

Studies in the Book of 1 Thessalonians
Lesson 6 - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Hope for a Hopeless World
The Comfort of His Coming

This is the classic passage on the rapture of the church. Sorrow had come to the lives of these saints, and they were wondering whether their dead fellow Christians would be left behind at the return of Christ. Paul assures them that their dead will be raised first, and that all the saints will be gathered together to meet Christ in the air.

Christians are expected to mourn when loved ones die, but they are not to grieve as do the people of the world who have no hope. Christ expects us to shed tears and feel loneliness as we go through the valley; but in the midst of our sorrow, there must be the testimony of the living hope we have in Christ.

The hardest thing about death is separation from our loved ones; but when Christ comes, we will be together with the Lord forever. The living saints will not precede those who have died; all will be caught up together to meet Christ.

We shall “*always be with the Lord.*” We shall obtain new bodies. Paul says that the body we place in the cemetery is like a seed awaiting the harvest. Of course, the body turns to dust, and that dust becomes a part of the earth. The Bible nowhere teaches that God raises and unites every particle of the believer’s body. What it does teach is that the resurrection body has identity with the body that was buried. Just as the seed that is planted in the ground has identity and continuity with the seed it produces, so the resurrection body will have identity and continuity with the body that was buried. Resurrection is not reconstruction.

The words “*caught up*” are full of meaning. They mean: 1. To catch away speedily, for there will be no warning. 2. To seize by force, for Satan will seek to hinder our rapture to heaven. 3. To claim for one’s self, just as the Bridegroom claims the bride. 4. To move to a new place. 5. To rescue from danger, for the church will not go through the Tribulation. “***Therefore comfort one another with these words.***”

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and answer the following questions

1. What is the subject discussed beginning in 4:13? What is meant by those who are asleep? (See Matt. 9:24, John 11:11, 2 Peter 3:4)

2. Paul indicates that when a Christian dies, his body sleeps until Christ returns to earth. Where does the Christian's spirit go when this happens? (See 2 Cor. 5:8, Phil. 1:23-24)

3. What assurance does Paul give to those who sleep in Jesus? By what authority does he speak?

4. Why does this hope change how we think about death and how we think about the present as well?

5. What do you learn about the nature of a resurrected body from 1 Corinthians 15:35-55?

6. How is the coming of the Lord described in 4:16? Look up the following Scriptures on the Lord's second coming: Matt. 24:30, 1 Cor. 15:51-52.

7. What three events will initiate the Rapture, and what do you think is the importance of each? (See 4:16)
8. Paul didn't write about the Rapture in order to give a prophetic time line. What was his purpose according to 1 Thessalonians 4:18?
9. How does it make you feel that as a believer one day you will live in this amazing place called Heaven in the presence of God? How has knowing this helped you cope in a time of need or tragedy?
10. What difference does the guarantee of the Lord's return for His people, living or dead, make to you in your day to day life?

What Does 1 Thessalonians 4:18 Mean?

In this verse Paul appeals to his readers to encourage one another with the truths of the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). The fact that departed and living Christians will be caught up to be with Jesus forever is a solid reason not to grieve hopelessly, but to anticipate a great reunion with fellow Christians in the presence of Jesus.

When we are united with Christ, pain and suffering will be over (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). Our bodies, which now age and deteriorate, will become imperishable (I Corinthians 15:54). Death will have lost its sting (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). Our bodies will be glorified, just as Jesus' body is a glorified body (Philippians 3:20-21). Joy will last eternally (Psalm 16:11). We will live in a place that Jesus promised to prepare for us (John 14:1-3). All the stresses and strains of earthly life will be gone. We will never again be victims of crime or fraud. Eternal joy and pleasure will delight our hearts in the presence of God (Psalm 16:11). What an encouraging promise that is.....