

I recently read a News article published by the Religious News Service titled [‘Is this when we disappear?’ Rapture triggers haunt the Left Behind generation, April 17, 2023 by Kathryn Post](#). It has left me concerned and worried about what has the church been teaching regarding the concept of the Rapture. How are we being taught to interpret Paul’s teachings in 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians? In what ways have these truths become distorted in America today? Should the concept of the Rapture scare a true believer of Christ?

## Fear and Trauma

The article reviews how the ideas of the “rapture” have traumatized several different people who learned about the concept through their various religious experiences and have since left their faith. Stacie Grahn told RHN that she thought “this is it. We’re all in our homes — is this when we’re all going to disappear?” as the COVID-19 scare rippled across the globe in March of 2020. She struggled with fear, panic and anxiety around the things she was taught about the coming return of Jesus. Stacie learned about end times prophecy and the rapture from her Grandmother of whom she says “anything her grandmother planned was with an asterisk. “We can plan that, but the Lord could be coming back,”” (RNS, Post)



Next we are introduced to Nikki who became involved with the International House of Prayer which subscribes to the idea that the saints will have to live through the Tribulation. It is easy to understand how that prospect can cause great distress, especially when reading in Revelations we learn about the great torment the earth will undergo before Jesus' return.

The article writer goes on to introduce Diana Frazier who grew up in an Assemblies of God church. She was taught that God could come at any time and she feared she would never be able to experience life growing up and then she would feel guilt and shame over those feelings. She found in life she was holding herself back because she was sure Jesus would arrive at any time.

The author pauses just a moment as she introduces April Sochia, a Baptist who learned about the rapture from reading the "Left Behind" series - which induced fear in her that her kids might be left behind if they did not pray the sinner's prayer before Jesus returned.

Finally, we meet Andrew Pledger, who was part of the Independent Fundamental Baptist movement. He had a traumatic experience as a young man where he found himself all alone and feared he had missed the rapture. The fear and anxiety he felt still haunts him today even though he has left the faith. (Note that I have chosen to skip over Ettie Nabb an ex-Jehovah Witness who learned significantly different ideas from those taught in Christian communities.)

We learn as the article ends that all the professing "Christians" in this article have left their faith. Each of them blaming their rapture related fear, panic and anxiety in part for their eventual abandonment of their belief in God and the message of Jesus. In fact, deconstructionism is one of the underlying themes of the article. Kathryn, our author, brings in an expert in the areas of rapture-related trauma - Author and Therapist Mark Gregory Karris, who has himself gone through the deconstruction of his faith.

Post summarizes her article with the following "As awareness around rapture anxiety grows, many who've been impacted by rapture teachings are reassessing their beliefs and finding physical, emotional and spiritual healing." Her implied meaning is clear - people who were taught about the rapture are moving away from that belief and their faith in general.

## **Why does it Matter?**

This article is clearly provocative. It takes the time to explore the idea of the rapture - which it accurately says is "read into" the scriptures as opposed to explicitly taught in the writings of the New Testament. Post clearly has uncovered real cases where real people have been traumatized by what they learned about the rapture. As indicated in the article by Dr. Karris "there's little research on rapture-related trauma" (RNS, Post) there is a certainty that these exist. This all seems to indicate that there is a lack of clear teaching on end times

events, the sovereignty of God and the judgement that His sovereignty requires.

So why does it matter? Can we just focus on the love of Jesus and doing good stuff, on saving souls and not worry about the end?

Actually we cannot. A complete theology that is soundly rooted in the entirety of the scriptures is essential to understanding God, knowing how to live the life we are called to live and that we may persevere to finish well; As Paul knew and contends in 2 Timothy 4:6-8 where he says of himself:

*“the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”.*

Followers of Christ must recognize the authority and divine inspiration of scripture\*. We must credit the writings of Daniel, Isaiah, Matthew, Paul or John which describe real events that have occurred and are going to occur in the future. God calls us not to have a spirit of fear - but rather one of love, power and sound judgement: 2 Tim 1:7:

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

Regardless of when your interpretation of the bible views the rapture (and there are several) - we are certain that there is a catching up of the saints at the end times. What can we then say as it relates to God's promises, His Judgement, His second coming, the salvation of the saints and the salvation of the people whom we have met in this article?

