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Leading Thoughts on Eschatology in the Epistles to the Thessalonians

VII

The passage chosen for the seventh and final article on the leading thoughts on eschatology in St. Paul's letters to the Thessalonians is one of special beauty and rich content. In the preceding articles we have shown on the basis of the two letters that the Lord will surely come, and come suddenly, as a thief in the night, 1 Thess. 5:1-3; that He will not come before the Man of Sin has made his appearance, 2 Thess. 2:1-12; that when He comes, He will come to take vengeance upon the unbelievers and to glorify the believers, 2 Thess. 1:3-12. In the passage which we shall consider in the final installment, 1 Thess. 4, 13-18, the apostle points out that Christ's Second Advent will transpire in separate acts. In vivid detail St. Paul pictures four separate and distinct events occurring at His coming, 1) Jesus will appear in glory; 2) the dead in Christ shall rise; 3) the Christians still living shall together with those raised from the dead be caught up; 4) together they shall ever be with the Lord. 1 Thess. 4:13-18. Because of the importance and heavenly comfort of these lessons the ancient Church has very properly chosen this passage also, as one of the great eschatological pericopes of the church year, assigning it as the epistle for the Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity.

"I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." V. 13. "I would not have you to be ignorant," is a transitional form introducing a new and important thought; cp. Rom. 11:25; 1 Cor. 10:1; compare also the positive expression "I would have you know," 1 Cor. 11:3; Col. 2:1. While the matter he has in mind is not altogether unknown to Paul's readers and, in fact, was referred to already in this letter, cp. 2:19; 3:13, it is of

sufficient importance to warrant a more thorough instruction, particularly since the Thessalonians were in need of such indoctrination, as we gather from vv. 10 and 11 and 3:10. Far from addressing the disturbed and perplexed Christians in harsh terms, reprimanding them for their ignorance or forgetfulness, he admonishes them as beloved brothers. The tone and spirit of the entire passage prove the sincerity of his brotherly affection, his patience with the young Christians, realizing that many of them had emerged from the ignorance and superstition of pagandom only a short while ago.

Paul's intention is to instruct them with regard "to them which are asleep." This phrase is used as a euphemism for "those who have died." It is the translation of the Hebrew שָׁכַב, 1 Kings 2:10. A similar Greek term is καθεύδειν, 1 Thess. 5:10, which means "to sleep," while κοιμᾶν means "to cause to sleep"; the middle and passive, "to sleep, to fall asleep." Adopting the language of Christ, John 11:11, Paul frequently uses this term for those who died as believers in Jesus, 1 Cor. 11:30; 15:6, 18. This expression was used also by the Greeks and Romans, who often designated death as a brother of sleep, since the dead person resembles one sleeping. Christianity has injected a new content into the word. When one has fallen asleep, he again awakes, arises, returns to the activities of his calling. This term, therefore, is especially suitable in this connection where the apostle is about to speak of the resurrection of the dead.

The *textus receptus* has the perfect tense, "who have fallen asleep," other texts, the present, "who are asleep." Both readings are well attested. The present tense seems to be preferable, since Paul usually employs the preterite, cp. vv. 14 and 15, and therefore the perfect may be a scribal correction of the unusual present. We translate: those sleeping, those falling asleep. Paul does not teach a soul-sleep. He is not a defender of psychopannychism, an intermediate state of semiconsciousness, during which the soul is neither happy nor unhappy. Scripture knows nothing of such a state. Cp. Phil. 1:23; Rev. 14:13; 1 Cor. 15:20.

