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SLEEP AS METAPHOR IN PAUL: DYING AND LIVING IN THE PROMISE OF THE
PAROUSIA

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By

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February 2007

Approved by

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PREFACE

This project began with a curiosity for "life after death" matters when I was in confirmation class at a small South Jersey Lutheran church. My mother wanted to know if believers would be with Jesus as soon as they died, so I asked the pastor this and more. It was not until almost ten years later when I attended the 1999 Theological Symposium at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, MO, as an undergraduate deaconess student from Concordia University, River Forest, IL, that I learned what *really* happens to believers when they die—and even if they don't. I am ever grateful to Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs for his passionate plenary address, "Regaining a Biblical Hope: Restoring the Prominence of the Parousia," that fateful September morning. It was the spark for my own quest to know more about eschatology—but more importantly, to better know Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith.

First, I would like to thank all my professors at Concordia Seminary for the outstanding education I received while a student there. Specifically, many thanks go to Dr. Bruce G. Schuchard, for teaching me Greek and for his guidance during this project as Dean of the Graduate School; Dr. R. Reed Lessing, for teaching me to enjoy Hebrew; Dr. Bryan R. Salminen, for expanding my talents in the practical realm of theology; Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs, for teaching me to how to study Pauline texts and for his faithful mentoring; Dr. Paul R. Raabe, for teaching me to love biblical theology and for his encouragement to write; and to Mrs. Marla Brewer, whom I first met and was aided by in the Graduate School, now serving in the Dean of the Faculty's office, Dr. James W. Voelz. She, along with Mrs. Mary Ann Florea, who is now with Jesus, was always a source of encouragement and support.

A special word of thanks goes to Dr. James W. Voelz, my advisor for this thesis. I feel honored and privileged to have researched and written this work under his faithful and excellent guidance. His enthusiasm for my work was a constant source of encouragement and perseverance. I would also like to thank Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs and Dr. Joel D. Biermann for serving as readers for this thesis, and the Graduate School staff for their assistance.

Many thanks to Deaconess Tressa Weyer for her support; Mrs. Mariana Cassell, Mrs. Monica Hetzner, and Mrs. Paula Woomer, for their support and assistance with my children; to Rev. Justin Rossow, for discussions on metaphors during this project; to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Henry D. DuBois Jr., for their support, and for never stopping me from following my dreams, even if they took me far away from home; and to Mrs. Laura Thompson, for helping me realize this was my dream, and for encouraging me to follow it.

Last, but most importantly, I would like to thank my long-suffering husband, Rev. Samuel J. Grayl, for all of his sacrificial love, support, patience, and comments on my manuscript during the writing of this thesis. Without his encouragement, willingness to be flexible, and belief in the message of this project, it would never have been finished.

This thesis is dedicated with love to our son, Samuel Xavier Grayl, who was born shortly after this project was approved, and to our daughter, Anastasia Sophia Grayl, who was born during the final stages of its submission.

CHAPTER ONE

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE USE OF SLEEP AS A METAPHOR

Metaphor is a powerful tool for conveying concepts in culture, especially abstract concepts.¹ For example, we often say “Life is a journey” in order to describe the various “paths” life takes in our culture.² When expressing ideas concerning the death of someone we might say, “He passed away,” or “Aunt Margaret is asleep.” Paul, being the great thinker that he was, knew the power of such metaphorical language. Not only that, Paul knew that the Greeks, to whom he was sent to preach, used metaphors,³ so he used them as a tool when he wrote about the complete salvation story.

For the purposes of this chapter and the next, our discussion will be limited to one of the metaphors Paul employs, viz. sleep to describe death. Paul is not the first person to use this metaphor. The Greeks used it; the Romans used it; and it even appears in the Old Testament. Does he use sleep as metaphor for death and give it a different definition than it had before? Is there anything special about how Paul uses the metaphor in the New Testament? Does he give the metaphor a new context, a new culture, and thereby give it a completely new theological meaning? Is it related to the way in which other sources used it?

¹ George Lakoff and Mark Turner, in *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 18. They observe: “Life and death are such all-encompassing concepts that we need many different conceptual tools for understanding and reasoning about them. There are a number of basic metaphors for comprehending life and death, and each of these metaphors focuses on different aspects, highlighting or downplaying them, giving rise to different inferences, which often conflict.” They give examples such as “A Lifetime is a Year; Death is Winter” and “Death is Sleep”.

² Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason* in Justin Rossow, “If Jesus ‘Came Down from Heaven,’ Where Does that Leave Me?” *Concordia Journal* 23 no. 4 (October, 2006), 393. This article is very helpful for understanding how metaphor shapes our culture, our thinking, and biblical concepts, especially the time in which we now live before the Lord’s return.

In the third chapter, we will look at a second way in which Paul uses sleep as a metaphor. Sometimes in our culture we hear phrases such as, “If only you would wake up!” or “Come on, wake up and smell the coffee,” or even, “You sleepy-head! Get with the program!” Exhortations like these are used in order to get someone to change what they are presently doing or not doing. As we shall see, when Paul uses the metaphor sleep for “spiritual and moral indolence” (laziness), it is grounded in and flows out of his use and definition of sleep as a metaphor for death. Before we can discuss his second use, however, it is necessary to first demonstrate that Paul uses sleep as death in a newly developed way.⁴

In order to provide a context and background for Pauline usage, we will first give a general look at those ancient Greek and Roman uses of the sleep as a metaphor for death. This will help us understand the ways in which the pagan cultures of ancient times used the metaphor and give us an idea of how they viewed death and its aftermath.

Since Paul was a Jew, and a well-schooled one at that, we will also look at how the Old Testament used sleep for death in order to understand how it might have shaped Paul’s use of the metaphor. It will help us see how God, in speaking of death in such terms, reveals clues about the complete salvation story, as it has been revealed to us in the New Testament.

New Testament references to sleep for death will then be examined briefly, but special emphasis will be placed on Paul’s works and the uses of the metaphor by him. By the conclusion of this paper, the reader will be able to see a distinct Pauline use of the metaphor, one different

³ Paul's usage will be explored later in this first chapter.

⁴ We will not be exploring the background of Paul’s second use of the metaphor (according to the order in this paper), sleep for spiritual and moral indolence, in the same way that we explore the background and context of Paul’s first use of the metaphor, sleep for death. His first use, death as sleep, is based on a specific context and theological understanding. For the purposes of this thesis, the second use will not require the same kind of establishment. It finds establishment in the first use of the metaphor and Paul’s purposes therewith. If time and space permitted, more research on Paul’s second use of the metaphor would be insightful, but it would not change the conclusions of our paper.

from that of any other New Testament writer, and perhaps different from that of any other writer before him.

We will also look at a few examples of how the Early Church used sleep as a metaphor for death in the works of the Apostolic Fathers, in order to understand how Paul's teachings regarding this metaphor, influenced the Church in its early formulations and practice.

Sleep as a Metaphor for Death in Ancient Greek and Roman Literature and Inscriptions

Homer

According to N.T. Wright, if “the ancient non-Jewish world had a Bible, its ‘Old Testament’ was Homer.”⁵ Homer did not believe that the resurrection of the dead was possible, which meant that those who were dead were not thought of as having any hope for a future life. This may explain why, in the words of Marbury Ogle, the “conception of death (as a sleep) occurs, although not as frequently as we are inclined to think, in pre-Christian Greek and Latin literature.”⁶ Though we are not able to be exhaustive, we will look at some examples of this literature, in order to see how the ancients used sleep as a metaphor for death in a pre-Christian world.

As illustrations, we may note that Homer in the *Iliad*,⁷ speaking of Iphidamas, son of Atreus, who had just been killed by Agamamnon, *Iliad* xi, 241, says that he: “slept a sleep of bronze;”⁸ and then in, *Iliad*, xiv, 482-3, Acamas cried out to the Argives after avenging his

⁵ N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 32.

⁶ Marbury B. Ogle, “The Sleep of Death,” *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 11 (1933), 81.

⁷ All translations of the Greco-Roman Classical texts that follow are taken from the Loeb Classical Library series, unless otherwise noted.

⁸ κοιμήσατο χάλκεον ύπνον

brother's death with the murder of Promachus: "Consider how your Promachus sleeps, vanquished by my spear."⁹

In his exhaustive work "The Sleep of Death,"¹⁰ Ogle notes that "in Homer occurs also the expression of similarity of a natural sleep to death."¹¹ For example, in the *Odyssey*, xiii, 79-80, Homer writes of Odysseus, who laid down on the deck of a ship, "sweet sleep fell upon his eyelids, an unawakening sleep, most sweet, and most like to death."¹² In the *Iliad*, xvi, 672, Homer says, "to the twin brothers, Sleep and Death,"¹³ and again in the *Iliad*, xiv, 231, "There she met Sleep, the brother of Death,"¹⁴ (where he records a conversation between Sleep and the goddess Hera).

Tragedy

There does not appear to be much evidence of the use of sleep as a metaphor for death in tragedy, but we will examine several instances.¹⁵ Sophocles, for example, uses "sleep" as such a metaphor in *Ajax*, 831-2: "So much, O Zeus, I ask of you, and at the same time I call on Hermes who escorts men below the earth to lull me fast to sleep, without writhing, with one rapid bound, when I have pierced my side with this sword."¹⁶ Within Euripides' *The Daughters of Troy*, 591-594, Hecuba prays: "Thou on whom did Achaeans heap/ Outrage, whom eldest I bare/ Unto

⁹ φράζεσθ' ὡς ὑμῖν Πρόμαχος δεδημημένος εὔδει ἔγχει ἐμῷ

¹⁰ Ogle, "The Sleep of Death," 81-117. Ogle does a thorough job reviewing the literature mentioned in a much more exhaustive way than I will for the purposes of this paper. His work is a helpful resource, but it was not found necessary to list every example in order to demonstrate Ancient usage of sleep as a metaphor for death.

¹¹ Ogle, "The Sleep of Death," 81.

¹² ὕπνος ἐπὶ Βλεφάρουσιν ἔπιπτε, νήγρετος, ἥδιστος, θανάτω ἄγχιστα ἑοικώς.

¹³ Ὕπνω καὶ Θανάτῳ διδυμάοσι

¹⁴ ἔνθ' Ὕπνω ξύμβλητο, κασιγνήτῳ Θανάτοιο

¹⁵ This conclusion is based on Ogle's work in "The Sleep of Death." See page 82.

