

WORDS OF GRACE SEASONED WITH SALT

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The Dead In Christ

By Pastor Art Watkins

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Paul wrote: ***But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them 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.***

The reason Paul wrote these words was because of the ignorance in his day concerning the dead in Christ and the resurrection of the dead. He said; *I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep.* In Paul's day and today there was and is much ignorance and misinformation concerning those who have died in the Lord.

A Christian lady asked me if I knew what happened to Christians after they died. It was not her question that amazed me, but the fact she had been a member of a fundamental church for over 30 years. After attending church for 30 years she still did not know what happened to Christians after they died. The Saints in Thessalonica were ignorant of the dead in Christ too, for they were sorrowing over them, as if they had no hope of seeing them again.

Death brings grief and sorrow. God knows how we grieve over the loss of loved ones for he designed our bodies to grieve. Grief is a natural emotion. As a matter of fact, it surprises me when people do not grieve. But God does not want us to be overcome or paralyzed with grief, so he has given us a mountain of information about the dead in Christ to help us overcome grief and sorrow.

In verse 18, he said; *comfort one another with THESE WORDS.* When reading the words Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4 and other passages, our grief is removed. We can live with it and continue to function as Christians. Paul had many friends and helpers to die, but he continued to serve the Lord in spite of the grief he suffered. He did not allow his grief to paralyze him. He knew their loss was temporary and he did not treat it as permanent. He knew he would see them again. In this article, you will see what you can know for sure about the dead in Christ.

The Dead in Christ Have Departed

In Philippians 1:21-24 Paul wrote: ***For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.***

For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.

The subject of this verse is death. Paul was in a straight between two options; death and life. The best option as far as he was concerned was death, for he said: *to depart and to be with Christ is far better*. This tells us that when a person dies a departure takes place. They leave their body and this world. This means the dead in Christ are no longer in this world or in their body or even the grave we bury them in. They have departed. Death is a departure from the flesh and from this world.

In 2 Timothy 4:6 Paul writing about his coming death said: ***For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.***

The departure Paul wrote about in this verse was not a trip he was going to make to another town or nation. He was in Rome when he wrote this epistle and he died in Rome and his body was buried somewhere in Rome. His departure was his coming death. His body died, but he departed from his body and from this world. What departed? His soul and spirit. You have a body, soul and spirit and when you die your soul and spirit will depart and leave your body. There is an example of this in Genesis 35:18 when Jacob's wife died. It says: ***And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, for she died.*** In this account of her death we see a number of facts about death: Death is the separation and disunion of soul and body. At death the soul departs from the body. The soul does not die with the body, but leaves the body to go elsewhere. The soul lives in a separate state and never dies. The soul goes into another world.

Every death is a departure. At death your soul and spirit will leave your body and this world. We will not all go to the same place, but we will all depart from this world and from our bodies when we die. Your physical body is a temporary house. When you die you will move out of it. As a matter of fact, you will not attend your own funeral. Your body will be there, but your soul and spirit will have departed. At death, a person's spirit and soul are loosed from their body.

In Luke 16:20-26 Jesus told us a true story of two men who died and were buried at the same time, but they went two different places. One man died: ***And was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes being in torments.*** The other man died and the Lord said: ***He was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.*** Their bodies were dead and buried, but their soul and spirit departed this world. One man went to hell the moment he died and the other to Paradise.

The Dead in Christ Have Ascended

In Philippians 1:21-24 Paul wrote: ***For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.***

Paul not only said that when he died he would depart this world, but he told us where he was going. When you take a trip you depart from one place and travel to another. This verse shows us where Christians go when they die. He said that at death: ***they depart to be with Christ.*** When Paul died he expected to go where Christ is. He expected to be with Christ after his departure from this world. Therefore, where ever Christ is, the dead in Christ go, for the dead in Christ depart to be with Christ when they die.

If we can locate the place where Christ is, we will find where the dead in Christ go, for when they die they depart to be with Christ. We know exactly where Christ is. In Ephesians 1:20 Paul says that Christ sits at the right hand of God in heavenly places. If the dead in Christ have departed to be with Christ, then the dead in Christ are in heavenly places with Christ.

To be with Christ means to be where he is. This verse tells us he is in heavenly places. So, where do the dead in Christ go when they depart this world? To heavenly places. Therefore, the dead in Christ are not in the grave yard. They are not in their bodies. They are not even in this world. They are in heavenly places with Christ. Paul expected to go to heavenly places when he died, because that is where Christ is.

Heavenly places is a big place. Where in heavenly places is Christ located? In Hebrews 12:18-23 Paul tells us exactly where Christ is located in heavenly places.

He wrote: **But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than *that of Abel*.**

These verses describe the heavenly city New Jerusalem. It's the same city John describes in Revelation 21-22 when he saw it coming down from heaven to the earth in the future. Paul gives us a peek into the city and shows us who occupies the heavenly city New Jerusalem today. Every city has a population and these verses describe the present population of New Jerusalem. If you could look into the city you would see:

(1) *An innumerable company of angels*

There are so many angels in the city you cannot count them. They are innumerable, that is, without number.

