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Death And Sorrow Of The Believer

1Thess. 4:13-14

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

Their concern was the relationship between the death of believers and the Lord's return. 4:13-18

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

Some had died since Paul left and they were anxious as to the participation of the believers who had died at the Lord's return.

Often this passage is used for the Rapture of the church and it is not wrong in itself because it is clearly mentioned 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 between the death of believers and the Lord's return for His church, as well as the order of resurrection of believers who have died and those remaining alive at the coming of Jesus.

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. 1:10
3. They were anticipating the imminent return of Christ at any time. 5:1-2

Every time Paul mentions the Lord's return in first Thessalonians, it deals with the Lord's return "for His saints in the air". 1:10, 2:19, 3:13, 4:15, 5:23

While second Thessalonians deals with the Lord's return with His saints to the earth. 1:10

The apostle gives an entire section to deal with the Lord's return for His church, giving it a greater emphasis in the second part of the letter. 4:13-5:11
* The outcome of such instruction is to be comfort, mentioned twice. 4:18, 5:11

- I. What happens to the dead believers at Christ's return? 4:13-18
- II. When will Christ return? 5:1-3
- III. How shall we live in view of His return. 5:4-11

Paul tells the Thessalonians three things about what happens to the believers at the return of Christ, who have died before Christ's return. 4:13-18

- I. The proclamation of hope. vs. 13-14
- II. The particulars in order. vs. 15-17
- III. The purpose of mind. vs. 18

For our study we want to look at the proclamation of hope, consisting of three important truths. vs. 13-14

- I. Paul did not want the Thessalonians to be ignorant concerning the state of their departed loved ones. vs. 13a-c
- II. Paul did not want the Thessalonians to sorrow as others who have no hope. vs. 13d
- III. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to know that Jesus will bring with Him those who have died in Jesus. vs. 14

I. Paul did not want the Thessalonians to be ignorant concerning the state of their departed loved ones . vs. 13a-c

- A. The concern was to instruct them regarding their spiritual need.
 - 1. The word but mark a contrast between what he has said and what he is going to say as well as a transition.
 - a. Paul has told the Thessalonians that he did not need to write to them concerning brotherly love, for the were taught of God. vs. 8
 - b. Now Paul is going to teach them something they had inquired about when Timothy visited them again.

- 2. The state of their spiritual understanding was ignorance.
 - a. The word ignorance “agnoeo” simply means not to know, to lack understanding.
 - b. Remember that Paul had only spent three weeks that we know of, before he was escorted away, due to the persecution of the Jews. Acts 17:2, 10
 - 1) They were new believers and were attempting to make sense of their Christianity, apart from their pagan religious beliefs, which taught that the dead went down to a dark underworld for which there was no return.
 - 2) For the Greeks the body was a prison for the soul, this should never be the thought with the believer.
 - c. The phrase is often used in the Scriptures to correct or instruct spiritual truth.
 - 1) Paul writes to the Romans and tells them that he did not want them to be ignorant of how often he planned to come to them but had been hindered until the present time. Rom. 1:13
 - 2) Paul also told them that he did not want them to be ignorant of the

mystery about 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 and the Spirit of God. 1Cor. 12:1
 - 4) Paul did not want the Corinthians to be ignorant about their sufferings in Asia beyond measure, even despairing of life. 1Cor. 1:8
3. The state of ignorance can occur by lack of knowledge, understanding or spiritual illumination by the Holy Spirit, according to the scriptures.
- a. The believer can be willfully ignorant about spiritual things, by not reading and studying the word and being diligent to grow, develop and mature.
 - b. The believer can be ignorant about spiritual understanding, due to pride and self dependence, rather than trusting in Jesus.
 - c. The disciples remember, 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 age to come.
 - 2) In this mind set, they were expecting Jesus to go to Jerusalem

and destroy the Roman authority and set up His Kingdom.