¹⁶ Τοσαῦτά σ', ὦ Ζεῦ, προστρέπω, καλῶ δ' ἅμα πομπαῖον Ἑρμῆν χθόνιον εὖ με κοιμίσαι, ξὺν ἀσφαδάστῳ καὶ ταξεῖ πηδήματι πλευρὰν διαρρήξαντα τῷδε φασγάνῳ.

Priam in days that were,/ To thine Hades receive me to sleep.”¹⁷ Hippolytus cries out with agony in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, 1371-1377: “A new pain has me—/relax your hold, men. Death, come now—/ cure my life. Don't let my pain/ soar beyond enduring. I have suffered enough./ I would love a spear's razoring edge/ to rip through my life and lay it to rest./ Father, what inspired your brutal curse?”¹⁸ Hippolytus continues, 1386-1388: “All I ask I to go free of pain./ Let the compulsion of death,/ dark and nocturnal, lay my body down.”¹⁹ Euripides also writes in *Hecuba*, 470-474: “In manifold hues on its folds wide-flowing,—Or the brood of the Titans whom lightnings,/ that fell/Flame—wraught from Cronion, in long sleep quell?”²⁰ Sleep is clearly a reference to death, and is, at times, an escape for these writers.

There are few “references in pre-Hellenistic Greek and Roman literature of the Republic to the sleep of death,” which “suggest the conclusion that the conception of death as sleep is not a reflection of popular ideas but represents, rather. . . a literary convention,” according to Ogle.²¹ The “Greek poets of the centuries from Homer to the Alexandrian period” did not use sleep as a metaphor for death often in their works.²²

The Metaphor in the Hellenistic World

Wright calls Plato the “New Testament” of the Hellenistic world.²³ Death, where

¹⁷ σύ τ', ὦ λῦμ' Ἀχαιῶν, τέκνων δῆποτ' ἀμῶν πρεσβυγενὲς Πριάμῳ, κοίμισαί μ' ἔς Ἄιδου.

¹⁸ καὶ νῦν ὀδύνα μ' ὀδύνα βαίνει. μέθετέ με τάλανα· καί μοι Θάνατος Παιᾶν ἔλθοι. προσάπολλυτέ μ' ὄλλυτε τὸν δυσδαίμονά μ'· ἀμφιτόμου λόγγας ἔραμαι διαμοιρᾶσαι, διὰ τ' εὐνάσαι τὸν ἐμὸν βίοτον. Translated by Robert Bagg, *Euripides: Hippolytus* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 80-81.

¹⁹ ἐμὰν τοῦδ' ἀναλγήτου πάθους; εἶθε με κοιμίσειε τὸν δυσδαίμον' Ἄιδου μέλαινα νύκτερός τ' ἀνάγκα. Translated by Bagg, *Euripides: Hippolytus*, 81.

²⁰ ἐν δαιδαλέαισι ποικίλλουσ' ἀνθοκρόκοισι πήναις, ἡ Τιτάνων γενεὰν τὰν Ζεὺς ἀμφιπύρω κοιμίζει φλογμῶ Κρονίδας;

²¹ Ogle, “The Sleep of Death,” 84.

²² See Ogle's references in “The Sleep of Death,” 82.

²³ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 47-48.

the separation of the soul and the body takes place, is welcomed, in this “testament.” The soul is set free in death and is no longer constrained by the physical body.²⁴ “The body is not only the house of an alien soul, but its prison, or even its tomb.”²⁵ For example, in Plato, *The Apology*, 40 C-D, Socrates states, “And if it is unconsciousness, like a sleep in which the sleeper does not even dream, death would be a wonderful gain.”²⁶

Ogle notes that the Latin poet Lucretius “identifies sleep with death in *de Rerum Natura*” (iii, 904-905): “Yes, you, as you now lie in death’s quiet sleep,”²⁷ and iii, 909-911: “Of such a speaker then we may well ask, if all ends in sleep and quiet rest, what bitterness there is in it so great that one could pine with everlasting sorrow,”²⁸ and again, iii, 921-922: “when both mind and body alike are quiet in sleep; for all we care that sleep might be everlasting, and no craving for ourselves touches us at all.”²⁹ This sleep, for Lucretius, is the end. He wishes it to be “everlasting.” It is, as Rossow states, a “final destination.”³⁰ That destination, in their eyes, is one of peace and quiet.

Hellenistic Poetry

According to Ogle, Hellenistic/late Greek use of sleep as a metaphor for death was “frequent, although it appears chiefly in phrases which are reminiscent of Homer.” In the

²⁴ See N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 47-49.

²⁵ Richmond Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), 23.

²⁶ καὶ εἴτε μηδεμία αἴσθησίς ἐστιν, ἀλλ’ οἶον ὕπνος, ἐπειδάν τις καθεύδων μὴδ’ ὄναρ μὴδὲν ὄρα, θαυμάσιον κέρδος ἂν εἴη ὁ θάνατος. This “inspired Xenophon to ascribe a similar thought to Cyrus, *Cyr.*, viii, 7, 21,” see Ogle, “The Sleep of Death,” 82.

²⁷ Tu quidem ut es leto sopitus

²⁸ illud ab hoc igitur quaerendum est, quid sit amari tanto opere, ad somnum si res redit atque quietem, cur quisquam aeterno possit tabescere luctu

²⁹ cum pariter mens et corpus sopita quiescunt; nam licet aeternum per nos sic esse soporem, nec desiderium

³⁰ Rossow, “If Jesus ‘Came Down from Heaven,’ Where Does that Leave Me?” 393.

Aeneid, Virgil recalled *Odysseus*, xiii, 79-80 (cf. p.1-2)³¹ when he wrote, (*Aeneid*, vi, 278): “Death’s own brother Sleep,”³² and vi, 520-522: “Care-worn and sunk in slumber, sleep weighing upon me as I lay—sweet and deep, very image of death’s peace.”³³ Again Homer’s words, *Il.*, xi, 241 (cf. p.1), “must have been on his mind”³⁴ when he wrote *Aeneid*, x, (743-) 745-746: “Now die; but let the sire of gods and king of men see to me!” So saying, he drew the weapon from the hero’s body; stern repose and iron slumber press upon his eyes, and their orbs close in everlasting night.”³⁵

Pre-Christian Pagan Epitaphs

Sleep as a metaphor for death continues in Greek and Latin epitaphs found both before and after the first coming of Christ as recorded in the New Testament. First we will consider an epitaph from what appears to be from Corcyra in the second century B.C.: σὲ δ’ ὕστατον ὕπνου ἐλοῦσαν πικρὸς ὄδε ζοφερᾶ τύμβος ἔδεκ[το κόνει (“This harsh tomb has received you, to take your final sleep in the gloomy dust”).³⁶ According to Lattimore, this may be the earliest known epitaph where, “if it is qualified as ultimate or eternal, then sleep is annihilation; a dreamless sleep is a complete suspension of all sensation.”³⁷ There is no hope for an afterlife expressed in

³¹ This and the following Homer/Virgil comparisons are from Ogle, “The Sleep of Death,” 84.

³² consanguineus Leti Sopor

³³ tum me, confectum curis somnoque gravatum, infelix habuit thalamus, pressitque iacentem dulcis et alta quies placidaeque simillima morti.

³⁴ Ogle, “The Sleep of Death,” 84.

³⁵ (“nunc morere. ast de me divum pater atque hominum rex viderit.” hoc dicens eduxit corpore telum.) olli dura quies oculos et ferreus urget / somnus, in aeternam clauduntur lumina noctem. The same passage is found in xii, 309-310: “stern repose and iron slumber press upon his eyes, and their orbs close in everlasting night.” This is repeated again after a killing: olli dura quies oculos et ferreus urget / somnus, in aeternam clauduntur lumina noctem.

³⁶ Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs*, 78. He notes this epitaph is from Kaibel, *Rhein. Mus.* 34 (1879), 184a, 7-8 (Corcyra, 2nd cent. B.C.?).

³⁷ Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs*, 78. He also observes: footnote from p. 83: “Cf., however, Moore, *Pagan Ideas of Immortality* 27: “The longing for annihilation, which appeals at times to most weary mortals, also led to dedication ‘to eternal rest’ or ‘to eternal sleep’.”

this epitaph; one can easily sense the existential nature of death felt by the person responsible for this inscription. The sleeper will not wake up—this sleep is final.

Post-Christian Pagan Epitaphs

We also find what appear to be pagan Greek epitaphs from the second century A.D. that depict death as sleep. Our first example is from Syria: “Υπνος ἔχει σε, μάκαρ, πολυήρατε, διε Σαβίνε, καὶ ζῆς ὡς ἦρας καὶ νέκυς οὐκ ἐγένου· εὐδεις δ’ ὡς ἔτι ζῶν ὑπὸ δένδρεσι σοῖς ἐνὶ τύμβοις. ψυχὰὶ γὰρ ζῶσιν τῶν ἄγαν εὐσεβέων (“Blessed and beloved Sabinus, it is sleep that holds you: you live as a hero and have not turned into a corpse. You sleep in your tomb under the trees as if you were still alive; for the souls of those who are very pious live on”).³⁸ The second is from Rome καὶ λέγε Ποπολίην εὐδειν, ἄνερ· οὐ θεμιτὸν γὰρ θνήσκειν τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς, ἀλλ’ ὕπνον ἠδὺν ἔχειν (“Say that Polipa is asleep, sir; for it would be wrong for the good to die, rather they sleep sweetly”).³⁹

It was too difficult for those who grieved the deaths of Sabinus and Polipa to think of them as “corpses,” or that they even really “died” to be no more. Sabinus’ soul, because of his piety, lives on—but note there is no mention of an awakening, a resurrection, or of the continuation of the body. Similarly, Polipa could not really be dead because she was “good.” Instead, she “sleeps sweetly.” Again, there is no mention of hope for an awakening from sleep, or of a resurrection in this epitaph. Death appears to be the end for them.

Summary

The use of sleep as a metaphor for death was present but not common during certain periods of ancient Greek and Roman history. The meaning represented in its use is, nevertheless,

³⁸ Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs*, 49. EG 433 (Soada, Syria, 2d cent. AD).

