



NG Study Guide: 1 Th. 4:13-18 “Be Comforted” [10.28.18]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: There are two transcendent hopes in the universe that can provide true comfort despite the hardships of life in our world. The first is the hope of Jesus, the resurrection, and His gospel that when you leave this earth, you can spend eternity in the very presence of God with no more heartache, suffering, or despair, only pure contentment in Christ’s presence. The second hope is the Rapture and Second Coming of Jesus. The Messiah, will surely gather his church and return a second time as foretold by the prophets just as surely as the First Coming; and restore righteousness, mercy, and justice to His world. These two great hopes can provide comfort and encourage God’s people regardless of our suffering. In this world, you will undoubtedly experience pain and suffering, but today we discover hope that truly comforts. In this study, we contemplate the resurrection and rapture with the goal of sharing the comfort of Christ’s hope.

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴ For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

1. The Resurrection: the believer’s hope of eternal life [13-16]

Paul did not want them to remain *uninformed about ... death* [13]. He wanted them to have understanding about what happens when your physical life ends on earth. The Thessalonians were confused about what would happen to their loved ones who died before Jesus’ return. God wants you to know what happens when someone dies.

Paul describes the end of physical life as *those who sleep in death* [13]. The soul continues to live.

Paul did not want them to grieve like unbelievers, *so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope* [13]. All people grieve for the loss of loved ones. However, when a follower of Jesus passes from this earth, their loved ones, especially those who also follow Christ, are comforted by the hope of an eternal reunion.

Most of us have attended a memorial service where someone made the comment regarding the departed, “There in a better place ...” Is there some reasonable basis for why they believe the departed is in a better place? For the follower of Jesus there is...

Since Jesus died and rose again, His followers can have confidence that they too will be resurrected [14]. Whether we have passed from this earth before His Second Coming or whether we are alive when He comes his followers have nothing to fear. Jesus will either return with us or for us (and bring believers who passed before His return)[14, Jn.14:1-3].

What happens when a follower of Jesus passes from this earth? To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord [2Cor. 5:8]. Thus, your soul is in the very presence of God. There is no reason for a follower of Jesus to

fear death, because the sting (or fear of God's judgment for sin) of death was swallowed at the cross, because of Jesus sacrifice for our sin and His resurrection [1Cor. 15:54-57].

I don't fear death. Some methods of dying appear more attractive than others, but death itself doesn't worry me. When I leave this earth, I know that I will be in the presence of Jesus; and I'll be more alive than ever before. To live is Christ and to die is gain [Ph. 1:21-24]

What is the basic order of the resurrection? Paul explains that *the dead in Christ will rise first* [16]. In other words, believers who passed before Jesus' return will be the first to receive their resurrected bodies. Jesus will come, along with angelic beings and will give the command like He did at the tomb of Lazarus [16, Mt. 24:3, Jn.11:43].

The sound of *the trumpet call of God* signals the gathering of God's people [Mt. 24:31, 1Cor.15:52, Num.10].

What will our resurrection bodies be like? The resurrected body is glorified like Jesus' body after His resurrection [1Cor.15:59]. It will not merely be a reconstructed earthly body, but a physical body perfect for eternity. When we consider Jesus' resurrected body, we discover that He was able to eat, was recognizable, was able to be touched, but was also able to pass through walls [Jn. 20-21].

2.The Rapture: living believers taken up to meet Him [17]

¹⁷ *After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*

Believers who are still alive will then be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air [17].

The term "rapture" comes from the Latin *rapturus* which is the translation of the Greek term meaning "to catch away speedily; or to claim for oneself." This event will happen rapidly, in the twinkling of an eye [1Cor. 15:52], and suddenly millions upon millions of Christians will vanish from the earth. Believers will be *together* with Christian loved ones who had preceded them in death. And more importantly will be *Jesus forever*. This reunion with loved ones and with Jesus is a source of comfort and hope in difficult circumstances and in the midst of grieving.

