

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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An Informed View of the Second Coming

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 trumpet 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. (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, KJV 1900)

In the last two hundred years, Christianity has suffered under more speculation regarding the Second Coming than sound Biblical teaching. Today, a believer needs rocket scientist intelligence to decipher many of these ideas. Consider just one of the questions often debated. Does the Second Coming occur before, during, or after the "Great Tribulation"? You never hear these people focus on the leading motive that Scripture states for teaching and believing this truth. "*Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*" In our study passage, Paul describes a straightforward sequence of events that culminate in the Lord's complete victory, the resurrection to glory of His beloved people, and their present comfort while awaiting this longed-for day. His words describe a straightforward event that is quite focused on a few sequential events that take us from the grave to glory. No one suffers harm because they are alive or dead when the event occurs. And no one is "Left Behind" that the Lord intended to be there.

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren. "But..." The first twelve verses of this chapter are intensely practical and timely for believers in the here and now. Throughout our study of the resurrection, we have regularly observed that Scripture associates Jesus' resurrection, the Second Coming, and our resurrection in His image to how we live and especially to how believers are to respect each other in the here and now. In his first letter, John puts this point in our faces. How can we treat believers with harshness and claim that we either love them or that we love the Lord? And he concludes that we fail in the claim. (1 John 4:20) Rather consistently, Scripture's use of "Love" has to do with our actions, not with our sentiment. If in any action, word, thought, or deed, I fail to show my love to other believers by my actions, I equally fail to show that I love God. The near universal human behavior fails this test. If someone offends you, your sinful human reaction is to respond in kind, to be just as hateful to that person as he/she was to you. Scripture puts this attitude and behavior under

the spotlight and rebukes us with the reminder. Whenever we so comply with our sinful disposition, we shout to others that we do not love God! Is that what we intend? If we desire to show people that we love God, we have one way to do so. Show our love to God in action by showing His love to His people in our lives, whether or not they deserve it.

This admittedly demanding behavior that Scripture consistently requires can be attained in only one way. Keep your mind fresh with your conviction of the Lord's resurrection, His certain return, and your resurrection to be with Him in glory. *But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren.* Even if we know this truth, our failure to manifest it in action leaves us functionally ignorant. We do not savor the idea that we are ignorant, do we? We invest time and large sums of money for an education. The conscientious believer will invest much time in studying Scripture to learn its teaching. However, knowledge of facts alone, even the facts of Scripture, fails to curb this sinful ignorance of which Paul writes. The more we think we know the more prideful we are liable to become, thereby increasing our functional ignorance toward the Lord and other believers.

Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. (1 Corinthians 8:1; turn to this lesson and read the whole chapter. Based on its teachings, what is your obligation to your supposed "weak brother"? You can never fulfill that Biblical obligation by increasing your factual memory. You only avoid the "Puffed up" deplorable state by how you use what real Bible knowledge you have to help that brother)

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. As a pastor for over fifty years, I have preached my share of funeral services. During this time, I have observed an interesting trend in our culture. People

increasingly are quite hesitant to confront or to even acknowledge the reality of death and to use the time to mourn their loss of the loved one. They prefer to "Celebrate his life." False teaching regarding the Second Coming has stolen the intended comfort of Scripture from their minds, so they choose the least painful path which is effectively trying to deny the obvious death of their loved one. Paul directly leads us to acknowledge the reality of death, but to view it from the Lord's perspective, not from the human view. Our "hope" will define our view of death and our reaction to it. The believer need not sorrow at the loss of a loved one in the same way that an unbeliever would react. Rather than focus our reaction to the death of a loved one on a moment that tries to perpetuate his/her life for at most a few minutes, Paul directs our minds to the Lord's glorious design for our resurrection. A funeral service might well briefly recall precious moments in our memory of that person, but our only real comfort in the dark presence of death must come from our "Celebration" of the Lord and what He has done for His beloved children.

...concerning them which are asleep. Scripture uses the "sleep" analogy for death in several contexts. These contexts do not refer to the soul or spirit, but to the body. When Jesus used the analogy regarding Lazarus, He spoke these words, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." (John 11:11) Almost immediately after these words, Verse 14, Jesus spoke the direct words, "Lazarus is dead." From the human perspective, death is final and endless. From the "God perspective" of Scripture, it is temporary, in that way similar to sleep. Our body is relatively inactive in sound sleep; it is wholly inactive in death. We awaken from sound sleep refreshed. Our bodies shall awaken in the resurrection, gloriously refreshed, "...fashioned like unto His glorious body." (Philippians 3:21)

...that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. Paul does not write that we should not grieve at all, but that we should not grieve as those who have no hope in Christ. When we lose someone whom we love in death, we need to honestly confront our loss, and, yes, we need to grieve, to "sorrow." But the quality of that grief is the point that Paul draws to our attention. With no hope, a person who lost a loved one will grieve with no hope and with no resolution. Our hope in Christ gives resolution to our grief. We shall realize a day when our loved one and we shall be together in the glorious presence of our Lord to praise Him for ever. Our sorrow with hope is not endless and dark. It is dissolved in the Person of Him who conquered death and gives us life, endless life that shall enjoy and glorify Him for ever.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. When Jesus gloriously breaks into time at the last day, He shall not return alone! He

shall bring the redeemed souls of those who died prior to His return with Him. Our comfort, our distinction from "...others which have no hope," rests in our belief "...that Jesus died and rose again." Without this truth firmly established in our minds, we might embrace one of the endless superstitions that people have espoused across history, but none of them gave the comfort of Jesus and the resurrection. In fact, many of the superstitious ideas gave more torment than comfort to those who believed them. Have you ever studied ancient Egyptian or Greek mythology regarding their concepts of life after death? Scripture doesn't teach that believers must trek a dark, dangerous underworld in a doubtful effort to reach the ideal. In the Second Coming and resurrection, mystical beings do not escort us to Him through a dark and dangerous pathway. He comes to us where we are, and He immediately raises us and takes us to glory. We face no uncertainty in the process, and no danger. He even brings the souls of those who have died prior to His return with Him to rejoin their resurrected bodies, so that they, their whole transformed and glorified person, body, soul, and spirit, reunite to fully comprehend and praise Him in endless joyful glory. (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

Occasionally folks who start with human ideas and try to impose those ideas onto Scripture (Instead of starting with Scripture and rejecting any human idea that does not harmonize with Scripture) will claim that Jesus is not God and that He never claimed to be God. The Scriptures that contradict this idea abound. Interestingly, the passage before us supports those passages. Many passages dealing with the Second Coming affirm that Jesus shall return and raise the dead. (John 5:28-29 as just one clear example) Notice our study passage. Who brings those who sleep in Jesus? "...will **God** bring with him." Jesus is not a lesser being than God. He is God incarnate, God dwelling in human flesh. He dwelt in human flesh during His primary time on earth. He now dwells in human flesh in heaven. (Colossians 2:9; notice the present tense verb, "dwelleth") And He shall bring the souls of those who sleep in Jesus with Him when He returns to raise the dead in changed, glorified bodies.

Occasionally people refer to the "we" statements in Second Coming/resurrection passages and claim that the apostles were deceived, believing that the Second Coming and their resurrection would occur in their lifetime. A far more Biblical view concludes that they, like you and me, held to the living hope of the reality of the Second Coming, regardless of when it shall occur. We shall study this error more.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor