

I Thessalonians 4:14–16

I Thessalonians 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

CHRISTIANITY has a criteria for salvation that no other religion does: that for a man to be saved by God, he must believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. *That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation* (Rom. 10:9–10). As Romans reveals, salvation requires two essential elements: first, a confession of Jesus Christ's lordship; second, a sincere and genuine belief that God raised His Son from the dead. All heavenly salvation rests on these two great spiritual realities, without which no man can be saved. Hence, for God's salvation to be given, the penitent must make Jesus Christ his Lord and possess a solid and sure belief that God raised Jesus from the dead.

Even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. Based on the truth that God raised Jesus from the dead, Paul proceeds to reveal even more revelation concerning those who have died while in Christ. The new revelation brought forth is that at Jesus Christ's return God

will bring with Him the souls of the saved ones now in heaven.

(*Matthew Poole's Commentary*, I Thess. 4:14) *Will God bring with him*; and though their resurrection is not expressed in the text, yet it is implied in this saying. By God is meant, as some understand here, the Son of God, who is to come from heaven, 1 Thessalonians 1:10,¹ and who will bring the spirits of just men, made perfect in heaven, with him, and unite them to their bodies, which cannot be done without their resurrection: whereby the apostle gives another argument against excessive sorrow for the saints departed, they shall return from heaven again with Christ at his coming.

(*Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*, I Thess. 4:14) If the question be asked from whence God will bring the dead along with Christ, it must be answered, from Paradise, and the persons brought must be the disembodied *spirits*; for in 1 Thessalonians 4:16² this coming of the Lord with the saints is the signal for the dead—*i.e.*, the *bodies*—to rise.

For those who have believed in the Son of God and have made Jesus Christ their Lord, their justified souls will return with the Savior to be clothed with new bodies. From the grave, then, Jesus will transform what was previously His people's earthly, decayed bodies into heavenly bodies, equipped for permanent habitation in heaven. This bodily resurrection is intended to be a great part of Christ's

¹ I Thess. 1:10 *And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.*

² I Thess. 4:16 *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:*

The Dead Shall Rise

own glorification, when the souls who have been saved return to the earth and through Christ's power new spiritual bodies are given to them.

To understand the process of this future salvation, we must first identify what three elements make up a man's being. Paul lists these in I Thessalonians 5:23: *And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Generally speaking, when Scripture speaks of what man is comprised of, it reveals his being either flesh or spirit, the flesh as both the body and soul of man, the Spirit as the divine nature given to man by God. Yet here in Thessalonians there is a distinction between the soul and the spirit of a man.

(Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, I Thess. 5:23) All three, spirit, soul, and body, each in its due place, constitute man "entire." The "spirit" links man with the higher intelligences of heaven, and is that highest part of man which is receptive of the quickening Holy Spirit (1Co 15:47).³

In the unspiritual, the spirit is so sunk under the lower animal soul (which it ought to keep under) that such are termed "animal" (English Version. "sensual," having merely the body of organized matter, and the soul the immaterial animating essence), having not the Spirit (compare 1Co 2:14; see on [2447]1Co 15:44; [2448]1Co 15:46-48; Joh 3:6).⁴ The unbeliever shall rise with an animal (soul-animated) body, but not like the believer with a spiritual (spirit-endued) body like Christ's (Ro 8:11⁵).

Every man possesses all three elements—body, soul, and spirit—which comprise his total being. He has a body of the earth,⁶ he has a soul like those of the beasts of the field,⁷ and he has a spirit. What is unique, though, in a Christian, someone who has believed upon the Son of God, is that he is given the *Holy Spirit*, a divine Spirit directly related to and connected with Christ's own resurrected being. This supernatural and holy nature is everlasting because its source is He Who can never die again⁸ and now lives forever. There is thus a distinction between the spirit of man⁹ and the Holy Spirit, given to men by the Son of God.¹⁰

3 I Cor. 15:47 *The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven.*

4 I Cor. 2:14 *But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

I Cor. 15:44 *It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.*

I Cor. 15:46-48 *Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. ⁴⁸As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.*

Joh 3:6 *That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

5 Rom. 8:11 *But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.*

6 Gen. 2:7 *And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*

7 Gen. 2:19 *And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.*

8 Rom. 6:9 *Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.*

9 Job 32:8 *But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.*

Zech. 12:1 *The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him.*

I Cor. 2:11 *For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.*

10 Joh 20:22 *And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:*

I Thessalonians 4:15 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.

By using the words *we say unto you by the word of the Lord*, the apostle Paul assures the Thessalonians that what he is about to reveal to them concerning both the living and dead at Christ's return has its source in the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The Son of God had given this new revelation to the apostle Paul, and now he would reveal it to the Thessalonians. The gist of the revelation is this—that there is no real advantage of being alive at Christ's second coming, simply because the dead will be changed before the living. Hence, before the living are given new bodies by the Lord Jesus at His return, the dead will have already received and attained theirs. In simple terms, the bodily transformation of the dead will occur prior to the living having their temporal bodies changed.¹¹ At this glorious time, when Jesus returns to the earth to assume the authority that God has given Him,¹² it will be more advantageous for the bodies of those who have previously fallen asleep in Christ than for the saints still alive at His return. Thus, whereas one might easily believe that being alive at the Son of God's return could have advantage over having died before it, in reality it is the bodies of the souls of those who have already ascended into heaven that will be changed first. It was this truth that the apostle sought to make abundantly clear to the Thessalonians.