In this connection Paul does not speak of the general resurrection of all the dead taught Dan. 12:2 and John 5:28, 29. He has in mind only believers, particularly such members of the Thessalonian congregation as had fallen asleep; cp. vv. 14 and 16. The definite article v. 13 points out those sleeping as well known to the readers. It seems that the Thessalonian Christians had submitted definite questions to Paul with reference to their dead fellow Christians, or Timothy may have reported their misgivings to the apostle. Chap. 3:6. The Thessalonians were not asking for information on the status of their relatives and friends who had died as pagans. They were rather disturbed and perplexed with regard

to those relatives and fellow Christians who had died before the Advent of Christ for which they were waiting so anxiously. Would not these departed brethren be at a disadvantage over against those who would live to see Christ's coming? Would they participate to the same extent and in like manner as the survivors in the glorification of the congregation on Yonder Day? Would they be present at the glorious return of the Savior and take part in that joyous meeting of the believing Christians with their Savior coming to lead His Bride into the bridal chamber of heaven? They feared that those who had fallen asleep would be raised from their graves only after the Savior had come to meet His saints on earth. That this was the real cause of their misgivings is clearly brought out vv. 15-17. The Thessalonians did not fear that those that slept would remain in death's power forever; they did not, like some in the congregation at Corinth, deny the resurrection, 1 Cor. 15. Paul had invariably preached the doctrine of resurrection everywhere, also in Thessalonica, as one of the chief articles of the Christian religion, 1 Cor. 15:3. If the Thessalonians had denied or doubted the resurrection of the body, Paul would have been obliged to prove this doctrine, as he did in 1 Cor. 15. Only one question disturbed them, owing either to a misunderstanding of the apostle's instruction or to their own speculations: the relation of the resurrection to the Parousia. Neither is there the slightest justification for the assumption that the Thessalonians believed in a second general resurrection, in which their dead friends and relatives would participate without enjoying the glories and happiness of the millennium. There is not a trace in the entire Bible of a first and second *bodily* resurrection. That is an invention of the chiliasts, which cannot be proved from Scripture, nor, as we shall see, from v. 16, "the dead in Christ shall rise *first*."

The purpose Paul has in mind in addressing his instruction and consolation is "that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope." The *καὶ* after *καθώς* is quite a common idiom. The "others" are the non-Christians, the Gentiles, Eph. 2:3. Included in this term, however, are the Jewish Sadducees, who denied not only the resurrection, Matt. 22:23, but who also refused to believe in a life of the soul after death and held that the soul died with the body, as Josephus writes (*Antiquities*, XVIII:1, 4). The heathen mourn their dead because they have no hope. They do not look forward to an eternal life, everlasting bliss. Eph. 2:12. Most of the heathen believe that death is the final end of all things. Individual heathen, as Socrates, Plato, Cicero, Seneca, endeavored to prove the immortality of the soul and to derive some measure of comfort for themselves and others from their philosophy. Yet they denied the possibility of the resurrection of the body, did not even refer to it.

The future state of man in the nether world was a sad one, far inferior to life in this world, a mere shadowy existence. In vain did they seek to shake off that fear of death because of which all men are during their whole lifetime subject to bondage. Heb. 2:15. Hopelessness with regard to happiness and bliss after death is one of the characteristics of heathenism. For this reason, heathen lament and bewail their dead so loudly, so hopelessly. One may read passages corroborating this word of the apostle culled from the writings of Homer, Theokritos, Aeschylus, Catullus, Lucretius, Cicero, Lucian in the notes on our passage in the commentaries of Eadie, Riggenbach, and others.

Christians are not to mourn their dead in this manner. The Thessalonians need not be without hope. Theirs is a marvelously glorious outlook with regard to the fate of their beloved ones fallen asleep. Note that *καθώς* is a particle of comparison, not of degree. We must not translate: that ye sorrow not in the measure, in the degree as others do. The mourning of Christians is to be of a different nature from that hopeless mourning of the heathen. Paul does not forbid mourning and weeping over our dead. He does not regard every lamentation, every dirge as unchristian and heathenish. Scripture nowhere demands a stoic apathy. It acknowledges the anguish caused by death and the separation from our loved ones, John 11:35; Phil. 2:27. The saints of the Old Testament mourned for their dead and wept for them, but in a manner altogether different from that of the heathen. Gen. 23:2; 24:67; 50:10; Lev. 19:28; Deut. 14:1. Christians must not sorrow in hopelessness, must never descend to the level of those who are without Christ, without God, without hope in this world, Eph. 2:12. Therefore they must moderate their sorrow and the expressions of their sorrow. For the Christian, death has lost its sting. Death to the Christian is not annihilation, neither the gateway to eternal torment, but the portal to eternal, blissful communion with the Lord, 1 Cor. 15:55-57.