³⁹ Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs*, 164. EG 559, 7-8 (Rome, 2d cent. A.D.). Cf. also EG203, 297, 514, 702; *Inscr. Perg.* 578.

significant. What we can deduce from its usage by the Ancients is that it was never meant to imply that anyone would “wake up” from slumber.⁴⁰ Death was a “sleep” to some, either because it resembled actual sleep that people usually do at night, or because it was seen as an escape (which slumber can be) from the physical world into something else, perhaps more pleasant, but definitely unknown.⁴¹ This is its ultimate significance in the ancient usage with regard to sleep as death and an eternal view of sleep: there is no “waking up” from death within the worldview of the Ancients.⁴²

The Old Testament and Sleep as a Metaphor

Within the Old Testament, “sleep appears metaphorically for physical death, whether of the righteous or of the wicked”.⁴³ Some examples⁴⁴ are: Genesis 47:30:

וְשָׁכַבְתִּי עִם־אֲבֹתַי וְנִשְׂאָתָנִי מִמִּצְרַיִם וְקִבְרָתָנִי בְּקִבְרָתָם וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי אֲעֲשֶׂה כְדִבְרָךְ:

(but let me *lie with my fathers*.⁴⁵ Carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place);⁴⁶

1 Kings 1:21:

וְהָיָה כִּשְׁכַב אֲדֹנָי־הַמֶּלֶךְ עִם־אֲבֹתָיו וְהִירַתִּי אֲנִי וּבְנֵי שְׁלֹמֹה חַטָּאִים:

(Otherwise it will come to pass, when my lord the king *sleeps with his fathers*, that I and my son Solomon will be counted offenders); 1 Kings 2:10:

וַיִּשְׁכַּב דָּוִד עִם־אֲבֹתָיו וַיִּקָּבֵר בְּעִיר דָּוִד:

⁴⁰ Compare this statement with observations in footnote nos. 1 & 3.

⁴¹ See Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 47-60.

⁴² See Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 60.

⁴³ Alice Ogden Bellis, “death,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed.-in-chief David Noel Freedman, assoc. ed. Allen C. Myers, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 330-331.

⁴⁴ For an exhaustive list, see Ogle, 89-95.

⁴⁵ This is the first instance in the Bible of the phrase “lie with my fathers,” meaning after death in a sleep as metaphor sense. The root שָׁכַב is to be taken as “lie down”. See also footnote 47 below for further explanation.

⁴⁶ All Hebrew translations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

(Then David *slept with his fathers* and was buried in the city of David); 1 Kings 11:43:

וַיִּשְׁכַּב שְׁלֹמֹה עִם־אֲבֹתָיו וַיִּקְבְּר בְּעִיר דָּוִד אָבִיו וַיִּמְלֹךְ רְחֲבֹעַם בְּנוֹ תַּחְתָּיו:

(And Solomon *slept with his fathers*⁴⁷ and was buried in the city of David his father. And

Rehoboam his son reigned in his place); Job 3:11-13:⁴⁸

לָמָּה לֹא מֵרַחֵם אֲמוֹת מִבֶּטֶן יִצְאֹתִי וְאֶנְוֶע:
מִדּוֹעַ קִדְמוֹנֵי בְרִכּוֹיִם וּמֵה־שָׁרִיִם כִּי אֵינֶנְךָ:
כִּי־עָתָה שָׁכַבְתִּי וְשָׁקוּט יִשְׁנֹתִי אֲזַי יִנּוּחַ לִי:

(Why did I not die at birth, come out of the womb and expire? (12) Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breasts, that I should nurse? (13) For then *I would have lain down and been quiet*; I would have *slept*; then I would have been at rest); Job 14:12:

וְאִישׁ שָׁכַב וְלֹא־יִקְוִים עַד־בִּלְתִּי שָׁמַרִם לֹא יִקְיֹצוּ וְלֹא־רָעוּ מִשְׁנָתָם:

(so a man *lies down* and rises not again; till the heavens are no more *he will not awake or be roused out of his sleep*); Psalm 13:3:

הִבִּיטָה עֲנִנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָאֵרֶז עֵינַי כִּן־אִישׁן הַמּוֹת:

(Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; light up my eyes, *lest I sleep the sleep of death*);

Psalm 76:5:

אֲשֶׁתוֹלְלוּ אַבְיָרֵי לֵב נָמוּ שְׁנָתָם

(The stouthearted were stripped of their spoil; they sank into sleep; all the men of war were unable to use their hands);

⁴⁷ A common phrase, “he rested with his fathers,” or more correctly noted, “he sleeps with his fathers,” is an early and “perhaps the earliest expression of the metaphor” in this “traditional formula. . . which occurs frequently in Kings and Chronicles and may be dated therefore not far from 600 B.C.,” in Ogle, p. 90. See also 1 Kings 14:31; 2 Kings 8:24; 13:13; 14:16; 21:38; 2 Chronicles 16:13-14, which employ a congruent formulation using the phrase “slept with his fathers”.

⁴⁸ In Job 3:13, two roots are used: שָׁכַב for the first instance, “lain down,” and יָשָׁן for the second, “slept.” This root is also used for Psalm 13:3, “sleep.”

Jeremiah 51:39:

בְּחַמָּם אֲשִׁית אֶת־מִשְׁתֵּיהֶם וְהִשְׁפַּרְתִּים לְמַעַן יַעֲלוּ וַיִּשְׂנוּ שְׁנַת־עוֹלָם וְלֹא יִקְיִצוּ נְאֻם יְהוָה:

(While they are inflamed I will prepare them a feast and make them drunk, that they may become merry, then *sleep a perpetual sleep* and not wake, declares the Lord); Jeremiah 51:57:

וְהִשְׁפַּרְתִּי שָׂרֶיהָ וְחֻכְמֶיהָ
פְּחוּתֶיהָ וְסִגְנֶיהָ וְגִבּוֹרֶיהָ וַיִּשְׂנוּ שְׁנַת־עוֹלָם וְלֹא יִקְיִצוּ נְאֻם־הַמֶּלֶךְ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ:

(I will make drunk her officials and her wise men, her governors, her commanders, and her warriors; they shall *sleep a perpetual sleep* and not wake, declares the King, whose name is the Lord of hosts); Daniel 12:2:⁴⁹

וְרַבִּים מִיִּשְׁנֵי אֲדָמַת־עָפָר יִקְיִצוּ
אֱלֹה לְחַיֵּי עוֹלָם וְאֱלֹה לְחַרְפוֹת לְדָרְאוֹן עוֹלָם:

(And many of those who *sleep* in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt).

In these examples, we see sleep as death described in various ways. For some it is a “sleep with the fathers;” for others, “a rest,” or a “perpetual sleep” from which there is no waking. In Daniel 12:2, however, we see a new set of possibilities. In the text it is said that as those who sleep from night until morning in the cycle of everyday life awaken in the morning, so, too, will those who sleep in death awaken. Upon awakening, some will have “everlasting life” (positive), and some will have “shame and everlasting contempt” (negative). Based on Old Testament theology, we can safely say that it is only believers in Yahweh who will have a “positive outcome” when the sleepers are awakened. N.T. Wright notes that this awakening is “not a different sort of sleep, but its abolition.”⁵⁰ This text does not say how sleep will be abolished, who is going to do it, or when it will happen. It simply says that it will happen, and

⁴⁹ The Hebrew root here is יָשַׁן for “sleep.”

when it does, some will have one fate and others will have another. As McAlpine observes, “when new, eschatological possibilities are introduced [as they are in Daniel 12:2], it is by a negation of this difference: the dead will also awaken.”⁵¹

Daniel 12 provides, as it were, a bridge to the New Testament and its theological world with respect to death and the use of the sleep as a metaphor for death. Painted in large strokes, the New Testament provides the detail for the world of Daniel 12.⁵²

The New Testament and Death as Sleep

The Gospels

Although it is not a common connection in the Old Testament, the New Testament’s use of sleep for death is often associated with some kind of awakening.⁵³ We will see this in the passages in which sleep as a metaphor for death are explored, beginning with the Gospels. Jesus himself uses sleep metaphorically for death. The following are salient: Matthew 9:23-24: Καὶ ἐλθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν τοῦ ἄρχοντος καὶ ἰδὼν τοὺς ἀνλητάς καὶ τὸν ὄχλον θορυβούμενον ἔλεγεν· ἀναχωρεῖτε, οὐ γὰρ ἀπέθανεν τὸ κοράσιον ἀλλὰ καθυεύδει. καὶ κατεγέλων αὐτοῦ (And when Jesus came to the house of the ruler, and saw the flute players and the crowd in disarray he said, “Go away, for the girl is not dead but *asleep*,” cf. Luke 8:52, Mark 5:39); and John 11:11: Τὰυτα εἶπεν, καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο λέγει αὐτοῖς· Λάζαρος ὁ φίλος ἡμῶν κεκοίμηται· ἀλλὰ πορεύομαι ἵνα ἐξυπνίσω αὐτόν (After saying these things, he said to them, “Our friend Lazarus *has fallen asleep*; but I go in order to awaken him”). This statement can be

⁵⁰ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 110.

⁵¹ Thomas H. McAlpine, *Sleep, Divine & Human, in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Series 38), 146.

⁵² Credit must be given to my advisor, Dr. James W. Voelz, for this imagery.

