

"The Rest, Having No Hope"

Paul wrote, "we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Apparently, the readers had concern about what happens to believers when they die. Paul reminded them that based on the resurrection of Jesus, the faithful will also be resurrected to eternal life with God. Thus, Christians of every age need not grieve, but encourage one another with these words.

This is the heart of the gospel, without which the believer's faith would be empty (1 Corinthians 15). The hope of the resurrection puts meaning and purpose in life. It is what makes sense of Christianity. By implication, "the rest," who do not believe Jesus died and rose again, have no hope, and every reason to grieve. Some choose not to think about the consequence of unbelief, avoiding (at least temporarily) the unpleasantness it brings. Many trust in someone or something other than Jesus and hope their belief system can deliver. Others remain steadfast in their hope that the claims of Jesus and his disciples about his resurrection were untrue, and if there is a God, he is somehow removed from this world and our personal lives, expects nothing of us, and may or may not have something pleasing waiting for us (or at least most of us).

Paul indicates these are false hopes, no hopes, no matter how sincere. Yet, these words were not intended to provoke despair, but joy for believers and a challenge to examine the claims of the gospel, answer its call, and so have hope for "the rest."