(2) *God the Judge of all*

God the Father is seated on his throne surrounded by angels, seraphim and the elders.

(3) *The church of the first born*

Jesus Christ is the first born from the dead (Col. 1:18) and his church is called the church of the first born. It's called by his name. Who are they? In this same verse Paul identifies who they are. He calls them the *spirits of just men made perfect*. The spirits of just men made perfect are the dead in Christ. They are called *the spirits of just men made perfect* because they are justified and their spirits are now in heaven. According to Ephesians 3:15 the church of God has members in heaven and earth. The church of God on earth is the saints who are still alive. The church of God in heaven is the spirits of just men made perfect who are the dead in Christ. They are the heavenly members of the church, for they now occupy the heavenly city New Jerusalem.

(4) *Jesus the mediator of the new covenant*

In Ephesians 1:20 Paul said that Christ is seated at God's right hand in heavenly places. Now you know where he is located in heavenly places. He is in the heavenly city New Jerusalem with his Father, the angels and the dead in Christ who are the spirits of

just men made perfect. The dead in Christ have ascended to be with Christ in heavenly places and that place in heaven is the heavenly city New Jerusalem.

My mother and father are in that city. My son Julius is in that city. Some of you have relatives in that city. The dead in Christ are not in the grave yard. You may visit their grave, but remember they are not there. You are visiting someone who is not home. The dead in Christ are not in some fictitious place called purgatory where they are suffering for their sins. Purgatory is just one of the many lies of the devil to deceive people about the dead in Christ. It is another money making religious racket of the devil. The Bible makes it clear that the dead in Christ are with Christ in the heavenly city New Jerusalem.

The Dead in Christ Are Awake With Christ

The dead in Christ are with Christ in the heavenly city New Jerusalem, but are they awake and conscious or are they asleep and unconscious? Many people today have bought into the theory of soul sleep. They teach that when you die your soul goes to sleep and remains unconscious, until the second coming of Christ. Some teach the soul sleeps in the grave yard with the body. Others say, the soul goes to heaven, but remains asleep and unconscious in heaven until the second coming of Christ.

But what saith the scriptures? The Bible says the soul and spirit are very much awake and conscience in heaven. The word sleep is a metaphor that is used to describe death. A dead man is like a man that sleeps. A man who is asleep is like a dead man. That is why sleep is used to describe the death of someone. When we look at the body of dead man he appears as if he is asleep. But the question is; what part of the Christian sleeps when he dies; his body or soul? The scriptures show us the answer. In the following verses notice carefully these people whose bodies are dead and yet they are awake and conscience.

Matthew 17:1-3 says: ***And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.***

On the mount of transfiguration Peter saw Moses along with Elijah talking with Jesus. Moses died and God himself buried him in Deuteronomy 34:6, but here he is seen by Peter, James and John speaking to Jesus. It says: ***And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.***

Here is dead man speaking to Jesus. But how can a dead man speak if he is asleep and unconscious? The death of Moses is proof that when a believer dies it's not his soul and spirit that sleeps, it's his body. Moses body was dead and buried by God himself, but Peter saw the soul of Moses speaking to Christ 100's of years after he died.

In Revelation 6:9-11 John wrote: ***And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said***

unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

This is one of the incidental proofs in the Bible that the soul does not sleep or cease to exist at death. This is a group of martyrs who are killed, but their souls were awake praying and asking God to take vengeance on their enemies. And the Lord is seen speaking to them and he said there were more martyrs in the future who would be killed like them, but in the end he would take out his vengeance on the ones who murdered them.

In Revelation 15:2-4 John describes a scene in heaven: ***And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.***

This is another group of martyrs (Rev. 20:4) who will lose their lives on earth for the sake of Christ and the gospel and John sees them in heaven singing and praising God. How could they sing and praise God in heaven if their souls were asleep? These saints are awake and conscious and they are in heaven and not in the grave yard.

Matthew 27:51-53 says: ***And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.*** This miraculous event came to pass after Christ was raised from the dead. When Christ was raised many saints who had been dead for many years appeared in the city of Jerusalem. And notice what it says about their bodies: ***Many bodies of the saints which slept arose.*** It's the bodies of saints that sleep, not their souls.

In these verses, we have seen the dead in Christ speaking, praying, singing, praising God and talking with Jesus after they died. The bodies of the saints may be asleep, but not their souls. Their souls are awake and conscious and in heaven.

But what about the lost? Many people believe that when lost people die, they are dead like a dog and no longer exist. But what saith the scriptures? The Bible says lost people have something in common with saved people when they die: they are awake and conscious and can feel, speak and talk. In Luke 16, the Lord tells us a story about a lost man who died: He said the man died and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes being in torments. The Lord said he cried out in pain and was tormented in the flames of a fire and begged God for water. His body was dead and buried, but his soul and spirit were in hell and fully conscious.