⁵³ All New Testament translations are the author’s own, unless otherwise noted throughout the paper.

misunderstood—and the disciples did so—therefore Jesus continues in explanation (verses 12-15): εἶπαν οὖν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτῷ· κύριε, εἰ κεκοίμηται σωθήσεται.¹³ εἰρήκει δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς περὶ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ, ἐκεῖνοι δὲ ἔδοξαν ὅτι περὶ τῆς κοιμήσεως τοῦ ὕπνου λέγει.¹⁴ τότε οὖν εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς παρρησίᾳ· Λάζαρος ἀπέθανεν, ¹⁵ καὶ χαίρω δι’ ὑμᾶς ἵνα πιστεύσητε, ὅτι οὐκ ἦμην ἐκεῖ· ἀλλὰ ἄγωμεν πρὸς αὐτόν (12 The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” 13 Now Jesus had spoken concerning his death, but they thought that he meant taking a rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, “Lazarus died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may have faith. But let us go to him”).⁵⁴

Acts

The book of Acts also describes death metaphorically as sleep. During the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7:60, Luke says: θεὸς δὲ τὰ γόνατα ἔκραξεν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· κύριε, μὴ στήσης αὐτοῖς ταύτην τὴν ἁμαρτίαν. καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἐκοιμήθη (And falling on his [Stephen’s] knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he *fell asleep*). Later during his sermon in Pisidian Antioch, Paul says in Acts 13:36: Δαυὶδ μὲν γὰρ ἰδίᾳ γενεᾷ ὑπηρετήσας τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ βουλῇ ἐκοιμήθη καὶ προσετέθη πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶδεν διαφθοράν· (For David, after he had served the will of God in his own generation, *fell asleep* and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption).⁵⁵

⁵⁴ In the Gospel of Matthew, the New International Version (NIV) translates the Greek word *κοιμάω* non-metaphorically as “had died.” See especially Matthew 27:52-53 following the death of Jesus on the cross: “The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who *had died* were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus’ resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.” This should have been more accurately rendered, as the English Standard Version (ESV) translation does, “The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who *had fallen asleep* were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.” We see in the Greek: καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν καὶ πολλὰ σώματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων ἠγέρθησαν, ⁵³ καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν καὶ ἐνεφανίσθησαν πολλοῖς.

⁵⁵ This language echoes that from the OT phrase “slept with his fathers,” (see pages 10ff, above).

Pauline Epistles and Sleep

1 Corinthians

The writings of Paul contain a significant number of metaphorical references to death as sleep.⁵⁶ The epistle of First Corinthians contains the largest amount. In 1 Corinthians 7:39, at the end of Paul's instructions on marriage, he writes: Γυνή δέδεται ἐφ' ὅσον χρόνον ζῆ ὁ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς· ἐὰν δὲ κοιμηθῆ ὁ ἀνὴρ, ἐλευθέρα ἐστὶν ᾧ θέλει γαμηθῆναι, μόνον ἐν κυρίῳ (A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives, but if the husband *falls asleep*, she is free to be married to whomever she wishes, only in the Lord). Later in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul writes concerning the Lord's Supper in verses 29-30: ὁ γὰρ ἐσθίων καὶ πίνων κρίμα ἑαυτῷ ἐσθίει καὶ πίνει μὴ διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα. διὰ τοῦτο ἐν ὑμῖν πολλοὶ ἀσθενεῖς καὶ ἄρρωστοὶ καὶ κοιμῶνται ἱκανοί (For he who eats and he who drinks condemnation upon himself eats and drinks not recognizing the body. On account of this among you many are weak and sick and quite a few *are now sleeping*).

First Corinthians 15 contains the largest number of metaphorical references to death as sleep within a single chapter of the New Testament. In it there are four, all from the same Greek verb, *κοιμάω*. When speaking of Christ's appearance to believers following his resurrection and previous to his ascension, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:6: ἔπειτα ὤφθη ἐπάνω πεντακοσίοις ἀδελφοῖς ἐφάπαξ, ἐξ ὧν οἱ πλείονες μένουσιν ἕως ἄρτι, τινὲς δὲ ἐκοιμήθησαν (Then he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at once, most of whom remained until the present time, though some *have fallen asleep*).

Later in that same chapter, Paul speaks of the resurrection of the dead. He writes that if Christ has not been raised, then faith is useless and the Corinthians (as well as other believers)

⁵⁶ The total number in Paul is 10 when death is spoken of metaphorically as a "sleep." It occurs 8 times in the Gospels and Acts, and only once in a non-Pauline epistle, 2 Peter.

are still in their sins. In verse 18 he says: ἄρα καὶ οἱ κοιμηθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ ἀπόλωντο (and as a result *those who have fallen asleep*⁵⁷ in Christ have perished). He continues in verses 19-20: εἰ ἐν τῇ ζωῇ ταύτῃ ἐν Χριστῷ ἡλπικότες ἐσμέν μόνον, ἐλεεινότεροι πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἐσμέν. Νυνὶ δὲ Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀπαρχὴ τῶν κεκοιμημένων (19 If in this life ‘we have placed hope in Christ with nothing beyond,’ we are to be the most miserable of all people. 20 But as a matter of fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of *the ones who are asleep*).

Near the end of Chapter 15 in 1 Corinthians, Paul discusses what will happen to those who are living when Christ returns. Verse 51 states: ἰδοὺ μυστήριον ὑμῖν λέγω· πάντες οὐ κοιμηθησόμεθα, πάντες δὲ ἀλλαγησόμεθα (Behold, I am telling you a mystery. Not all of us will *fall asleep*, but all of us will be changed). In each of these examples, Paul is using sleep as a metaphor for death.

1 Thessalonians

First Thessalonians contains the same number of metaphorical uses of sleep for death as 1 Corinthians 15; there are three in Chapter 4 and one in Chapter 5. Concerning the coming of the Lord on the Last Day, Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15:

13 Οὐ θέλομεν δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, περὶ τῶν κοιμαμένων, ἵνα μὴ λυπήσθε 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 αὐτῷ. 15 Τοῦτο γὰρ ὑμῖν λέγομεν ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου, ὅτι ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μὴ φθάσωμεν τοὺς κοιμηθέντας·

(13) And we do not desire you to be ignorant, brothers and sisters, concerning *those who are asleep*, so that you do not grieve just as the rest who have no hope. (14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in this way also through Jesus God will lead *those who have fallen asleep* with him. (15) For this we say to you in the word of

⁵⁷ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), translates this phrase “*the ones who were laid to sleep*,” 1214, 1221.

the Lord, that we who are still living, the ones left behind, will by no means precede *those who have fallen asleep* in the coming of the Lord.

Later in 1 Thessalonians 5:10, Paul writes: τοῦ ἀποθανόντος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, ἵνα εἴτε γρηγορώμεν εἴτε καθεύδωμεν ἅμα σὺν αὐτῷ ζήσωμεν ([Christ] who died on behalf of us so that whether we are alive or *asleep* we live together with him). This metaphor will be discussed in chapter 3.

Non-Pauline Epistles and Sleep

There is one other instance where sleep is used as a metaphor for death in the New Testament, and it is found in 2 Peter. When speaking of the Day of the Lord, Peter writes in 3:4: καὶ λέγοντες· ποῦ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐπαγγελία τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ; ἀφ’ ἧς γὰρ οἱ πατέρες ἐκοιμήθησαν, πάντα οὕτως διαμένει ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς κτίσεως (They [scoffers will] say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers *fell asleep*, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation”).⁵⁸

Summary

Based upon a brief review of the New Testament texts where sleep is used as a metaphor for death, it can be seen that such uses are “far more theologically conditioned than any uses in. . . the Old Testament” or in the Greco-Roman world at large.⁵⁹ Indeed, when sleep is used as a metaphor for death, especially by Paul, it takes on a deep theological meaning, a development that will be explored throughout the remainder of this thesis.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Again, the NIV translates the Greek word *koimao* as *died*, but it could also be *fell asleep*, as the ESV translates more accurately, in my opinion, “They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers *fell asleep*, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” This translation is more consistent with the Old Testament phrase, “slept with his fathers,” to which it is related.

⁵⁹ See McAlpine, *Sleep, Divine & Human, in the Old Testament*, 118.

⁶⁰ This is a conclusion opposite to that of George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. edited by Donald A. Hagner, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993). He states: “It is true that Paul often describes the state of death in terms of sleep (1 Thess. 4:13; 1 Cor. 15:16, etc.). However, sleep was a common term for death in both Greek and Hebrew literature and need not carry any theological significance,” 599.

Sleep as a Metaphor for Death in Select Early Church Fathers

After Paul, the Church Fathers see a natural link between sleep and death followed by a resurrection.⁶¹ On the one hand, the Fathers can now use Old Testament passages, which speak only of natural sleep, as depicting death and resurrection. We see this in *The First Epistle of Clement*, where he quotes Psalm 3:5 as he discusses the resurrection of the dead and the hope that those asleep in faith have:

CHAPTER XXVI — WE SHALL RISE AGAIN, THEN AS THE SCRIPTURE ALSO TESTIFIES. Do we then deem it any great and wonderful thing for the Maker of all things to raise up again those who have piously served Him in the assurance of a good faith, when even by a bird [from Chp. XXV — The Phoenix An Emblem Of Our Resurrection] he shows us the mightiness of his power to fulfil His promise?⁶² For [the Scripture] saith in a certain place, “Thou shalt raise me up, and I shall confess unto Thee;”⁶³ and again, “*I laid me down, and slept; I awaked, because Thou art with me;*”⁶⁴ and again, Job says, “Thou shalt raise up this flesh of mine, which has suffered all these things.”⁶⁵ (emphasis added)

On the other hand, pagan Homeric passages which parallel sleep and death but do not see a following resurrection can be employed in the service of an argument for a resurrection and life following death. Notice how the church father Athenagoras quotes Homer from the *Iliad* and mentions that sleep and death are brothers.

Chapter XVI — ANALOGY OF DEATH AND SLEEP, AND CONSEQUENT ARGUMENT FOR THE RESURRECTION. And let no one think it strange that we

⁶¹ Clement, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Alexanders Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 1, Reprint (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004): CHAP. XXIV.—GOD CONTINUALLY SHOWS US INNATURE THAT THERE WILL BE A RESURRECTION: “Let us consider, beloved, how the Lord continually proves to us that there shall be a future resurrection, of which He has rendered the Lord Jesus Christ the first-fruits [Cf. I Cor. xv. 20; Col. i. 18] by raising Him from the dead. Let us contemplate, beloved, the resurrection which is at all times taking place. Day and night declare to us a resurrection. *The night sinks into sleep, and the day arises; the day [again] departs, and night comes on. . .*” (emphasis mine), 11.

⁶² Literally, “the mightiness of His promise.”

⁶³ Ps. Xxviii. 7, or from some apocryphal book.