## **The Rapture**

Let's start here: what is the Rapture? It is a concept most commonly associated with certain branches of Christianity, particularly Evangelical and Fundamentalist branches. It was popularized by Hall Lindsay in the 70's and later by Jerry Jenkins and Tim LeHaye in the Left Behind book series. The term "Rapture" doesn't actually appear in the Bible. It comes from the Latin word "rapturo," which is used in the Latin Vulgate to translate the Greek word "harpazo" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. This Greek word can be translated as "caught up" or "taken away".

The core verse, from the Apostle Paul, that is often referenced in relation to the Rapture is 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (New International Version):

*“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”*

Some Bible teachers interpret this verse to mean that there will be a literal event where believers are physically caught up into the sky to meet Jesus. This event is often linked with the concept of the Tribulation, a period of intense suffering and hardship mentioned in the books of Daniel (Daniel 9:27) and Revelation (Revelation 7:14).

Another common scriptural reference comes from 1 Corinthians 15:52 (New International Version):

*“In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”*

Here, the quick, transformative event that Paul refers to is interpreted as the Rapture by many believers. The majority of teachers who prescribe to the inerrant Word of God do not dispute that there will be an event where believers in Christ will be taken up to meet Jesus. There is significant difference in interpretation as to when the event will occur in regard to the Tribulation and the Millennium taught about in Revelations and Daniel.

The belief in a pre-Tribulation Rapture posits that this event will occur before the seven-year Tribulation period, effectively sparing true Christians from that time of suffering and removing his Holy Spirit from the earth to allow Satan free reign over the earth. This belief is largely based on a dispensationalist interpretation of Scripture, which divides history into distinct periods or “dispensations,” and is largely derived from a literal interpretation of prophetic Scriptures, particularly from the books of Daniel and Revelation.



The opposing view posits a Resurrection at the Second Coming of Christ either at the end of the Tribulation or the Millennium. This belief holds that the “catching up” refers to the resurrection of the dead and the transformation of the living at the Second Coming of Christ. In this view there is no separate “rapture” event distinct from the Second Coming in.

The primary scriptural support comes from a reading of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 in their broader context, as part of descriptions of the resurrection of the dead and the return of Christ. Supporters point to verses like Matthew 24:30-31, where the gathering of the elect occurs at the same time as the visible return of Christ. They argue that the New Testament consistently talks about believers being resurrected or transformed at the “last day” (John 6:39-40, John 11:24) or “last trumpet” (1 Corinthians 15:52), which they understand to refer to the Second Coming.

They also often argue that the concept of a pre-tribulation rapture is absent from the historical Church until the 19th century, suggesting that it’s a recent innovation rather than a part of the original Christian understanding.

Both views believe in a “catching up,” they differ in timing (before or during the Second Coming), purpose (to escape the judgement of the earth or to join Christ at His glorious return), and interpretation (literal or more contextual). Both views can find support in

Scripture, but they require different interpretative approaches and understandings of biblical prophecy.

A deep dive into the Rapture and why we can trust that it is a real event and it will occur before the tribulation begins can be found in the article: [About the Rapture](#)

## Why Such Fear and Anxiety?

Many people, as indicated in the article written by Ms. Post, have some form of fear, anxiety or apprehension about the idea of a rapture and end times prophecy in general. What are these fears and what is the basis for these feelings?

**Uncertainty:** The rapture is a concept that carries uncertainty which stems from a variety of interpretations within different Christian groups and denominations. Some believe in a pre-tribulation rapture, where the faithful are taken up to heaven before a period of tribulation on earth. Others hold to a mid- or post-tribulation viewpoint, where the faithful are not raptured until during or after the tribulation. This lack of consensus and the ambiguity surrounding the timing can create a sense of unease, leading many to question their readiness or speculate about the signs preceding this event. This uncertainty can lead to a heightened sense of urgency, vigilance, and anxiety about spiritual matters.



**Fear of the Unknown:** Associated with the study of the end times, the rapture is often depicted as a monumental event accompanied by dramatic and cataclysmic changes. It's a time often painted with imagery of apocalypse and massive upheaval — the Antichrist, the tribulation, the mark of the beast, and final judgments. These depictions can be quite terrifying. This fear of the unknown — what exactly will happen, when it will happen, and

how it will happen — can cause significant distress and anxiety.