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." V.14. Paul proves his statement that Christians must not mourn their dead in the fashion of the heathen. We read, *if we believe*. The hypothetic *εἰ* is not problematic, but presupposes existence of true, living faith. It is syllogistic. If we really believe what we believe; if we do not merely regard it as an historical fact that Jesus died and rose again; if we really believe that, that is to say, if we place our trust and confidence in this death and resurrection of Jesus, our Savior, then the conclusion is inevitable: God will bring those which sleep in Jesus with Jesus. The one and the other are articles of faith, the second following by divine logic from the first. Between

Jesus and those that sleep in Jesus there exists a most intimate connection, so that where He is, there they also are. Where the head is, there must the members be. 1 Cor. 15:20, 23. This inseparable unity and connection has been brought about by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus died for us, 1 Thess. 5:10, and has risen for us. By His suffering and death He has redeemed us to be His own, and by His resurrection He has sealed us as His own possession. We are His own, and therefore we must be where He is, John 12:26; 17:24.

Paul does not place the emphasis on the power of God, as if to say, because God has raised Jesus, He is able to bring them which sleep in Jesus with Him. The apostle stresses the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is the premise from which the conclusion follows. Jesus, the Crucified and Risen, is the living surety that God will bring those that sleep in Him with Him. This argumentation proves in the first place that Paul speaks here only of such as have fallen asleep in the faith of Jesus; in the second place, that the death and resurrection of Jesus were acknowledged by the Thessalonian Christians as indisputable facts and absolute truth; else Paul would have been obliged to prove these facts and could not have used them as the basis of his argumentation; thirdly, that the Thessalonians were worried because their dead fellow Christians might be at a disadvantage over against the living at the Advent of Christ. Their worry was not that their dead would not at all be raised; else Paul would have drawn a different conclusion from his premise, such as, So then God will raise your deceased fellow believers also. He does say, God will bring them which sleep in Jesus with Him. He presupposes that their resurrection is conceded.

Speaking of Jesus' death and resurrection, the apostle uses the name Jesus; and he does not say, Jesus has fallen asleep, but directly and without figurative language, Jesus has actually died and actually rose again. Οὕτως, even so, does not merely introduce the apodosis; it draws the conclusion in the form of a comparison, "in like manner," cp. Rom. 5:12; and καί emphasizes the comparison. Note that Paul does not continue, We believe that God in like manner, etc.; he simply states it as a fact, In like manner God will, etc. Opinions differ on the connection of διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ. Luther and many other commentators connect it with κοιμηθέντες, "them which sleep through Jesus." That would be a proper translation if the preposition ἐν were used, as in v. 16, "the dead in Christ," and in 1 Cor. 15:18; Rev. 14:13. But διὰ is never equivalent to ἐν and can be translated only, "them that are fallen asleep through Jesus." It always designates the medium whereby something is done. For this reason the phrase is to be

connected with ἄξει, "will bring through Jesus," although this verb is already modified by σὺν αὐτῷ, with Him. This connection may be somewhat harsh linguistically, but it is not impossible and is chosen here purposely to insure greater emphasis. The meaning is, those who sleep, God will bring through Jesus with Jesus. Christ is the Mediator of the bringing of the believers to salvation as well as of their resurrection. Cp. 1 Cor. 15:21, 22; Phil. 3:21; John 5:28. In order to emphasize this thought, Paul states here directly that God will bring those having fallen asleep with Jesus, so that when Jesus appears, they are actually with Him in His company and fellowship. Hence they will in no wise be at a disadvantage as compared with those that lived till Jesus' coming. They will fully participate in the grace and in the glory of His appearance. And ἄξει here does not mean to lead away, *abducere*, but to bring forward, *adducere*, as the Vulgate translates correctly. When on the Last Day God will bring His Son visibly into the world, Heb. 1:6, then He will through Jesus bring with Jesus also those that have fallen asleep, after He has through Jesus raised them from the dead and re-united their body and soul, cp. v. 16.

