

## **Knowledge beyond Experience**

### *1 Thessalonians 4:13-18*

**Introduction:** Steve mentioned on Sunday that the return of Christ has been a source of all kinds of speculation and wrangling (not to mention a whole bunch of books too). But Paul is very clear in this passage that the purpose of studying this important doctrine is not so we can have a lively debate on theology; rather it is so that we can encourage one another. Have we understood the return of Christ in such a way that it allows us to bring such encouragement? Hopefully, this study will help put each of us in a better position to use these truths to bring timely and needed encouragement.

**Opening Discussion:** On a scale of 1-10 (ten being the highest) how often do you find yourself thinking about the return of Christ? Why do you think this is?

### **Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

1. What initially sticks out to you from this passage?
2. What concerns does Paul address in this passage?
3. What was the source of Paul's teaching about what happens to those who die (v. 15)? Why is this important?
4. What does Paul teach about the end times in this passage?
5. How would you describe the nature of Jesus' second coming?
6. What does this passage teach about believers who have died?
7. How can the truths taught in this passage be used to "comfort one another" (v. 18)?

Steve said:

Believers still grieve when a loved one dies. Death is still an enemy that Christ will ultimately conquer (1 Corinthians 15:26). Death brings about separation; you can no longer express love to that person, no longer receive love from that person, and no longer enjoy that person. And so we grieve: we cry/mourn; some experience a type of sadness that literally takes their breath away (they can hardly breathe). There is no reason for believers to “put on a happy face” when a loved one dies; we grieve.

But we grieve in light of deeper realities. Paul wrote this passage so that we “will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.” The Thessalonians lived among people who didn’t anticipate anything beyond the grave; they believed that death meant ceasing to exist. There was no hope beyond the grave. Remember that “hope” is not a wish, but a confident expectation of something. As believers we grieve in the context of hope.

8. What do you think it means to “grieve in the context of hope?”

9. What hope do Christians have in death?

10. What is an appropriate way to use this text when you are ministering to someone who has lost a loved one? What might be an inappropriate use of this text?

Steve said:

For this truth about the return of Christ to bring us comfort, we have to see the continuity between our love of being “with the Lord” here in this life and the hope of “being with the Lord always” when He returns.

This is where we need to be honest with ourselves: if we don’t love being with the Lord here and now, it’s hard to get excited about “being with the Lord always” when Christ returns. My simple challenge is for each of us to fall more deeply in love with Jesus here and now. This obviously isn’t the type of thing you can manufacture. This is something God has to do in your life.

But if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, this love of being with Jesus has been implanted in your heart. If it has been covered up or crowded out or neglected, simply ask God to rekindle it within you. I believe God loves to answer the prayer, “Heavenly Father, please rekindle within me the desire to enjoy fellowship with Jesus. And as I love His presence here on earth, teach me to fix my hope completely upon the grace Jesus will bring when He returns – especially the grace of His presence.” Even though the whole idea of being “caught up with Him in the air” goes far beyond our experience, it is wholly consistent with our experience of Jesus in this world.

11. How would you describe your current experience of loving to be “with the Lord”?

12. Do you sense a need to ask the Father to rekindle your love of being with Jesus?