- 3) In fact they still asked this question after the resurrection, "Lord, will You at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" Acts 1:6e-f
- B. The concern was to instruct them regarding those believers who had fallen asleep. vs. 13b-c
1. The ones addressed are brethren.
 - a. The word brethren "adelphos" means of the same womb, or parents.
 - b. The Thessalonians had been born again of the word and the Holy Spirit. 1:5
 - c. They were related to Paul and the others as brethren by their family relationship in heaven.
 - d. The council and instructions was to the believer, for the unbeliever would not receive this truth.
 2. The ones they were concerned about were those who had fallen asleep.
 - a. The ones who had fallen asleep were those who had come to Christ and now died physically.
 - 1) They had become followers of the apostles of the Lord, having received the word in much

- affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit. 1:6
- 2) They had turned to God from their idols to serve the living and true God. 1:9
 - 3) They had been waiting for His Son from heaven but they had died. 1:10
- b.** The phrase fallen asleep “koimaomai”, means to lie down.
- 1) We get our English word cemetery, from it means a place of sleep, dormitories.
 - 2) The phrase is a common euphemism used in the Old and New Testament for the physical death of believers. (K.J.V. & some N.K.J.)
* Gen. 47:30, 1 Kings 2:10, Matt. 27:52, 2Pet. 3:4
 - 3) The phrase is obviously suggestive of the future awakening of the body, in the resurrection.
 - 4) It is used also by secular writers as a loving sentimental expression but only with a religious hope that is void of the hope guaranteed to the believer.
- d.** 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

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. When she found 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.
 - a. There will be new believers that will come with no concept of the Bible or formal religion and will take in everything like a new born baby, the unadulterated word and receive it for growth. 1Pet. 2:2
 - b. There will be new believers who will come with a baggage of religion and they will have to examine the Scriptures to distinguish Biblical truth from their religion, before Christ. Acts 17:11

- c. There will be those who come sincerely thinking that what they are doing is not wrong, and as they sit under the teaching of the word, they see their error, like living with one another, fornicating, getting drunk, 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 has a high level of willful ignorance about many things.
 - a. Not because the word is not being taught from the pulpit, though that came 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 idol saints as intercessors on their behalf.

* 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 till the resurrection.

- a. The usual scriptures that are used to back their belief are taken from the book of Job and Ecclesiastes.
- b. The problem with these scriptures is that they are not interpreted in their context as Solomon is in a backslidden condition, mixing truth with error and Job was speaking out of ignorance, at which God reproves Him. Job. 38:1-3
- c. Paul rejects soul sleep. 1Thess. 5:10

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

II. Paul did not want the Thessalonians to sorrow as others who have no hope. vs. 13d

* The teaching is a contrast between the believer and the non-believer, not a denial or prohibition of sorrow!

- A.** Their spiritual ignorance had resulted in sorrow as other.
- 1.** Though they had excepted Christ and were Christians they were going through the same grief as the non-believers.
 - a.** Their mental, emotional and physical anguish was heart renting.
 - b.** The soul of man involves the mind, emotions and the will.
 - 2.** The word sorrow “lupeo” means to distress, be sad, cause grief and be in heaviness with mental anguish.

* This was their ongoing condition!

 - a.** The word is used of Herod when the daughter of Herodius asked for John’s head on a platter. Matt 14:9
 - b.** The word is used of the rich young ruler who Jesus asked to give away his great possessions. Mk. 10:22
 - c.** 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 intellectually by assessing it, 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, until the intellectual and emotional can be balanced or accommodated, so that disequilibrium is not the condition.
 - c.** What the spirit knows about God, His promised and the power available to the believer is the solution to bringing things into balance and perspective.
- B.** The sorrow which is experienced by all others who are not Christian, is one which has no hope regarding their dead loved ones.
- 1.** The word hope “elpis” means to anticipate, have expectation or confidence, usually with pleasure and good.
 - a.** When the word is used in the positive, it communicates something certain of taking place.
 - b.** When the word is used in the negative as in our text, it communicates something negative, in this case that will not take place.
 - 2.** Paul is declaring this truth based on the Scriptures.
 - a.** Ephesians tells us that 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. So the sorrow of the non-believer which lacks an expectant hope to see their dead loved ones with certainty, is not based exclusively on their emotional and mental grief of despair but on the fact that they have no relationship to Christ, as the Scriptures teach.
- c. Also their ongoing and continuous grief demonstrates that what they profess is mere speculation and religion, having no available comfort by and through God, for they served idols, not the living and true God. 1:9b

- C. There is a sorrow which believers experience but it is accompanied with the certainty of hope, knowing we will see our loved ones again if they were in Christ.
- 1. The sorrow of the believer is experienced as the non-believer; mentally, emotionally and physically because he or she will miss their physical presence and company.
 - * There is nothing wrong with crying and grieving for loved ones and friends, for Christians are not stoics!

