking the seventh Commandment which says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." A person cannot walk in the darkness of adultery (illegal co-habitation), incontinence, licentiousness, and lasciviousness and walk honestly in the Light. It is impossible to do both at the same time.

Lascivious thoughts and affections lead a person to read lascivious books and cause them to choose songs whose words carry sexual connotations. This in turn leads a person to indulge in lascivious looks, words, gestures and all kinds of dalliance or amorous play. All these things ultimately lead to the transgression of the sacred Law of Chastity or the breaking of the seventh Commandment.

Walking honestly in the Light of God's Truth also will make a person shun the darkness of strife and envy. Although few people are willing to acknowledge to themselves that they are envious and contentious, one only has to look around to see the wrangling, variances, debating, and quarreling between Christians to know that strife and envy exist. The pernicious disease of envy causes the mind and heart to boil with malicious zeal, emulation, and indignation against others. Strife and envy are very unbecoming to the followers of the precious, peaceful, humble Jesus. The glow of envy's fevered emotion blinds the mind and hardens the heart so that a person does not maintain

his awareness of the Coming of the LORD.

To be faithful in watching for the Coming of the LORD Jesus Christ, you must become personally aware of the existence of strife and envy in your own heart and ask Jesus Christ to remove it so that you can walk honestly in the Light of Truth.

The Apostle Paul also said to walk honestly toward them that are without (I Thessalonians 4:12). When a Christian sees somebody who has missed what God has for him, he himself will stay humble if he is walking honestly because his honesty will remind him that he is not where he is spiritually because of his own greatness; rather, it is only by God's Grace and Mercy that anyone stays on the right road.

Being awake (number one), casting off the works of darkness and putting on the Armour of Light (number two), and walking honestly in the Light (number three) are witnesses that a person is watching for the Coming of the LORD. First of all, Paul said you must "awake out of sleep." A positive way of telling if a person is asleep is by the way he walks. Casting off the works of darkness and putting on the Armour of Light shows that a person is walking honestly. The three work together to prove that a person is fulfilling God's Command to WATCH so that he might be ready for the Rapture.

The last way to tell whether a person is succeeding in doing what is necessary to watch for the Coming of the LORD is that he will make no provision for the lusts of the flesh. If a person's whole mind and heart are consumed with inordinate care in providing for the desires of the body, he will neglect the care of his own soul. Indulging oneself in solicitous, irregular concern for every whim of one's physical desires is considered by the Word of God as gratifying one's lust.

And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust (Psalm 78:18).

God demands that the necessities of bread and meat be granted to meet one's physical needs, but the lust of the flesh is not to be gratified. If you are watching for the Coming of the LORD, you will not be fulfilling the lusts of the flesh.

This I say then, **Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Galatians 5:16).**

It is not a trivial, easy thing to get ready for the Rapture! Paul's first words were "Put ye on the LORD Jesus Christ." Then, he said, "Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." *Put ye on* means not only to put on the Light of the Word, but also to put on Him (Jesus Christ) in full Spiritual Stature.

A Christian does not put Jesus on all at one time, but he must be awake and watching for every opportunity to lay hold of Christ's Nature. Prayer time is a good opportunity to do this. A believer puts on Jesus when he understands the Word and it becomes Light to him. Jesus desires to live His Life in and through the Christian believer. He is the Gospel that the believer's life is to preach.

In addition to taking heed and watching, Jesus gave one more instruction to His followers, if they were to be ready when He comes back for them. He said, "...and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." Pray means to beg as binding oneself. In other words, when a person prays or begs God to awaken him, to give him the spiritual things he has need of, he is bringing himself in commitment to God so that God can answer his prayer.

Many times the Holy Ghost will awaken a person, wanting him to go before God in prayer, but because the person does not take heed and pray with total commitment, he falls back to sleep. A Christian with a drowsy, sleepy spirit is not provoked or touched inside by the Word of God because he is spiritually asleep.

Because the Disciples were asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane, both naturally and spiritually, they could not perceive Jesus' Words. Consequently, they missed the only opportunity of Time and Eternity to see Jesus sweat, as it were, great drops of Blood, for them and the whole world, as He prayed.

You need to awake, and then pray to stay awake! Praying was the third Command Jesus gave when He listed the ways to prepare for His Return. "Take heed," He said. "Watch and pray always." Are you committing yourself to God in prayer daily so that He can prepare your heart for the Rapture?

