

## 1 Thess. 4:13-18 (WCF 10:3) "Sleeping Children"

**For the Children:** When I was a young boy, my family often holidayed on an island that was about a day and a half's drive away. They would wake us up before the sun came up. We were loaded into the car and told to go back to sleep. When we woke up, we would be far from home, in a very different place. It was very exciting (too exciting for sleep!). Whatever age we are when we leave this life, it is like that: we fall asleep in this world, but wake up in a new place, a much better place. It is very exciting! Maybe we are a bit scared of dying now; and we feel very sad when someone dies whom we love; but once we wake up in the place where the Lord Jesus is, we won't be scared any more. **Questions:** How can even little babies be saved when they don't understand the Bible? Is it better to die first, or to be alive when the Lord returns? What is the comfort that we have when facing dying?

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### Introduction:

#### **First Point: The Sequence of Events**

- 1) What Happens at the End: As the Lord is about to descend, He first returns the bodies to those of His people who have died – to the disembodied souls who have been waiting with Him in heaven. He then descends visibly, publicly and gloriously with them. The public nature of it is indicated by the unmistakable voice of the Archangel and the sound like trumpets blasting (as in Ex. 19; 1 Cor. 15:52). Those believers still alive on earth will be suddenly snatched up to meet with the Lord and the departed saints. Meeting in the air means that all this will be public – the Lord's return, with all His people. Then begins the judgement.
- 2) Equal in Glory: This is said to make it clear that there is no advantage to those who are still alive when the Lord returns. They won't "recede" those who have died (v. 15). They are all joined at the King's "reception."

#### **Second Point: The Participants**

- 1) In and Through Christ: Those who join the Lord in the air are those who were in union with Him when they died; and those who are in union with Him, through faith, as they live on earth at the time of His return. "In Christ" (v.16) means being united to Christ as our Head and Representative. "Through Christ," the literal translation of v.14, implies that He rules over the death of His people, using it to bring them home.
- 2) Following Christ: Because God's people are in union with Him, all He has done as Head and Representative affects us. He died and rose again for us (v.14). Therefore, we die to sin and receive new, spiritual life. For the same reason, when we die physically, our bodies must rise again to glory.
- 3) In the Covenant: The Epistles address the whole covenant-community as those who are in, through and for Christ. These are the "you" and "we" and "one another" of our text. Children are also being addressed by the Epistles (Eph. 6:1-2; Col.3:20). That is why both WCF 10:3 and CD 1:17 cite verses that prove that children are in the covenant (Acts 2:38-39; Gen.17:7; 1 Cor.7:14), to prove that they may be elect, set apart, regenerated and saved. Of course, God will judge the hearts of all covenant-members. But we can't. Therefore, we simply deal with His covenant-people as those "in Christ," whether young or old.

#### **Third Point: The Comfort**

- 1) Not a Merely Human Evaluation: Humanly speaking, it may seem impossible for infants, or some who are disabled, to know God. But we evaluate this matter by God's Word. See vss.15 and 18.
- 2) Not as Unbelievers Do: We do grieve when brethren die. But we do not grieve as do those who have no hope.
- 3) Hope-full Grief: The difference between our grief and that of the world is that we grieve in hope. Even the term, "falling asleep" implies this: it means something temporary; that we wake up with the Lord (consciously, Rev. 7:15-17, 20:4); that we can rest from our toil in this fallen world. Our hope comes from the fact that we live and die "in/through Christ," following His pathway of death, resurrection, ascension and glorification. We have the certain hope that even our dead bodies will be raised, immortal and glorious. And that we will all meet together with the Lord when He returns.

#### **Conclusion:**