



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond

V25 N15

April 9, 2023

NOT HOME YET

“Getting the Last Word”

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Eternity

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish his eternal kingdom.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

John 14:1-4



What happens to the dead *in Christ* when Jesus comes?

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul explains what will happen to those who have died before Jesus’ coming to rescue (1Th 1:10; cf. 5:10). Evidently, since leaving Thessalonica six months earlier, at least one person in the church died, leaving the community “uninformed” about their loved one’s participation in Jesus’ return. Scholars have proposed a variety of different explanations to account for their angst in this regard – none of which has earned a consensus. Still, one commentator writes: “The reconstruction of greatest merit argues that at the moment of confronting the reality of death, the Thessalonians did not allow their confession to inform their reaction to this human tragedy. Alternatively, they may simply have not understood fully the reality of the resurrection from the dead, especially in light of the general Gentile consensus that such things simply do not happen” (Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC, 215). In any case, to comfort them, Paul affirms the presence of those who have died at the Lord’s coming and their participation in the resurrection that takes place at that time. Those who “sleep in death” miss out on nothing that takes place when he returns.

Paul’s pastoral response to their concern includes the assurance that believers in Christ will be *together with the Lord forever* – in resurrection bodies like his resurrection body. It’s important to understand that resurrection pertains to the *material* part of a person and not the *immaterial* part. The *body* is resurrected, not the *soul*. This means that people are not resurrected *spiritually* when they believe in Jesus, nor are they resurrected *spiritually* when they go to be with him at death. Perhaps the following definition will clarify things: “The meaning of ‘resurrection’ as ‘life after “life after death”’ cannot be overemphasized, not least because much modern writing continues to use ‘resurrection’ as a virtual synonym for ‘life after death’ in the popular sense” (N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of*

the Son of God, 31). In general, first-century Greeks and Romans believed in *life after death*, that is, in a *disembodied* life of the soul after death, but not in *resurrection*, that is, in a new *embodied* life of the soul following a period of death. Regarding new life after a period of being dead, the same commentator writes: “Pagans denied this possibility; some Jews affirmed it as a long-term future hope; virtually all Christians claimed that it had happened to Jesus and would happen to them in the future” (Wright, 31).

When it comes to the subject of *resurrection*, the following three complementary passages must be read together: 1 Corinthians 15:35-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; and 2 Corinthians 5:1-10. At times in these passages, Paul speaks as if our mortal physical bodies will be *transformed* into immortal spiritual bodies (see 1Co 15:36-37, 51-54; cf. 2Co 5:2, 4) at times he speaks as if our mortal physical bodies will be *exchanged* for immortal spiritual bodies (1Co 15:44; 2Co 5:1, 8). Both notions, namely, *exchange* and *transformation*, are present in 2 Corinthians 5. One writer explains: “In verses 1 and 8 Paul refers to a destruction (*katalusis*) and a departure (*ekdēmia*). He alludes to the replacement of the earthy house by the God-given dwelling (v. 1) and of one place of residence or sphere of [bodily] existence by another (v. 8) . . . But balanced against this ‘exchange’ principle is the motif of change evident in the dual concept of super investiture (*ependusis*, vv. 2, 4) and ingestion (*kataposis*, v. 4). Paul longed to put on his heavenly habitation over his earthly tent-dwelling (vv. 2, 4) so that his mortal body might be swallowed up by life (v. 4)” (Murray J. Harris, *Raised Immortal*, 128-29). While the process entailed by the resurrection of our mortal bodies is difficult to comprehend, the result of the process is easy to identify. As a result of this complex process, believers end up with immortal resurrection bodies like Jesus’ resurrection body – the bodies in which they will live with him throughout eternity.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

13 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 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. 17 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. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Read in another translation

13 Now we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also we believe that God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep as Christians. 15 For we tell you this by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will surely not go ahead of those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be suddenly caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words. (ESV)

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Circle "uninformed" in v. 13.
- Bracket "sleep in death" in v. 13.
- Box "so that" indicating *result* in v. 13.
- Box "like" indicating *comparison* in v. 13.
- Circle "in him" in v. 14.
- Bracket "According to the Lord's word" in v. 15.
- Circle "precede" in v. 15.
- Circle "himself" in v. 16.
- Underline "loud command," "voice," and "trumpet call" in v. 16.
- Highlight "dead in Christ" in v. 16.
- Circle "will rise" in v. 16.
- Circle "caught up" in v. 17.
- Box "Therefore" indicating *result* in v. 18.

