

Essay #1

## With the Lord Always: An Exegesis of 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

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### Introduction

Medieval artists in Europe faced a unique challenge: How do you draw an animal you haven't seen? If you page through the *Aberdeen Bestiary* of thirteenth century England, you'll find local animals that look fairly normal but also some, like the leopard or tiger, that look considerably different. The results are understandable given the circumstances because whatever gaps in knowledge they had, the illustrators still had to draw a complete picture for that animal and choose some colors, perhaps relying on someone else's depiction or comments. Still, no one would look at its depiction of a tiger (printed here to the right) and accuse the illustrator of actually having seen a real tiger.<sup>1</sup>



Today I'm painting a picture of Christ's Second Coming from 1 Thessalonians but like bestiaries of old, obviously without personal experience in the matter. Thankfully unlike those artists, I can leave the gaps in our knowledge as gaps. However, I face an additional challenge because other interpreters have tried to fill in those gaps, creating a variety of false teachings on the End. My goal today is to accurately portray Paul's teaching on death and the End, but at the same time, I'll need to point out where others have incorrectly gone beyond Scripture. Additionally, I hope to address why interpreters go wrong, so that we can have helpful conversations with those who have heard or hold to these incorrect viewpoints, and in that respect, this exegesis will also deal with interpretive or hermeneutical principles.

Specifically, I seek to argue that Paul's purpose is to provide comfort for the grieving by paralleling the believer's hope with the certainty of Christ's own death and resurrection.

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<sup>1</sup> Illuminated Latin Bestiary, Aberdeen University Library, Ms. 24, folio 8r, <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/ms24>. For more on medieval bestiaries, see Elizabeth Morrison, ed. *Book of Beasts* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2019).

Additionally, believers who have died will not miss out on Jesus' Second Coming, because they will be raised for that experience. Paul's comfort highlights that the Christian looks forward to the End, knowing that we will simply be "always with the Lord" (4:17). At the same time, I will suggest that the erroneous interpretation of this passage according to the "rapture" is in part due to a misuse of the interpretive principle, "Let Scripture interpret Scripture."<sup>2</sup> When interpreters erroneously go down the path of the rapture, they often go so far as to construct an End Times system, predicting the future course of events among nations. I think we can counter such an interpretation by showing it to be biased with self-concern toward what one sees as the greatest problems among the nations, and that such systems go against the mission-minded, outward-focused message of Scripture (as in the Great Commission).

Before I get to the biblical text, I should outline the false view of the rapture and its connection to wider eschatological (End Times) errors, especially millennialism. It is not my intention here to go into depth, as our Lutheran fellowship has already produced excellent systematic works to address these problems.<sup>3</sup> In 4:17, when Paul speaks of believers being "caught up" or "snatched" to meet the Lord in the air, some millennialists understand this "rapture" (from the Latin translation of the term to *rapiemur*<sup>4</sup>) as when believers still alive are (usually secretly) disappeared from this earth to be with God, leaving behind unbelievers to go through a time of great tribulation. Note, however, that those holding this view disagree as to whether the rapture occurs at the start, middle, or end of the tribulation. After the tribulation in this system, is the millennium, a thousand-year period where Christ rules visibly on earth (though note there can be variations between post-millennialism and pre-millennialism). The rapture became popularized in the United States (often coupled with dispensationalism) through works like the *Scofield Reference Bible*, the *Ryrie Study Bible*, and the *Left Behind* series of books and movie franchise.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, the rapture is not mainstream in scholarship on 1 Thessalonians.<sup>6</sup> Though on the fringes of biblical scholarship, the rapture is perhaps widely held in various forms among evangelicalism broadly understood. I myself was exposed to the rapture viewpoint even back in grade school and high school. Because its adherents tend to take Scripture very seriously, I think we shouldn't be surprised if lay Lutherans are susceptible to it. Because the rapture is more in the realm of pop-theology with many individual variations, we need to listen carefully when we come

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<sup>2</sup> For more on the principle, "Let Scripture interpret Scripture," and its background, see Peter Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 61–62.

<sup>3</sup> See Daniel Deutschlander, *Grace Abounds* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2015), 537–560; Lyle Lange, *God So Loved the World* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2005), 603–639; and Thomas Nass, *End Times, People's Bible Teachings* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> For the term and context in the Latin Vulgate, see Robert Weber and Roger Gryson et al., ed., *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatae versionem*, 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007), 1827.

<sup>5</sup> Cyrus Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1917); Charles Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1978); and Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, *Left Behind*, 16 vols. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1995–2007). For more of an introduction, see Anthony Thiselton, *1 & 2 Thessalonians: Through the Centuries* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 143–145; and Nass, 309–316.

<sup>6</sup> Thiselton, 145, speaking about the rapture and dispensationalism in the history of interpretation on 1 Thess.: "Few biblical specialists would endorse its main claims." Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 145–146, probably represents the most favorable mainstream commentary in openness toward the rapture by merely granting legitimacy for some "to draw their inferences" as long as there is "room for legitimate differences of opinion." Committed pro-rapture commentaries include John Walvoord and Mark Hitchcock, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, ed. Philip Rawley, The John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries (Chicago: Moody, 2012), 54–55; and John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary 23 (Chicago: Moody, 2002), 134–137.

across these views so we can give a helpful, loving response. I hope this paper gives us some avenues to counter the rapture in such conversations.

Before offering the Greek text and translation, I should comment on my translation style. I've chosen to translate in a way reflecting how a native English speaker might write the genre of a letter today. This style aims to accurately reflect the style of Paul's Greek, since word-for-word translations give an impression that the New Testament was written in an archaic or artificial style.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, finer details may seem lost, but in my commentary, I hope to offer a window into the Greek, so my translation doesn't need to unpack everything.