"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep." V. 15. Solemnly Paul emphasizes and proves his statement that at His second Advent Jesus will bring with Himself all that have fallen asleep in Him. "This," τοῦτο, therefore does not refer to the preceding statement but to what the apostle is about to say. Paul speaks not merely with apostolic authority and on the basis of his infallible knowledge of the truth; his statement rests on a specific word of the Lord, the Christ. That is the meaning of ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου, in, by virtue of a word of the Lord. Cp. 1 Kings 20:35. The statement, of course, would have been just as true and trustworthy even if he could not have quoted a word of Christ. Paul is writing by inspiration of God; his word is God's word. 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 2:13. For the sake of his readers he uses this and similar expressions. Cp. 1 Cor. 11:23. What is meant by "a word of the Lord"? Interpreters have seen a reference to Christ's eschatological speech and have compared Matt. 24:30, 31 or 25:1-13; because of the εἰς ἀπάντησιν, "to meet the Lord" in v. 17 (Luthardt). Hofmann prefers a reference to Matt. 16:27, 28. But none of these passages say what Paul says here, and the interpreter must supply the chief thought. Others hold that Paul quotes one of the words of Jesus preserved by tradition; cp. Acts 20:35. (Calvin, v. Zezschwitz.) The most plausible suggestion is that Paul received this word by direct revelation; cp. 1 Cor. 11:23; 15:51; 2 Cor. 12:1, 9; Gal. 1:12; 2:2; Eph. 3:3;

Acts 22:17-21. (Calov, Alford, De Wette, Luenemann, Nebe.)
Cp. Luther's sermons, St. L., XII:2032 ff.

The content of the Lord's word is stated by Paul in two clauses. The first, v. 15, introducing the word, the second adding the reason, vv. 16 and 17, for the statement of v. 15. Paul says, we which are alive, we who shall still be living when Christ comes. This translation is demanded by the context, which contrasts those that live to see the Advent with those who fall asleep before this Day, cp. vv. 13-17. This first participle is at once explained by a second participle, "that remain," whom God permits to remain alive until the Advent of the Lord, εἰς, "unto," designating the *terminus ad quem*. Both participles are present participles and must not be translated as futures. They describe the present state as continuing until the Parousia. On παρουσία cp. chaps. 2:19; 3:13. Paul means to say, we certainly shall have no precedence over those who are sleeping, as far as the meeting with Christ and participation in His glory are concerned. That is the point on which the Thessalonians were in doubt. They sorrowed because those sleeping would be at a disadvantage at the Day of Christ's Coming. Paul shows that those living on that Day will not precede them that sleep, will not take part in Christ's glory prior to those that have died in the faith. On the contrary, if any precede, it is those sleeping. They shall rise first incorruptible, and then those living shall be changed, vv. 16 and 17; 1 Cor. 15:51 and 52. φθάσωμεν, "prevent," is here used in its usual sense of precede, come earlier, before. The English word "prevent" here retains its original Latin meaning, to come before. The double negative οὐ μή emphasizes that something shall certainly not occur.

These words of Paul can be understood only as an expression of Paul's expectation that he together with his readers would live to see the Lord's coming. Paul did not live to see it. More than 1800 years have passed since this expectation was voiced. Hence many interpreters conclude that Paul was mistaken. Others turn and twist the clear words, so that they no longer refer to Paul and his contemporaries but to the Christians actually living at the Parousia. Both interpretations are wrong. We have no reason to charge Paul with having been mistaken, least of all in this case, where he quotes a word of the Lord. On the other hand, the words must be interpreted as they read, and undoubtedly they refer to Paul and his readers. Interpreters who refer these words to the Christians living at the Last Day, regard them as figurative language, as an *enallage personae* or an ἀνωσίωσις, *communicatio*, attributing an action or a state to a whole body while it actually refers to only a part of it. According to this interpretation, Paul wanted to say that we Christians in general, that is to say, those of