⁶⁴ Ps. iii. 6. (Ps. 3:5)

⁶⁵ Job xix. 25, 26. *The Apostolic Fathers: THE FIRST EPISTLE OF CLEMENT*, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Allan Menzies, vol. 9, Reprint (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 237.

call by the name of life a continuance of being which is interrupted by death and corruption; but let him consider rather that this word has not one meaning only, nor is there only one measure of continuance, because the nature also of the things that continue is not one. For if each of the things that continue has its continuance according to its peculiar nature, neither in the case of those who are wholly incorruptible and immortal shall we find the continuance like ours, because the nature of superior beings do not take the level of such as are inferior; nor in men is it proper to look for a continuance invariable and unchangeable; inasmuch as the former are from the first created immortal, and continue to exist without end by the simple will of their Maker, and men, in respect of the soul, have from their first origin an unchangeable continuance, but in respect of the body obtain immortality by means of change. This is what is meant by the doctrine of the resurrection; and, looking to this, we both await the dissolution of the body, as the sequel to a life of want and corruption, and after this we hope for a continuance with immortality,⁶⁶ not putting either our death on a level with the death of irrational animals, or the continuance of man with the continuance of immortals, lest we should unawares in this way put human nature and life on a level with things with which it is not proper to compare them. It ought not, therefore, to excite dissatisfaction, if some inequality appears to exist in regard to the duration of men; nor, because the separation of the soul from the members of the body and the dissolution of its parts interrupts the continuity of life, must we therefore despair of the resurrection. For although the relaxation of the senses and of the physical powers, which naturally takes place in sleep, seems to interrupt the sensational life when men sleep at equal intervals of time, and, as it were, come back to life again, yet we do not refuse to call it life; and for this reason, I suppose, *some call sleep the brother of death*,⁶⁷ not as deriving their origin from the same ancestors and fathers, *but because those who are dead and those who sleep are subject to similar states, as regards at least the stillness and absence of all sense of the present or the past, or rather of existence itself and their own life*. If, therefore, we do not refuse to call by the name of life the life of men full of such inequality from birth to dissolution, and interrupted by all those things which we have before mentioned, neither ought we despair of the life succeeding to dissolution, such as

involves the resurrection, *although for a time it is interrupted by the separation of the soul from the body* (emphasis mine).⁶⁸

Clearly, to understand death through the metaphor sleep in a Christian sense is natural for these writers.

⁶⁶ This is referenced in the text as being from Job xix. 25. On which we see St. Jerome, *Ad Paulinum*, cap. 10, tom. Iv. 569, ed. Bened. And, on the text itself, see Pusey on *Daniel*, p. 504, London, 1864. A fine passage in Calvin, *ad locum*: "En igitur quails debate esse nostra Fides," etc. *Opp.*, tom. Ii. P. 260, ed. Amsterdam, 1676.]

⁶⁷ This is referenced in the text as being from Homer, *Iliad*, b. xiv. 231, and Virgil, *Æn.*, vi. 278.

⁶⁸ Athenagoras. "The Treatise of Athenagoras," *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donalson, vol. 2, Reprint (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 157-158.

Conclusion

Throughout the literature of Greece and Rome, the inscriptions, the Old Testament, the New Testament, and later literatures, both pagan and Christian, we find sleep used as a metaphor for death. While the metaphor may have a different meaning in each genre for the beliefs of the people within its context concerning an afterlife or lack thereof, the New Testament, compared to its predecessors, stands alone in its use of the metaphor with a significantly developed theological understanding. In chapter 2, this claim will be explored in greater depth as the reader will be led to see how Paul, in the use of sleep as a metaphor for death, reveals to us in his epistles the complete salvation story.

CHAPTER 2

SLEEP AS A METAPHOR FOR DEATH IN PAUL

We have noted that Paul uses sleep as a metaphor for death in a different way than his Greco-Roman predecessors, and to a large degree even the Old Testament writers. But to what extent is it different? What is Paul's theological meaning of the metaphor we spoke of previously?

As observed in chapter one, ancient, pagan usage of sleep as a metaphor for death was never meant to imply that anyone would “wake up” from their slumber. Death was a “sleep” to some, either because it resembled actual sleep that people usually do at night, or because it was seen as an escape (which slumber can be) from the physical world into something else, perhaps more pleasant, but definitely unknown.⁶⁹ Some may argue that this terminology makes death sound less terrible, less existential. Nevertheless, this is the predominant understanding in ancient literature. There is no “waking up” from death within the worldview of the Ancients.

In Old Testament usage of sleep for death, “sleep appears metaphorically for physical death, whether of the righteous or of the wicked”.⁷⁰ Daniel 12:2 makes some progress toward a further understanding, however, when it says: “And many of those who *sleep* in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”⁷¹

Though it does not say how sleep will be abolished, who is going to do it, or when it will happen,

⁶⁹ See Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 47-60.

⁷⁰ Alice Ogden Bellis, “death,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed.-in-chief David Noel Freedman, assoc. ed. Allen C. Myers, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 330-331.

⁷¹ ESV translation. See Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 110.

it does say that it will happen, and when it does, some will have one fate (everlasting life) and others will have another (everlasting contempt).

Paul's Usage of the Metaphor: Preliminary Remarks

With Paul, we have the deepest possible understanding of death when he employs the metaphor of sleep. Congruent with Daniel 12:2, Paul says, through this metaphor, that death is not the end, that it will not have the final say, for an awakening will follow sleep. But further, in the passages in which he employs this metaphor, Paul, like a good journalist, answers the six journalist questions (who, what, when, where, how, why) regarding death, especially *how* death will be conquered and *what* the triumph over it will be like. Developing sleep as a metaphor for death enables him to accomplish this wide-ranging task. As we study Paul's theological thinking, we will also see the purposes for which Paul uses the metaphor of sleep for death, despite the fact that Paul in no way "sugar-coats" death or minimizes its effects, but declares it is an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26) that is sure to pay its wages (Romans 6:23).

We will look at all ten instances of Paul's use of sleep as a metaphor for death in this chapter.

1 Corinthians 15

In 1 Corinthians 15, we find all the answers to the journalistic questions just listed above. We will look at the passages in this pericope of Scripture that contain sleep as a metaphor for death, and the Greek word Paul uses for it. Special attention will be given to the main verse in this section of Scripture that defines and solidifies the metaphor.

All four references to sleep for death in 1 Corinthians 15 use the same Greek verb, *κοιμάω*.⁷² This word *κοιμάω* is found in 1 Corinthians 15:6, 15:18, 15:20, and 15:51. When used

⁷² *Κοιμάω* denoting sleep as a metaphor for death is used in the following Pauline passages: 1 Cor. 7:39; (continued next page)

in Paul's epistles, this word means "sleep" for "death/dead" *only*; it never means "sleep" in the "resting at night" sense, which is its literal meaning.⁷³ As mentioned in Chapter 1, this is important to note, because it takes away any doubt one might have with regard to which definition Paul meant in a specific context, either asleep as in "dead," or sleeping as in "resting at night."⁷⁴

The first time Paul mentions sleep as a metaphor for death in this pericope is in 1 Corinthians 15:6, where he writes: ἔπειτα ὤφθη ἐπάνω πεντακοσίοις ἀδελφοῖς ἐφάπαξ, ἐξ ὧν οἱ πλείονες μένουσιν ἕως ἄρτι, τινὲς δὲ ἐκοιμήθησαν (Then he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at once, most of whom remained until the present time, though some *have fallen asleep*). Some of the "brothers" to whom Christ appeared "have fallen asleep," which means, "died." Paul could have used the latter term instead of the former—but he didn't. Why?

Ten verses later in the same chapter, we find Paul doing the same thing—he uses sleep as a metaphor for death when he simply could have said "died" or "dead." He does say "the dead," so why does he change the vocabulary?

Verses 16-20 of 1 Corinthians 15 state the following: 16 εἰ γὰρ νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται, οὐδὲ Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται· 17 εἰ δὲ Χριστὸς οὐκ ἐγήγερται, ματαία ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν, ἔτι ἐστὲ ἐν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ὑμῶν, 18 ἄρα καὶ οἱ κοιμηθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ ἀπώλοντο. 19 εἰ ἐν τῇ ζωῇ ταύτῃ ἐν Χριστῷ ἡλπικότες ἐσμέν μόνον, ἐλεεινότεροι πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἐσμέν. 20 Νυνὶ δὲ Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀπαρχὴ τῶν κεκοιμημένων (16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ

1 Cor. 11:30; 1 Cor. 15:6; 1 Cor. 15:18; 1 Cor. 15:20; 1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:13; 1 Thess. 4:14; 1 Thess. 4:15. See also Matt. 27:52; John 11:11; Acts 7:60.

⁷³ See BDAG, κοιμάω: "This word may be translated as literal *sleep* or *fall asleep* in the following passages: Matt. 18:13; Luke 22:45; John 11:12; Acts 12:6."

⁷⁴ Dr. Louis Brighton, in his article, "Three Modes of Eternal Life," *Concordia Journal*, vol. 27, no. 4 (October 2001): 304, writes, "Whenever the New Testament refers to the death of faithful followers of Jesus, it declares that they are not dead but only sleeping." This is a phenomenon that the author of this paper thought may have been true but did not research thoroughly before finding this statement in Dr. Brighton's work.

has not been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is empty and you are still in your sins, 18 and as a result ‘*those who have fallen asleep*’⁷⁵ in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life ‘we have placed hope in Christ with nothing beyond,’⁷⁶ we are to be the most miserable of all people. 20 But, as a matter of fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the *firstfruits of the ones who are asleep*).

As we can see, Paul uses sleep as a metaphor for death in this section of 1 Corinthians 15, when he could have simply said “dead.” In other words, verse 18 could have said this: “and as a result, the ones who are dead in Christ have perished,” but Paul chose *not* to use that wording; he chose to say “those who have fallen asleep *in Christ*” (emphasis mine). Here we see a clue to the puzzle: the dead are “in Christ.” But what does that matter? They died and are with Christ, presumably. But Paul doesn’t even presume the Corinthians think that is where the dead are. If he did, he would not have said in the next verse, “If in this life ‘we have placed hope in Christ with nothing beyond,’⁷⁷ we are to be the most miserable of all people.” So Paul goes on to make a correction—no, two corrections of the Corinthians’ position in what may be the most important verse in the entire chapter (verse 20): “But, as a matter of fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the *firstfruits of the ones who are asleep*.”

