

“We Would Not Have You To Be Ignorant ...”

“... brethren, concerning them that fall asleep; that ye sorrow not, even the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of an archangel and with the trump of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

Since 1 Thessalonians is Paul's first extant epistle, the expression “we would not have you to be ignorant” appears its first time in 1 Thessalonians 4; the first of many times the expression will be found. The subject Paul wishes his brethren to be informed about was that should Christ wait 10,000 years before He returns, every saint who has died will be resurrected to share the joy and glory of the home He has gone to prepare for them (Jn. 14:6). Apparently in Timothy's report to Paul of the condition of the Thessalonian church, he revealed there was some misunderstanding among them about sharing in the blessings of the return of Christ for His own. Apparently some brethren believed that should one die before the Lord's return, he would have lost his sharing in the blessing which Christ had promised to give His disciples when he returned. It was this misunderstanding Paul sought to correct for them.

Be apprised of the truth that this section deals exclusively with dead saints and surviving ones. The status of those not in Christ is not dealt with. This is important to understand, for many in our religious world see the passage as dealing with the doctrine that there will be two resurrections: the first of the righteous who are raptured (caught up) to be with Christ, then after the “tribulation,” return to earth for an earthly reign of Christ for 1,000 years. When that is ended (so the doctrine teaches), there will be a second resurrection of the wicked. That doctrine is not found in this (or any other) text in the scriptures. The wicked are not in the context: the text contrasts living saints and dead saints at the coming of Christ.

Paul assures these brethren that if they believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus, then they must believe in the resurrection of those who have fallen asleep (in Jesus) before He returns as He promised He would (Jn. 14:3). The living saints will have no advantage over those who have died: the resurrection of the dead Christian would take place before God's living children are caught up to be with Him in the air. Only after the dead saints have been raised, will the living be changed into a glorified body and together with the resurrected saints will meet the Lord in the air where they will ever be with the Lord.

The resurrection of the dead was and is a cardinal part of the Christian's faith. Jesus, on numerous occasions, promised a future resurrection for all. Consider that in John 5:28-29 He said, “Marvel not at this for the hour cometh when all that are in the tombs

shall hear his voice and come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that had done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment.” Repeatedly in John 6 the resurrection of the righteous is promised. Verses 39, 40, 48 all promise Christ will His own and significantly notice that that resurrection will take place on the “last day.” This promise is a “death blow” to the theory that there will be “two bodily resurrections, separated by 1,000 years” for both righteous and wicked will be raised on the “last day.”

As Jesus promised a future resurrection for all who fall asleep in Him before He comes, Paul repeated His promise, adding, “Wherefore comfort one with these words” and so they have! Untold millions of surviving family members and friends of deceased Christians have been comforted in memorial services by the reading once more of this promise of the Savior. And added to that comfort is the assurance that God cannot lie and that He always keeps His word!

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