Additionally, I have put a few footnotes into my translation to give little explanations if the points don't merit further comment below. Though there is definitely value to using a word-for-word translation, many such translations already exist in English, are commonly used in our fellowship, and are easily referenced.

### **The purpose and basis for Paul's teaching on the End (4:13–14)**

13 Οὐ θέλομεν δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, περὶ τῶν κοιμωμένων, ἵνα μὴ λυπησθε καθὼς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα. 14 εἰ γὰρ πιστεύομεν ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη, οὕτως καὶ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς κοιμηθέντας διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἄξει σὺν αὐτοῖς.

*Brothers, we<sup>8</sup> want you to know about those who fall asleep, so you also don't grieve like others<sup>9</sup> who have no hope. Specifically,<sup>10</sup> if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so also it's through Jesus that<sup>11</sup> God will bring those who have fallen asleep along with him.<sup>12</sup>*

Though sounding roundabout when put into English (“We do not want you to be uninformed”), Paul begins by negating a negative verb to make a positive point. He regularly uses this style, potentially for emphasis (“We really do want you to know”),<sup>13</sup> but perhaps simply as a common letter-writing formula in antiquity.<sup>14</sup> Either way, the phrase marks the shift to a new topic.<sup>15</sup> Though an insignificant difference, it reminds us to be careful in interpreting, so we don't make the biblical message sound inaccurately harsh, since negative connotations go along with translations like “ignorant” (for example, the New King James Version).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For a helpful analysis of developments in the Greek language as well as the dialect of the New Testament compared to later Atticizing Christian authors, see Geoffrey Horrocks, *Greek: A History of the Language and its Speakers*, 2nd ed. (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 124–159.

<sup>8</sup> Though I will usually refer to Paul as the main author, Paul, Silas, and Timothy are all listed as co-authors in 1 Thess. 1:1.

<sup>9</sup> Though we have the article in front of οἱ λοιποὶ οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα, I think it is best translated generally, since there does not seem to be a specific group in mind as “the others” beyond non-Christians generally. The articles here seems to be needed to clarify the syntax of ἔχοντες as adjectival rather than adverbial. Paul's overall meaning is plain either way.

<sup>10</sup> Here the γάρ expresses that what follows is an elaboration or explanation, see Evert van Emde Boas et al., *Cambridge Grammar of Classical Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 59.14 (p. 668); and Heinrich von Siebenthal, *Ancient Greek Grammar* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019), 251d (p. 422).

<sup>11</sup> My expansion and word order shift (“it's through Jesus that”) is meant to make the connection between the “if” and the “then” clauses more obvious in English.

<sup>12</sup> All Greek text is taken from: Institute for New Testament Textual Research, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, WBC 45 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 95; see also, 1 Cor. 10:1, 12:1; 2 Cor. 1:8; Rom. 1:13, 11:25; (yet in Col. 2:1 Paul states things positively).

<sup>14</sup> Abraham Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, AB 32B (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 262.

<sup>15</sup> Jeffrey Weima, *1–2 Thessalonians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 208.

<sup>16</sup> Note Luther's translation also creatively avoids casting the Thessalonians' lack of knowledge in a negative light. *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Deutsche Bibel*, vol. 7, *Das Neue Testament: Zweite hälfte* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus, 2001), 247 (hereafter abbreviated WA DB): *Wir wollen*

Additionally, the phrase raises the question of what prompted Paul's discussion here. With similarities to other letters of Paul, 1 Thessalonians sounds like parts were written in direct response to something the Thessalonians asked him, perhaps through Timothy who brought news to Paul from them (3:6).<sup>17</sup> Unlike other contexts in Paul's letters, here he gives no hint of correcting a false teaching that sprang up. Because he assumes knowledge of the resurrection in this context, it's not that he was unable to teach them about the End at all in his brief stay in Thessalonica.<sup>18</sup> Some commentators wonder whether the Thessalonians had difficulty in applying what was taught to their present situation with the death of a fellow Christian.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, it sounds like Paul is giving new content since we don't find any reminding language as he sometimes uses.<sup>20</sup> Though several options are possible, I think the Thessalonians' concern was about confusion over what happens when a believer dies now before the Last Day and whether they somehow miss out on something in the End.<sup>21</sup> After all, Paul answers that whatever happens in the End involves *equally* those who died and those still alive (4:15–17). In addition, the climax of his explanation is that we will always be with the Lord (4:17). This connection brings clear comfort even though we lack experience, having not died nor yet faced the Second Coming. The situation may be comparable with how we talk to those who are joining our church: We explain when we die that we are with the Lord in heaven, but also we talk about a resurrection on the Last Day. A new Christian could wonder, how are the two related or is there something missing before the Last Day? Of course, in our minds there may be a little tension between the two, but in reality, we underscore the same thing in both situations: Yes, the believer dies and then enjoys being with the Lord, and yes, there is a resurrection of our bodies after which we will be with the Lord. We have limited understanding, but the comfort is clear. So also here, Paul is simply filling a similar gap in understanding with a similar solution for the Thessalonians.

Trying to discern this context matters because if Paul is filling in a prior basic knowledge, this text itself isn't merely the basics of the End, it *already is* the more detailed account of the End. False teachings like the rapture can only work with this text if one approaches it as though there were significant blanks and as though Paul is giving a superficial account into which one can legitimately insert further ideas on the End, usually taken from a skewed, incorrect interpretation of Revelation. If this is Paul's more detailed account of the End, it would be quite an oversight to omit details like unbelievers being left behind for a time of tribulation.