us who are still alive at the Advent of Christ, the Church of the latter days, shall not precede those that sleep. While "we," *ἡμεῖς*, may be used in this communicative sense, this usage can hardly apply here, since very clearly two classes of Christians are contrasted, "we which are alive" and "they which are asleep." Moreover, chap. 5:4 the same statement is made concerning those that live at Paul's time, and cannot be taken figuratively as referring only to those living at the end. Other interpreters, therefore, suggest as the correct sense: "we who live in our posterity." That is adding a thought not expressed in the words. Still others translate hypothetically: we, if, provided, we are still alive. This interpretation is rendered impossible by the definite article, which identifies the survivors with "we." All these interpretations are makeshifts. We must not forget that the time of the Advent is unknown to man, unknown also to the apostle. Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7; 1 Thess. 5:1-4. Whenever Paul therefore speaks of the Last Day, he must speak of it as if it could possibly come during his lifetime. Cp. 1 Cor. 15:51, 52; 1 Cor. 7:29-31; 1:7, 8; Rom. 13:11; Phil. 4:5; 1 Thess. 5:4. And since in our passage and in 1 Cor. 15 two classes of Christians are distinguished, the living and dead, Paul could not speak otherwise than he does, since he certainly belonged to the living while writing these letters. (These two classes, of course, were in a state of constant flux.) On the other hand, Paul was not certain whether he would live to see the Day of the Lord. That is evident from our letter, chap. 5:10, "whether we wake or sleep." Here we have the key that solves the difficulty, particularly since Paul elsewhere speaks of the Parousia as in the distant future, and as if he were one of those to be raised on that Day. Cp. 1 Cor. 6:14 (which casts an illuminating light on 1 Cor. 15:51 and our passage); 2 Cor. 4:14; Phil. 3:20, 21; Acts 20:29; Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6. We must not forget that Paul knew that the Man of Sin would have to be revealed before the Parousia, 2 Thess. 2. These passages give us the clue to the correct interpretation of our passage. All that is necessary is to picture to ourselves vividly the situation in apostolic times. The last of the wonderful works of God had been accomplished in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Only one remained, the return of Christ unto judgment. For this day the Christians longed and prayed with earnest desire. But at no time could they know for certain whether they would live to see this day, live to see the revelation of the Man of Sin, live to see him consumed by the spirit of the Lord's mouth and destroyed with the brightness of Christ's coming, 2 Thess. 2:3, 8. Else they would have actually known the times and seasons, Acts 1:7, that day and that hour which no man knoweth, Mark 13:32. Cp. Acts 1:11; Matt. 16:27; 24:25; 1 Pet.

4:7; James 5:8; 1 John 2:18, and the eschatological discourses of our Lord.

"For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first." V. 16. Verses 16 and 17 prove the assertion that the living shall not precede the dead in the Lord's Advent; they picture the succession of the separate stages of the Parousia. "Himself," αὐτός, like 3:11, is the subject, emphatically placed at the beginning of the sentence; "the Lord" is the apposition. Himself, the Lord, the main person, will appear in person, descending from heaven. Purposely He is again called "the Lord," as in v. 15, not "Jesus," as in v. 14. The Lord comes in the fullness of His glory and majesty. He will descend from heaven upon the earth, for the crucified and risen Savior now is enthroned at the right hand of God in the heavens, Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Phil. 3:20. Now He will come upon the earth for the second time but in a manner altogether different from His first coming; in a novel, unheard-of manner. Cp. Acts 1:11. This coming is described by three prepositional phrases. He comes "with a shout." Ἐν in connection with verbs of coming denotes accompaniment, together with; and κέλευσμα, occurring only here, designates the commanding word of a military officer, of the general, a military order rousing the army to action. Luther's translation, "Feldgeschrei," the shout of the soldiers, is incorrect, and the "shout" of the Authorized Version not exact enough. The word is also used of the command issued by the driver to his horses, of hunters to the dogs, of the captain of a ship to the rowers. This word of command does not issue from the Father. It is Christ's command directed to all His own sleeping in their graves. As the general rouses his army to renewed activity after the night's rest, so the great Captain of our salvation rouses His followers, His warriors, from the sleep of death, John 5:28, 29. Christ descends "with the voice of the archangel." At His coming Christ will be surrounded by myriads of angels; cp. 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 1:7; Matt. 13:41; 16:27; 24:31; 25:31. Among these angels there are various orders and classes, and the highest order, the leaders, are the archangels. One of these leaders is Michael, Jude 9; Rev. 12:7 (although both passages may refer to Christ Himself), and accordingly some interpreters believe that Michael is the archangel referred to here; others suggest Gabriel, Dan. 8:16; Luke 1:19, 26, although he is never called an archangel; still others, Raphael, Tobit 12:15; cp. with Rev. 8:2. The term archangel corresponds to the term "prince," Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1. No matter who this archangel is, on the Last Day he is Christ's herald, proclaiming His coming and perhaps Christ's resurrection command. Christ descends from heaven "with

