

10/12/25

Death And Sorrow Of The Believer

1Thess. 4:13-14

Paul having declared how the Thessalonians ought to walk to please God regarding sexual purity and brotherly love, now deals with a specific area of concern.

The Thessalonians were being troubled about the state of dead believers at the Lord's return for His church, since some had died already. 1Thess. 4:13-18

1. Will they be included or excluded?
2. Will they be at any disadvantage?

Often this passage is used for the teaching of the Rapture of the church, and it is not wrong in itself because it clearly mentions it indirectly to show the order of raising of the dead and live believers. vs. 17

But the direct central theme of this section is the relationship of dead believers at the return of the Lord for His church, giving the **order** of their resurrection and of the believers that are alive at His Coming.

1. They were not asking whether they would be resurrected for they knew they would. Acts 17:1-4
2. They were not doubting the Lord's return or their meeting Him in the air. 1Thess. 1:10
3. They were anticipating the imminent return of Christ at any time. 1Thess. 5:1-2

Every time Paul mentions the Lord's return in the letter, it refers to the Lord's return "for His saints in the air". 1Thess. 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23

* Second Thessalonians deals with the Second Coming Jesus to the earth with His saints. 2Thess. 1:10

Paul now wrote in greater detail about the Lord's return for His church, due to their lack of clear understanding, giving a greater emphasis in the second part of the letter. 1Thess. 4:13-5:11

- I. What happens to the dead believers at the return Christ for His church? 1Thess. 4:13-18
- II. When will Christ return for His church? 1Thess. 5:1-3
- III. How shall we live in view of the return of Christ for His church. 1Thess. 5:4-11
* The purpose and outcome of this detailed instruction to the believer was to be comforted, stated twice. 1Thess. 4:18; 5:11

Paul tells the Thessalonians three things about what happens to dead believers at the return of Christ for His church. 1Thess. 4:13-18

- I. The proclamation over their anxious hope. vs. 13-14
- II. The instruction on their living hope. vs. 15-17

III. The edification for their ongoing hope. vs. 18

We want to look at the first, the proclamation over their anxious hope regarding the dead believers, in view of Jesus coming for His church, which consists of three important truths. 1Thess. 4:13-14

- I. The Thessalonians were not to be ignorant concerning the state of departed believers. vs. 13a-c
- II. The Thessalonians were not to grieve for departed believers like unbelievers. vs. 13d
- III. The Thessalonians were to know Jesus would return with the departed believers. vs. 14

I. **The Thessalonians were not to be ignorant concerning the state of departed believers. vs. 13a-c**

- A. The apostle Paul was concerned to instruct them regarding their spiritual need.
 - * “But I do not want you to be ignorant.”
 - 1. The word “but”, marks a contrast, as well as a continuation, but a clear transition.
 - a. The contrast is that Paul had told the Thessalonians he did not need to write to them concerning brotherly love, for they were taught of God, but now he was going to write and teach them what they had enquired about the dead believers when Timothy visited them. vs. 9, 13-18

- b. The continuation is marked by the context of the imminent return of Jesus in what preceded and follows.
- 2. The state of their spiritual understanding was ignorance.
 - a. The negative expression is to bring a positive result.
 - * The word ignorance “agnoeo”, means not to know, to lack understanding.
 - b. Remember that Paul had only spent three weeks before escorted away, due to the persecution of the Jews. Acts 17:2, 10
 - 1) They were new believers attempting to make sense of their Christianity apart from their pagan religious beliefs that taught the dead went down to a dark underworld, there being no return.
 - 2) For the Greeks the body was a prison for the soul, this should never be the thinking of a believer.
 - c. The phrase is often used to correct and instruct spiritual truth in the Scriptures.
 - 1) Paul told the Romans, he did not want them to be ignorant of how often he planned to come to them, but had been hindered till the present time. Rom. 1:13
 - 2) Paul also did not want them to be ignorant of the mystery of Israel’s blindness, until the fullness of the Gentile had come. Rom. 11:25

- 3) Paul did not want the Corinthians to be ignorant about the operation of the spiritual gifts by the Spirit. 1Cor. 12:1
- 4) Paul did not want the Corinthians to be ignorant about their sufferings in Asia beyond measure, even despairing of life. 2Cor. 1:8
- 3. The state of ignorance can occur by lack of knowledge, understanding of the Scriptures or spiritual illumination by the Holy Spirit.
 - a. The believer can be willfully ignorant about spiritual things by not reading and studying the word, not being diligent to grow, develop and mature.
 - b. The believer can be ignorant about spiritual understanding, due to pride and self-reliance, rather than trusting in Jesus.
 - c. The disciples recall didn't understand when Jesus said He was going up to Jerusalem to be crucified. Mk. 9:32
 - 1) In their Jewish minds they were expecting the Kingdom Age to come.
 - 2) In their minds they were expecting Jesus to go to Jerusalem, destroy Roman and set up His Kingdom.
 - 3) In fact after the resurrection they still asked this question, "Lord, will You at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" Acts 1:6e-f