The Metaphor Sleep and the Correction of the Corinthian Position on Resurrection

First, *some* of the Corinthians were saying that there is no resurrection from the dead.⁷⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:12-13 states clearly, “Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, *how*

⁷⁵ Anthony C. Thiselton, in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000) translates this as ‘the ones who were laid to sleep,’ 1214, 1220-1221.

⁷⁶ This phrase was taken from Anthony C. Thiselton’s translation in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 1214, 1221.

⁷⁷ This phrase was taken from Anthony C. Thiselton’s translation in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 1214, 1221.

⁷⁸ Thiselton notes that this belief could have occurred for four different reasons, which are argued among scholars: “(i) a lack of belief in any form of postmortal existence, perhaps similar to Epicurean attitudes (W. M. L. *(continued next page)*)

can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? (13) But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised” (emphasis mine). So Paul defends the resurrection of the dead, and we will see that he uses a metaphor to help illustrate his defense.

Second, it would be consistent with some of the beliefs of the Ancients⁷⁹ and with verse 19 (see above) for one to assume that *some* in Corinth believed that “the resurrection was ‘inner’ or ‘spiritual’ and had already occurred in the case of ‘spiritual’ believers.”⁸⁰ These Corinthians may have assumed that this “spiritual resurrection” was all they needed. When they died, they would shed the “bad” physical body and continue as the (now free) “resurrected soul” they already became in their bodily life.⁸¹ This is absurd to Paul, for he states in verse 20, “But, as a matter of fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of *the ones who are asleep*.” Christ has been raised from the dead, and the *dead* will be raised from the dead as well.

This point brings us back to Paul’s choice in vocabulary. He could make his case for a resurrection of the dead with the words we used in the previous paragraph, “Christ has been raised from the dead, and the dead will be raised from the dead as well.” But he didn’t. He used sleep metaphorically for death instead. There is a powerful difference. This power comes alive as we look at the overall context of 1 Corinthians 15.

de Wette, W. Schmithals, and [on the basis of Paul’s misunderstanding their problem] Bultmann); (ii) belief that the resurrection was ‘inner’ or ‘spiritual’ and had already occurred in the case of ‘spiritual’ believers (Heinrici, Schniewind, Wilckens); (iii) specific doubts about the possibility of ‘bodily’ resurrection, whether because of the nature of the ‘body’ or because of confusion with the immortality of a continuing ‘soul’ (Weiss, Sellin, Dale Martin); and (iv) the view that *some* may represent one problem, and *some* another (Mitchell, Saw, Erickson, Luther), 1216. Thiselton quotes Luther on Page 1173 as being under position (ii) and possibly (i), but he is not clear. It is this author’s opinion that Luther would have been under groups (i) and (ii), as would she.

⁷⁹ Wright in *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, notes, “Christianity was born into a world where its central claim was known to be false. Many believed that the dead were non-existent; outside Judaism, nobody believed in resurrection,” 35. “Paul, though he remained here and elsewhere very Jewish in his thinking, saw himself primarily as the apostle to the pagan world. It is therefore vital to understand the context into which one of the most central features of his proclamation was addressed,” 36.

⁸⁰ See footnote 75 above.

⁸¹ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, “In various forms this approach is linked with an overrealized eschatology and sometimes with spiritual enthusiasm or alternatively a high sacramentalism. . . ,” 1173.

Sleep as a Metaphor and the Context of 1 Corinthians 15

As we consider sleep as a metaphor for death, we must recognize that 1 Corinthians 15 is about *resurrection*: that of *Christ*, and that of *believers*. But it's not only about that. It is overwhelmingly about the Day of the Lord, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, in whom this resurrection has taken place *first* as the “*firstfruits of the ones who are asleep*” (verse 20). Jesus is the first one to be bodily resurrected from the grave, from the *dead*; he is also the first one to be bodily resurrected among the ones fallen asleep *in Him*. The context is *eschatological*.

This realization leads us to an understanding of what Paul is doing when he chooses the word sleep for death, when he chooses metaphorical language to allude to something the metaphor would naturally lead one to think of, *viz.*, awakening.⁸² Perhaps he *would* have said “those who are dead in Christ” if indeed the dead are not raised, but that is absolutely the opposite of what Paul wants to communicate. To say “those who are dead in Christ” has the potential to leave his hearers with no hope of a resurrection for themselves in Christ, and therefore no hope for the return of Christ on the Last Day when God completes his salvific work. Instead, here again, the metaphor gives information to the Corinthians that “those who are asleep in Christ” are not simply “dead;” they are “asleep,” and called this for a specific reason, even when speculating about the possibility that they would not be awakened (resurrected). It is because they will “wake up” from their sleep on the Last Day, as we will see in the pages that follow, that he uses the metaphor.

Christ: The First Awakened Sleeper

In verse 20, Paul solidifies his argument for the future hope of a resurrection when he states rather frankly, “as a matter of fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the *firstfruits* of the

⁸² Thiselton observes, “The metaphor of *falling asleep* (ἐκοιμήθησαν) to denote the death of Christian believers carried with it the grammar of being *awakened* at resurrection (see under 15:51),” *The First Epistle to the* (continued next page)

ones who are asleep.”⁸³ This is the most powerful locutionary force statement in the entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 15, because it gives his hearers the most important reason *why* those who “are asleep in Christ” are not lost⁸⁴—it is because *Christ has been raised from the dead*. Using another metaphor, the *firstfruits*, Paul explains that Christ is the first one from the *harvest*,⁸⁵ the first one from among those who belong to the Father, to be resurrected from the dead.⁸⁶ Christ’s resurrection from the dead is a foretaste of the resurrection of all believers on the Last Day.

Instead of using sleep as a metaphor for death in verse 20, Paul could have said, “as a matter of fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first one of those who are dead.” But that statement would have been deceiving and it would not have been helpful to the Corinthians. If Paul had said “the first one of those who are dead” in verse 20 instead of the metaphorical language, “the firstfruits of those who are asleep,” it would not have given the Corinthians any information concerning the future of presently deceased believers. In other words, when he says “dead,” it simply means “dead;” it does not imply in any way that the dead are *waiting* for something. But when Paul uses sleep as a metaphor for death, it gives his hearers a different type of information; it says that they are, indeed, waiting for something. To say “the ones who are asleep in Christ” implies that they are not only “in Christ,” with him and belonging to him, but also that they are asleep and will “wake up.” This is the “awakening” for which they wait.

Corinthians, 1207.

⁸³ Christ is not only the first one to be raised from the dead (in the resurrection sense), but also “a representation of the rest,” Holleman quoted in Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1223-1224.

⁸⁴ See 1 Corinthians 15:18.

⁸⁵ See the conversation on *firstfruits* and *harvest* in Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 1223-1224.

⁸⁶ See 1 Corinthians 15:21-28 for further explanation.

Waiting for the Final Awakening

Paul shows us that this awakening is what the sleepers wait for in verses 22-23 of 1 Corinthians 15: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the *firstfruits*, then those who belong to Christ at his coming.” At Christ’s coming, the dead will be made alive—the sleepers will “wake up.” Then the waiting will be over.

Finally in verse 51, Paul writes concerning those who do not die before Christ returns. What about them? Will they receive a resurrected, glorified body on the Last Day? Paul states: ἰδοὺ μυστήριον ὑμῖν λέγω· πάντες οὐ κοιμηθησόμεθα, πάντες δὲ ἀλλαγησόμεθα (Behold, I am telling you a mystery. Not all of us *will fall asleep*, but all of us will be changed). Again, Paul uses sleep as a metaphor for death as he tells the Corinthian Christians that not all of us, as believers in Christ,⁸⁷ will *die* before Christ returns, but we will all receive resurrected bodies like the body of Christ, a glorified and immortal body (1 Cor. 15:35-49). It continues in verses 52-58:

52 . . . in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ 55 ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (ESV)

Through this use of sleep as a metaphor for death, we see that Paul has grounded the metaphor in the future hope of the Day of the Lord, the eschaton, the fulfillment of the Scriptures in Christ on the Last Day. He uses the metaphor to tell the Corinthians that one day they will “wake up” from their sleep. They will not awaken because they will to do so. They will awaken

because Christ has been raised (v.20-23; 50-57). God the Father is the one who “wakes us up,” just as Christ has been raised by the Father (v. 24, 27-28). When believers are “awakened,” God will give them each a resurrection body (v. 35-49, 52-54). And then, as Paul writes, the final prophesy to be fulfilled will come to pass (verse 54b-55): “‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’”⁸⁸ Death will be conquered forever, and there will be no more “sleeping,” no more waiting. The metaphor will no longer be relevant or needed, as those who sleep will finally be awakened for eternity.

Illocutionary and Perlocutionary Force of the Metaphor

Now we go back to an earlier question, “Why does Paul give the Corinthians this information concerning the dead?” What is the illocutionary force of his statements? This information is given to them in metaphor, using sleep for death, to change their minds and attitudes concerning death and what lies beyond it: when they die in faith (in Christ), they are not lost; when those who had gone before them died in faith, they were not lost. They are simply waiting to be awakened, which Christ will do on the Last Day. Sleep as a metaphor for death is meant as an illocutionary act to be of comfort and encouragement to the Corinthians, as well as to all believers. When the believers think of those who have died as asleep,⁸⁹ this allows for the communication of *comfort* and *hope* because of its implication of a future awakening, which Paul gives it. Those who are dead are not lost; they are sleepers who will be “awakened” on the Last Day when Christ returns, as His resurrection becomes our resurrection. Therefore, the Corinthians have no reason to be miserable, nor does any believer. Faith in Christ is not in vain,

⁸⁷ See 1 Corinthians 15:50 where he is addressing the “brothers” who are in the faith.

⁸⁸ Quote in these verses based on Isaiah 25:8; Hosea 13:14.

⁸⁹ Paul consistently refers to the dead *who will be raised* in chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians in this way.

and it is not existential. Faith in Christ is not simply for (the benefit of) this life only, nor simply for our souls; it is for *eternity*, and it is *bodily*.

