

05-23-10

Series: The Resurrections

# The Resurrections (8)

## What Happens to Christians Who Die?

([1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#))

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[Matthew 28:1-10](#)

(Continuation from 05-16-10)

### The Doctrine of the Resurrections

([1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#))

In [verse 14](#) those who are asleep are identified as “the dead in Christ.”

[1 Thessalonians 4:14 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>14</sup> For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those **who have fallen asleep** in Jesus.

The present tense participle *koimōmenōn* ([v. 13](#)) refers to those who are continually falling asleep (dying) as a regular course of life in the church.

[1 Thessalonians 4:13 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those **who are asleep**, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.

They had grown increasingly concerned as their fellow believers continued to die.

It is important to remember that in the New Testament “sleep” applies only to the body, never to the soul. “Soul sleep,” the false teaching that the souls of the dead are in a state of unconscious existence in the afterlife, is foreign to Scripture.

In [2 Corinthians 5:8](#) Paul wrote that he “prefer[red] rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord,” while in [Philippians 1:23](#) he expressed his “desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better.”

Those statements teach that believers go consciously into the Lord’s presence at death, for how could unconsciousness be “very much better” than conscious communion with Jesus Christ in this life?

Jesus promised the repentant thief on the cross, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise [heaven; cf. [2 Corinthians 12:4](#); [Revelation 2:7](#)]” ([Luke 23:43](#)).

Moses’ and Elijah’s souls were not asleep, since they appeared with Jesus at the Transfiguration ([Matthew 17:3](#)), nor are those of the Tribulation martyrs in [Revelation 6:9-11](#), who will be awake and able to speak to God.

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After death *the redeemed* go consciously into the presence of the Lord, while the *unsaved* go into **conscious punishment** ([Luke 16:19-31](#)).

Paul related this information to the Thessalonians so that they would **not grieve**.

**1 Thessalonians 4:13 (NASB)**

<sup>13</sup> **But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.**

There is a normal sorrow that accompanies the death of a loved one, caused by the pain of separation and loneliness. Jesus grieved over the death of Lazarus ([John 11:33, 35](#)), and Paul exhorted the Romans to "weep with those who weep" ([Romans 12:15](#)).

However, the apostle did not have that kind of grief in mind here, but grief like **the rest who have no hope**.

In [Ephesians 2:12](#) Paul described unbelievers as "having no hope and without God in the world."

There is an *awful, terrifying, hopeless finality for unbelievers* when a loved one dies, a sorrow unmitigated by any hope of reunion.

Commenting on the hopeless despair of unbelievers in the ancient world, *William Barclay* writes,

"In the face of death the pagan world stood in despair. They met it with grim resignation and bleak hopelessness. *Aeschylus* wrote, "Once a man dies there is no resurrection." *Theocritus* wrote, "There is hope for those who are alive, but those who have died are without hope." *Catullus* wrote, "When once our brief light sets, there is one perpetual night through which we must sleep." On their tombstones grim epitaphs were carved. "I was not; I became; I am not; I care not." (*The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, rev. ed. [Louisville: Westminster, 1975], 203)

Even those pagans who believed in life after death did not have that hope confirmed by the Holy Spirit; they merely clung to it without affirmation from God. But Christians do not experience the hopeless grief of nonbelievers, for whom death marks the permanent severing of relationships.

Unlike them, Christians never say a final farewell to each other; there will be a "gathering together [of all believers] to Him" ([2 Thessalonians 2:1](#)). Partings in this life are only temporary.

The Thessalonians' *ignorance about the Rapture* caused them to grieve. It was to give them hope and to comfort them that Paul discussed that momentous event, giving a fourfold description of it: 1) **its pillars**, 2) **participants**, 3) **plan**, and 4) **profit**.