- B. The apostle Paul was concerned to instruct them regarding the dead believers. vs. 13b-c
 - * "brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep."
 - 1. Paul addressed them as brethren. vs. 13b
 - a. The word brethren "adelphos", means of the same womb, or parents.
 - b. They had been born-again by the word and the Holy Spirit. 1Thess. 1:5
 - c. The word brethren identified them as being related to Paul and others by their family relationship in heaven.
 - d. The council and instruction was to the believer, unbeliever would not receive this truth.
 - 2. Paul addressed their concerned about the dead believers. vs. 13c
 - a. The ones who had come to Christ and now had died physically and departed, "those who have fallen asleep".
 - 1) They had become followers of the apostles of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit. 1Thess. 1:6
 - 2) They had turned to God from their idols to serve the living and true God. 1Thess. 1:9
 - 3) They had been waiting for His Son from heaven, but some had died. 1Thess. 1:10

- b. The phrase fallen asleep “koimaomai”, means to lie down, stated three times. vs. 13, 14, 15
- 1) The tense is the perfect participle, “having fallen asleep”, the word cemetery comes from it, a place of sleep, dormitories.
 - 2) The phrase is a common metaphor and euphemism used in the Old and New Testament for the physical death of believers, never of unbelievers. (K.J.V. N.K.J.V) Gen. 47:30; 1Kings 2:10; Matt. 27:52; 2Pet. 3:4
 - 3) The phrase suggests stillness, rest after labor and a temporary condition, but also of the future awakening of the body at the resurrection!
 - 4) It is used also by secular writers as a loving sentimental expression, but only with a religious hope, void of the sure hope of believers.
- c. The phrase has nothing to do with the soul and spirit of man, only with the physical body.
- 1) It is used of Lazarus. Jn. 11:11-13
 - 2) It is used of Stephen. Acts 7:60
 - 3) It is used of the believer who had seen the Lord after the resurrection and now were dead. 1Cor. 15:6

- 4) 13 of the 18 appearances in the New Testament, it is translated “slept, sleep, fallen asleep”/

Illustration

A woman had committed herself to a life of widowhood and loneliness because her religion prohibited her to remarry after the death of her husband. Then one day a Christian shared the gospel with her, and she excepted Jesus as her Lord and Savior. Finding out that she could remarry, if she chose to and enjoy her life, she was comforted beyond words at the clearing up of her religious ignorance!

Application

1. In the church there will always be ignorance about spiritual matters for different reasons.
 - a. There will be new believers that will come with no concept of the Bible or formal religion and will take in everything as a new born baby, the unadulterated word for growth. 1Pet. 2:2
 - b. There will be new believers who will come with baggage and will have to examine the Scriptures to distinguish Biblical truth from their religious dogmas before Christ. Acts 17:11
 - c. There will be those who come sincerely believing what they are doing is not wrong, but as they sit under the teaching of the word they will see their error, such as living together, fornicating, getting drunk, lying etc.

* “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Acts 2:42

2. In the church today there is a high level of willful ignorance about many things.

a. Not because the word is not being taught from the pulpit, though that can be the case.

* “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.” Phil. 3:17

b. But rather due to the fact that individuals refuse to acknowledge the error of their beliefs or practices and reason them away, while still calling themselves Christians.

1) “And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.” 2Thess. 3:14

2) “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” 1Jn. 1:6

c. Some knowing that Jesus is the only way, the truth and the life, still will pray to Mary and idols to interced for them unscripturally.

* “And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.” 2Cor. 6:16

3. In the church today there are those who still believe in what is called “soul sleep”, that at death the believer’s soul and spirit remain in a state of sleep with the body, till the resurrection.

a. The usual Scriptures used to affirm their belief are from the book of Job and Ecclesiastes.

b. The problem is they are interpreted out of context, Solomon was describinh life apart from God and Job spoke out of ignorance, at which God reproved Him. Job 38:1-3

c. Paul rejected soul sleep.