Moving on from the context, Paul speaks about those who died as falling asleep, raising the question of in what way death is like sleep. Some Christians have incorrectly thought that after death the believer's soul is unaware and unconscious as if asleep so that when Judgment Day comes, all the intervening years passed by in a flash while in the ground. Though this

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*euch aber, lieben Brüder, nicht verhalten von denen die da schlaffen* ("We do not want, dear brothers, to withhold from you concerning those who sleep").

<sup>17</sup> Paul is most overt in responding to specific situations reported to him in 1 Corinthians with clear examples in 1 Cor. 5:1, 7:1, 8:1, 11:18, 12:1. A similar tone as if responding to specifics is found also in the Thessalonian epistles: 1 Thess. 4:9, 5:1; 2 Thess. 2:1–5. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: American Edition*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, et al. 75 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955–), 35:387 (hereafter abbreviated *LW*); and Gordon Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 164–165.

<sup>18</sup> Gene Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 213–214. This book has a thorough discussion of the issue too.

<sup>19</sup> Green, 215; Gary Shogren, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2012), 176; and I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 120–122.

<sup>20</sup> See for example, 2 Thess. 2:5. Fee, 164–165.

<sup>21</sup> So also Malherbe, 284; Weima, 312 (and others cited in their commentaries).

idea of “soul sleep” can seem to satisfy the challenge of understanding what happens between death and the End, it goes against passages that make it clear believers after death and before the resurrection are in some way enjoying the conscious presence of their Lord (the thief on the cross being the most commonly cited).<sup>22</sup> Additionally, even non-Christians like Homer used sleep (κοιμάω) as referring to death but at the same time clearly “believed neither in soul sleep nor in the resurrection.”<sup>23</sup> Speaking of death as sleep was common throughout the ancient world, though it seems that Christians took to it more.<sup>24</sup> For Christians, death as a sleep is a helpful picture if the emphasis is placed on having nothing to fear from death any more than sleep.

Paul aims to help them not to “grieve like others” (4:13). Such simplicity contrasts strongly with convoluted misinterpretations centering on the rapture (involved in a tribulation) or purgatory, while offering little comfort to those grieving.<sup>25</sup> Paul’s focus on comfort likely stood out as exceptional in antiquity, when the Greco-Roman religions did not pretend to offer much comfort (though there were some exceptions).<sup>26</sup> For example, some discovered funerary inscriptions from antiquity read, “I was not, I was, I am not, I care not.”<sup>27</sup> If we live in a culture that tries to forget death as soon as possible, it is worth remembering that in antiquity death and rituals after death were a far larger component of everyday life. Remembering such a mix of pagan attitudes and rituals concerning death puts us in a better position to appreciate how the Thessalonians easily had further questions on how to deal with the death of a Christian.

In verse 14, the phrase ὁ θεὸς τοὺς κοιμηθέντας διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἄξει σὺν αὐτῷ, specifically regarding the διὰ, presents a challenge in syntax. One option is to take it as “God will bring the ones who have fallen asleep *in Jesus* with him.” With that option the διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ is taken perhaps to clarify that those who have died were “in Jesus” or believing in him. Even without this phrase, we know that Paul is speaking of believers in this context because later in verse 16 he speaks of “the dead in Christ” (οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ) as a way of talking about believers. Yet in verse 16, he uses the preposition ἐν, and I think it is more likely he would

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<sup>22</sup> Luke 23:39–43; see also Acts 7:55–60 (Stephen prays for Jesus to receive his spirit); 2 Cor. 5:6–9 (where it contrasts being “in the body” with being “at home with the Lord” in death); Phil. 1:20–24 (where death is “gain” and a departing “to be with Christ”). For more discussion, see Green, 217.

<sup>23</sup> Shogren, 180 (who cites the *Iliad* 11.241).

<sup>24</sup> Charles Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 167; Earl Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, Sacra Pagina 11 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 224; Green, 217; and Fee, 169.

<sup>25</sup> For a perspective that incorporates the rapture, see Walvoord, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 54–55. Especially for adherents of a mid- or post-tribulation rapture, the text is infused with more negativity but in a different direction, since then those living should grieve for themselves for potentially facing severe parts of the great tribulation—for more on that, see J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Findlay, OH: Dunham, 1958), 209. For a perspective that incorporates purgatory into this text, see Douglas Farrow, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2020), 131–134, who says the doctrine “ought to cause both holy fear and holy rejoicing.” Yet Paul has no hint of such negativity toward those who had died here—quite the opposite!

<sup>26</sup> Green, 218; Morris, 137–138; Malherbe, 282–283 (who has a good discussion of evidence in antiquity); R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1946), 325; and David Kuske, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2019), 148. For evidence surrounding the extremes of grieving in antiquity, especially in the cult of Isis and *praeficae*, see Florence Gillman, et al., *1–2 Thessalonians*, Wisdom Commentary Series 52 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2016), 79–80. One difficulty with such evidence is to what extent different Roman funerary practices were present in Thessalonica. *Praeficae* were women “hired to lament at the head of a funeral procession,” as defined in Charlton Lewis and Charles Short, *Harpers’ Latin Dictionary* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1891), 1419.

<sup>27</sup> Cited in Green, 218.

have done the same thing in verse 14, were he saying the same thing. Additionally, διὰ with a genitive object is commonly used to express instrumentality or means as in “through Jesus,” so that should be the safer choice before resorting to unexpected uses. Though an objection could be that “through Jesus” is too redundant when Paul also adds “with Jesus” (σὺν αὐτῷ), I don’t think it presents such a problem. Rather, “through Jesus” is the key component of the “so also” statement setting up a parallelism that guides our End Times thinking. Specifically, Jesus was the one who saved us by dying and rising so it’s also fitting that he brings that saving to its ultimate conclusion by raising us up for eternal life in the End.