11 *Phil. 3:21 Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.*

12 *Matt. 28:18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Eph. 1:20–21 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:*

13 *Matt. 24:30–31 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

(*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, I Thess. 4:15) *Shall not prevent them which are asleep*—Shall not precede; anticipate; go before. . . . The meaning here is, that they who would be alive at the coming of the Lord Jesus, would not be “changed” and received up into glory before those who were in their graves were raised up. The object seems to be to correct an opinion which prevailed among the Thessalonians that they who should survive to the coming of the Lord Jesus would have great advantages over those who had died. What they supposed those advantages would be—whether the privilege of seeing him come, or that they would be raised to higher honors in heaven, or that they who had died would not rise at all, does not appear, nor is the origin of this sentiment known. It is clear, however, that it was producing an increase of their sorrow on the death of their pious friends, and hence it was very important to correct the error. The apostle, therefore, states that no such disadvantage could follow, for the matter of fact was, that the dead would rise first.

I Thessalonians 4:16 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:

The Lord Jesus' return from heaven to earth will initiate and commence His giving new bodies to both those previously dead and those alive at His coming. Jesus spoke of a time when all the people of the earth would see Him coming in the power and glory of God.¹³ It is this coming of the Lord in the clouds that Daniel spoke prophetically about in reference to the Son of Man: *I saw in the night visions,*

The Dead Shall Rise

and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him (Dan. 7:13).

(Benson Commentary, Dan. 7:13) behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven—One in the shape and likeness of a man, but clothed with such ensigns of majesty and honour, (signified here by the clouds of heaven,) as showed him to be an extraordinary person, (compare Revelation 1:13; Revelation 14:14,¹⁴) indeed no less than the Messiah, as the following description of him declares.

The Scripture here lists three things marking Christ's heavenly entrance into this world: First, there will be heard a shout. Second, this loud and reverberating exclamation is said to be the voice of the archangel. Third, the trump of God,

which was sounded in Israel to mark all solemn events and gatherings of its people,¹⁵ will be blown. Hence, both the shout of the archangel and the trump of God will signal that a great event is about to commence—Christ's second appearance on the earth. Whereas before the Son of God came in the flesh¹⁶ to save man, now He returns in the glory of the Father to rule man and execute divine justice upon the earth.¹⁷ The heavenly sounds are meant to draw people's attention upward, for it is from heaven that Jesus will appear. It will be at this moment that all the world will recognize the Son of Man, Jesus, as the Son of God, the Christ. Never before has the earth, the entire earth, heard the trump of God, which caused the Israelites to shrink in fear at Mount Sinai.¹⁸ Never before has the voice of the archangel been so loud

14 Rev. 1:13 *And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.*

Rev. 14:14 *And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.*

15 Exod. 19:13 *There shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount.*

Num. 10:4 *And if they blow but with one trumpet, then the princes, which are heads of the thousands of Israel, shall gather themselves unto thee.*

Isa. 27:13 *And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem.*

Lev. 25:9 *Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land.*

16 John 1:14 *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

I Tim. 3:16 *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*

I John 4:2 *Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:*

17 Rev. 19:11–16 *And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. ¹²His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. ¹³And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. ¹⁶And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.*

Matt. 25:31–32 *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: ³²And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:*

18 Exod. 19:16–19 *And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. ¹⁷And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. ¹⁸And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because*

and dramatic that not even one person will not recognize it as coming from the higher realm of God. So great will this shout be that accompanies Jesus' return to the earth that it will awaken and call from the grave the bodies of those saved spirits, purposed to be a part of Christ's triumphant processional parade.

If one should ask why such a public and universal display of Christ's glory is needed, then consider that Jesus was first publicly humiliated: He was mocked, put to shame, and lifted up on the cross by the Romans for all men to see. Thus, just as Jesus was openly and publicly humiliated, so now will He be likewise publicly and universally glorified. At this time also all faith in the Son of God will be spiritually vindicated. *Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven* (Acts 1:11).

(*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, Acts 1:11) (2) it is proper that he should come to vindicate his people, and raise them up to glory. Here they have been persecuted, oppressed, put to death. Their character is assailed; they are poor; and the world despises them. It is fit that God should show himself to be their friend; that he should do justice to their injured names and motives; that he should bring out hidden and obscure virtue, and vindicate it; that he should enter every grave and bring forth his friends to life.

(3) it is proper that he should show his hatred of sin. Here it triumphs. The wicked are rich, and honored, and mighty, and say, Where is the promise of his coming? 2 Peter 3:4.¹⁹ It is right that he should defend his cause. Hence, the Lord Jesus will come to guard the avenues to heaven, and to see that the universe suffers no wrong by the admission of an improper person to the skies.

(4) the great transactions of redemption have been public, open, often grand. The apostasy was public, in the face of angels and of the universe. Sin has been open, public high-handed. Misery has been public, and has rolled its deep and turbid waves in the face of the universe. Death has been public; all worlds have seen the race cut down and moulder. The death of Jesus was public: the angels saw it; the heavens were clothed with mourning; the earth shook, and the dead arose. Jesus was publicly whipped, cursed, crucified; and it is proper that he should publicly triumph—that all heaven rejoicing, and all hell at length humbled, should see his public victory. Hence, he will come with clouds—with angels—with fire—and will raise the dead, and exhibit to all the universe the amazing close of the scheme of redemption.

There is no day that a true believer of Jesus Christ looks forward to more than this one, the Lord's day, when his faith in God's Son will be both justified and vindicated. For at this time the very faith that was maligned and reproached in the world will be revealed publicly as the only faith that saves men.

the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. ¹⁹*And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice.*
19 II Pet. 3:4 *And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.*

