

If We Believe

1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 18

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~ It is extremely difficult to accept that each day, as our bodies waste away, becoming shorter of breath, and one step closer to death - as the song goes - we, that is, our spirit, soul *AND* body, are all designed for an eternal existence. In our last report, we learned Paul taught the church in Thessalonica the rapture; and he did so on the basis of the Lord Jesus Christ's Own words as recorded in the Gospel of John chapter fourteen; and which is likened to a first century Jewish wedding. If you have not read our previous safari report, I highly suggest you go back and do so now. The correct eschatological teaching of the rapture is perhaps the most glorious hope revealed in the entire Word of God. It is a living hope that brings a purifying purpose during the most hopeless time in life. And hopelessness will come on our deathbed, friends – we can count on it.

Those without Christ will experience the place of paralyzing hopelessness when this flesh passes away; irrespective of whether you believe it, accept it, agree with it, like it – or not. You may arrive at hopelessness *LONG* before you physically die, too, by the way. There is nothing as tragic as the death of a lost person. The wailing, howling, and screaming, and the inconsolable friends and loved ones as they carry on at an unsaved person's funeral, are sights and sounds you'll not forget – trust me on that. Frankly, I don't blame them – because they have no hope. The child of God *DOES* have a hope in time of death; because the Lord Jesus Christ said He will return and bodily raise up all believers who sleep in death....

13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

~ This section has been labeled one of the most important prophetic passages in the Scriptures — and it is that. Actually, the primary consideration is not the rapture, though this passage clearly teaches it. The question Paul is answering concerns believers who die before the rapture. Paul had taught the young church in Thessalonica the truth of the imminent

coming of Christ for His own. After Paul left Thessalonica, there was evidently lapse of several months, as he had gone to Berea, Athens, and then to Corinth. During this interval, some believers had passed away. Had they missed the Rapture? Paul had not dealt with this aspect of the subject while he was with them. So, now he answers their specific question in this epistle.

The “... *others which have no hope*” in verse thirteen are the lost, atheistic, pagan and heathen person in the city of Thessalonica in the day in which we are studying – and in the world today, naturally. They have no hope. Their lives are mundane and sublunary. “*Asleep*” refers only to the body; it never refers to the spirit or soul. See, the resurrection is a bodily resurrection. The bodies we have today do not have a spirit and a soul, friends; no, our spirit and souls have a *temporary* body. That difference is *CRITICAL* to our doctrine. The soul and spirit never die – the fleshly body does — until it shall be raised incorruptible.

There is a very definite similarity of a sleeping body and a dead body. At almost every funeral with a viewing, someone makes the remark, “... *they look like they are asleep.*” Candidly, that’s exactly true. A man that sleeps does not cease to exist; and the Bible teaches that our body does not cease to exist when we enter into rest – sleep – what we understand as death. Sleep is temporary; so, the inference is that death is also temporary. Sleep has a time to wake up; death has resurrection – both for the saved and the lost; and they occur at two different times, by the way. Life is not a mere existence. Death is not merely non-existence.

The derivation of the word “*sleep*” in verse thirteen is the Greek word “*koimaomai*” – meaning “*lying asleep*” – and of which the root meaning is the Greek word “*keimai*” - “*to lie down.*” This word is used elsewhere for natural sleep in Luke chapter twenty-two verse forty-five, and Acts chapter twelve verse six. The same word is used for the death of the body — but *NEVER* the soul. The very nature of the word prevents use of the term “*soul sleep*” - which was a very popular cult teaching at one time. Only a body can lay down — certainly not a soul. Paul also said, “... *To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.*” Even the Old Testament teaches

that the spirit returns to God Who gave it. Remember, the body was created from dust, and then God breathed His Spirit of life into it.

Ecclesiastes 12: 7 ... *then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God, who gave it ~*

By the same token, only the body is spoken of in resurrection. The word for “resurrection” is the Greek word “*anastasis*” - which means “*to stand up.*” Naturally, a soul can neither lie down nor stand up. So, there’s just no such thing as a spiritual resurrection. Of course, if you think you can tell me the position a spirit takes when lying down, or how the soul might die or be resurrected, I would certainly love to hear all about it. Let me warn you, though, I’ve heard almost every explanation of exactly such, and the Bible not only contradicts you – it will convict your soul to the point of being blanched if you pursue an argument – but I digress. Just let me know.

