



# Do You Know Where You Are Going?

Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 178–182.



# 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 (NKJV)

13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

# Points In The Text

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- **Revelation: We Have God's Truth**  
*(1 Thes. 4:13, 15a)*
- **Return: Christ Is Coming Again**  
*(1 Thes. 4:14–15)*
- **Resurrection: The Christian Dead Will Rise**  
*(1 Thes. 4:15–16)*
- **Rapture: Living Believers Caught Up**  
*(1 Thes. 4:17)*
- **Reunion: Christians Forever with the Lord**  
*(1 Thes. 4:17–18)*

Do You Know Where You Are Going? (1 Thess. 4:13–18)

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# Revelation: We Have God's Truth

(1 Thes. 4:13, 15a)

- The question has been asked how can mortal man penetrate beyond the grave and find assurance and peace for his own heart?
- Paul solved the problem when he wrote, “*For this we say to you by the Word of the Lord*” (1 Thes. 4:15). We Christians need not wonder about death or life after death, for we have a revelation from God in His Word.

Do You Know Where You Are Going? (1 Thess. 4:13–18)

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# Revelation: We Have God's Truth

*(1 Thes. 4:13, 15a)*

- We look to Christ and the New Testament for the complete revelation concerning death.

## **2 Timothy 1:10** (NKJV)

but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,

Do You Know Where You Are Going? (1 Thess. 4:13–18)

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# God Gave Paul A Special Revelation Concerning The Resurrection And The Return Of Christ.



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NEW MERCIES CHRISTIAN CHURCH | JOHN 4: 28-30

Do You Know Where You Are Going? (1 Thess. 4:13–18)

# 1 Corinthians 15:51–54 (NKJV)

51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—

52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”



# What Paul Taught Agreed With What Jesus Taught.

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## John 5:24–29 (NKJV)

24 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

25 Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.

# What Paul Taught Agreed With What Jesus Taught.

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26 For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself,  
27 and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.  
28 Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice  
29 and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

Do You Know Where You Are Going? (1 Thess. 4:13–18)

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- God's revelation is based on the historic fact of Christ's resurrection. Since our Saviour has conquered death, we need not fear death or the future.

## 1 Corinthians 15:12 (NKJV)

Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

- The authority of God's Word gives us the assurance and comfort we need.

# Return: Christ Is Coming Again

*(1 Thes. 4:14–15)*

- We have noted the emphasis on the return of Christ in the Thessalonian letters.
  - Paul related Christ's return to salvation (*1 Thes. 1:9–10*), service (*1 Thes. 2:19–20*), and stability (*1 Thes. 3:11–13*).
  - In this paragraph, he related it to sorrow, and he showed how the doctrine of Christ's return can comfort the brokenhearted.

Do You Know Where You Are Going? (*1 Thess. 4:13–18*)

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# Return: Christ Is Coming Again

(1 Thes. 4:14–15)

- Paul applied the word sleep to those believers who died. Jesus used the same expression (*John 11:11–13*). Paul was careful to state that Jesus died; the word sleep is not applied to His experience. It is because He died that we need not fear death.

Do You Know Where You Are Going? (1 Thess. 4:13–18)

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- However, Paul did not say that the soul went to sleep at death. He made it clear that the soul of the believer went to be with the Lord: “them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him” (*1 Thes. 4:14*).
- He cannot bring them when He returns unless they are with Him. It is not the soul that sleeps; it is the body.
- The Bible definition of death is given in James 2:26—“For as the body without the spirit is dead.”

- At death, the spirit leaves the body, and the body goes to sleep and no longer functions. The soul-spirit goes to be with the Lord, if the person has trusted Jesus Christ.

## **2 Corinthians 5:8** (NKJV)

We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

- The fact of our Lord's return is comfort to us in bereavement, because we know that He will bring with Him His people who have "died in the Lord."
- On the authority of the Word of God, we also know what will happen: Jesus Christ will one day return and bring His people with Him.///



- Jesus Christ will return in the air, and this is where we shall meet Him (*1 Thes. 4:17*). Suddenly, millions of people will vanish!
- Whether we Christians live or die, we have nothing to fear because Jesus will come either with us or for us!
- The fact of His return is a comfort to our hearts.

# Resurrection: The Christian Dead Will Rise

(1 Thes. 4:15–16)

- When Paul preached the doctrine of the resurrection to the Athenian philosophers, most of them mocked him (*Acts 17:32*).
- To the Greeks, being rid of the body was their great hope. Why would any man want to have his body resurrected? Furthermore, how could his body be resurrected, when the elements of the body would decay and become a part of the earth? To them, the doctrine of resurrection was foolish and impossible.

Do You Know Where You Are Going? (1 Thess. 4:13–18)

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# Resurrection: The Christian Dead Will Rise

(1 Thes. 4:15–16)

- When Jesus Christ returns in the air, He will issue the “*shout of command*” and the “*dead in Christ shall rise first*” (1 Thes. 4:16). This does not mean that He will put the elements of the body together again, for resurrection is not “*reconstruction.*” Paul argued for the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:35<sub>ff.</sub>

Do You Know Where You Are Going? (1 Thess. 4:13–18)

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- He pointed out that the resurrection of the human body is like the growing of a plant from a seed. The flower is not the identical seed that was planted, yet there is continuity from seed to plant.
- Christians shall receive glorified bodies, like the glorified body of Christ.