What one word would you use to describe the **TONE** of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the **THEME** of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Express “we do *not* want you to be *uninformed*” — a figure of speech called *litotes* — positively.
 2. What were Thessalonian believers “uninformed” about?
 3. Paul’s concern for them is *pastoral*. How so?
 4. Paul writes, “Jesus died and *rose* again” (v. 14). Was the body that *came out* of the tomb on Sunday morning the same body that *went in* the tomb on Friday afternoon? Explain.
 5. Identify the *logical* implication of the fact that Jesus “rose again” for those “who have fallen asleep in him.”
 6. What does Paul mean by “we who are still alive . . . will not *precede* those who have fallen asleep.”
 7. Identify *who* will “come down,” *who* will “rise first,” and *who* will be “caught up.”
 8. What is Jesus’ *coming to rescue* commonly called? It’s derived from the Latin term for “caught up.”
 9. Identify the *change* on those “who have fallen asleep” and on those “who are still alive” as a *result* of the coming of the Lord.
 10. **Discussion:** Talk about the practical application of Paul’s teaching regarding future events.
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Commentary On The Text

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul addresses another concern of the church either reported to him by Timothy or contained in a letter to him brought from Thessalonica by Timothy. This concern pertains to “those who sleep in death” (v. 13). Evidently, one or more people in the church died in the months that passed since Paul, Silas, and Timothy left the city. Thinking, perhaps, that all would live to see the Lord’s coming to rescue, the death of any members of the community would naturally give rise to questions and concerns. One commentator writes: “The concern is not for people in general who have died, but only for those who were a part of the believing community in Thessalonica and who have (apparently unexpectedly) died before the Coming. And even though Paul in the explanatory clause in verses 16-17b elaborates somewhat on the nature of the Coming, his interest throughout is on this singular issue . . . Thus Paul’s ultimate concern is twofold, the expression of which serves to enclose the entire passage: that the believers in Thessalonica ‘do not sorrow as the rest of humankind who do not have this hope’ (v. 13), and that they therefore ‘encourage on another with these words’ of Christian hope (v. 18)” (Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT, 166). Paul’s concern is clearly *pastoral*.

In verse 14, Paul assures his readers that Christians who die before the Lord’s coming to rescue will be resurrected because “Jesus died and rose again.” (Remember that resurrection pertains to the body; dead bodies are resurrected. People are not resurrected *spiritually* when they believe in Jesus, nor are they resurrected *spiritually* when they go to be with him at death.) They will see their loved ones again because when he comes, “God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.” “Knowing the bright future of believers who have died gives hope in the midst of grief. Paul did not deny that the death of a believer brings grief to his or her loved ones (cf. John 11:35). Nevertheless he insisted that Christians need not grieve like those who have no hope grieve” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on 1 Thessalonians,” 2023 ed., 49, planobiblechap-el.org/tcon/notes/pdf/1thessalonians.pdf).

In verses 15-17, Paul first tells what *will not* happen before he then tells what *will* happen. In verse 15a, Paul appeals to the words of Jesus to describe what will transpire at his coming. Then in 15b-17, he outlines the sequence of events connected to Christ’s

return, making it clear at the outset that those who have died will not go last in that sequence, but in fact, will go first. The events unfold as follows: 1) “the Lord himself will come down from heaven” announced by a “loud command” — issued perhaps by the archangel — and a “trumpet call;” 2) “the dead in Christ will rise first,” meaning the resurrection of the dead in Christ will happen first; and then 3) “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.” Briefly stated, “we will all be changed” (1Co 15:51). The dead in Christ will be resurrected and the living in Christ will be transformed. Both will receive immortal bodies like Jesus’ resurrection body at that time. The commentator above summarizes: “Living saints will experience translation (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35-53; 2 Cor. 5:1-4; Phil. 3:20-21) — their bodies will become immortal — and saints who have died will experience resurrection with immortal bodies. Both kinds of Christians will meet (Gr. *apantesis*, cf. Matt. 25:6; Acts 28:15) in the air with Christ with whom they will remain never to experience separation from Him” (Constable, 56).