**Separation from Loved Ones:** The idea of the rapture often comes with the belief that only those who are true Christ followers will be taken, while others will be left behind to endure the tribulation. This can result in anxiety over the spiritual status of loved ones and friends who may not share the same beliefs or are perceived to be non-believers. The thought of potentially being separated from them, of being unable to help or protect them during this time, can be a deep source of anguish.

**Existential Anxiety:** The belief in the rapture confronts individuals with profound existential questions. These include the nature of existence, the reality of mortality, and the potential for a radical alteration of life as we know it. Such contemplation can stir deep-seated fears and anxieties as individuals grapple with their place in the universe, the meaning of their lives, and the prospect of dramatic, divinely-orchestrated change. This is a heavy burden to carry and can lead to what is known as existential anxiety or dread, a kind of fear that goes beyond everyday worries and reaches into the core of an individual's being.

**Judgment and Worthiness:** The rapture doctrine inherently implies a divine judgement. There's a differentiation between those deemed worthy, who will be caught up with Christ, and those who are not. For some people, this can instigate a fear of not being worthy enough or not having done enough to warrant salvation (it is important to realize that we cannot earn God's salvation - we can only take it freely - Eph. 2:8-9). For many there is a fear of failing the divine examination, of falling short of God's expectations. This worry can be amplified by teachings about the strictness of divine judgement, potentially leading to a perpetual state of self-evaluation, guilt, and anxiety.

**Implications for the World:** The rapture doctrine has implications that extend beyond personal beliefs and into the realm of social and political attitudes. For example, if one believes that the world is destined for divine destruction, they might be less motivated to engage in environmental stewardship or long-term societal improvement. This fatalistic worldview can lead to anxiety about the future of our planet and society. Conversely, others might be anxious about the influence of such beliefs on policy-making and societal attitudes, fearing that it could lead to disregard for long-term sustainability and peace-making efforts.

As we will see - all of these things are rooted in a wrong idea about God, His love and His Judgement.

## **God's Plan is One of Victory for His People**

We see throughout the Old and New Testament that God has a plan of victory for His people. He brought the Hebrews out of Egypt in victory and crushed the world's strongest army at the time. He ushered the people into the promised land in victory destroying Jericho

and defeating the people who inhabited the land God promised to the patriarchs. He gave victory to the Jews as they faced the Philistines providing victory through a young shepherd boy named David as he faced off against Goliath. David defeated Goliath with a single stone from his sling, demonstrating God's power to deliver victory for His people. Perhaps the most significant victory is found in the New Testament. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's greatest victory for all mankind. After He had been crucified on a cross and buried, Jesus rose from being dead, demonstrating God's victory over death and sin and providing a way for us to come into an intimate relationship with Him.

God's plan is one of victory as He has demonstrated through history and He is planning for victory for his people, those who trust and believe in Him, those who are true Christ followers. We recognized that suffering for a short time is often part of the human experience, but God's people are encouraged to endure these challenges with the assurance of God's love and eventual victory. Here are some key biblical concepts:

**Victory through Faith:** The Bible emphasizes that the victory of God's people comes through faith. 1 John 5:4 says, *"For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith."*

**Perseverance and Character:** Romans 5:3-4 states that suffering leads to perseverance, and perseverance, character; and character, hope. This passage suggests that even in suffering, God is working to develop a Christ like character in His people which ultimately leads to hope.

**God's Sovereign Control:** In the book of Revelation, the end times are filled with significant tribulation. But those who remain faithful are promised a place in God's eternal kingdom (Revelation 21:7). Despite the hardships, God is still sovereign and will bring about a final victory over evil. Many find the judgements of God distressing - but God has given us these prophecies for our security and hope. He has demonstrated delivery for His people time and again and we can be assured He will deliver us once more.

**Christ's Victory over Suffering:** The New Testament teaches that Jesus, through His suffering and death on the cross, achieved victory over sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:55-57). This victory benefits all believers, as they share in Christ's triumph. Therefore, even in suffering, Christians can have hope because of Jesus' sacrifice. As Paul said - the suffering is only for a little while - the reward is eternal.

**The Promise of Eternal Life:** John 16:33 records Jesus' words, *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* Christ followers believe in the promise of eternal life, which offers a perspective beyond immediate suffering. The tribulations of this world are viewed as temporary, while God's kingdom is eternal.

