



1 Thessalonians

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For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 4:14

The words "For if" are stressed in the Greek, "If indeed..." In other words, this is not a question which asks, "If we can just believe." Rather it is an emphatic statement containing no doubt as in, "For we certainly believe." This is what the gospel hinges on. Nobody that Paul is writing to as one of the brethren (noted in the previous verse) would be considered as such unless he believed this particular precept which he now states – "that Jesus died and rose again." As he says in Romans 10 –

"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith which we preach): ⁹ that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

-Romans 10:8, 9

To not believe in the death and resurrection of Christ, is to not be a Christian. Either one believes this and is saved, or he does not believe it, and is not saved. Paul takes the two verbs, died and rose again, and places them side by side as a single action. He did this also in Romans, speaking of the two things as one unified whole –

"It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification." Romans 4:24, 25

The focus here then is on the humanity of Jesus. Though fully God, His humanity died, and it was up to God to raise Him, having been satisfied with His work. In the gospel of John, Jesus stated that He would lay down His own life and take it up again, but it is His divine nature which accomplished this. This is shown true because in Romans 10:9, it says God has raised

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Him. In His humanity, He literally died, and He literally rose again from the grave. As this is so, and as we are in Christ because of belief in what He has done for us, then Paul next says, "...even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus."

In this there is surety. There is no, "We hope this will happen." Paul states it as a matter of fact. As Christ arose, so will those who sleep in Him. There is literally nothing to question because it is impossible for it to not occur. In the words of Paul though, he doesn't actually say, "in Jesus," but rather *dia*, or "through Jesus."

The symbolism of what Paul is saying is missed by translating this word as "in." Jesus is the way. He is the door. He is the One who welcomes us through Himself. When our physical bodies die, we pass through Christ Jesus into a state of rest. As believers, we are in Jesus, and so the actions which occur in this manner are through Him. It is one of the infinite blessings we possess because of simple faith in what He has done for us.

Further, the verb for sleep in this verse is passive. Therefore, instead of "who sleep," it should read, "who have fallen asleep," or "who have been laid asleep." God has directed the moments of their lives, and at some point their lives ended, symbolized by the word "sleep." Likewise, at some point, God will again direct the movement of what occurs for them, bringing them to a new state. We are participants in what occurs, not the initiators of it.

As an exciting second possibility, Vincent's Word Studies renders this verse as, "...them also that are fallen asleep will God through Jesus bring with him." In this, Jesus is "represented as the agent of the resurrection." In either translation, we are the participants, and God is the One to do the work. We sleep; God raises. Depending on how Paul's words are formed, they tell us that the sleep is either through Christ, or the resurrection is through Christ. In the end, it is all about what Jesus has done for us, and what God will do through Jesus for us. We have a surety that those who have died before us are safe and secure in the hands of our most capable God.

Life application: If you have believed in the work of Jesus Christ, you are saved. Nothing is going to change that. Someday, unless the Lord comes first, your earthly life will end, just as it has happened to the countless believers in Christ thus far. But that is not the end of the story. It is simply the closing of one act. God has set the plan, and it will not be thwarted. We shall be raised to eternal life because of the work of Christ Jesus.

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 1 Thessalonians 4:15

“For this we say to you” is given to build upon the words of verses 13 and 14. Paul has made statements which pertain to those who have died, and to the future concerning them as well. Those in Thessalonica could say, “What is he talking about? How could he know these things? He is just saying this to give us comfort in our sorrow, but it cannot be true.” This is certainly a possibility, and so the words “For this we say to you” will then be built upon with, “by the word of the Lord.”

Paul claims direct inspiration from the Lord in this. There is nothing else in Scripture which matches what he says here. In other words, it cannot be said that he is simply repeating a previous thing found elsewhere in Scripture. Nor is this something that was passed on to him through a third party. Instead, he is explicitly stating that he was instructed by the Lord. It is the word of the Lord bearing the full authority of the Lord, and it is now being transmitted to the believers at Thessalonica (and thus to us!).

Understanding this, he continues with this “word of the Lord” by saying, “that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord.” There is a time when the Lord will return. That is as sure as anything to be found in Scripture. The exact time is left unstated, and the way which He will return has to be fleshed out of several passages in Scripture, including Paul’s words here. He is certainly returning again. But He isn’t just coming back to an empty world, or a world devoid of believers. Rather, there will be believers on earth waiting for Him. This is what it means when He says “that we who are alive *and* remain.”

Understanding this, Paul’s words which include the word “we” in no way implies that Paul expected this to occur in his own life. It was probably a hope of his, but the words must be taken generally. For all he knew, he could die that day. The timing of one’s life is up to the Lord. And so Paul is speaking as a broad picture of the coming of the Lord for whatever Christians were alive at that time, not specifically for a time he himself would participate in. Further, the words “who are alive and remain,” indicates that the timing is an unknown thing. It was unknown to Paul; it remains unknown to all to this day.

From there, he then goes on to explain, that those who are alive when He comes, “will by no means precede those who are asleep.” The words here have a strong emphasis on the negative. The Greek reads, “remaining unto the coming of the Lord no not shall precede those who have fallen asleep.”

This emphasis shows two things to the anxious Thessalonians. First, those who have died will be quickened first. There is no reason for the confusion someone introduced into their minds that they would not participate in this first resurrection. Secondly, there was to be no fear for those who were facing death that they would be included in the first category and somehow

miss the blessed return of Jesus. In fact, just the opposite is true. Those who have died in Christ would receive the honor of being quickened first!

Life application: We may mourn over the loss of a loved one who is in Christ, but we can also rejoice that they will have the honor of being raised to new life before we who are left alive at His coming. Isn't an extra moment of seeing the Lord's face worth more than all the riches we possess? Certainly it is so. We should rejoice for their gain, even in our loss.