

Words that comfort (1 Thess 4:13-18)

Death is a topic that has baffled people for centuries. In fact throughout man's existence he has struggled with the concept of death. As we scan the world, we know that death is not a respecter of persons. Whether one is rich or poor, healthy or weak, educated or uneducated, young or old, one cannot escape from death. An individual's status in society does not make him exempt from death. One cannot run away or outsmart death. Wealth, power, knowledge or influence cannot elude death in any way.

While it remains a fact that death has left its mark in every age and has left its ugly mark on all of mankind, death is not an end in itself. The Bible, the word of God sheds light into the origin of death at the same time giving us a glimpse into the fact that death is a doorway that leads from the temporal life on earth to eternity with or without God. Considering death from this angle will send shock waves into our lives and would spur us to prepare ourselves for what lies beyond death. As we examine and understand the sacred scripture we know that death is a gain for those who are properly informed and prepared for it.

Death as The Result of Sin:

The bible reveals that death is a direct result of sin. God had given clear instructions to man forbidding him from eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The instruction and the consequences of disobedience were very clear. Man's choice to disobey God's instruction set into motion death, which deprived man of life and so much more. God was true to his word, "In the day thou eatest thou shalt surely die" (Gen 2:17). Adam did eat and reaped the consequences of his actions: "The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). As a result of man's sins, the Bible sheds light into three different kinds of death. One should never forget the fact that death does not annihilate, but only separates. In the Garden of Eden it separated man from God spiritually; this is spiritual death. In the natural, death separates the spirit and the soul from the body; this is physical death. In final death, it separates man from the mercy of God forever; this is eternal death.

Apostle Paul writing to the Thessalonians says that he does not want them to be ignorant or uninformed about the subject of death. The Thessalonian believers had lots of questions concerning those who had died. Paul taking into consideration their questions gives them an answer which prepared them then, and equips us today with the understanding to tackle the issue of death in the correct and biblical perspective. Being informed is very important, as it is going to influence and impact our response to the death of our dear ones. The distinct difference in the Christian's response to death is hope. Yes, we feel the same sorrow and weep the same tears as others do. But beneath all of the pain and sadness is a deep and abiding hope. We have the hope of a victorious Savior, the hope of resurrection and eternal life, the hope of an indwelling Comforter to stand by our side to help and aid us in moments of pain. What an awesome hope!

Paul makes it clear that Christians should understand death as sleep. In fact Paul uses the term "those who have fallen asleep". Those who die in the Lord during the present age will remain in their "rest" until the rapture of the church. Yes, the death for a believer would be as one went to sleep, was aware of the most perfect rest imaginable and will be awakened to experience resurrection. Our belief in the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ will impact our own our destiny. In order to calm their anxious and perplexed minds, Paul makes his source very clear. When you and I receive seemingly vital information from someone; don't we always want to verify the source of that information? The source of the information, and whether it is reliable or not will put us to ease and will authenticate the information. Life after death is not just a trivial issue; therefore the information received regarding this issue ought to be authentic. Apostle Paul is not expressing his own opinions, or what he had overheard in the market place, but as he presents this vital truth to the believers in Thessalonica, he unveils his source: "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord". Yes we can count on and bank on the word of the Lord. For the word of the Lord is unchanging and true to its core.

Yes, we as Christians believe in the resurrection and the return of the Lord. If we believe that Jesus was resurrected from the dead, then that same power that raised Jesus from the grave will also resurrect those who belong to him. The

word of God unfolds a grand and joyous reunion of all believers of all times at Christ's return. Yes, death brings the pain of separation and the grief of readjusting to life without the person who was important to us. However, in Christ, we have the future hope of resurrection and eternal life to temper the pain of this present world. Paul concludes this section with the admonition "Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thess 4:18)." Truly, such an unveiling of God's word is always comforting in times of the loss of a loved one.