This parallelism, though a simple concept, is critical for us, because it centers the Christian End Times mindset on Jesus’ death and resurrection. In fact, elsewhere Paul makes a similar connection in 1 Corinthians 15. In this way, he grounds what is beyond our experience now on what we know from Scripture and base our faith on. Just as his death and resurrection was the fulfillment of Old Testament hope, his Second Coming and our resurrection is the fulfillment of the hope brought to us by his death and resurrection. New Testament language like calling Jesus the “firstborn of the dead” brings out this connection (Col. 1:18, Rev. 1:5). The link also simplifies how we interpret the End: Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension were fundamentally simple, saving events; the End, as presented here and elsewhere, lacks the complexity that is so prominent in false eschatological schemes. Specifically, Paul presents the End as a clear resurrection to be “always” with the Lord, while in chapter 5 he stresses the unexpectedness and condemnation of those who rejected him. Though not a watertight argument against the rapture-tribulation-millennium system, I think there still is some merit to pointing out the simple parallelism between the End and Jesus’ death and resurrection on which it is grounded, a parallelism that is lost completely when viewed with a rapture and millennium.

### **How we will always be with the Lord (4:15–18)**

15 Τοῦτο γὰρ ὑμῖν λέγομεν ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου, ὅτι ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μὴ φθάσωμεν τοὺς κοιμηθέντας· 16 ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος ἐν κελεύσματι, ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ, καταβήσεται ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστήσονται πρῶτον, 17 ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἄερα· καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ ἐσόμεθα. 18 Ὡστε παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις.

*So this is what we’ll tell<sup>28</sup> you based on the Word of the Lord:<sup>29</sup> We who remain and still live to reach<sup>30</sup> the coming of the Lord will definitely not have priority over those who sleep, because the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a command, an archangelic speech, and a divine trumpet blast, and the dead in Christ will rise up first, then all at once<sup>31</sup> those of us still alive and remaining will be taken away<sup>32</sup> in clouds to meet the Lord in the air*

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<sup>28</sup> Though the Greek is present tense, it seems to me that in English we tend to use the future tense when we are prefacing something we are about to say, so I translated accordingly.

<sup>29</sup> The ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου construction is an instance where the rule of Apollonius Dyscolus (second-century grammarian) and its corollary would apply (hence my translation). The rule (or tendency) is that we expect the head noun and the genitive modifier to both have the article or lack it. The corollary is that we expect both nouns to have the same semantic force when lacking the article (both definite or indefinite, for example). For further explanation, see Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 239–240, 250–252.

<sup>30</sup> Often translated as “into” or “to,” εἰς can specify moving toward or reaching a goal or destination, which I am trying to bring out with the phrase, “live to reach the coming.”

<sup>31</sup> I tend to agree with Kuske, 155, that ἅμα should be taken as “at the same time” rather than “together,” since then it would seem too redundant with the σὺν αὐτοῖς right there.

<sup>32</sup> Some uncertainty surrounds Paul’s use of ἀρπάζω here, a term often (but not exclusively) used negatively for being seized, snatched away, carried off, plundered, and the like, as can be noted in Frederick Danker, ed., *A*

along with them. And that's how we'll always be with the Lord. Consequently, use<sup>33</sup> these words to comfort one another.

Paul prefaces his explanation of the End by saying it is ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου or “based on the Word of the Lord,” as I have translated it.<sup>34</sup> The phraseology has raised the question of whether Paul means that his explanation is based on a special revelation he had been given on the matter or whether he is grounding it on some message the Lord spoke in his earthly life that was passed on through the apostles.<sup>35</sup> Of course, Paul as an apostle wrote about having special gifts so a direct revelation is not out of the question, though I don't think he would have needed it here. He likely uses this phraseology to say that his following explanation is simply a repetition of what Jesus himself taught during his earthly ministry, because both in chapter 4 and 5 Paul's explanations show excellent parallels with Jesus' End Times discourse of Matthew 24.<sup>36</sup>

These overlaps are helpful for us as we consider how one should interpret different End Times sections of Scripture, including the Book of Revelation. Just as Paul shows close continuity with Jesus' teaching, we should look for continuity between End Times sections of Scripture as opposed to separate components that add together for a unified whole. If that latter approach were appropriate, how one pieces together the parts of the End would be highly dependent on the interpreter's opinion and not the clear words of Scripture. I believe this is the exact problem with a rapture-tribulation-millennium view of the End with the result that you find such variations now and in the past on when the rapture occurs (before, mid, or after the tribulation) and whether Christ's return is before or at the end of millennium (pre- and post-millennialism). Adherents to the rapture have no true unified account of the End when comparing Jesus, Paul, and Revelation. For example, in Revelation you supposedly have a millennium but certainly not overtly in Jesus and Paul, while here in Paul you supposedly have a rapture but not overtly in Revelation. Even John MacArthur who holds to a pretribulation rapture admits, “No solitary text of Scripture makes the entire case for the pretribulation Rapture.”<sup>37</sup> This is precisely their weak spot. Though outwardly it could seem like a rapture and millennium theology is simply going with the interpretive principle of “let Scripture interpret Scripture,” when Scripture is allowed to be connected as if each section presents an incomplete part of the whole, the door is open for all sorts of interpretations, because it puts the interpreter in charge of constructing the bigger picture.

As a result, I think this portion of 1 Thessalonians is a helpful case study in how we use the concept of “let Scripture interpret Scripture” and how we pinpoint when someone has misused the concept. After all, those who believe in a rapture and millennium take Scripture and its truthfulness very seriously as we do. Their use of Scripture to interpret other places of

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*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), see under ἀρπάζω (p. 134), and Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, ed. Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder (Leiden: Brill, 2015), see under ἀρπάζω. Weima, 331, suggests “a possible wordplay, since this term was often used by non-Christian writers to speak of life or the living being ‘snatched away’ by death.”