**God's Presence and Comfort:** Even during suffering, Christians believe that God's



presence is with them. As Psalm 23:4 says:

*“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”*

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is also referred to as the “Comforter” or “Helper” (John 14:26), indicating God’s continual support in times of distress.

It may seem counter intuitive that the possibility of suffering should bring Christ followers comfort. We know though - as indicated in the above points that we can rest in Christ’s all-encompassing provision and His peace that he grants us. To have a fearful spirit about what the future holds - whether blessing or suffering - is antithetical to the Christian experience. We know this from Paul’s writing to Timothy where he says: *“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”* (2 Tim. 1:7)

## God Will Judge the Earth

We tend to focus on the love and compassion of God, and these are certainly key components of His character, but His sovereign and just nature requires Him to be a God of judgement as well. Throughout the Old Testament we see God’s judgement in action many times:

**The Flood (Genesis 6-9):** In response to the wickedness of humanity, God decided to cleanse the earth with a global flood. However, Noah and his family were spared due to Noah’s righteousness. Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19): The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were obliterated by fire and brimstone due to their pervasive wickedness. Before the destruction, God rescued Lot and his family because of the intercession of Abraham.



**Plagues on Egypt (Exodus 7-12):** To compel Pharaoh to release the Israelites from slavery, God sent ten plagues on Egypt. These plagues were judgments against the Egyptian gods and displayed God’s power and sovereignty.

**Judgement of Israel (2 Kings 24-25, Daniel 1):** God used Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, as an instrument of His judgment against Israel due to their persistent disobedience and idolatry. Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and carried many Israelites, including Daniel, off into captivity in Babylon. This event, known as the Babylonian exile, was a pivotal moment in Jewish history.

What we see that God is a righteous judge who punishes sin but also offers grace and mercy. He ultimately aims to eliminate sin and restore creation to its intended state of perfection. God promises that He will exercise His righteous judgement once more as the time of man comes to an end. These events of future judgment are described in Matthew 24, Daniel 9, and Revelation.

**Matthew 24, often referred to as the Olivet Discourse,** is a significant passage where Jesus delivers an extended teaching about the end times. This passage is complex and has been interpreted in many ways. In the most common interpretation, Jesus prophesies the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in Matthew 24:1-2:

*“Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. ‘Do you see all these things?’ he asked. ‘Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.’”*

This prophecy was fulfilled in AD 70 when the Roman Empire, under General Titus,

destroyed Jerusalem and the temple during the First Jewish-Roman War. The destruction of the temple was a significant event, as it was the center of Jewish religious life and worship.

Jesus' prophecies in this passage go beyond the destruction of the temple. They also cover a range of signs and events leading to the end times, some of which Christians generally believe have yet to be fulfilled. These include widespread deception, wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes, persecution of believers, the proclamation of the gospel to the whole world, the "abomination of desolation" standing in the holy place (an event that causes desolation, referenced in Daniel 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11), cosmic disturbances, and the second coming of Christ (Matthew 24:4-31).

**In Daniel 9:24-27**, Daniel receives a prophetic vision concerning the future of his people, Israel, and the city of Jerusalem. The vision outlines a timeline of "seventy weeks." Scholars commonly interpret each "week" as a set of seven years, making the total period span 490 years.

The prophecy sets forth several key goals to be achieved within this period: to end sin, to make atonement for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, among others. This suggests a time of significant spiritual transformation and renewal.

The prophecy then introduces two figures: the "Anointed One" and the "prince who is to come." The "Anointed One," often understood to refer to the Messiah, is predicted to be "cut off" after "seven weeks and sixty-two weeks" (interpreted as 483 years). Many Christians see this as a prediction of the coming and crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Following this, the prophecy discusses the "prince who is to come," who is said to make a covenant with many for one "week" (seven years), but then break it. This leads to a period of desolation. This figure is often associated with a future antagonist in the end times, referred to as the Antichrist.