It’s worth reiterating that Paul isn’t speaking in this passage as an academic with a view to teaching eschatology as a subject. While he does present events related to the coming of Jesus to rescue *sequentially*, he doesn’t do so *chronologically*. In other words, he doesn’t address the specific time of the rapture relative to other end time events, although some conclusions may be inferred from the broader context of the whole book — e.g., the rapture occurs prior to “the coming wrath” (1:10) and prior to “the day of the Lord” (5:1-11). He is speaking as a pastor with a view to addressing the angst of those who have lost loved ones. To those who wonder whether they will ever see their departed Christian friends and loved ones again. To them, Paul writes: “And so *we* will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words” (v. 17b-18).

One final note, it appears that the relationship of Jesus’ resurrection body to his mortal body provides the paradigm for understanding the relationship of the new earth to the earth as we know it. Put differently, the redemption of the body provides the paradigm for understanding the redemption of creation.

Word Studies/Notes

v. 13 **uninformed** “The infinitive ‘to be uninformed’ (*agnoeiv*) might be rendered ‘to be or stay ignorant,’ but as this has an insulting tone in English, we render it in a way that does not imply criticism. The clause is a typical formula for disclosing new information (see 1 Cor 10:1; 12:1; 2 Cor 1:8)” (Gary S. Shogren, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 13, ZECNT, 180). “The formula probably did not introduce totally new material but explained or elaborated on teaching previous shared with the church (cf. 5:2)” (D. Michael Martin, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, NAC, 143).

v. 13 **sleep in death** Cf. “the dead” (v. 16). “*Koimaō*, a common word for ‘sleep,’ was often used as a euphemism for death in Greek, Jewish, and Christian writings as well as in Paul’s epistles” (Martin, 143). “Some have erroneously concluded that this epithet for the dead implies that the soul sleeps after death, but the NT teaching clearly points to a conscious existence during the intermediate state (Luke 16:19-31; 23:39-43; Acts 7:55-60; 2 Cor. 5:6-10; Phil. 1:20-24; Rev. 6:9-11)” (Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC, 217). “This figure is particularly appropriate in view of the fact that God will resurrect everyone at some time in the future” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on 1 Thessalonians,” 2023 ed., 49, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/1thessalonians.pdf).

v. 13 **like the rest** “His concern is not that they should not sorrow at all, as has sometimes been suggested, as though Christian hope has eliminated all expressions of sorrow as such. Rather, his point is that believers who have hope in the resurrection do not sorrow *in the same way* as others, people who lack that hope” (Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT, 168-69).

v. 14 **in him** Cf. “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, *through* Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep” (ESV). “The Greek preposition *dia* before ‘Jesus’ really means through. Paul may have meant that when a Christian dies, his hope of being in God’s presence is made possible because of the person and work of Jesus. Or he could have meant that those whom God will bring with Jesus will return because of the person and work of Jesus. Both are true” (Constable, 51).

v. 15 **according to . . .** “This information could have been an otherwise unrecorded saying of Christ (cf. Acts 20:35). Or it could have come to Paul by direct revelation (cf. Acts 16:6; 18:9; 1 Cor. 2:10; 2 Cor. 12:1-4; Gal. 1:12, 16; Eph. 3:3)” (Constable, 51; see also Robert L. Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 11, 276-77).

v. 15 **precede** “Believers ‘who are still alive, who are left to the coming of the Lord,’ will not go to meet him before the dead in Christ do so (v. 15)” (Thomas, 277). “Believers who manage to survive until the Parousia will certainly not be the first to be summoned to go out and meet Christ . . . The parousia is not just the coming of Christ from heaven. There is also movement on the part of Christians, the dead first and then the living” (Shogren, 185).

v. 16 **himself** Cf. Ac 1:11.