2 Corinthians 5: 1 ... *for we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven....4 For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life....6 Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: 7 (For we walk by faith, not by sight) 8 We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. 9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him ~*

The word for tabernacle in verse one of second Corinthians chapter five means “*tent.*” The tabernacle Moses established was just a tent. These bodies we reside in temporarily are tents, friends. I don’t care if you live in a home that cost one hundred million dollars – all you really have is a flimsy and tattered little tent – because this body is where we live. Now, if you broke down the sixteen chemical elements of your body – which are all found in the earth, by the way - it wouldn’t even be worth five dollars. So, if you have a million dollar home, all you’re really doing is polluting it with your cheap old self. Your old, ragged tent could be folded up at any

moment, placed in a box on a shelf and – that’s it – you’ll quickly and silently just slip away - and the end. If you haven’t yet discovered all of this to be true – you will.

So, for a Christian, death means to be absent from the body and present, at home, with the Lord. Our body of flesh is a frail tent that is laid aside temporarily upon physical death. Early Christians called the burying place for bodies a cemetery, derived from the Greek word “*koimeterion*,” which means “... *rest house for strangers; sleeping place.*” We call such a place a hotel or motel, where we spend the night, rise up in the morning, and continue our journey fresh and rested. “... *Even as others who have no hope*” should read “... *even as the rest who have no hope.*” The pagan philosophy concerning death is dark and hopeless. Theocritus, a Greek poet of the third century B.C., wrote: “... *hopes are among the living, the dead are without hope.*” Moschus, his contemporary, speaking of the plants that perish in the garden, said, “... *alas! alas!...these live and spring again in another year; but we...when we die, deaf to all sound in the hollow earth, sleep a long, long endless sleep that knows no waking....*”

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

~ Notice Paul did not say “*Jesus slept*” – because Jesus died. Jesus died a substitutionary, redemptive death; in which He bore the penalty of sin. He cried, “*My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?*” Death means separation. There are three kinds of death: (1) *physical death*; where the spirit separates from the body (2) *spiritual death*: remember, God told Adam that “*the day you eat of the forbidden fruit you shall die.*” Well, Adam didn’t die physically for another nine hundred years – but Adam died spiritually that same day! God came into the Garden, and Adam and Eve hid in the bushes. Adam died spiritually the day he rebelled against God. That’s when he was separated without hope, and without the Lord. Paul also said, “... *to be carnally minded is death.*” That also means separated from God.

See, God hath quickened us who were dead in trespasses and sins. Interestingly, there was a famous speaker who went around with the message: *"millions now living will never die."* A famous Baptist preacher followed behind him with the message *"millions now living are already dead."* Then, there is (3) *eternal death* – which is eternal separation from God. The Thessalonians were worried about the dead; and Paul tells them, *"... they are going to come first."* *"By the word of the Lord"* indicates that this is a direct revelation from God Almighty....

16 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:

~ The Lord Jesus Christ won't be sending angels to do His work in the rapture, friends. No, Jesus will be coming Himself, Personally for His church. This is a great comfort to believers – but it is a terror to the lost world – and it's one reason the atheist hates God so incessantly. Now, when Christ returns to establish His earthly Kingdom, He *WILL* send angels to the four corners of the earth to gather the elect – meaning Israel and the Gentiles alive at that time. However, angel ministry is *NEVER* connected with the church in any way, shape or form in the New Testament. Even the angels that announced the birth of Christ called Him the Son of David. The wise men wanted to know where the King of the Jews was.

On the Day of Pentecost there were no angels present. The Holy Spirit Himself came upon men. Angels are only connected with the nation Israel, as far as ministry is concerned. The *"voice of the archangel"* and the *"voice of a trumpet"* are both still *HIS* voice. This speaks of the majesty and authority of Christ Jesus. John, on the Isle of Patmos, said, *"... I heard One with a voice as the sound of a trumpet."* When John turned to see Who it was, it was the glorified Christ. When Jesus commanded Lazarus to come forth from the grave, He didn't ask Gabriel to stop by and help. So, we'll end this leg of our Spiritual Safari through the entire Word of God comforting each other with these words; and we'll continue on beginning in chapter five in our next report....

17 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.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words ~

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