

**“The Dead in
Christ Are Not
Disadvantaged”**

1 Thessalonians 4:15



1 THESSALONIANS 4:1–5:22 – Instructions for What Is Lacking

4:1–12

**Commands
regarding God-
pleasing Conduct**

4:13–18

**Instruction
regarding the Dead
in Christ**

5:1–11

**Reminders
regarding the Day
of the Lord**

5:12–22

**Exhortations
regarding Church
Relations**

- Previous sermon: “Doctrine Makes All the Difference” (1 Thess 4:13–14)
- Paul responded to the Thessalonians’ concerns by emphasizing how right doctrine will address and alleviate their worry about the death of believers.

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.” —**1 Thessalonians 4:13–14**

“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 not precede those who have fallen asleep.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

—1 Thessalonians 4:15–18

- From 4:15–17, Paul will explain why the Thessalonian believers must not worry about fellow believers who die before Christ's coming.
- He lays the groundwork for this explanation in v. 15 with two important emphases:
 - 1. A reassuring declaration (4:15a).**
 - 2. A resounding denial (4:15b).**

1. A Reassuring Declaration: “I speak the words of Jesus!” (4:15a).

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord”
(v. 15a).

- **“For”** – Paul is now going to explain the statement he just made in v. 14.
- **“This”** – points forward to the words Paul will write in vv. 15b–17, beginning with **“that”** (v. 15b).

“For this **we say** to you by the word of the Lord”
(v. 15a).

- The gravity of the need and the weightiness of the response leads Paul to emphasize the *origin* of his teaching.
- “**We say**” – present tense—not “we said” but “we say.”
- This small nuance indicates that the doctrine of vv. 15b–17 differs from his other teaching in the context in one particular way.

SECTION	TIMING OF THE INSTRUCTION (VERB TENSE)	NATURE
4:1–8	“as you received,” “we gave you” (vv. 1, 2)	reminder
4:9–12	“you have no need for anyone to write to you,” “just as we commanded you” (vv. 9, 11)	reminder
4:13–18	“we do not want you to be uninformed,” “this we say . . . that” (vv. 13, 15)	new
5:1–11	“you have no need of anything to be written to you,” “you yourselves know full well” (vv. 1, 2)	reminder



- Paul was forced to depart Thessalonica against his will (Acts 17:5–10).
- He repeatedly longed to return but was prohibited by city officials (1 Thess 2:17–18; Acts 17:9).
- He sent Timothy as his proxy to visit and continue the work in Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:1–5).
- Timothy's report identified deficiencies (1 Thess 3:10)—most required reinforcement, but one highlighted the “unfinished business” caused by Paul's departure (1 Thess 4:13–18).

“For this we say to you **by the word of the Lord**”
(v. 15a).

- The phrase recalls the OT formula, “the word of the LORD came” (Gen 15:1; 1 Kings 13:1; Isa 38:4; etc.), but Paul consistently uses the title “Lord” to refer to “Jesus.”
- ***Option 1:*** A reference to instructions given during Jesus’ earthly ministry (e.g., Matthew 24:30-31).
- ✓ • ***Option 2:*** A reference to a prophetic revelation, given by Jesus after his earthly ministry.

“Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 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 will be changed.”

—1 Corinthians 15:51–52

- “**Mystery**” (μυστήριον, *mystērion*) = “that which was previously unrevealed and unknowable.”
- Paul recognized that he was an instrument of new revelation—here, about the resurrection/glorification of church-age believers.

IMPLICATIONS

- The details of eschatology are not incidental or optional. They are the words of Jesus.



2. A Resounding Denial: “The dead in Christ are not disadvantaged!” (4:15b).

“that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep” (v. 15b).

- “That” – points back to the pronoun “this” to introduce the content of what Paul now “says” in the new revelation.
- The first part of Paul’s revelation (v. 15b) consists of a *denial*; he describes what will *not* happen.

“that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep” (v. 15b).