<sup>33</sup> I think this adjustment in English is a more natural-sounding work around for the idea of means with ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις.

<sup>34</sup> “Based on” is my unpacking of ἐν in this context where his “word of the Lord” is not a direct quotation. Though the preposition is one of the most fluid in Greek, it can denote “ground or basis,” as discussed in Albrecht Oepke, “Ev,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 2:538 (hereafter abbreviated *TDNT*).

<sup>35</sup> For a fuller discussion with references throughout the secondary literature, see Weima, 321.

<sup>36</sup> See the comparison chart in Ben Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 136. Weima, 321; and Lenski, 332.

<sup>37</sup> MacArthur, 135. Richard Phillips, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 182–184, notes this problem and helpfully expands on it.

Scripture can seem convincing at first glance. Irenaeus of Lyon (second century), when disputing against Gnostic Valentinianism gives a helpful mosaic illustration of how agreement on a passage's truthfulness can still leave room for incorrect views, depending on how one pieces it all together:

Suppose someone would take the beautiful image of a king, carefully made out of precious stones by a skillful artist, and would destroy the features of the man on it and change around and rearrange the jewels, and make the form of a dog, or of a fox, out of them, and that a rather bad piece of work. Suppose he would then say with determination that this is the beautiful image of the king that the skillful artist had made, at the same time pointing to the jewels which had been beautifully fitted together by the first artist into the image of the king, but which had been badly changed by the second into the form of a dog.... In the same way these people patch together old women's fables, and then pluck words and sayings and parables from here and there and wish to adapt these words of God to their fables.<sup>38</sup>

So where advocates of the rapture choose to cobble together portions of Scripture is where their inventiveness and departure from Scripture shows through. In a conversation with someone holding to false End Times views, I might approach it with the goal of showing how even a serious "let Scripture interpret Scripture" view is undermined if one takes the liberty to arrange things to one's own view.

In this regard, we can learn a lesson for ourselves too in how we interpret and explain Scripture. It is often very practical in a new member course or catechism class to have different verses right next to each other to explain a doctrine (and I'm not criticizing this practice). At the same time, a pastor from a different denomination could put different verses on the page in his own order and leave others out to teach a false doctrine. So then, when teaching how we interpret or use the idea of "let Scripture interpret Scripture," we can clarify the additional need for greater biblical context to be sure of a doctrine rather than relying only on someone's individually chosen and arranged passages. For example, we would be walking on dangerous ground if we would simply explain away one passage by giving preferential treatment to a different favorite one. With every doctrine, we should look for its comprehensive treatments and how they stand on their own. Supplementary or smaller passages often present useful parallels but care should be given that they are connected to the larger treatments, though not as if to change them. Additionally, some smaller sections of Scripture make it clear how they fit in with a broader doctrine. For example, Paul explicitly tells us how the "man of lawlessness" fits into the End when treating it in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8. To use a different teaching as an example, we should be able to show how we are saved by God's gracious work not our own efforts, not simply by using Paul but also showing this is same message found in Matthew alone, John alone, or even James alone. Though the connection of Paul and James poses challenges, even then I can note how James says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above" (1:17-18), how his use of Rahab the prostitute (2:25) would not be an ideal example of work righteousness (if that's what he really was teaching), and how his view of justification like Paul's was grounded in Genesis where the important chronology of Abraham's life does not change between the two (2:21-24)! Care in how we use Scripture to interpret other places in Scripture helps us show that the Lutheran interpretation is the authentic reading of the text and exposes when people get incorrect ideas by letting one part of Scripture simply slant, overpower, or flatten the context of another part.

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<sup>38</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against the Heresies: Book 1*, ACW (Mahwah, NJ: The Newman Press, 1992), 8.1 (p. 41).



The focus of verses 15 and 16 is on equality on the Last Day for both the believers who have died and those still alive. Paul uses the strong future negation formula, οὐ μὴ φθάσωμεν (an aorist subjective negated with both negative particles), with a verb I translated as “have priority,” since in the context the concern is specifically over whether one group is better off by arriving first (that is, it is not simply a matter of time), and the English term has a time element as well. The Greek verb (φθάνω) at first emphasized arriving or attaining something before another, but later it could simply mean to arrive, though the comparative meaning between two groups is clear in 4:15.<sup>39</sup> Though Paul has a sequential element here and later (4:16–17: “The dead in Christ will rise up first, then...”), the focus does not seem to be on a significant passage of time but that the dead have to rise first before being collected together with those still living to be in the Lord’s presence.<sup>40</sup> Since verse 15 likely pinpoints and answers the difficulty facing the Thessalonians, a concern over so brief a time seems too small of a matter to have raised a problem for them. It might have posed a greater concern if the dead in Christ were going to miss out on something in the End or have a lower priority in some sense.<sup>41</sup> Paul then is clarifying that there is no significant difference between those who had died and those still living at the End: either way it works out that both are quickly joined together to be with the Lord always.