The Apostle Paul gave the Christian believer the fourth necessary condition to meet in order to be ready to meet Jesus in the air, which is to *love His Appearing*.

Paul is a perfect example of one who loved the fact that Jesus would reappear. Before his death, Paul gave this beautiful testimony of the kind of life that he had led for Christ:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. **I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:** Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (II Timothy 4:6-8).

How wonderful that Paul included the possibility that Christians everywhere could share in his testimony. You, too, can have a Crown of Righteousness if you learn to love Jesus so much that you long for His Appearing.

Paul was preparing to die a martyr's death, but in living, Paul was already a martyr in love and loyalty to Jesus. He had lived always ready to be poured out as a drink offering unto the LORD. He always was ready to be sacrificed, ready to use his life as an offering for Jesus. Paul was continually watching for the LORD's personal Coming. He saw Jesus' Coming as a release for himself from the imprisonment of this world and as a journey into the enjoyments of his Heavenly Home.

Beloved, a person must be willing to offer his body as a living sacrifice, or he will not continue to grow in Christ Jesus. When the LORD puts the Christian in a place in which his body has to suffer a little strain for the Glory of God, how does he react? Paul was the perfect example; he was ready to be offered, to lose his life's blood if necessary. Paul experienced total commitment of his life to Christ as he faced his time of dying. He could gladly lay down his life one final time because his daily experience with Christ was one of dying daily. He had been hungry; he had fasted; he had been shipwrecked; he had suffered many things for Christ's Cause and the Word of God. Paul already had poured himself out for the saints of God through his sufferings as he encouraged, comforted, and consoled them.

A person will not be ready for a martyr's death until he is willing to let God make him a whole burnt offering, as it were, wringing out his life's blood day by day. With this kind of daily love for Jesus, one's heart will be filled with love and longing for Christ's Appearing in whatever way it comes and at anytime.

Paul said he had fought a good fight. A person will not love Jesus' Appearing if he is not fighting a good fight. One has to fight to stay awake; fight to press on; fight to keep one's eyes on Jesus; fight to grow to full, mature spiritual stature in Christ.

Believers must be in such good fighting condition that, if Christ were to come today, assurance rather than fear would fill their hearts with joyful anticipation. This was Paul's testimony. He had fought through the difficulties of warfare and had overcome and had carried the glorious Gospel of the exalted Redeemer to the then-known world. A faithful soldier loves the appearing of the General of his army. Paul loved the Appearing of his Saviour.

The life of a Christian is not only a warfare; it is also a race. Paul said, "I have accomplished what God wanted me to do in this life; I have finished my course; I have completed the race. Now I am waiting for the Wedding Supper, for the Bridegroom's Return." Paul's life was a course, and he had run his race. He had won the race and was longing and loving the Promise of the LORD Appearing.

If you are reading this, you have not finished your course, so you still need to prepare for His Coming. If you are preparing, you will finish your race with joy, confidence, and love for His Appearing.

What did Paul avow next? "I have kept the faith." God gives a person one kind of faith, the gift of good faith for Salvation, without which a man would perish and be lost. There is also a good faith that comes by spiritual growth in the Word of God, and this kind of faith produces spiritual stature. Paul had kept the gift of faith, and he had kept the faith that came by spiritual stature. Both types of faith come the same way. They come by *hearing* the Word of God, *receiving* it, and *allowing God to quicken it* to one's heart. Faith comes as the believer puts on the Light of the Word.

In paraphrased terms, Paul said this in the foregoing verses: "I have kept the faith. I have kept the Light of the Salvation of the Word. I have kept the revelation of the Word that has caused me to grow spiritually. I have run my course according to God's Blueprint, according to His Master Plan. I have kept every new sunbeam of Light of His Truth. I have cherished it, obeyed it, and walked in it. While I was fighting in my course to grow up in Christ's Spiritual Stature. I did it in a legitimate way, according to the Light of God's Word. Henceforth, because I have done this, a Crown of Righteousness is laid up for me. Because I have loved, prepared, and longed for His Appearing, I have confidence that He will come for me and take me to my reward."

For Paul it was a good course, a good fight, a good warfare, a good victory, and a good faith! It can be for you, too. A Crown is laid up for all who love, prepare, and long for Christ's Appearing.