the trump of God." The Jews used trumpets to call the people together, Num. 10:2; 31:6; Joel 2:1. The manifestations of God in the Old Testament were frequently accompanied by the sound of trumpets; Ex. 19:16; Heb. 12:19; Ps. 47:6; Zech. 9:14. So Christ's glorious Advent will be ushered in by the blowing of the trumpet of God, 1 Cor. 15:52; Matt. 24:31, so called in contrast to man-made trumpets to convene an assembly at some man's command. Here it is God and His Christ, God of God, Lord of Lord, who proclaims a unique, marvelous assembly. This trump of God, sounded by the archangel or another member of the angelic host, is the divine signal, the command of Omnipotence, that the dead shall rise, 1 Cor. 15:52. The sound of this trumpet penetrates the graves of all the believers wherever they may rest. The sound of this trumpet has divine, living, life-giving power. We read accordingly, "And the dead in Christ shall rise." It will hardly be necessary to state that we cannot define the nature of this trumpet. Heavenly facts and events are pictured in language that man can understand; cp. Rev. 8:1-13.

The resurrection of the dead is the purpose intended and achieved by the Advent of Christ; *καὶ* therefore is consecutive, "and so"; "and in consequence of this," "the dead in Christ shall rise first." The phrase "in Christ" is correctly connected with "the dead"; it does not belong to "shall rise." That this resurrection is made possible only by Christ is evident from the entire context, while it was necessary to state to which dead the statement is to be referred. The apostle removes all doubt as to this question. The dead in Christ, those dead that have fallen asleep in Christ and even in death are still united with Christ; cp. Rom. 14:8,9; these dead alone are in the mind of the apostle in this entire context. He speaks of the relation of the Christians having fallen asleep to those still living when He shall come. Cp. 1 Cor. 15:18,23; Rev. 14:13. Grammatically this interpretation would seem to demand the definite article before ἐν Χριστῷ, but there are exceptions to this rule, as Winer and other grammarians have proved.

"The dead in Christ shall rise first." Very emphatically the adverb is placed at the end of this statement, adding another amazing and comforting fact to the amazing truth of the resurrection of believers. This "first" is the definite and satisfactory answer to the questions and doubts of the Thessalonians.

But just this little word "first" has been pointed out by chiliasts of every time and age as incontrovertibly proving a first resurrection, the resurrection of the just referred to in Luke 14:14, a thousand years later than which the resurrection of the wicked would take place, Rev. 20. This interpretation, the favorite one in our day among the Fundamentalists, has absolutely no foundation in the