## Philippians 3:20–21 (NKJV)

20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

# 1 Corinthians 15:47–58 (NKJV)

47 The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven.

48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly.

49 And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—  
52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.  
53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.  
54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”.

55 “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?”

56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.

57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

The dead body is the “seed” that is planted in the ground; the resurrection body is the “flower” that comes from that seed.



# Rapture: Living Believers Caught Up

(1 Thes. 4:17)

- The word rapture is not used in this section, but that is the literal meaning of “*caught up*.” The Latin word *rapto* means “*to seize, to carry off*”; and from it we get our English word “rapture.”

Greek scholar, Dr. Kenneth S. Wuest, preached on this passage and explained the various meanings of the Greek word that is translated “caught up” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. Each of these meanings adds a special truth to the doctrine of our Lord’s return.

Do You Know Where You Are Going? (1 Thess. 4:13–18)

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# Rapture: Living Believers Caught Up

*(1 Thes. 4:17)*

- “To catch away speedily.” This is the translation in Acts 8:39, where the Spirit “caught away Philip” after he had led the Ethiopians to Christ. When the Lord returns in the air, we who are alive will be caught away quickly, in the twinkling of an eye. This means we should live each moment in the expectation of our Lord’s return, lest He come and find us out of His will

*(1 John 3:1–3).*

Do You Know Where You Are Going? (1 Thess. 4:13–18)

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# Rapture: Living Believers Caught Up

(1 Thes. 4:17)

- *“To seize by force.”* See John 6:15. Does this suggest that Satan and his armies will try to keep us from leaving the earth? I trust it does not suggest that some of the saints will be so attached to the world that they must literally be dragged away. Like Lot being delivered from Sodom, they will be scarcely saved (*Gen. 19:16*).
- *“To claim for one’s own self.”* This views the Rapture from our Lord’s point of view as He comes to claim His bride.

Do You Know Where You Are Going? (1 Thess. 4:13–18)

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- “To move to a new place.” Paul used this word when he described his visit to heaven (*2 Cor. 12:1–4*). Jesus Christ has gone to prepare a home for us (*John 14:1–6*), and when He comes, He will take us to that glorious place. We are pilgrims and strangers in this world. Our true citizenship is in heaven (*Phil. 3:20–21*).
- “To rescue from danger.” See Acts 23:10. This suggests that the church will be taken home before the time of Tribulation that will come to the world from God. 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9 seems to state this clearly.

- Will the unsaved world be aware of what is happening? Will they hear the shout, the voice, and the trumpet? First Corinthians 15:52 indicates that this will happen so suddenly that it will be over in the twinkling of an eye. Since the shout, voice, and trumpet apply to God's people, there is no reason to believe that the unsaved masses will hear them. If they do, they will hear sounds without meanings *(see John 12:27–30)*. Millions of people will vanish instantly, and no doubt there will be chaos and great concern. Except for those who know the Bible teaching, the world will wonder at what has happened.

# Reunion: Christians Forever with the Lord

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*(1 Thes. 4:17–18)*

- You and I shall meet the Lord in the air, in person, when He comes for us. The Greek word translated “meet” carries the idea of meeting a royal person or an important person. We have walked with Christ by faith here on earth, but in the air we shall “see Him as He is” and become like Him *(1 John 3:1–2)*. What a meeting that will be!

Do You Know Where You Are Going? *(1 Thess. 4:13–18)*

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# Reunion: Christians Forever with the Lord

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*(1 Thes. 4:17–18)*

- It will be a glorious meeting, because we shall have glorified bodies. When He was here on earth, Jesus prayed that we might one day see His glory and share in it *(John 17:22–24)*.
- The suffering that we endure today will be transformed into glory when He returns *(Rom. 8:17–19; 2 Cor. 4:17–18)*.

Do You Know Where You Are Going? *(1 Thess. 4:13–18)*

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# Reunion: Christians Forever with the Lord

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(1 Thes. 4:17–18)

- It will be an everlasting meeting, for we shall be “forever with the Lord.”
- This was His promise: “I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (*John 14:3*). The goal of redemption is not just to rescue us from judgment, but to relate us to Christ.

Do You Know Where You Are Going? (1 Thess. 4:13–18)

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- Our meeting with the Lord will also be a time of reckoning. This is called “the Judgment Seat of Christ” (*Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10*).
- The Greek word *bema*, which is translated “judgment seat,” referred to the place where the Olympic judges awarded crowns to the winners. Our works will be judged and rewards will be given (*1 Cor. 3:8–15*).
- The Judgment Seat of Christ must not be confused with the White Throne Judgment described in Revelation 20:11–15. You may contrast these two important events as follows:

Do You Know Where You Are Going? (*1 Thess. 4:13–18*)

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- Judgment Seat of Christ
- Only believers
- Immediately after the Rapture
- Determines rewards for service
- White Throne Judgment
- Only unbelievers
- After the thousand year kingdom
- Determines amount of judgment

- We will not only meet our Lord Jesus Christ at the Rapture, but will also be reunited with our believing friends and loved ones who have died. *“Together with them”* is a great statement of encouragement. Death is the great separator, but Jesus Christ is the great Reconciler.
- Certainly, the saints will know each other in glory, including believers we have never met. *“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known”* (1 Cor. 13:12).

- Death is a fact of life. The only way we can escape death is to be alive when the Lord Jesus Christ returns. Death is not an accident; it is an appointment: “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (*Heb. 9:27*). If you should die today, where would your soul go?