* Jesus, “Who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.” 1Thess. 5:10

The Thessalonians were not to be ignorant concerning the state of their departed loved ones!

II. The Thessalonians were not to grieve for departed believers like unbelievers. vs. 13d

* The teaching is a contrast between believers and the unbelievers, not to deny or prohibit sorrow!

A. The apostle Paul declared their spiritual ignorance had resulted in grief as other.

* “lest you sorrow as other.”

1. Paul knew that though they had excepted Christ they were going through the same grief as the non-believers.

a. Their mental, emotional and physical anguish was heart rentng.

- b. The soul of man involves the intellect, emotions and the will.
- 2. Paul was deeply concern over their present grief.
 - a. The word lest you “hina me”, is a purpose clause.
 - 1) The purpose behind Paul’s words is to relieve and stop their sorrow.
 - 2) The motive was his love for them.
 - b. The word sorrow “lupeo” means to distress, be sad, cause grief and be in heaviness with mental anguish.
 - 1) This was their ongoing condition, the present tense!
 - 2) Their agony was a real one.
 - c. The word sorrow appears 26 times in the New Testament.
 - 1) The word is used of Herod when the daughter of Herodius asked for John’s head on a platter. Matt. 14:9
 - 2) The word is used of the rich young ruler who Jesus asked to give away his great possessions. Mk. 10:22
 - 3) The word is used for Peter when Jesus asked him a third time, “Do you love Me?”. Jn. 21:17
- 3. The Thessalonians due to their lack of spiritual understanding about the state of dead believers were going through real turmoil, emotionally and physically!

- a. What we can handle by intellectual assent will devastate us emotionally once we experience it, either by guilt, regret or grief through ignorance.
 - b. What affects us emotionally will affect us physically, so we trust and obey the Word of God to sustain us in our emotional difficulties that there be no disequilibrium.
 - c. What our spirit knows about God, His promises and the power available to the believer is the solution to bringing things into perspective and balance.
- B. The apostle Paul declared grief experienced by non-Christians is one of no hope for the dead.
 - * “who have no hope.”
 - 1. Paul declared with full confidence that unbelievers have a false hope.
 - a. The word hope “elpis” means to anticipate, expectation or confidence, usually with pleasure and good.
 - b. When the word is used in the positive it indicates certainty of something taking place.
 - c. The word is used in the negative in our text, communicating the empty dark despair in the future, false hope.
 - 2. Paul declared the truth based on Scripture.
 - a. Those not born-again are without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel

and strangers from the covenants of promise having no hope and without God in the world. Eph. 2:12

- b.** The sorrow of the non-believer is void of sure and expectant hope to see their dead loved ones after death in heaven.
 - 1)** Because their hope is not based on the revelation of God and contrary to it, so God does not honor it.
 - 2)** Hope resulting only in emotional and mental grief of despair reveals a person has no relationship to Christ.
 - 3)** God cannot be manipulated by our emotions, like people!
 - c.** The ongoing and continuous grief of unbelievers reveals certain things.
 - 1)** That what they profess is mere speculation and religion.
 - 2)** That they have no available comfort by or through God.
 - * The Thessalonians once served idols, not the living and true God.
- 1Thess. 1:9b

C. The apostle Paul did not deny sorrow to believers over departed believers.

- 1.** Paul knew it was and is accompanied with the certainty of hope.
 - a.** Knowing we will see our loved ones again, if they were in Christ.

- b.** Knowing we will be our friends, if they knew Christ.
- 2.** Paul understood that the sorrow a believer experiences is the same as the unbeliever in certain ways.
 - a.** The mental grief over the loss of a love one or friend, but not without hope.
 - b.** The emotional turmoil to deal with, but with the Lord's strength.
 - c.** The physical longing missing their physical presence and company, but knowing we will see them again.
 - * There is nothing wrong with crying and grieving for loved ones and friends, Christians are not stoics!

Illustration

Theocritus, a Greek writer says, "Hopes are among the living, but the dead are without hope." on the Catacomb of Callistus is written, "Alexander is not dead, but he lives above the stars and his body rests in the tomb."

Application

- 1.** You can be a Christian, but if you do not know what the Bible says about the available comfort for believers, then you will respond the way you use to understand life according to your culture or religion, rather than with the mind of Scripture. 2Tim. 3:16-17
 - a.** Resorting to wail for the death uncontrollably and emotionally, tearing at the coffin.