word "first" as used by Paul in our passage. The word "first" cannot mean here a first resurrection in contrast to a second one occurring later. That is made impossible by the clause introduced by "then," *ἐπειτα*, v. 17. This clause does not speak of a second resurrection, nor of a time much later, but of an event connected with the coming of the Lord, v. 16, and the resurrection of those having fallen asleep prior to this coming; and this event is not the resurrection of the wicked, nor a resurrection at all, but of the catching up in the clouds of those living, together with, at the same time with, those having been raised from their graves. The unmistakable purpose of the passage is to allay the fear of the Thessalonians that their deceased fellow Christians would be at a disadvantage on the Day of the Coming of Jesus. Far from falling short of any blessing and joy of that Day, they will rather be the first to experience its blessed miraculous power; they will be raised from death and corruption, body and soul re-united, and then only, and not before, those having lived until that Day will be caught up; and again not a moment before those that had died, but together with them. We have already repeatedly called attention to the fact that this whole passage deals with the resurrection of the dead Christians and that the scopus, the purpose of this instruction, is to comfort the Christians with respect to their deceased brethren in faith, v. 18. We repeat that the apostle in the present discussion leaves out of consideration entirely the general resurrection which is taught Dan. 12:2; John 5:28, 29; 2 Cor. 5:10; Acts 17:31, 32; 24:25. Neither can chiliasts defend their doctrine of two separate resurrections by referring to Rev. 20. There John speaks of spiritual resurrection, as can readily be proved. If a resurrection of the body were meant, only the martyrs would participate in this resurrection, only those "that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus," Rev. 20:4. Furthermore, only the *souls* are spoken of as living, while not a word is said about the re-union of the soul with the body. Finally, only martyrs could then escape "the second death," v. 6, "the lake of fire," v. 14. According to Scripture, resurrection consists in the restoration of *bodily* life, in the re-union of the soul, the principle of life, with its body, from which it was separated by death.

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." V. 17. We have seen that "then" refers to "first," the closing word of v. 16. It introduces the second result of the Lord's coming down to the earth. First the resurrection takes place, then the rapture. The "then" closely links these two acts. In this context the implied sense is "only then" when the dead believers have been raised, then and not at some

earlier period of time. The phrase "we which are alive and remain" is to be taken in the same sense as in v. 15. "Together with them" refers to the believers who had died but are now raised. "Together," *ἄμα*, here does not mean all without exception, as, e. g., Rom. 3:12. It is used here not numerically but temporally, at the same time with them, as, e. g., Acts 24:26. Those who have been raised and those who were still alive will be caught up at the same time and in one company. Before the rapture can take place, the transformation taught 1 Cor. 15:51-54; Phil. 3:20, 21 must have occurred. Our corruptible earthly body, the natural body, will be changed into a spiritual, glorified body, similar to Christ's glorified body. Only then is the rapture possible; cp. 1 Cor. 15:44, 50. Both the transformation and the rapture takes place "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," 1 Cor. 15:52. We "shall be caught up," literally, snatched, carried off suddenly. The term describes the swiftness and irresistible force by which those raised up together with the living ones will be carried upward. The term is to be understood as a real and actual bodily lifting up, ascending through the air. The passive denotes this ascent as one not due to our own strength, but to the power of God. Acts 8:39. This ascension, or rapture, takes place "in the clouds." In the original the article is missing. We shall be caught up in clouds, either surrounded by clouds, or preferably, upon clouds, riding and sitting upon them as upon a throne. Clouds appear elsewhere in Scripture as the heavenly triumphal chariot. As such they serve God when He comes down from heaven; as such they serve the Christians when they are lifted up from the earth to heaven. Cp. Dan. 7:13; Acts 1:9, 11; Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Rev. 1:7; 14:14; 2 Kings 2:11; Rev. 11:12. The clouds of heaven descend to carry upward those ascending from the earth. As the Lord comes in majesty and glory, so they that are the Lord's own shall be carried toward Him gloriously, majestically. What a marvelous prospect! What a unique promise, approximated only Matt. 25:6. The purpose of this ascent is "to meet the Lord," to be led into His presence. "In the air" is to be connected with "caught up" and means simply "into the air," *εἰς ἄερα*, not "through the air," or "into heaven." The apostle does not mean to say that the air is to be the abiding dwelling place of the Christians together with Christ. The air, the atmosphere surrounding our earth, is merely their meeting place, when Christ descends from heaven and the glorified saints ascend towards Him. They meet midway between heaven and earth, in the air. The believers go forth to meet the Lord, as the chief citizens of a commonwealth go forth to meet and greet and welcome their returning king; as a bride hurries forth to be with her bridegroom; cp. 2 Thess. 2:1; Matt. 24:31. In this manner God shall through Jesus

bring with Jesus those that have fallen asleep, v. 14. The other event of that great Day, the final Judgment of the world, is not mentioned here because Paul's purpose was merely to quiet the doubts and misgivings of the Thessalonians concerning their dead fellow Christians. For this reason, in keeping with this purpose, nothing is said of the transformation of the believers and the general resurrection of all the dead.