All who are in the Bride of Christ will have loved, prepared, and longed for the Bridegroom's Coming. The Bride will have made herself ready. Because she will be ready, the LORD will return to catch her and the Wedding Party

away. The Bride will have taken heed to herself. Her heart will not be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life. She will be watching by staying spiritually awake. She will have been putting off the night clothes of darkness (ignorance, misery, imperfections) and putting on the Garments of Linen and Light (deeds of Truth and Love). She will have walked honestly in the Light of the Word and made no provisions for the lust of the flesh. She will have been praying always and loving the Promise of His Reappearing in the Clouds.

Besides the Bride, there will be other people ready for Jesus Christ's return. Just as there are others at a wedding besides the bride and bridegroom, other believers in the Wedding Party also will be caught away in the Rapture, such as the Bridesmaids and Guests. The Virgins spoken of in Psalm 45:14 are the Bridesmaids. In an eastern wedding, the virgins were the bridesmaids. Queen Esther, who was a type and shadow of the Bride of Christ, was accompanied by virgins or bridesmaids as she went in to the king. All these different classes of people will be at the Wedding of the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, and His Bride.

In the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, all the Virgins slept, even the wise ones, until the Bridegroom was at the door. It was the Bride who awakened the Virgins, or even the wise would have missed the wedding. The Bride is going to be awake. She will be watching for every opportunity to dress herself in her Wedding Garments.

You cannot be ready if you are asleep. You must watch! Watch for what? Watch to see what you must take off and watch to see what to put on in every situation and circumstance of life.

Now is a time of undressing and dressing, of ridding ourselves of the thoughts, feelings, and actions that are not Christlike and of putting on His Nature of Love, Light, and Life. However, watching can be done only as Jesus opens our eyes. Only then can we really see. The night is far spent. Christians must prepare if they are to escape what will come upon the world after the Rapture of the living and the saints who have died has taken place.

To those who refuse to heed God's Warning and Instructions, sorrow will come. Not everyone will be counted worthy to escape from this world when Jesus comes to catch away the prepared ones; therefore, many will be left behind. Some will be left sorrowful at the LORD Jesus Christ's Appearing unless they begin now to lay aside the binding weights of sin and run the race with patience and faithfulness.

There are many Christians, lulled into a sense of false security, who think that they are ready to meet Jesus, but their hearts are overcharged with surfeiting, drunkenness and the cares of this life. They spend little time in the Word and Prayer in the secret place with Jesus. They are making little preparation to watch for the Coming of the LORD. Therefore, *that day* will come upon them unawares. God took some time to send the flood, but He took only a moment to shut the door of the Ark. Likewise, when Jesus Himself shuts the door on the Day of His Coming, it will be quick and final! The late plea of the five foolish Virgins will be rejected. The door will be shut!

What sorrow for those who will have had the opportunity to prepare themselves, those who will have had the opportunity to obtain an extra supply of oil for proper preparation, but who will have stubbornly and carelessly refused. Some will choose the fleeting pleasures of this life rather than the Eternal Riches and Treasures that Jesus gives. Some will choose the world; therefore, God will leave them with their choice.

What chaos all nations will be cast into at the Coming of the LORD! Imagine an airplane pilot or a bus driver suddenly being snatched away or, in a flash, a loved one being taken from the home. What sorrow to look up and see a pile of clothes where a precious loved one had been sitting — one who had loved and had served God with all his heart. Beloved, it is going to happen according to the Word of God. The day of His Appearing is at hand, yes, even at the door.

Dear friend, how is it with you? Are you ready for His Coming? Have you made the necessary preparation? God pleads with you in His Word and with His Spirit to take heed that your heart be not overcharged with surfeiting, drunkenness, and the cares of this life so that *day* will not come upon you like a thief in the night. Watch and pray and long for His Coming so that you may be accounted worthy to escape all the things that shall come to pass. Someday you will stand before the Son of Man. Pray that it will be as an overcoming saint who, while on this Earth, totally committed his or her life to God.

What hope the Rapture is for those who are prepared! But what sorrow for those who are left, for they will be the ones who will go through the period of the greatest Tribulation the world has ever known. Jesus is the only hope for mankind. Do you know Him? Are you ready for the RAPTURE?