- b. Remaining to dress in black for years as a widow, if not life.
 - c. Revisiting the grave of the dead, spending hours in conversations and contemplation.
- 2. You can be a Christian and because you know what the Scriptures say, you are able to communicate the gospel of hope by your conduct and words.
 - a. You will be broken inside by the loss of your friend, love ones, children, husband or wife, cherishing their love and no longer able to enjoy their company, but not because you do not know their state or where they are.
 - b. You will be able to articulate the message of hope for others, that of eternal life in Christ.
 - * Giving an answer to people. 1Pet. 3:15
- 3. The Christian is to experience sorrow for a legitimate time, not a continuous grieving through years or one's lifetime, it is not Biblical.
 - a. This denies the certainty of the Christian hope!
 - * David fasted and prayed to God for his child of adultery with Bathsheba for seven days, but once he knew the child was dead; he washed, changed and ate. The servants were shocked, but David said while he was alive perhaps God would intervene and be gracious to him. Now he was dead and he could not bring him back nor would he return to David, but David would go to him. 2Sam. 12:15-23
 - b. The believer's hope is based on the certainty of God's promises in the Scriptures.

- 1) It is Hope based on the resurrection. Acts 23:6
 - 2) It is called a good hope. 2Thess. 2:16
 - 3) It is the hope of eternal life. Tit. 1:2
 - 4) It is for assurance of hope. Heb. 6:11
 - 5) It is a sure and steadfast hope. Heb. 6:19
 - 6) It is identified as a better hope. Heb. 7:19
 - 7) It is a lively hope. 1Pet. 1:3
 - 8) It is all summed up in Christ, who is our blessed hope and our hope of glory. Tit. 2:13; Col. 1:27
- 4. Funerals are for the living, not for the dead.
 - a. When people die they either enter eternity lost, being separated from God forever or they are united with Him. Lk. 16:19-31; 2Cor. 5:1-8
 - b. The time to make arrangements for eternity is before you die, it is too late after death. Jn. 3:36
 - c. Do you realize no Moslem can tell you they will be in heaven with certainty, but a Christian can!

The Thessalonians were not to grieve for departed believers like unbelievers!

III. The Thessalonians were to know Jesus would return with the departed believers. vs. 14

- A. The apostle Paul declared the common denominator of belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus. vs. 14a

- * “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again.”
1. Paul stated their faith was in a real person, Jesus
 - a. The word if “ei”, does not imply doubt, but certainly.
* And would be better translated “since”.
 - b. The word believe “pisteuo” means to be persuaded, to place confidence in or reliance, not mere credence by works.
 - 1) The tense is indicative present active.
 - 2) The word is used by Jesus, asking the blind man, “Do you believe I am able to do this?” Matt. 9:28
 - c. Jesus “Iesous” is His name indicating His humanity.
 - 1) Jesus means Yahweh is salvation.
 - 2) Jesus is the Greek translation of the Hebrew name Joshua.
 - 3) Jesus was God Incarnate, born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit. Jn. 1:1, 14; Matt. 1:23
 - a) He grew in wisdom, stature and favor with God and man. Jn. 2:52
 - b) He hungered, thirsted, slept, grieved, cried, bled and died.
 2. Paul stated the faith that one is placing confidence in is in Jesus’ atoning work.
 - a. Faith in Jesus that He died for me and was raised out from the dead.

- 1) Notice Paul doesn’t use sleep for Jesus, but died “apothnesko”, in order to emphasize His substitutionary death in our place.
- 2) Jesus tasted death for every man. Heb. 2:9
* Rom. 3:21-26; 5:6; 2Cor. 5:21; 1Jn. 2:2; 1Cor. 15:3-4
- 3) Therefore Jesus is the mediating High Priest. Heb. 4:14-16
- 4) Jesus lives to ever make intercession for the believer. Heb. 7:25
- b. Faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus will cause me to view death correctly.
 - 1) The death and resurrection of Jesus is the heart of the gospel. Jn. 14:19; Rom. 8:11; 1Cor. 6:14; 2Cor. 4:14
 - 2) Death is physical separation from the body and eternal separation from God, if you do not know Jesus.
 - 3) If Christ had not risen our faith would be futile and would still be in our sins and those who have died believing in Christ would have perished and therefore our hope in Christ would be only in this life and we would be most pitiable. 1Cor. 15:17-19
 - 4) Paul tells the Corinthians, “O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is

sin, and the strength of sin is the law.
But thanks be to God, who gives us
the victory through our Lord Jesus
Christ.” 1Cor. 15:55-57

- b. Faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus will cause me to view life differently.
 - 1) I am a new creature; old things are passed away. 2Cor. 5:17
 - 2) I am able to live life in godliness by a divine nature escaping the corruption. 2Pet. 1:3-4
 - 3) I am able to understand the things of God. 1Cor 2:12-16

- B. The apostle Paul declared the confident hope that as God raised Jesus from the dead, Jesus will come back with the dead saints. vs. 14b
* “even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.”
 - 1. Paul declared God will bring with Jesus those who have died, before His return for His saints on earth.
 - a. It implies they are alive, not dead or in some sleep state like soul sleep, as taught by some. 1Thess. 5:10
 - b. It clearly teaches that those who have died are present with Him, but not in their glorified bodies.