Paul permits another glance at the unspeakable bliss and joy of yonder world. He states the final goal of the several acts pictured, "and so shall we ever be with the Lord." "So," by virtue of this marvelous meeting and communion with the Lord. "Ever," for all times, without ceasing, we shall be with Him. "With" Him, *σὺν*, not *μετά*. The latter term expresses rather an external companionship, the former, an intimate fellowship and communion. "We," the living and those that had fallen asleep, together in a happy re-union. Where the Lord is to remain forever with His own, is not stated here; only the inseparable communion is asserted, we forever with the Lord, He forever with us. The place, of course, is heaven, John 14:2,3; 2 Cor:5:1; 2 Tim. 4:18; the kingdom of everlasting glory and bliss. We note finally that not all men shall die and that the transformation is not to be regarded as a momentary death, cp. 1 Cor. 15:51.

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words." V. 18. That is the concluding exhortation introduced by the consecutive particle *ὥστε*, so, on this account, because of the information given. And *παρακαλεῖτε* in keeping with the context demands the translation, "comfort, console," not "exhort," as in chap. 4:1. It connects with the "sorrow" of v. 13. Comfort one another "with these words," on the basis of these words, vv. 15-17, spoken by the Lord and transmitted to you by me. An inexhaustible wellspring of comfort is here opened to all Christians weeping at the deathbeds and the graves of their loved ones. Their dead are not lost, are not at a disadvantage. They shall rise again, hurry to meet the Lord, to be forever with Him. Let us drink deeply of these living waters! In Oxyrhynchos in Egypt a letter of condolence has been discovered written by an Egyptian woman, Eirene, to a family of her acquaintance, closing with words that seem to agree with these closing words of Paul. And what comfort does Eirene dispense to the mourners? She assures them that together with them she mourns their loss.

"I was grieved and wept as much over Eumoiros as over Didymos, and I did all that was fitting, as did all my family. . . . But still we can do nothing in such a case. So comfort yourselves"; quoted in the Expositor's Greek New Testament *in locum*. That illustrates Paul's expression "as others which have no hope." How

grateful ought we to be for the firm and sure hope that the inspired Word of God, Holy Scripture, offers to us so freely!

Maranatha. The Lord cometh! 1 Cor. 16:22. "And the Spirit and the bride says, Come! And let him that heareth say, Come!" "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly! Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" Rev. 22:17, 21.

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False Principia Cognoscendi in Theology

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It is a fact, admitted also by scientists, that all theological knowledge, in the very nature of the case, must be derived from God Himself. It is a fact, furthermore, that God holds all who venture to speak for Him strictly to His Word when He declares: "To the Law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Is. 8:20. Lastly, it is a fact that God has issued a solemn warning by the first and the last writers of our Bible that no man shall dare either to add to or take away aught from the Scriptures, Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18, 19. This being so, we are amazed at the audacity of men who have tried to substitute for the Word of God, either in part or whole, a different source of knowledge for theology, to the incalculable damage of true theology.

Foremost among false *principia cognoscendi* in theology is human reason, not only that of outsiders to the Christian religion, but also that of the Christian himself. Attacks from this quarter upon theology come partly in the form of open defiance to, and absolute rejection of, the teachings of theology, which are denounced not only as supranatural, beyond reason, but also as unreasonable, contrary to common intelligence; as attempts to hypnotize the thinking faculty in man and to deprive him of his judgment. Partly these attacks come in the form of subtle insinuations to the theologian himself, who imagines that he must make the deep truths of God's revelation acceptable to the reason of men and that he is able to do so, because he has become enlightened by the Holy Spirit through his study of the divine Word and therefore can produce reasonable explanations of matters which on first blush appear inexplicable.

Now, evidently the theologian must employ his ordinary intelligence in his study of the Scriptures as of any other writing. To begin with, he must be able to read, to understand the meaning of words, to perceive the right connection of words to one another, and the structure of sentences and groups of sentences. When-