v. 16 **loud command, voice, trumpet call** Cf. Jn 11:43; 1Co 15:52. According to one version, “at the signal given by the voice of the Archangel” (NJB). “The sounds mentioned in this verse — **a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God** — are difficult to interpret. Will it be Jesus Himself (cf. John 11:43), or the archangel Michael (Dan. 10:13; Jude 9), or another angel? Is this a literal trumpet call, or was Paul speaking figuratively in describing the call of God by which He will announce the Advent of His Son? (cf. 1 Cor. 15:52) These three phenomena may all refer to the same things, but probably they are three separate almost simultaneous announcements heralding Christ’s return” (Thomas L. Constable, “1 Thessalonians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 704).

v. 16 **dead in Christ** I.e., those who “believe that Jesus died and rose again” (v. 14). “Note that only the dead ‘in Christ’ will experience resurrection, not Old Testament saints, as some believe. As Paul used the phrase ‘in Christ’ it means Christians, members of the body of Christ, the church. God will reunite their resurrected glorified bodies with their spirits (1 Cor. 15:35-58)” (Constable, 54). Old Testament saints are likely resurrected along with tribulation saints at Jesus’ coming to reign (Rev 20:4).

v. 16 **will rise** “We render the verb ‘will be resurrected’ (the future passive, *anastēsontai*) rather than the traditional ‘will rise,’ which might be confused with the rising ‘in the air’ (4:17)” (Shogren, 187).

v. 17 **caught up** “The living among whom Paul still hoped to be (cf. ‘we’) will be suddenly snatched away (*harpagēsometha*, ‘caught up’; cf. Acts 8:29; 2 Cor 12:2, 4; Rev 12:5). This term in Latin, *raptus*, is the source of the popular designation of this event as the ‘rapture.’ So sudden will it be that Paul likens it to a blinking of the eye (1 Cor 15:52)” (Thomas, 279).



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Encourage one another knowing that the dead in Christ will be resurrected, those who are alive will be changed, and together they will be caught up to be with the Lord forever when he comes.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

There's a lot of stuff I don't know. I don't know how to dance (really, it's terribly embarrassing). I'm pretty sure I couldn't solve a chemistry equation if my life depended on it. My mouth takes on a hillbilly life of its own, ensuring I can't speak other languages besides English. The other day I needed help making a discipline decision and had no clue what to do, so I called my 21-year-old and asked for advice. I've got "knowledge gaps" and I'm not afraid to admit it. One thing I do know with absolute certainty is Jesus is returning. I am 100% confident in this truth and it gives me overwhelming peace and hope. Jesus has gone to prepare a place for His followers. Think about how you painstakingly prepared a nursery to bring home your little one. Consider the care and concern to make it a special and unique space with everything your newborn might even think about needing. You carefully chose the perfect paint color and a theme specific for your child that included a quilt, chair, crib, books, carpet, toys. Every part of this room was specially prepared with your child in mind. How humbling to know Jesus Christ is doing this for you right now. The King of the Universe is preparing a room with your name on it. He's promised to return and gather you to be with Him and He is faithful to fulfill His promises. Don't miss an opportunity to talk with your kids about this certainty this Easter season. There will always be moments of unknown and uncertainty, but in Jesus' return, we can be sure. Happy Easter!

What Does The Bible Say?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

1. What two things does Paul say we believe?
2. How is Jesus' return described in verses 16-17?
3. Knowing Jesus will return, what should we do?

What Do You Think?

Why is the rest of mankind hopeless? What gives believers in Christ hope?

What Do You Do?

Divide the memory verse into 15 parts. Write the different parts on paper and put them in an Easter egg. Hide the eggs and go on a family hunt. Put the memory verse together after you find all the eggs. Talk about why you can have hope this Easter.

CORE COMPETENCY: Eternity

I believe in heaven and hell and that one day Jesus will come again.

MEMORY VERSE: Romans 15:13

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- ☐ I completed my Bible Study
- ☐ I memorized this week's verse
- ☐ I brought my Bible to church
- ☐ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)

I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)

I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)

I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)

I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)

I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)

I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)

I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)

I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)

I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

The Scrolls Bible Study is a spiritual growth resource of Central Bible Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

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