- 1) When this tent is destroyed, we have our eternal abode present with Jesus in heaven immediately. 2Cor. 5:1-8
- 2) To be absent from the body and be present with the Lord is far better. Phil. 1:21-23
- c. The word bring “ago” means to lead or take with one.
 - 1) It is used of Paul, “Take Mark and bring him with you.” 2Tim. 4:11
 - 2) It is used of Jesus and what He accomplished through His death and resurrection, “Bringing many sons to glory.” Heb. 2:10
- 2. Paul declared God will bring with Him those who have died in Jesus.
 - a. The reference to “those who sleep”, once again is to the believers.
 - 1) The word sleep “koimao”, means to lie down, stated three times. vs. 13, 14, 15
 - 2) The word “sleep” is in the aorist tense, indicating a single past action, literally, having fallen asleep.
 - b. The word in “dia” is better translated “through”, being the ground or reason for something being done or not done.
 - 1) Referring to those who died through Jesus as Savior and Lord to remove them from this world at physical death to be with Him.

- 2) Jesus destroyed him who had the power of death, the devil. Heb. 2:14
- 3) Jesus tasted death for every man by the grace of God. Heb. 2:9
 - * For every man is appointed to die once and then the judgment. Heb. 9:27
- c. This is the benefit of all who have repented, lived as pilgrims and sojourners, and having died physically they are present with Him.
 - 1) For Christ is the first fruits of all who have fallen asleep. 1Cor. 15:20
 - 2) Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. Ps. 116:15

Illustration

After Sir Walter Raleigh was beheaded in the tower they found in his Bible these true and striking lines, written the night before his death:

“Even such is time, that takes in trust
 Our youth, our joys, our all we have,
 And pays us but with age and dust;
 Who in the dark and silent grave,
 When we have wandered all our ways,
 Shuts up the story of our days.
 But from this earth, this grave, this dust!
 My God shall raise me up, I thrust!”

All the things of this world he had lost, but he had kept his faith; and faith spoke to him of a hope and life beyond the grave. C. E. Macartney #5020

Application

1. Have you placed your confidence in the person of Jesus Christ who died in your place to forgive you of your sins that you can live eternally with Him?
 - a. There is no intermediate state between death and resurrection, either you are present with Christ or separated from Him for eternity.
 - b. There is no such thing as limbo, purgatory or any other such thing that religion teaches.
 - * “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.” Col. 2:8
2. Have you the confidence that the instant you die you are instantly present with the Lord?
 - a. The Bible prohibits the various practices of the pagan to contact the dead, either through familiar spirit, wizards, soothsaying, necromancy, etc. Lev. 19:26, 31; 20:6
 - b. The witch or medium of En Dor was sought out by the command of Saul, “Now Samuel said to Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” And Saul answered, “I am deeply distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, neither by prophets

nor by dreams. Therefore I have called you, that you may reveal to me what I should do. “Then Samuel said: “Why then do you ask me, seeing the LORD has departed from you and has become your enemy?” 1Sam. 28:15-16

* “When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or *one* who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or **one who calls up the dead**. For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you. You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the LORD your God has not appointed such for you.” Deut. 18:9-14

3. Have you understood that loved ones and friends who have died and gone before us will miss out on nothing at the coming of Jesus for His church, but in fact Jesus will bring them back with Him?

- a.** We are to not sorrow as others, who have no hope by not knowing Jesus as their Savior. 1Thess. 4:13d-e

- b.** We are to comfort one another with these words. 1Thess. 4:18

The Thessalonians were to know Jesus would return with the departed believers!

Conclusion

This was the proclamation over their anxious hope regarding the dead believers, in view of Jesus coming for His church, consisting of three important truths.

- I.** The Thessalonians were not to be ignorant concerning the state of departed believers!
- II.** The Thessalonians were not to grieve for departed believers like unbelievers!
- III.** The Thessalonians were to know Jesus would return with the departed believers!