But why does Paul want to encourage the Corinthians so? What is the perlocutionary force of these verses? The texts suggest that Paul wants to comfort and encourage the Corinthian Christians, in order to persuade them to live in hope and to be strong in faith. This hope is for a resurrection from the dead, an awakening on the Last Day from the sleep in the grave, when all believers receive imperishable bodies and dwell with Christ in the new heavens and new earth for eternity.⁹⁰ Christians at Corinth can *live* in that hope because Christ is the “firstfruits” of what is to come. Whether they are dead in Christ, that is, *asleep* in Christ, when he returns, or alive, all will receive an “awakening” of sorts, an imperishable and immortal body.⁹¹ The dead are not lost forever. As a result, the Corinthians can live in faith, strengthened in the knowledge of what they hope for in Christ.⁹²

Conclusion

As stated earlier, the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians is the most obvious section of Scripture where the reader can see the fullness of the Pauline development of a new, or fuller, theological and eschatological meaning of sleep as a metaphor for death. As we will see, this is not the only text where Paul uses the metaphor for a specific purpose in the context of the Day of the Lord. In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul addresses a concern of the believers at Thessalonica and uses sleep as a metaphor for death to do it.

⁹⁰ See Revelation 21.

⁹¹ See 1 Corinthians 15:53.

⁹² See Romans 8:18-25 for a description of the hope that Christians have as we await a new heaven and new earth when Christ returns. Even creation itself “groans” as it waits for the “revealing of the sons of God” (ESV). This revelation of the “sons” or children of God will happen as 1 Corinthians 15 states. Romans 8:25, “But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (ESV).

1 Thessalonians 4

The future hope of a resurrection for the Thessalonians is expressed with sleep as a metaphor for death, just as it is in Corinthians. This metaphor is again tied to the death and resurrection of Christ as Paul grounds their hope in his saving work. But before he demonstrates this fact in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-15, he says in 1 Thessalonians 4:13: Οὐ θέλομεν δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, περὶ τῶν κοιμωμένων, ἵνα μὴ λυπήσθε καθὼς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα (And we do not desire you to be ignorant, brothers and sisters, concerning *those who sleep*, so that you do not grieve just as the rest who have no hope). In saying “those who sleep,” Paul is referencing the ones who are dead *in Christ* (verse 16), even though he has not mentioned Jesus (Christ) yet in the context of the Coming of the Lord on the Last Day. He does not want the Thessalonians “to grieve as *the rest* who have no hope.”

Who are “the rest,” according to Paul? They are the ones who do not have faith in Christ. Without faith in Christ, “the rest” *have no hope* of a future resurrection.⁹³ They grieve differently than those who believe Jesus died and rose again. Here Paul differentiates those who die in faith from those who die without faith through the metaphor of sleep when he calls the dead believers “those who sleep.” Paul never refers to the dead without faith in Christ as “those who sleep.” If he did call unbelievers “those asleep,” the metaphor would not have the new theological meaning and understanding this author is arguing that Paul alone gave it, through his full development of the metaphor’s meaning.

The Ones Asleep and the Lord’s Return

Concerning the coming of the Lord on the Last Day, Paul writes in verses 14-18:

⁹³ “The rest” who have no hope are in “darkness” (1 Thess. 5:4-5). They will be surprised at the Lord’s coming, and will experience God’s wrath (1 Thess. 5:9-10). Cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

14 εἰ γὰρ πιστεύομεν ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη, οὕτως καὶ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς κοιμηθέντας διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἄξει σὺν αὐτῷ. 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 ἄρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἄερα· καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ ἔσόμεθα. 18 Ὅστε παρακαεῖτε ἀλλήλους ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in this way also through Jesus God will lead *those who have fallen asleep* with him. 15 For this we say to you in the word of the Lord, that we who are still living, the ones left behind, will by no means precede *those who have fallen asleep* in the coming of the Lord. 16 Because he, the Lord, in a command, in a loud noise, an archangel and at the call of the trumpet of God, he will come down from heaven and the dead in Christ will rise first, 17 then we, the living ones, the ones left behind, together with them, we will be snatched away in clouds for a meeting with the Lord in the air and hence (so) we will be with the Lord always. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

As in verse 13 discussed previously, we see again Paul’s choice of the Greek verb, *κοιμάω* for sleep.⁹⁴ As previously mentioned, when used in Paul’s epistles, this word only means “sleep” as a metaphor for “death;” it never means “sleep” in the “resting at night” sense, which is its literal meaning.

In verse 14, Paul is referring to those whom Christ will awaken on the Last Day, “those who have fallen asleep.” He explains this awakening in verses 16-17. Again in these verses, Paul addresses an issue that he also addresses to the Corinthians. What of those who are living when Christ returns? He calls them “the ones left behind” (verse 15), and says that they “will by no means precede those who have fallen asleep in the coming of the Lord.” The dead in Christ will rise first (those who are asleep), according to verse 16. Then “the living ones,” the “ones left behind,” will be taken to meet the Lord in the air to be with Him forever (verse 17).

⁹⁴ *Κοιμάω* meaning sleep as a metaphor for death is used in these Pauline passages: 1 Cor. 7:39; 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 Cor. 15:6; 1 Cor. 15:18; 1 Cor. 15:20; 1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:13; 1 Thess. 4:14; 1 Thess. 4:15. See also Matt. 27:52; John 11:11; Acts 7:60.

Again in this section of Scripture, Paul could have simply said, “those who are dead” instead of using the metaphoric expression, “those who have fallen asleep”.⁹⁵ But he does not. The believers are “those who have fallen asleep” because they have hope for an “awakening.” In fact, Paul links the dead and a resurrection in the same sentence in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. Instead of using the metaphor sleep, he actually uses the word “dead:” (16) For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the *dead* in Christ will rise first.⁹⁶ This is an amazing phenomenon. He could have said, “And those asleep in Christ will rise first,” or “And those asleep in Christ will awaken first,” or even “And those dead in Christ will awaken first.”⁹⁷ Even so, there is no question about hope here – the dead *will* rise. Why does he do that? One can’t say for sure, but it is apparent that to say the “dead in Christ will rise first” leaves no room for guessing. It is a literal statement, without metaphors. It is what will actually happen.

Illocutionary and Perlocutionary Force of the Metaphor

Why does Paul tell the Thessalonians all this? Is it simply for information, or does Paul intend them to react a certain way to the information regarding the Day of the Lord concerning those who are asleep and those who are alive? This is easy to answer, because Paul tells us why in verse 18: “Therefore encourage one another with these words.” The illocutionary force of Paul’s use of sleep as a metaphor for death is that he wants this to be a source of *encouragement* to the Thessalonians, and to all believers. Indeed, they do not grieve as those who have no hope;

⁹⁵ See earlier discussion on 1 Corinthians 15 pages 26, 28.

⁹⁶ This Scriptural reference to believers as “dead” and not asleep may at first seem to contradict Brighton’s comments in footnote 22. However, when Paul uses this word “dead,” he does not leave it without a qualifier of sorts; rather, he writes, “the dead *in Christ*.” See footnote below.

⁹⁷ Also, he could have said, “the dead will rise first”, but Paul doesn’t mean just any old dead people; he meant those who died in faith in Christ, therefore Paul says, “the dead *in Christ*.”

they have a perfect hope, a complete hope—promised immortality through a resurrection and life with Christ forever. This is something those who do not believe in Christ do not have.

Not only does Paul want it to be a source of *encouragement*, or even *comfort*, but he intends for the Thessalonians and all believers as the metaphor's perlocutionary force to "encourage one another with these words." He wants them to remind one another, even instruct one another, concerning the coming of the Lord on the Last Day and the resurrection of the dead in Christ, so that they may encourage one another. As a community, the believers are to be future-focused with respect to death, so that they do not grieve as those who have no hope. In other words, even in spite of death, Paul wants the Thessalonians, as well as all believers, to live in hope.⁹⁸ This hope and mutual encouragement brings comfort.

Conclusion

This section of 1 Thessalonians 4 is not the only place where Paul addresses the living concerning those who have fallen asleep before the Lord's return on the Last Day. As we look at two more sections of 1 Corinthians, we will see Paul use the metaphor in a context where the eschatological connection to sleep as a metaphor for death and its importance are not so obvious. The first is 1 Corinthians 11:27-34, and the second is Corinthians 7:39-30. In each verse in which Paul uses sleep as a metaphor for death, this author contends that Paul does so to invoke the future hope his hearers have as believers, in order to bring them comfort, and to encourage them to live in a certain way. Again, in these verses, Paul uses the Greek verb *κοιμάω* to denote sleep, used as a metaphor for death.

⁹⁸ "And if they hope for what they do not yet see, they wait for with patience," Romans 8:25 (ESV).

1 Corinthians 11

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul writes concerning the Lord's Supper. Specifically in 1 Corinthians 11:26-32, he addresses the issue of those who receive the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. He writes:

26 ὡσάκις γὰρ ἂν ἐσθίητε τὸν ἄρτον τοῦτου καὶ τὸ ποτήριον πίνητε, τὸν θάνατον τοῦ κυρίου καταγγέλλετε ἄχρι οὗ ἔλθῃ. 27 Ὡστε ὃς ἂν ἐσθίῃ τὸν ἄρτον ἢ πίνῃ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦ κυρίου ἀναξίως, ἔνοχος ἔσται τοῦ σώματος καὶ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ κυρίου. 28 δοκιμαζέτω δὲ ἄνθρωπος ἑαυτὸν καὶ οὕτως ἐκ τοῦ ἄρτου ἐσθιέτω καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ποτηρίου πινέτω· 29 ὁ γὰρ ἐσθίων καὶ πίνων κρίμα ἑαυτῷ ἐσθίει καὶ πίνει μὴ διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα. 30 διὰ τοῦτο ἐν ὑμῖν πολλοὶ ἀσθενεῖς καὶ ἄρρωστοι καὶ κοιμῶνται ἰκανοί. 31 εἰ δὲ ἑαυτοὺς διεκρίνομεν, οὐκ ἂν ἐκρινόμεθα· 32 κρινόμενοι δὲ ὑπὸ [τοῦ] κυρίου παιδευόμεθα, ἵνα μὴ σὺν τῷ κόσμῳ κατακριθῶμεν.

26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. 27 Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner 'will be held accountable for so treating'⁹⁹ the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let him examine his self and in this way let him eat out of the bread and let him drink out of the cup. 29 For he who eats and he who drinks condemnation upon himself eats and drinks not recognizing the body. 30 On account of this among you many are weak and sick and quite a few *are now sleeping*. 31 But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. 32 But if we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we might not be condemned with the world.