- 2. The sorrow of the believer is to be experienced for a legitimate time, not a continuous grieving through years and ones lifetime.
 - a. David fasted and prayed to God for his child of adultery with Bathsheba for seven days 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 a 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

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 and if you do not know what the Bible says about the available comfort there is for believers, then you will respond to the way you use to understand life culturally or religiously, rather than with the mind of the Scriptures. 2Tim. 3:16-17

- a. Resorting to wailing for the death in an uncontrollable and emotional manner, tearing at the coffin.
- b. Remaining 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. 1Pet. 3:15

- a. You will be broken inside by the loss of your love one or husband and wife,

cherishing their love and no longer able to enjoy their company but not because you do not know what has happened to them or where they are.

- b. You will be able to articulate the message of hope for others, the hope of eternal life in Christ.
3. You see, funerals are for the living not for the dead.
- a. When people die, they either enter eternity lost and are separated from God forever or they are united with Him. Lk. 16:19-31
 - b. The time to make your arrangements for eternity is before you die, it is too late after death.
 - c. Do you know that no Moslem can tell you with certainty they will be in heaven but a Christian can!

The Thessalonians were not to sorrow as others who have no hope!

III. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to know that Jesus will bring with Him those who have died in Jesus. vs. 14

A. The common denominator is belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus. vs. 14a

- 1. The faith is in a real person, Jesus

- a. The word if, does not imply doubt but certainly and would be better translated “since”.
- b. The word Believe “pisteuo” means to be persuaded and place confidence in, reliance and not mere credence by work.
 - * The word is used by Jesus when He asked the blind man, “Do you believe I am able to do this?” Matt 9:28
- c. Jesus is His human name which means Jehovah is salvation, it is the Greek translation from the Hebrew name Joshua.
- b. He was born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit. Jn 1:1, 14
 - 1) He grew in wisdom, stature and favor with God and man. Jn 2:52
 - 2) He hungered, thirsted, slept, grieved, cried, bled and died.
- 2. The faith that one is placing confidence in, is in His atoning work.
 - a. Jesus died and rose again from the dead for us.
 - * Notice Paul doesn’t use sleep for Jesus but “died” to emphasize His substitutionary death in our place. Rom. 3:21-26, 5:6, 2 Cor. 5:21, 1 Jn. 2:2, 1Cor. 15:3-4

- b. He is the mediating High Priest. Heb. 4:14-16
- c. He lives to ever make intercession for us, the believer. Heb. 7:25
- a. Faith in His death and resurrection will cause me to view death differently.
 - 1) Death is physical separation from the body and eternal separation from God, if you do not know Jesus.
 - 2) If Christ had not risen, our faith would be futile and we 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 & we would be most pitiable. 1 Cor. 15:17-19
 - 3) 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 His death and resurrection 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 confident hope is that as God raised Jesus from the dead so God will bring with Him those who have slept in Christ. vs. 14b
* Jn. 14:19, Rom. 8:11, 1 Cor. 6:14, 2 Cor. 4:14
- 1. God will bring with Him those who have died, before His return for His saints.
 - a. It implies they are alive not dead or in some sleep state like soul sleep, as taught by some. 5:10
 - b. It clearly teaches that those who have died are present with Him.
 - 1) When this tent is destroyed we put on our eternal abode in the heavens. 2Cor. 5:1-8
 - 2) To be absent is far better. Phil. 1:21-23
 - c. The word bring “ago” means to lead
 - 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. God will bring with Him those who sleep

through Jesus.

- a. It refer to those who died through Jesus, intervention, to remove them from this world, for we belong to Him.
 - 1) The word “sleep” is in the aorist tense, indicating a single past action.
 - 2) The word “in” is really the word “through” in the Greek, indicating that it is due to His dying for us that we are able to sleep through Jesus.
 - 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
- b. It certainly means those who have repented, lived as pilgrims and sojourners, and having died physically they are present with Him.
 - * For Christ is the first fruits of all who have fallen asleep. 1Cor. 15:20
 - * 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 trust!”

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. in order to 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.
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.

- 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

* Lev. 19:26, 31, 20:6,

3. Have you understood that the love ones and friends who have gone before us will miss out on nothing at the coming of Jesus for His church, but will in fact bring them back with Him?
 - a. Sorrow not as others, who know not Jesus as their Savior. 4:13d-e
 - b. comfort one another with these words. 4:18

The Thessalonians were to know that God will bring with Him those who have died in Jesus!

Conclusion

Paul’s proclamation of hope.

- I. The believer is not to be ignorant concerning the state of their departed loved ones!
- II. The believer is not to sorrow as others who have no hope!
- III. The believer is to know that God will bring with Him those who have died in Jesus!