**Revelation** - The book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ outlines God's final judgments on the world. This includes the Seven Seals, Seven Trumpets, and Seven Bowls, each describing a series of divine judgments to be poured out on the earth. These judgements on earth are God's response to human sin and rebellion against Him. God's judgments in Revelation demonstrate His holiness and justice, call humanity to repentance, vindicate His faithful followers, dismantle the power of evil, and pave the way for the ultimate renewal of creation. It concludes with the final judgment at the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15), where anyone whose name is not found in the Book of Life is cast into the Lake of Fire. After this, God creates a new heaven and a new earth where the righteousness will dwell (Revelation 21-22).

## **God Will Save His People - Whether We Endure or Escape**

We may fear the immediate trials that are to come as the world begins to feel the pains of birth that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 24. These are the calamities that are, and will, befall the earth as it continues to move away from God, and deteriorate into base sinfulness. Make no mistake - there are Christ followers who are living in immense and dramatic suffering in our world today. Those in Nigeria, India, China and Islamic countries live under the dark shadow of torment and suffering, even death for their beliefs today.

The apostle Paul endured great suffering for the message he proclaimed in a time when

many Christians were being persecuted for their faith. He describes this suffering at length in 2 Cor. 11: 23-27. Among the many things he endured he says:

*“five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked;”*. Yet this same Paul tells us in Romans 8:18 *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”*

This must also be our attitude in suffering. I write this from the coziness of a nation that still protects both my right to worship as I choose and say what I wish to. This may not always be the case.

God promises to save those who are His. This has never meant that we will be safe from suffering. Jesus knew when He was walking on this earth that we would suffer for our belief in Him. He promised as much (John 16:33, Matthew 24:9). It was true of the apostles - all of whom were martyred with the exception of John. It was true of the early church.



Jesus has a promise for us that we can claim even in the trials and suffering. He says in Matthew 24:13 - *“he who endures to the end shall be saved.”* - and He provides the endurance as Paul eloquently states in 2 Cor. 12:9-10:

*“He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

So whether we must endure suffering in the beginnings of birth pains or in the hardship of tribulation we know that God will save. He gives us the strength to endure. Not only that, but He gives us hope which can produce joy in spite of the persecution. Paul makes this clear in Romans 5:1-5:

*“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”*

This is solid theology - a right understanding of the purposes and working of God. We cannot call ourselves Christ followers if we will not take up the cross he calls up to bear. The cross may not be an easy one - but it can be a joyous one from which we derive hope. Hope of salvation from this present suffering to an eternal glory and joy. Failure to grasp this is a failure to understand the relevancy and requirement for God’s judgement and our deliverance through and from judgement.

## **God Does Not Want Us to Live in Fear**

We have addressed it at length already in this article, but it is worth repeating - God does not want his elect to live in fear. In Matthew 10 we see Jesus sending out the 12 to spread the message of the Kingdom. He warns the disciples of a time coming when in verse 21 *“brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake.”* These sound like perilous times but Jesus also cautions the disciples to not fear men but rather fear God in verse 28 *“do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”* This command tells us to rightly recognize and revere the Lord, but not man.

Paul encourages us to not be anxious about anything in life - but to handle it with prayer and let Jesus peace guard and inform our hearts and minds (Phi. 4:6-7). Psalms 23 is a gorgeous and promise filled poem of God’s provision in times of peril and suffering. Traditionally believed to have been written during a period in David’s life when his own son was plotting to kill him - [David calls out to the Lord and remembers His salvation, provision](#)

[and protection](#). David was determined to not live in fear but to rely on God. We see this time and again in the Psalms written by David.

Isaiah also proclaims his reliance on the Lord and His provision in the face of fear in Isaiah 41:13 *“For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, “Fear not, I am the one who helps you.””*. Like Isaiah, the writer of Hebrews declares his dependence on God for protection from fear in Hebrews 13:6 *“So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?””*.

For me personally the verses in Romans 8:38-39 give one of the best declarations against fear in our lives. Paul powerfully proclaims:

*“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*. What else is there to be concerned about? For the Christ follower the victory is already won - perhaps the battle will be difficult but we have God’s assurance that we will be conquerors and will forever dwell with Him in eternity.

So why fear? So why fear indeed. God has not called us to be fearful - He has called us to power, to love and to a sound mind 2 Tim 1:7. Power knowing we are conquerors, love that reaches a lost world around us and a sound mind that can rightly interpret God’s word, and know and understand our place in it. It is a place of victory.