At this moment the souls of the dead in Christ are in the heavenly city New Jerusalem with Christ, talking with him, enjoying his presence and singing his praises. But, the lost

are in hell crying in agony and pain and suffering the torments of a fire that will never end.

The Dead in Christ Will Descend With Christ

In 1 Thessalonians 3:13 Paul prayed that God would establish the hearts of the saints; ***Unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.***

Notice that when the Lord comes again, he will come with all his saints. Paul's prayer for the saints in Thessalonica was for them to be blameless and holy when Christ comes again with all his saints. It should be our prayer also to be holy and harmless when he comes with all his saints. But, who are these saints who will come with Christ? In 1 Thessalonians 4:14 Paul tells us who they are. He wrote: ***For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.***

This verse shows us two things: When saved people die they go to be with the Lord and when he comes again, they will come with him. The saints who will come with the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 are the dead in Christ of 1 Thessalonians 4:14. When the Lord comes again he will not come alone. He will come with his angels and with his saints. The saints who will accompany him are the dead in Christ.

If they come *with him* in the future, they must be *with him* now. At the second coming the Lord will come with his saints and for his saints. He will come **with** the saints who have died and he will come **for** the saints who are still alive. It is two aspects of one event. Even Enoch who was a prophet before the flood knew about the coming of Christ with his all saints. Jude 1:14 says: ***And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints.*** He said the Lord will come with ten thousands of his saints. Not ten thousand, but ten thousands which is an indefinite number. It may be millions, if not billions and 1 Thessalonians 4:14 shows us who they are; it's the dead in Christ.

The dead in Christ are not in the grave yard. The dead in Christ are now in heaven with Christ. The dead in Christ are not asleep or unconscious; they are awake and conscious. The dead in Christ will not remain in heaven; they will descend with Christ when he comes again.

The Dead in Christ Will Be Reunited With the Alive In Christ

In 1 Thessalonians 4:16 Paul wrote: ***For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.***

When the Lord comes again there will be a great reunion in the air. God will gather together his saints from one end of heaven to the other and from one end of the earth to the other. (Mark 13:37) The dead in Christ from all ages will be united with those who are still alive when the Lord comes. Once we are united together, we will never be separated again. It says: *so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

This was written to comfort the saints whose loved ones had died. Our separation is just temporary because one day we will be gathered together to meet the Lord in the air and from that day forward there will never be another separation between the saints of God. In John 14:1-3 Jesus said: ***Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.***

The question you need to ask yourself is this: when I die and my spirit and soul depart from my body, will I ascend into heaven or descend into hell? Your soul and spirit will live in either heaven or hell forever. Death is not the end. When you die, you will not be dead like a dog. Your death will be the beginning of eternity. It will either be an eternity enjoying the blessings and riches of living with God, his saints and angels forever in the glorious kingdom of God; or the misery of suffering in the fires of hell with the devil and his angels. God is not willing for you to perish in hell. God will have all men to be saved and to live with him forever. He has done all that is necessary to save you and to keep you saved so you can live with him forever. God sent his Son down to this earth to suffer and die for the thing that keeps you out of heaven; **your sins**. Sin is a transgression of the law of God. (1 John 3:4) The Law of God is the 10 commandments. Have you ever taken the time to go through the 10 commandments to see what kind of person you really are? Answer the following with an honest heart:

Have you ever told a lie? (Be brutally honest with yourself because God will be in the Day of Judgment) If you answered, "Yes" then you are a liar. Have you ever stolen? (Even if it was something small). Then you are a thief. Jesus said that if you *look* upon someone with lust, you are an adulterer. If you hate, then you have committed murder in your heart. Have you loved God above all things and all men? Have you made a 'god' to suit yourself? (This is having your own beliefs about God, which is idolatry). Have you ever used God's name to curse which is blasphemy? Have you always obeyed and honored your parents? Have you ever been greedy which is covetousness? If you have transgressed even one of these Laws, God says you are guilty of breaking them all.

The penalty for breaking God's Law is the second death, which is being cast into the lake of fire, where the torment is everlasting. If you think that because God is "good" he will overlook your sins, think again---His "*goodness*" will make sure that liars, thieves, murderers, adulterers, blasphemers, idolaters etc., will be punished. The sins and crimes we have committed must be punished.

There is only one way we can escape the penalty and punishment of our sins and crimes. Someone must assume our guilt and pay the penalty for us. But, that person must be perfect and free from sin. There is only one person who is like that and it's Jesus Christ. The Gospel declares that Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God assumed our guilt on the cross and allowed God to punish Him for the sins and crimes we committed against Him. The only way for you to be saved from God's wrath is to put all of your faith and trust in Christ and his death and resurrection for your sins. Remember, you have broken all of God's Laws and someone must pay the penalty. You have a choice as to who pays; you can pay for them yourself, but it will take you an eternity in

Hell to do so. Or, you can believe that Christ paid for them by His death on the cross. Which will it be?

Why not bow your head and ask the Lord to save you from sin and hell. As you pray, put all of your faith and trust in Him to save you. If you will believe and call, God has promised to save you, for He said; ***That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Romans 10:9-13)***

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