

INTRODUCTION

- One of the greatest struggles for God's people through all ages, from the OC to our day, is to embrace the truth and resist the false perspectives of the surrounding culture
- The great difficulty with this is that we often can't see and don't understand how deeply we are effected with those false ideas
- We strive and sometimes think we are thoroughly biblical, and we come to recognize that we are not as thoroughly biblical as we thought
- This was also true of the Thessalonians, and this passage relates to us how the truths of Christianity had not yet so deeply sunk in that they had overcome the influence of non-Christian thinking

EXPOSITION

I. THE GREAT CONCERN FOR THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP – v.13

- ***But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep*** - there were apparently some false or misguided beliefs that Paul became aware of that were causing problems or despair in the church regarding those who had died
- It seems that the church had recently lost some beloved members, and there was confusion about their condition
- ***Those who have fallen asleep*** – a common description in both OT (Dan12:2) and NT of those who have died
- The Greeks used this terminology, but used it to describe an eternal sleep - even those who believed in the immortality of the soul did not believe in a bodily resurrection, but the existence of the soul in the netherworld
- **So what does this mean "to sleep"?** - one major view is that the body dies, and the soul or spirit goes into a state of unconsciousness
- This is particularly true when the connection between the mind and the brain (in its physical nature) is emphasized; however, we know that conscious spirit does exist apart from physicality (in angels/demons and God)
- With the unfolding of the NT it is clearer that there is conscious existence 5:10 2Cor5:6-8; Phil1:23
- **If this is so (consciousness), how do we respond to texts that apparently say that the dead do not do these things?** - Ps115:17 is used to speak of the silence of the grave; but Psalm 88:10 reminds us of the yet unrevealed perspective
- We should adopt this language of falling asleep; there is a sense in which we do die
- ***Lest you sorrow as others who have no hope*** - ignorance of basic Christian teaching can lead to hopelessness; this doesn't mean a denial of our humanity; we don't adopt a kind of "Christian Stoicism"
- Examples of mourning as legitimate – Jesus (Jn11:33), devout men over Stephen (Act8:2), and Paul (Phil2:27)
It is one thing to bridle our grief, that it may be made subject to God, and quite another thing to harden one's self so as to be like stones, by casting away human feelings. - Calvin
- But Christians sorrow with hope; our sorrow is not so much for the one who has fallen asleep, as they have no sorrow
- We sorrow because we miss them and they are taken from us; but we do so in a tempered way
- While it is legitimate to grieve, we should not grieve as those who have no hope; we will all come to a point of testing
- We will all lose parents, children, spouse, friend
It is only this hope that can sooth the pains of grief at parting; only when we can look forward to a better world and feel that we shall see them again-love them again-love them forever-that our tears are made dry. – Barnes
- We should so live, have such a testimony, that others would not have to be confused, or worse grieve, over us without hope

I would have their sorrow for my departure alleviated by the belief that my soul is happy with my God, even when they commit my cold clay to the dust. - Barnes

II. THE FUNDAMENTAL TEACHING OF THE RETURN OF CHRIST – v.14-17

- ***For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again*** - no more fundamental belief in the Christian church than this; a literal death and resurrection; this is the Gospel, the foundation of the entire hope of salvation
- Both of these verbs are active; not that he was killed and raised, but that he died and rose
It was he who stepped into death and then stepped out of it again; he had the power to lay down his life and to take it up again (John 10:17). – Lenski
- ***even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus*** - equally as fundamental to what we believe about Jesus' death and resurrection is the surety of those who are now sleeping in Jesus will return together with Him
- At this point, Paul will expand and give description in more detail

- **For this we say to you by the word of the Lord** – Paul ensures that the Thessalonians understand that what is being said is not his own opinion or teaching of human wisdom, but rather that which is direct revelation from the Lord, or a summary of the teaching from the Gospels
- **that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep** - Paul is particularly dealing with the order in which people, both living and dead (or asleep) will be gathered together with the Lord at His return to enter into a state of the new heavens and the new earth
- At the coming of the Lord, there will be those who are alive; there will be those remaining on the earth at His coming
- Those who remain will not enter the Kingdom in its fullness, the new heavens and the new earth before those who have already fallen asleep
- **For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven** - Jesus Christ, now in the presence of God, at the right hand of the Father, will break into human space/time history and a certain year, month, day, hour, second; He will descend from heaven in the same resurrected form in which He left the earth (Acts 1:11)
- 1Thes1:10 waiting for His Son from heaven, to deliver from the wrath to come (Rev1:7)
- **with a shout** - shout of command [with authority], signal call, summons
- **with the voice of an archangel** - with the command of one who is King of angels, returning with also the angels (2Thes 1:7 Mt25:31)
- **and with the trumpet of God** - the trumpet was used to call an assembly of people, particularly of Israel in the OC; this is called the last trumpet (1Cor15:52)
- **And the dead in Christ will rise first - How will they rise?** Rom8:11 Phil3:21; not a totally different body, but the glorification of our mortal body; not only those asleep in Christ, but also all who are in the grave (Jn5:28-29)
- **Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them**
- There is the problem, however, that unglorified people would not be able to bear such glory - 1Cor15:52
- **In the clouds to meet the Lord in the air** - this term was used to describe the welcoming of a newly arrived magistrate by the leading citizens of the city who went out to meet him, then escort him back into the city
- This is the great meeting, the great gathering of all the church, the ecclesia – then we will look around and see one another, see saints of old, but supremely see the Lord Jesus face to face; for how long?
- **USE YOUR IMAGINATION!!!** – What will this be like? Christianity doesn't shut the door on our imagination; this isn't something we have ever experienced; it doesn't just open the door, but kicks it off the hinges and takes some of the door jam with it!
- **And thus we shall always be with the Lord** - Always...with the Lord; never again separation, never again distance, never again faith or hope...only unending love
- There are teachings that arose in the late 1800's that developed an elaborate scheme of other comings after this secret (silent) rapture, multiple resurrections, and one final climactic event a thousand years later than what Paul describes here
- Without digging into the controversy, I will only say that at this point Paul's description breaks off...he felt it was enough to accomplish what he wanted to do
- In Rom8:21, 23 we can conclude that with the reception of the glorified body is also the redemption of the creation, and thus the bringing in of the new heavens and earth

III. THE PRACTICAL USE OF ESCHATOLOGY – v.18

- **Therefore comfort one another with these words** - We miss the purpose of eschatology (last things) if we are content with the abstract, the fantastical, and spectacular
- In the Scriptures eschatology is for the purpose of building hope, anticipation, and expectation of joy in God's people
- If you read through the book of Revelation and are terrified, you have missed the whole point of the book
- John's intention there is to display the glory of God and of the Lamb as what is going on in heaven parallels the catastrophe that is taking place on the earth; it builds to a climax for the joyful display of the new heavens and earth
- This is a call for God's people to minister to one another from the Scriptures

APPLICATION

- We need to ask ourselves, "How do the dominant views of our culture effect our thinking and living as Christians?"
- The predominant perspective is Naturalism; how does it effect us? Putting hope that this life is really all there is
- In what ways do we shy away from suffering, and death without the abandonment of ourselves to God in hope of the resurrection?
- The *ultimate hope* in Scripture is not based on dying and going to heaven, but rather the return of Jesus Christ – Tit2:13 1Pet1:13
- For those outside of Christ Jn5:28:28 alerts you that this event does have to do with you