Though a side point to our main concern today, it’s worth addressing the potential question of whether Paul thought Jesus was coming so soon that he’d still be alive for it as the phrase, “we, the ones living and remaining” (ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι) might indicate. The main challenge comes from a higher-critical perspective (which our fellowship has rejected) and would suggest that early Christians initially thought Jesus had inaugurated a new, brief age that would quickly reach its peak in his Second Coming while many were still living.<sup>42</sup> As this coming was delayed, Christians supposedly modified their view to accommodate a delayed Second Coming, so the perspective goes, and consequently the New Testament contains instances of this modification in the later books. Here I would briefly address the problem by saying in this very letter, Paul says the Second Coming would be unexpected and sudden like “a thief in the night” (5:2–3), and he gives no indication that he knew when he was going to die, the same situation we are in. Consequently, he like other Christians at the time should indeed have thought it possible for the Lord to come in their lifetime, not that he *had* to come then (contradicting the unknown time stressed both in Paul and Jesus’ End Times discourses).<sup>43</sup> One of the common problems noted between 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians is that in the first one, the End seems soon, while in the second one, Paul sounds like he is telling the Thessalonians Jesus is not coming so soon in the “man of lawlessness” section (2 Thess. 2).<sup>44</sup> Yet even in 2 Thessalonians 2:2, he merely warns them “not to be quickly disturbed” if someone falsely claims “that the day of the Lord has come” or “is here” (ὡς ὅτι ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου). The problem is thinking the End has come already, not that it might be soon, and even the revealing of the “man of lawlessness”

<sup>39</sup> Gottfried Fitzer, “Φθάνω, Προφθάνω,” *TDNT*, 9:88–92.

<sup>40</sup> For further information about there being no lengthy sequence and the “first” (πρῶτον) of 4:16, see Kuske, 153–154. Luther has the same view, *LW* 51:253.

<sup>41</sup> I think this confusion was from the Thessalonians themselves trying to piece things together, but for the possibility that “apocalyptic Judaism had stressed the importance of being part of the generation of the end-time” and was maybe a factor, see Richard, 242. It bears mentioning that some converts in Thessalonica were of Jewish background (Acts 17:1–4). Nevertheless, Green, 215, is probably right that such a view expects too much familiarity on the Thessalonians’ part as new converts. I would think if they had been familiar with such literature, there probably would have been several additional points of confusion.

<sup>42</sup> Fee, 175–176, gives a more thorough refutation of this viewpoint.

<sup>43</sup> Weima 323–324; Shogren, 184–185; and Morris, 141–142.

<sup>44</sup> The challenge in this relationship between 1 and 2 Thessalonians is noted and addressed further in D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 540–542.

does not make it necessary for the End to be *impossible* in a lifespan when the text was written. More could be said on this challenge, but it suffices to say that early Christians like Paul, since they took Jesus' words seriously, had to assume his Second Coming was possible in their lifetime and spoke accordingly. We should make the same assumption for our lifetimes since we likewise do not know when we will die nor when the Last Day is.

In mentioning that the Lord will come “with a declaration, an archangelic speech, and a divine trumpet blast” (ἐν κελεύσματι, ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ), Paul leaves no doubt that when the End comes, it will be impossible to miss. Nevertheless, those who favor the rapture tend to say it will be a *secret* rapture, as if only believers will hear all these things, but a loud commotion is inescapable here.<sup>45</sup> Paul says it will involve “the Lord himself” ἐν κελεύσματι, a noun which could “range from a specific command, through a terse order, to an inarticulate cry.”<sup>46</sup> At the very least, it is a command or declaration here, but it might mean “summons,” another lexical possibility, especially in this context of raising the dead.<sup>47</sup> The uncertainty lies in whether this κέλευσμα simply announces Christ's coming or is what calls up the dead (or maybe both). The end result is still the same. The phrase ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου “with an archangelic voice” or “the voice of the archangel” is straightforward, but one could wonder what significance is involved with the lack of the article. Is this *an* archangel, as if one of many? It's worth noting that often articles are lacking after a preposition, even if the noun is definite.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, genitive constructions tend to have the article before both words or for neither word, and they tend to be either both definite, both indefinite, or both qualitative.<sup>49</sup> So then, it's hard to leverage the presence or lack of an article in front of the words in question for verse 16. From Scripture alone, not much can be said, except Michael is called an archangel in Jude 9, so he is a potential candidate. Regardless, angels regularly feature prominently in key saving acts, like announcing Christmas and Easter, so it fits that angels would be involved in the final realization of Christ's work in the End. Further adding to the noise is the “trumpet blast of God.” Trumpets in antiquity would not have been musical instruments as much as for “military exercises, cultic events, and funeral processions. In the Roman army nothing happened without sounding the trumpet.”<sup>50</sup> It announces the critical time is now. With all these sounds, Paul presents the End as unmistakable. Since surprisingly some End Times schemes nevertheless involve a secret rapture, we have a strong passage to counter such views.

These details of the End and the resurrection seem to drive at being with the Lord always as the key feature of comfort to the Thessalonians and us. With the term ἀπάντησιν or “meeting,” many commentators note that in antiquity this term was often a technical one to refer to the reception of a king, conqueror, or prominent visitor to a city.<sup>51</sup> John Chrysostom (from a fourth century vantagepoint) heard this idea in the term as well:

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<sup>45</sup> Morris, 145, notes: “It is difficult to see how he could more plainly describe something that is open and public.”

<sup>46</sup> Lothar Schmid, “Κέλευσμα,” *TDNT*, 3:657.

<sup>47</sup> Montanari, see under κέλευσμα.

<sup>48</sup> Wallace, 247.

<sup>49</sup> As mentioned above in footnote 29 regarding the rule and corollary of Apollonius Dyscolus, see Wallace, 239–240, 250–252.

<sup>50</sup> Green, 224–225. Luther, WA DB 7:247, also interprets the verse with military connotations when he takes κέλευσμα as a *Feldgeschrey* or “battle cry.” Yet he takes such imagery in verse 16 metaphorically, *LW* 51:253: “[Paul] was trying to paint a picture, as we must use pictures with children and simple people, and use words which we are accustomed to use in describing a grand, magnificent march of an army, when a lord takes the field in great triumph with his lifeguards, banners, trumpets, and canisters, so that everyone hears that he is coming.”