Note, *they meet the Lord in the air*. The rapture is distinct from the Second Coming [Rev. 19:11-16], because believers are gathered *in the air* prior to the Lord stepping foot on the earth. The Second Coming occurs at the end of the Great Tribulation, the seven-year period of God's Judgement upon wickedness and rejection of Christ [Rev. 6-19, Dan. 9:23-27]. There are varying views upon the timing of the rapture, and whether it occurs prior to, in the middle of, or at the end of the Great Tribulation. We will discuss it more at the end of chapter five, but we believe that the best evidence is that the rapture occurs prior to the Great Tribulation [i.e. Pre-Trib.], and can occur at any moment [1Th. 5:2-9].

Regardless of the timing, the rapture offers the comfort of Christ's hope to the suffering and grieving. Ironically, it also provides hope and comfort for the rejoicing. When your life on this earth seems to "be going great" and you realize that apart from Christ, it still doesn't satisfy, then the longing to be united with Jesus forever gives hope and encouragement.

The Response: what believers should do [18]

¹⁸ *Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

My hope is firmly rooted in reality of life with Christ, today and forever. This hope comforts me in the challenges that I have experienced, the struggles of today, and the undoubted hardships of tomorrow.

We are called to share the comfort of Christ's hope: *Therefore encourage one another with these words*. We are to *encourage* which means to strengthen, comfort, instruct and exhort about the reality of the resurrection and rapture. My greatest comfort lies not in the hope that everything will work out the way I want in this life, but that everything will be perfect in the life to come; and compared to glory with Christ these present struggles seem like light affliction [2Cor. 4:17-18]. We are called to share this hope that others might experience the comfort that flows from the resurrection and rapture. We want to see family, friends, and neighbors discover and experience this hope. If there is no resurrection, then there is no forgiveness of sin, and the best we can have is eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you die [1Cor. 15:32], but since Jesus was raised we know the gospel is true and we will be raised too [1Cor. 15:1-19].

It is good to dialogue with people about life and death, and to discover what they believe happens when people die. It is good to ask, "How do people get to heaven?" and to help point the way to get there. However, when we are living for Christ, we are living for eternity and we will know the comfort of Christ's hope, and be able to share that hope with others.

Undoubtedly, skeptics will say, “Jesus hasn’t come for 2,000 years he certainly isn’t coming.”

But the reason Jesus Has delayed, is not because He is lazy or isn’t coming, but to give you the opportunity to receive Him, His salvation, and His hope. Jesus has not delayed His return because He is slack, but because He is longsuffering and does not any to perish, but all to repent and receive eternal life [2 Pet.3:9].

Just as surely as the prophecies of His First Coming were literally fulfilled, so too will the prophecies regarding the Second Coming be literally fulfilled. The great deception is that you don’t need Jesus to get to heaven, or that there is no heaven. There is no true hope or comfort in either, but the gospel, the resurrection, the rapture and the Second Coming provide true hope.

Study Guide Qs

1. Assuming that you’ve attended memorial services for a believer as well as an unbeliever, how would you compare and contrast them?

2. Assuming that you have Christian loved ones that have departed this earth, how does knowing they are with Jesus and that you will one day be united with them make you feel? How does that reality comfort you in the midst of grieving their loss? How does that knowledge make your grieving different from those that don’t have that hope?

3. When you contemplate your resurrection, and the rapture of the church, what thoughts or feelings come to mind?

4. How have you shared the comfort of Christ’s hope, or how would you like to share in the near future?

“Digging Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

1. Read 1Cor. 15. What did you learn about the resurrection and the gospel?

2. Here is a good read about the differences between the Second Coming and the Rapture:

<https://www.gotquestions.org/difference-Rapture-Second-Coming.html>.

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?

2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?

3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

Pray for an opportunity to share the comfort of Christ’s hope with a grieving neighbor. One of the best ways to comfort grieving people is to spend time listening to them. If the departed was a follower of Jesus, there is comfort for the grieving in the hope of the resurrection. And this is a great way to share Jesus’ gospel.

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

- 1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
- 2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
- 3. The "Digging Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Digging Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
- 4. Every time you meet consider asking:**
 - a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.