

Promised  
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Allen Power

## 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Opening: Okay “grammar scholars”, what is the difference between a period and a comma? Our Lifeway lesson writers used this as an illustration about death. How does it apply? Eternity eliminates the “periods” in the story of life (I DO believe there WILL be exclamation points!) That’s good news for Christ-followers and bad news for those who refuse to trust Him as Savior and Lord.

We might title this lesson: *“The Good News About Death.”* While that seems like a paradox, the good news of the gospel is about life “in Christ” both now and forever. What could be more encouraging than the words: *“whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life?”*

In this passage, Paul responded to a question being asked in the new church in Thessalonica: *“Will our loved ones who have died be left out of Christ’s return?”*

**1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 (ESV) — 13** But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. **14** For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. **15** For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. **16** For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. **17** Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. **18** Therefore encourage one another with these words.

- Verse 13: Don’t be “uninformed.” That’s why we study our Bible!
- The first thing to know about the death of a loved one who dies “in Christ” is that *“We do not grieve like those who have no hope.”*
- People often say, *“I’m sorry you lost your loved one.”* If they were in Christ we haven’t lost them, we know where they are and that we’ll be reunited. We suffer temporary loss of their presence but it’s a “comma” not a period.
- Verse 14 says, *“Since we believe Jesus died and rose again.”*
- Christ’s resurrection guarantees that “God will bring [the dead in Christ] with Him” when Jesus returns to “take away” all His followers.
- He can’t bring them “with Him” unless they are already “with Him.”
- Paul assured these concerned early Christians: When a Christ follower dies the physical body sleeps but the spirit is “with Christ” until He returns to claim His church. Verse 15 says that is a truth “directly from the Lord.”

- At amusement parks you can purchase a “fast pass.” Their saved love ones (and ours) won’t miss Christ’s return; they are already with Him! For the believer, death is a “fast pass” to be with Jesus in paradise! (Lk. 23:43)
- Paul had commended this little church for their faith. Here’s another thing to commend: They were actively expecting Christ’s return! *“Theologians call this the doctrine of the imminent return of Christ. Imminent means that it can happen at any moment.”*<sup>ii</sup> How about us?
- How will this happen, Paul? Verses 16-17 give the specifics:
  - “The Lord Himself” – Jesus will descend from Heaven in person.
  - “Shout of command” – I wonder what He will shout?
  - “Voice of the archangel” – More directions for Christ’s followers.
  - “Sound of a trumpet” – Trumpets declared great events!
  - “The dead in Christ will rise first” – New glorified bodies!
  - “We who are alive” will be “caught up” “with them” – We will be reunited with our loved ones that have died “in Christ.” Reunited!
  - “Meet Him” and “always with Him.” – We will meet Jesus and stay with Him forever! Regardless of whether our bodies are physically dead or alive, all believers will be “caught up” to meet Him.
- What about these “glorified bodies?” Paul wrote about that in 1 Cor. 15:
  - *“How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?”*<sup>36</sup> *You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.*<sup>37</sup> *And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.*<sup>38</sup> *But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.*<sup>iii</sup>
  - *“<sup>42</sup> So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. <sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. <sup>44</sup> It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.”*<sup>iv</sup>
  - Wiersbe: *“The dead body is the “seed” that is planted in the ground; the resurrection body is the “flower” that comes from that seed.”*<sup>v</sup>
  - Jesus had a glorified body and Philippians 3:21 says, He “...will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body...”<sup>vi</sup>
- What about the term “caught up” with Him? We call this the “rapture.”
- The word means to “snatch away” or “pluck away” by “force.”<sup>vii</sup>
  - **“To catch away speedily.”** Acts 8:39<sup>viii</sup>
  - **“To seize by force.”** John 6:15<sup>ix</sup>
  - **“To claim for one’s own self.”**<sup>x</sup> The Lord claims “His bride”
  - **“To move to a new place.”** 2 Cor. 12:1–4<sup>xi</sup>
  - **“To rescue from danger.”** See Acts 23:10<sup>xii</sup> Before the tribulation
- Back to 1 Corinthians 15. Verse 52 describes the rapture: *“...in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.”*<sup>xiii</sup>
- That’s good news for those who have trusted Christ as Savior and Lord!
- I don’t want to end on “downer” but we need to acknowledge there is also bad news about death for those who refuse to trust Christ.

- When all the Christ followers disappear in an instant it will usher in chaos here on earth. That thought might cause concern, but there's nothing for Christ's followers to worry about because we will be with Him.
- Our concern should be for those who haven't trusted Him as Savior.
- Warren Wiersbe wrote: *"I once saw a quaint inscription on a gravestone in an old British cemetery not far from Windsor Castle. It read: 'Pause, my friend, as you walk by; As you are now, so once was I. As I am now, so you will be. Prepare, my friend, to follow me!' [Wiersbe adds] I heard about a visitor who read that epitaph and added these lines: 'To follow you is not my intent, Until I know which way you went!'"*<sup>xiv</sup>
- That rhyme makes us chuckle but the reality is no laughing matter. Death is also a comma for those who refuse to trust Christ; their souls will live on but in a horrible way (Luke 16:24, Revelation 20:13-15). For the unsaved, death is the "period" at the end of their opportunity to trust Him.
- That should motivate us to pray for them and share the gospel with them.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- As sobering as that last thought is, let's take Paul's advice in verse 18 of today's passage. Let's "encourage one another with these words."
- This passage gives us MUCH to be encouraged about.
- We are encouraged that, though death is real and grief is normal, Christ followers do not grieve like those with no hope. We have ETERNAL hope!
- We are encouraged that our loved ones who have died "in Christ" are with Him now and will return with Him when He comes back. What a reunion!
- We are encouraged that at that moment, the souls of all Christ followers will claim our glorified bodies. No more sickness, pain, or limitations; we will have perfect bodies for our perfect eternal home.
- We are encouraged that believers will leave this world of sin, sorrow and confusion, and BEST OF ALL "we will be with the Lord forever."
- There's an old gospel song entitled: "What a Meeting in the Air." Listen to these words:

*Wretched lives are oh so sad to see  
Those who live in misery  
But in Heaven, no more grief or pain  
Crippled lives are whole again*

*What a happy day 'twill be  
What a glorious jubilee  
All of Heaven will be there  
What a meeting in the air*<sup>xv</sup>

- That is an ENCOURAGING picture, so let's leave with Paul's instruction: "Encourage one another with these words"! Death is not the period at the end of the believer's life, it's just a comma, a pause before we all leave for our eternal home to "be with Christ forever." What a meeting in the air!

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- <sup>i</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 3:16). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.
- <sup>ii</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 2, p. 179). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- <sup>iii</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Co 15:35–38). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.
- <sup>iv</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Co 15:42–44). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.
- <sup>v</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 2, p. 180). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- <sup>vi</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Php 3:21). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.
- <sup>vii</sup> **726. ἄρπάζω harpazō**; from a prim. root ἄρπ- **harp-**; *to seize, catch up, snatch away*:—carry off(1), caught(4), snatch(2), snatched ... away(1), snatches(1), snatches away(1), snatching(1), take ... away ... by force(1), take ... by force(2).<sup>vii</sup>
- <sup>viii</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 2, p. 180). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- <sup>ix</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 2, p. 180). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- <sup>x</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 2, p. 181). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- <sup>xi</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 2, p. 181). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- <sup>xii</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 2, p. 181). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- <sup>xiii</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Co 15:52). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 2, p. 182). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- <sup>xv</sup> Written By Marty And Ann Phillips