παρουσία

parousia / coming; advent; presence

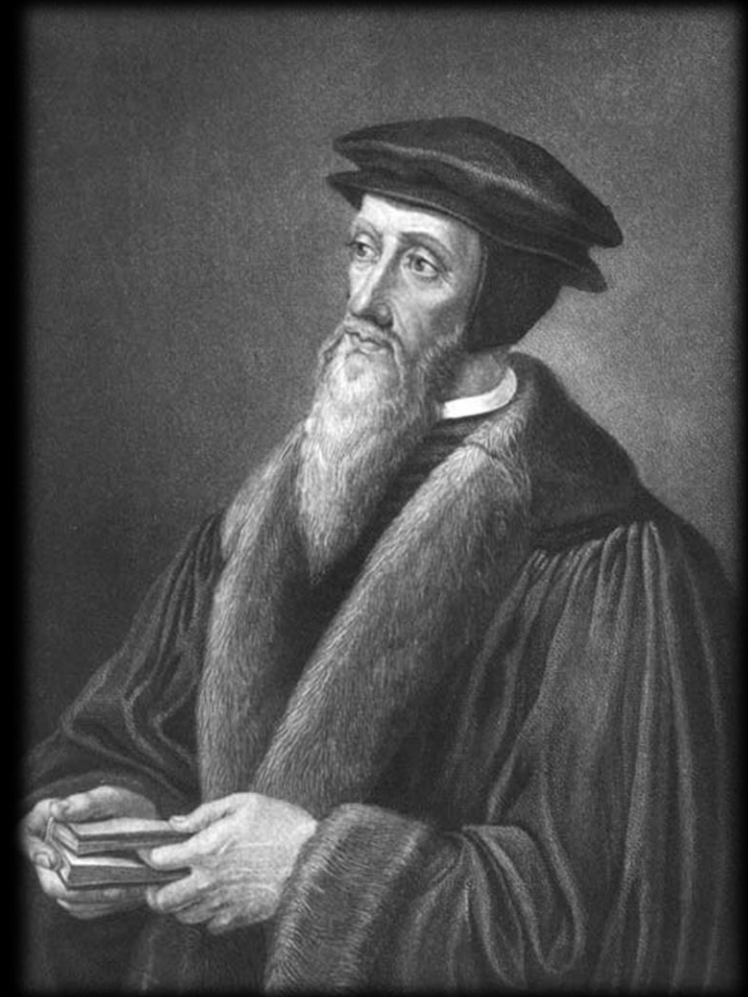
- “The coming of the Lord” (παρουσία, *parousia*) = “the act of coming/arriving; the state of being present with.”
- Paul already used the term in 2:19 and 3:13.

“that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep” (v. 15b).

- The pronoun “we” in “we who are alive” is emphatic.
- How are we understand Paul’s connection to those “who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord”?
- Some commentators suggest the “we” is just rhetorical.

“He means by this to arouse the Thessalonians to wait for it, nay more, to hold all believers in suspense, that they may not promise themselves some particular time: for, granting that it was by a special revelation that he knew that Christ would come at a somewhat later time, it was nevertheless necessary that this doctrine should be delivered to the Church in common, that believers might be prepared at all times.”

—Calvin, *Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 282



- A better, more natural reading is to recognize that Paul uses the pronoun “we” sincerely.
 - First, the pronoun is emphatic.
 - Second, Paul could have instead used the third person plural pronoun (“they”) if he had wanted to distance himself from the picture.
- Paul reveals his own expectation by describing himself as part of the group “alive” and “remaining” at the moment of Christ’s *Parousia*.

“Paul’s indication that he was looking for the Lord’s return was no pious pretense perpetrated for the good of the church. He sincerely lived and labored in the anticipation of the day.”

—Hiebert, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 210



- Paul's words support what is called *the doctrine of imminency*.
- “**Imminence**” = “the condition that something could happen at any time or is about to happen” (MacArthur & Mayhue, 931).
- Applied to the “coming of the Lord” (*Parousia*), it indicates Paul's conviction it could happen at any time.



COMING SOON


- **Romans 13:11** – “Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.”
- **1 Corinthians 15:51–52** – “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 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 will be changed.”
- **Philippians 4:5** – “Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near.”

“that **we who are alive and remain** until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep” (v. 15b).

- Paul’s expectancy supports what is called *the doctrine of imminency*.
- “**Imminence**” = “the condition that something could happen at any time or is about to happen” (MacArthur & Mayhue, 931).
- Applied to the “coming of the Lord” (*Parousia*), it refers to Paul’s conviction it could happen *at any time*.

“that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will **not precede those who have fallen asleep” (v. 15b).**

- **“Not”** – a very strong negation; rarely found in Paul’s writings (1 Thess 5:3; Gal 5:6; 1 Cor 8:13).
- **“precede”** = “doing something before someone else and so gaining an advantage over him.”
- Paul firmly denies that remaining alive until the coming of the Lord gives any advantage; the opposite is true.



“The misunderstanding of the Thessalonians lay in the belief that the dead in Christ would not go as soon as the living to be with the Lord, that a special blessing belonged to those surviving until the coming of the Lord. The Apostle responds by pointing out to them that if anything, the dead in Christ are the ones who have the privilege, because they will go first to participate in the glory of the *Parousia*.”

—Thomas, *Exegetical Digest*, 21

IMPLICATIONS

- As a believer, revise your view of death.
- No longer think that the death of a believer is a disadvantage to him or to her.
- One of the best blessings you can give your family is the confidence of knowing that if you die, you die “in Christ.”
- If you were to die today, would you die “in Christ?”

