

First Thessalonians 4:13-18 – The Future for the Dead in Christ

(Read Gordon Fee's Commentary on First and Second Thessalonians online here →

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/165409434/Fee-G-D-The-First-and-Second-Epistles-to-the-Thessalonians-The-New-International-Commentary-on-the-New-Testament>

This is new instruction for the Thessalonians concerning those who have died.

- Paul doesn't want them uninformed (4:13), meaning they have not yet been informed.
- Paul does not say anywhere that he is reminding them of this information
- Paul will "remind" them of things he taught beginning in 5:1

This teaching comes from Paul's response to the Thessalonian's question through Timothy.

We do not know who has died: One or many? We do not know why they died: Natural or Persecution?

We know Paul's answer: Dead believers will be resurrected to join the living believers to meet the Lord at his Coming.

It does seem the Thessalonians were concerned about an immediate return or the nearness of the Lord's Coming.

Paul's main concern is to give the Thessalonians HOPE in regard to those who had died.

Theologically Paul establishes: 1) a physical resurrection; 2) re-gathering of all believers with the Lord

4:13 –

For the 9th time Paul begins with "brothers and sisters"

The Thessalonians had already received information concerning the Lord's Coming (5:1-6), but not concerning those who had died before the Lord's Coming.

They had understood the Day of the Lord coming suddenly, unexpectedly to mean soon, even before they died. (5:2-3)

Paul needed to instruct them about those who were "sleeping" which is a euphemism referring to those who had died.

"Sleeping" captures the concept of the temporary state of death. Death is not final. We will be raised from sleep of

resurrected. This is language is used in the Old Testament: 2 Sam. 7:12; 1 Kings 2:10; 11:43; 22:50; Job 14:12;

Ps. 13:3; Matt. 9:24; Acts 7:60; 1 Cor. 15:51

Paul uses "fallen asleep" reference 3x

Paul begins by saying "we do not want you without knowledge" and so he begins the instruction.

6x in his writings Paul says "we do not want you to be ignorant" (or, "without knowledge" or "uninformed"):

- 1 Thes 4:13 – dead in Christ
- 1 Cor. 10:1 - correction
- 1 Cor. 12:1 – spiritual gifts
- 2 Cor. 1:8 – uninformed concerning Paul's hardships
- Rom. 1:3 – misunderstanding concerning Paul's intentions
- Rom. 11:25 - Israel

Grieve like the rest of men, does not mean we do not grieve at all.

Even Paul faced grieving if Epaphroditus had died in Philippians 2:27 and even means "sorrow piled upon sorrow"

4:14 –

Greek begins with "ei" which is untranslated "since it is true" or "since we believe that Jesus died and rose again..."

Based on historical events and theological understanding we make these true assumptions.

God the Father is mentioned once, but is the origin of the resurrection

Jesus is mentioned twice doing two things: 1) causes the resurrection; 2) accompanies the believers

The dead are already present with the Lord in this verse and are returning with him. (Absent from the body means to be present with the Lord as in 2 Cor. 5:6-8)

Word for Word literal rendering of the Greek would be:

"so also God the sleeping through Jesus will bring with him."

Note:

- Paul is stating the fact of the resurrection, but not the how.
- "through Jesus" is translated "in Jesus"
- Jesus is referred to twice: "through Jesus" and "in him"
- God "will bring"
- Our English word order is: "God will bring those who are sleeping"
- God is the prime cause, and Jesus is the agent of the action

It is worth noting that Paul does not say "Christ" nor does he say "Lord Jesus", but in a rare case merely uses "Jesus".

This occurs only 18x in his writings (3 in 1 Thess. And 7 in 2 Cor. 4:5-14). This is because the emphasis is not on the death of the Christ on the cross or the ruling of the Lord in heaven but on the resurrected man returning with/for the rest of the men.

4:15 –

"The Lord" is always used to refer to Jesus, the Son.

"God" is always used to refer to the Father.

"The Lords' own word" would refer to:

- Something Jesus had taught that Paul received by tradition from the apostles
- Something Jesus gave to Paul by revelation

Paul does not plan to live until the coming of the Lord, but he might? It is unknown.

1 Thes. 5:10 2 Cor. 5:6-9

The Thessalonians are not consumed with eschatology, but instead are concerned with those who have died.
Paul is reassuring them

4:16 –

The Parousia is viewed two ways:

- a) Jewish Scripture and Apocalyptic writing. Namely
 - a. Exodus 19:16 with the coming of the theophany and the trumpet blast
 - b. Psalm 47:5, the psalm of Ascent that came with shouts
- b) Greek/Roman emperors coming to a city

In English we can have “command, voice and trumpet”, but in the Greek it is “Command: Voice and Trumpet.”
Archangel Michael is not OT, but developed Jude 9 and Rev. 12: 7 from Enoch 20:5 from Daniel 12:1

Trumpet:

Ex 19:16

Isaiah 2:13

Zec. 9:14-16

Mat. 24:30-31

4:17 –

“caught up” is 2 Cor. 12:2, 4

It does not indicate “secret” and it does not indicate “violent”

Clouds

Daniel 7:13

Mark 13:26

Acts 1:9

Point: we will be with the Lord forever

Does not focus on timing or geography (heaven or earth)

4:18 –