## **Why Would Someone Leave Their Faith Then?**

The people featured in the article referenced in the beginning have all left their faith. Why was this so? Why allow fear and uncertainty to shipwreck a faith in the loving and saving work of Jesus Christ? We have seen that He is faithful and that He has a plan of victory for the saints. We know already that God does not want us to live in fear. We know He will save his people. In Matthew 24:12-14 we read that the saints must endure the times of great turmoil at the end, but as Jesus says in verse 13 - *“but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.”*.

If we are followers of Jesus we have made that decision for a reason. Faith in Christ requires we understand and internalize that reason - specifically that Jesus is who he says he is. That He is the Son of God, that He lived a sinless life only to take on the sin that we all have committed and pay the price for that sin which is death. We also have agreed that He has conquered death and is living today as evidenced by an empty tomb and the witness of thousands. He has told us He will come again and that He will judge the living and the dead. Paul used the word “persuaded” in Romans 8. He was so convinced of this truth that it was the persuasion of his soul. Anything less is not a true faith. Anything less and we cannot call

ourselves true Christ followers. That is what Christ meant when he called us to pick up our cross and follow Him. The cross leads to death of ourselves and life in Christ.

Those who do not have this faith face judgement. Revelations 20:11, 12 & 15 tell us:

*Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. (NIV)*

We are told elsewhere that only those who profess a faith in Christ and live as His followers will have their names written in the book of life. So the choice seems to be clear. Those who have turned from Christ most certainly are not bearing their cross. Perhaps they never actually picked up a cross at all. Why else would someone choose to abandon their faith. The results of a lost faith do not sound encouraging.

So we have to ask - are these people really leaving their faith? Paul warns Timothy in chapter 3 of 2nd Timothy about Godless people who will rise up during the last days and will *"have the appearance of godliness, but deny its power."* (2 Tim 3:5). Are these the people of whom we are speaking - they claim Christianity but fail to lay hold of salvation? They claim the cross but deny anything about Christ. The suffering or challenges of living for Him violate their safe spaces and cause them trauma. They cannot, for a minute, bear the weight of the cross they are asked to carry. As soon as it is difficult they turn away. Paul tells Timothy in verse 5 that he should have nothing to do with these people. We too need to be discerning.





Do not get me wrong - I do not, for a minute, suggest that someone possessing true faith can lose their place in the heavenly family. I recognize that real, faithful followers of Christ, lose their way and can appear to abandon their faith in crisis. This does not disqualify them from the salvation they have laid claim to. I believe that God will pursue these people with zeal and will not let them remain lost. Just as Jesus suggested the good shepherd does - leaving the ninety-nine to find the one.

## Conclusion

The article that Ms. Post has written is sad in that it tells a story that is being repeated over and over. There are many people choosing to walk away from their long held Christian beliefs over many different issues - the sovereign judgement of God is just one of them. Many of these people were raised in the church and have expressed Christian sentiments during their life. Decisions to justify walking away from their faith have been varied but most people seem to have a very basic understanding of the faith they proclaimed to believe at one time. This lack of depth of knowledge seems to go hand in hand with shallow faith. As the writer of Hebrews said in Chapter 5:

*In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the*

*elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Heb 5:12-14 (NIV)*

This failure of the body to produce mature Christians from within - in our children and grandchildren primarily is endemic of a larger failure in Christianity today. We are not investing in those new in the faith and those in our families who grow up in the church. We cannot and should not let these stories pass through our minds - in one ear and out the other - without seeing ourselves complicit in the failures of these people of faith who are walking away from the truth.

We are called to pass the faith on. We are called to disciple those coming to a saving knowledge of Christ. We must teach them the hard truths along with the beauty of that salvation. We must help these people to want to love God and pick up their cross and die to self. This is not a message that is easily accepted in today's society. Self-denial is far from popular. We are the church of comfort and wealth and it is way too easy to sit, relaxed in our own provision and never really need God. This is a mistake that leads to the death of others, if not our own death. Examine yourself. What are you living for and what message are you sending to your children? Jesus says:

*Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?" - Matthew 16:24-26 (ESV)*

Is this world worth your soul and your children or grandchildren's soul?

- Note: I have taken for granted that we agree that the scripture passed down to us from the first century, containing 39 old testament books and 27 new testament books, is divinely inspired and without contextual error as God has intended. See my article on ["Can you trust the Bible?"](#)