<sup>51</sup> Green, 223; Shogren, 189–190; Phillips, 186; and Kuske, 156.

If he is about to descend, on what account shall we be caught up? For the sake of honor. For when a king drives into a city, those who are in honor go out to meet him; but the condemned await the judge within. And upon the coming of an affectionate father, his children indeed, and those who are worthy to be his children, are taken out in a chariot, that they may see and kiss him; but the housekeepers who have offended him remain within. We are carried upon the chariot of our Father. For he received him up in the clouds, and “we shall be caught up in the clouds.” Do you see how great is the honor? And as he descends, we go forth to meet him, and, what is more blessed than all, so shall we be with him.<sup>52</sup>

Though the beautiful imagery is without any doctrinal problem, the term also appears in plain uses for meetings as well, leaving some uncertainty. If this figure of speech is intended by the term, however, the feature that those receiving the king accompany him to the city is not quite in the text itself.<sup>53</sup> Of course with all metaphors, some features do not carry over, and this would then be one of them.

Before signaling a clear topical transition to chapter five (indicated with *Περὶ δὲ... ἀδελφοί*), Paul highlights the purpose of this whole discussion: “And that’s how we’ll always be with the Lord. Consequently, use these words to encourage one another” (*καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ ἐσόμεθα. Ὡστε παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις*). A variety of bad ideas about the End can be helpfully addressed by noting the purpose of a section and questioning how this or that false idea *really* fits with that clearly stated purpose. For example, if this section were teaching some secret rapture, that really doesn’t fit why Paul himself says he’s writing these things, which is to explain how we’ll always be with the Lord—both those believers who have died and those still living in the End. That purpose forms the basis of the comfort he set out to give (the comfort which allows the Thessalonians “to encourage one another”) and is indicated by a common use of *οὕτως* (“thus”). *Οὕτως* can refer backwards (“in this way,” “accordingly”), forwards (“as follows”), or indicate degree (“so”).<sup>54</sup> Because a transition follows and “always” (*πάντοτε*) doesn’t work with degrees, we know it refers backwards, indicating his previous statements build to this main point of being with the Lord always.

Though the ending of our text is straightforward, it should be kept as the dominant feature of how we speak about the End. People can come up with all sorts of unanswerable questions about the End but being with the Lord always is easily understandable and comforting. This eternal togetherness summarizes the goal of Christ’s gospel-centered mission with his life, death, and resurrection.

Verse 18 is likewise simple but sometimes a challenge to live out: “Consequently, use these words to comfort one another.” Though etymologically *παρακαλέω* means “to call to oneself,” in the New Testament it is well established as a verb of comfort and

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<sup>52</sup> Peter Gorday, ed. *Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament 9 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 90 (citing John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Thessalonians*, 8).

<sup>53</sup> Malherbe, 277, summarizes well the negative viewpoint: “The Hellenistic processions were undertaken at the initiative of the welcomers, whereas here they are snatched up, presumably by God. Furthermore, the purpose of the meeting is to bring about their gathering with the Lord and each other, not to escort the Lord, of which nothing is said.”

<sup>54</sup> Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990–1993), 2:549.

encouragement.<sup>55</sup> Paul gives us a wonderful basis in Christ to give comfort when faced with death. As leaders in the church, we face a variety of problems, and it's easy to focus on whatever is going wrong. Though dealing with problems is part of our work, Paul centers our thoughts on eternal encouragement that we can give to each other. He gives us the bigger picture of being with our Lord always, and I hope we let that overpower our discouragements when they come and help us comfort people with the most important eternal hope.

Centering our End Times discussions on Jesus and his eternal salvation perhaps makes it more obvious how far from Jesus many incorrect End Times systems can be, as one commentator noted: "One of the chief problems with so much end-times fervor today is that attention is devoted to practically everything except to Christ himself. Eschatologically speculative Christians rack their brains searching the newspapers for signs of the end instead of directing our hearts to our Lord."<sup>56</sup> Such systems often read current politics into biblical imagery or a "tribulation," like in reading Revelation, but I think we have an opening to counter these views when we point out how they often are self-centered. In published examples from the United States—and I've found their ideas reflected in personal conversations too—the End Times are often characterized by whatever dominates news headlines and political issues.<sup>57</sup> Though they have to be somewhat negative about the United States to fit their false interpretations of Revelation and the downfall of western civilization, they are profoundly more negative against many nations of the Middle East (besides Israel) and Asia who are villainized and made to fit western caricatures as "bad guys," to say the least.<sup>58</sup> Admittedly Christians unfortunately do face persecutions under various governments (and I don't want to minimize that), but abovementioned treatments of the rapture and tribulation quickly make sweeping generalizations of people groups. Yet the same interpretive moves would have obviously led to a dramatically different scenario if someone developed them at the start of World War Two, for example. This End Times attitude (and it likely finds different forms in different places) shows itself to be self-centered and nationalistic. Who are we to categorize nations as good or bad, let alone that this categorization is mediated through current worldly politics and news, not God's Word? Not only do such schemes deface a clear, Jesus-focused End in 1 Thessalonians, they put sinful humans in charge of plugging in their own whims to sacred Scripture. We can't safely leave God's Word and read his hand and providence into history or the future by assuming some special vantage point or that a particular nation is exceptional as if it's God's favorite. "God so loved the world," which includes all nations, he sends out workers to harvest for his kingdom in *all nations*, and his church is in all these nations whether obvious or underground.<sup>59</sup> With a mission and kingdom-minded focus, we can see clearly the self-centeredness of false End Times speculation. With Law and Gospel, we can help someone caught up in these schemes to see that they are in no position to judge or justify nations, when we are the ones in the position of needing justification and forgiveness from God (which we

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<sup>55</sup> Moises Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 3:628–630.

<sup>56</sup> Phillips, 157.

<sup>57</sup> For example, John Walvoord, *Armageddon, Oil, and Terror: What the Bible says about the future of America, the Middle East, and the end of Western Civilization*, rev. ed. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2007); and Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

<sup>58</sup> For example, in Walvoord, *Armageddon, Oil, and Terror*, 68–72, the United States is merely weakened by loss of oil, moral decline over time, but especially the rapture, because then "the true church would suddenly be gone, and America would experience a significant loss of leaders and citizens in all walks of life." On the other end, Walvoord's and Lindsey's analyses of eastern nations strikes me as too offensive to be quoted here. That their works were published by Zondervan (originally), a reputable evangelical publisher, with best-selling boasts is a helpful warning about how easy it can be to generalize and villainize whole groups of people.

<sup>59</sup> John 3:16; Matt. 9:35–38; John 4:34–38; and 1 Cor. 3:5–9.

thankfully receive freely through faith in Christ). Often worries about world events beyond our control might lead to End Times speculation (because thinking we understand the reasons for things could give us at least a feeling of agency or control when we feel powerless), but the real and comfort-giving solution is to look to God’s providence now and eternally. He who cares for the sparrows and the lilies of the field will surely care for us, and our Good Shepherd will let no one snatch us from his hands.<sup>60</sup>

One final challenge to consider in conversations with those believing in the rapture is that it can look like we are not taking Scripture as seriously or literally as they are. Rapture adherents will assert: “Pretribulation rapturism rests essentially on one major premise—the literal method of interpretation.”<sup>61</sup> This assertion could make the rapture sound convincing to Lutherans, since we also emphasize the literal meaning. Part of this difficulty is the occasional ambiguity that surrounds the term “literal” even into the distant past.<sup>62</sup> For example, is the literal meaning of the Parable of the Lost Coin the plain story of the coin or the decoding of the parable to speak of lost *people*? Then when we look at the Book of Revelation, are we abandoning the literal meaning when we decode the language? Additionally, someone could think we don’t hold to the rapture or millennium because we are unwilling to take Scripture as seriously as it presents itself, as if we want to find workarounds to avoid what it is saying. I think a helpful path forward is to positively highlight the different genres of Scripture, teaching how different rules apply when interpreting those genres and the positive place of those genres. We do this all the time with a variety of literature. For example, we interpret a subway/metro map differently than a road map, satellite image, or a work of art about the city. All four are still true to what they are saying but the rules for interpretation are different and so is their value. But if you interpret a subway map like a satellite image to drive through a city, it won’t work out well. So also problems arise when Revelation is the lens for viewing 1 Thessalonians because both communicate the message differently. The Book of Revelation itself teaches us how to interpret it according to its genre when it at times explains its own figurative language, like calling the seven lampstands churches and the seven stars angels.<sup>63</sup> Because we can be less sure of ourselves decoding figures that are left unexplained, it would be reckless to use such features to modify or add information to plain, literal texts of Scripture on the End, like 1 Thessalonians. Revelation is valuable as a genre because extreme imagery hits home the severity and seriousness of forces that challenge our faith, while 1 Thessalonians gives us the End in plain terms so we understand clearly. When we treasure the various genres of Scripture for what they offer us, I think we have a positive angle to prevent many misuses and misunderstandings of the Bible.

## Conclusion

By paralleling the End with Christ’s resurrection and by centering the message on comfort in being with the Lord always, 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 presents the same simple and powerful message we find in the hymn, “On Christ’s ascension I now build the hope of my ascension.”<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, the false teaching of the rapture empties the text of Paul’s positive tone. I have tried to offer different approaches to counter the rapture viewpoint. First,

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<sup>60</sup> Matt. 6:25–34, 10:29–31; Luke 12:6–7, 22–31; and John 10:27–29.

<sup>61</sup> Pentecost, 193. Similarly, Tim LaHaye, *The Rapture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2002), 233: “I doubt a person could arrive at an amillennial or postmillennial position simply by reading the Bible literally.” Our Lutheran fellowship holds to the amillennial viewpoint that there is no special 1000-year earthly reign of Christ.

<sup>62</sup> Iain Provan, *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 81–106, gives a helpful overview of some challenges in talking about the literal meaning throughout history, though I would take issue with some of his points.

<sup>63</sup> Rev. 1:20. Other examples include Rev. 11:8; 17:7, 9–11.

<sup>64</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (St. Louis: MorningStar Music, 1996), 392; and *Christian Worship: Hymnal* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2021), 476.

the rapture could only work by inserting other biblical texts into 1 Thessalonians, but this move is highly subjective without an overall bigger picture elsewhere in Scripture to guide it. Second, the rapture and its compliment, the millennium, go against Paul's explicit purpose in 1 Thessalonians 4. Third, the views only appear to take Scripture seriously but in reality ignore genre distinctions embedded into the biblical text. Finally, adherents to the rapture at times show present-day concerns are guiding their biblical interpretations above all else. We all face things outside of our control (like for instance, much about the pandemic or world politics), but we are better off trusting God's providence as beyond our understanding than to think we are the center of human history and can correctly piece together End Times imagery to match the concerns surrounding our nation or life. Hopefully, we can helpfully and lovingly correct false End Times views whenever they come up in our ministry and point people to the true comfort of Christ's saving work for us to free us from sin and death, resulting in Paul's timeless comfort here for "how we'll always be with the Lord" (4:17).