Those among the Corinthian Christians who have received the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner have eaten and drunk judgment upon themselves. As a result, many are weak and sick and quite a few are "sleeping". Given the context, this must surely mean "died". The Corinthians did not place this judgment upon themselves; rather, it has been a judgment of the Lord so that they "may not be condemned along with the world." They die, but they are not lost. They receive judgment in this life, but it is not eternal judgment.

⁹⁹ Thiselton recommends this translation in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 890.

Present Judgment, Future Hope

Since Paul uses sleep as a metaphor for death in this context, it is interesting to note that the metaphor reinforces the conclusions just listed above concerning the Christians' judgment in the present versus their judgment for eternity. Yes, the Christians who have fallen asleep have died, but they will also be awakened on the Last Day when Christ comes again. Paul reminds the Corinthians in this section that the Lord is coming again, which will be on the Last Day, in verse 26 when he says, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord *until he comes*" (emphasis mine). That day when he comes, he will in fact raise the dead—the sleepers will awaken.

As we have already seen, Paul uses this metaphorical language later in 1 Corinthians 15 when he discusses the fate of those who "have fallen asleep." The Christians who died as a result of eating and drinking judgment upon themselves through the misuse of the Lord's Supper are among the "ones fallen asleep" in 1 Corinthians 15, but they are not the only ones Paul is talking about. He is talking of all believers who had died up to that point, especially the ones whom the Corinthians knew. There is hope for a future resurrection for them.

Illocutionary and Perlocutionary Force of the Metaphor

In this passage we see that when God brings judgment, he brings mercy. In the use of the metaphorical language of sleep concerning the death of some of the Corinthians who had died as a result of the misuse of the Lord's Supper, Paul brings his hearers comfort, which is the metaphor's illocutionary force. The Christians who have fallen asleep have died, but they will also be awakened on the Last Day when Christ comes again. The dead who have sinned by bringing the judgment of God upon themselves have not lost their salvation; they have not been cut off from the promised inheritance of eternal life. As a result, the Corinthians can live in hope for those who have received judgment in this life, which is the metaphor's perlocutionary force.

In fact, these believers who have fallen asleep will receive the same gift of a resurrected body as all who believe in Christ will receive one when he comes on the Last Day.¹⁰⁰

1 Corinthians 7

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul also uses the Greek verb *κοιμάω* to denote sleep as a metaphor for death. It may be argued that 1 Corinthians 7:39-40 is the least obvious passage where sleep as a metaphor for death finds itself in the context of the Last Day. This author will defend the proposition that it is, nevertheless, in the context of the Day of the Lord, and that the metaphor has a powerful impact on the hearers in this case.

The Death of a Husband

At the end of Paul's instructions on marriage in 1 Corinthians 7, specifically speaking here of the widowed in verses 39-40, he writes: Γυνή δέδεσται ἐφ' ὅσον χρόνον ζῆ ὁ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς· ἐὰν δὲ κοιμηθῆ ὁ ἀνὴρ, ἐλευθέρα ἐστὶν ᾧ θέλει γαμηθῆναι, μόνον ἐν κυρίῳ. μακαριωτέρα δὲ ἐστὶν ἐὰν οὕτως μείνη, κατὰ τὴν ἐμὴν γνώμην· δοκῶ δὲ καὶ γὰρ πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἔχειν. (A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives, but if the husband *falls asleep*, she is free to be married to whomever she wishes, only in the Lord. But she is happier if she remains as she is, in my judgment, and I think I have the Spirit of God).

If a wife's husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wants, but as Paul states, he thinks she is happier if she stays single. Why doesn't Paul just say, "if her husband is dead. . . ?" It is possible that this links us to the greater context within the chapter, specifically earlier in the chapter, with verses 29-31 being very important to our understanding:

29 Τοῦτο δὲ φημι, ἀδελφοί, ὁ καιρὸς συνεσταλμένος ἐστίν· τὸ λοιπόν, ἵνα καὶ οἱ ἔχοντες γυναῖκος ὡς μὴ ἔχοντες ὦσιν 30 καὶ οἱ κλαίοντες ὡς μὴ κλαίοντες καὶ οἱ χαίροντες ὡς μὴ χαίροντες καὶ οἱ ἀγοράζοντες ὡς μὴ κατέχοντες, 31 καὶ οἱ

¹⁰⁰ See 1 Corinthians 15.

χρώμενοι τὸν κόσμον ὡς μὴ καταχρώμενοι· παράγει γὰρ τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου.

29 This I mean, brothers and sisters, the time has become short. Therefore, those who are married women should be as though not having married ties, 30 and those who weep as those who are not weeping, and those who rejoice as if they were no rejoicing, and those who are buying goods as those who did not buy, 31 and those using the world as though they had no use of it. 'For the external structures of this world are slipping away.'¹⁰¹ For 'this world in its present form is passing away.'¹⁰²

The first part of verse 29, "This I mean, brothers and sisters, the time has become short," and the two last sentences of verse 31, "For the external structures of this world are slipping away. For this world in its present form is passing away," are the eschatological keys of this chapter. As Lockwood observes, "He reminds them that they live in the last days."¹⁰³ These last days are the days between the time of Christ's resurrection from the dead, and His Second Coming on the Last Day.¹⁰⁴ With this reality in mind, Paul refers to the dead in this chapter in only one instance, and this instance is in verse 39: a dead husband of a living wife. In this conditional sentence beginning with "if the husband *falls asleep*," that is, dies in the Lord, (and he is speaking of a Christian couple here), the wife is no longer bound to him and she is free to marry whomever she wishes. But the husband is not dead without any hope of a resurrection. He is now waiting to be awakened, as are all believers in Christ who die before Christ's return on the Last Day.

¹⁰¹ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 585.

¹⁰² Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 585

¹⁰³ Gregory J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, Concordia Commentary, gen. ed. Dean O. Wenthe, (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 255.

¹⁰⁴ Lockwood, "Paul has in mind the Last Day (cf. 1 John 2:17-18), when the form (σχῆμα, 1 Cor 7:31) of this present creation will pass away and be superseded by a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21-22), just as the form of our lowly body will then be transformed (μετα-σχῆμα-τίζω, Phil. 3:21) so that it conforms to Christ's glorious body (1 Cor 15:35-38)," 257.

Death and Remarriage in the Context of the Last Days

As mentioned in the discussion concerning the believers who fell asleep because of the improper use of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul was also talking about these men, these husbands in chapter 7, who died before their wives, in 1 Corinthians 15 when he says, "those who have fallen asleep." They have not perished. Why would Paul again use this language in a seemingly unimportant place? Couldn't he have just said, "but if the husband dies, she is free to marry whoever she wishes, only in the Lord"? Yes, Paul could have, but if he did, he would not have implied hope for a future resurrection. He would not have brought the husband's death or the decision of the wife to remarry (or not) into the context of the "last days" before the Last Day.

In a sense, it is a rather pastoral move on the part of Paul to use sleep as a metaphor for death in this instance. What Christian wife does not grieve the loss of her husband to death, or the husband the loss of his wife? Here he has a word for those who face such a situation in the present time before Christ returns.

Illocutionary and Perlocutionary Force of the Metaphor

When the apostle Paul says that "if the husband falls asleep", he is bringing his hearers, especially the would-be widows, hope and comfort, which is the metaphor's illocutionary force. If the husband(s) falls asleep, he will awaken on the Last Day, based on 1 Corinthians 15. The husband will be with Christ in his death, and then with him for eternity, as will the widow and all believers, when Christ comes again, in resurrected bodies. Despite what happens on earth, such as the death of a loved one, the destiny is the same for all believers in Christ: eternity with Christ. This is a great comfort, especially for those in grief.

As a result, the perlocutionary force of the metaphor sleep for death in 1 Corinthians 7 is that Paul wants the hearers to live in hope based on the future resurrection that is to come

through Christ on the Last Day. Not only that, he wants them to put their decisions in a “last days” perspective and to act accordingly (verses 29-31). This world will pass away, as it will last only for a time.

Conclusion

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 58: “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain.”

N.T. Wright explains:

The final verse of the chapter could be felt as an anti-climax, but only if we had allowed ourselves to forget the multiple ways in which this extensive discussion of resurrection was linked to the rest of the letter. A casual reading of Paul, assimilating his thought to popular piety, might have expected him to end such a chapter by saying, ‘Therefore brothers and sisters, look forward eagerly to the hope that is set before you!’ Instead, he redirects their gaze to the present time, to the tasks awaiting attention and the call to be ‘steadfast and immovable’ in them. The point of it all has been that, despite the discontinuity between the present mode of corruptible physicality and the future world of non-corruptible physicality, there is an underlying continuity between present bodily life and future bodily life, and that gives meaning and direction to present Christian living.¹⁰⁵

Indeed, as one New Testament scholar has noted, “*Real* hope directs and affects how we live today.”¹⁰⁶ This eye-opening statement will be explored further in the next chapter as we look at Paul’s use of sleep as a metaphor for spiritual and moral indolence. In addition, we will also discuss one last instance, found in 1 Thessalonians 5, where we believe Paul to use sleep as a

¹⁰⁵ N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 356. He has a footnote at the end of this quoted section which states: “This point is missed by e.g. Wedderburn 1999, 146, who caricatures Paul’s view (and subsequent Christian views) in terms (169) of living life which is ‘[simply] a preparation for another one beyond death and the grave’. That may be how some jaded Christians have put it; but what Paul describes is new creation bursting in to the present world.”

¹⁰⁶ I owe this to Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs, from an email conversation concerning N.T. Wright’s quote (see footnote above) on July 17, 2006.

metaphor for death within the same section of Scripture where he uses sleep as a metaphor for spiritual and moral indolence.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ This discussion has been saved for chapter 3 for two reasons: one, Paul uses *καθεύδω* instead of *κοιμάω* in 1 Thessalonians 5 for both metaphors; two, because some scholars disagree with the definition of physical death we give the metaphor in 1 Thess. 5:10. This will be discussed in the last third of chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

SLEEP AS METAPHOR FOR “SPIRITUAL AND MORAL INDOLENCE” IN PAUL

In this third chapter, we will see Paul use sleep metaphorically in light of the Day of the Lord, as in chapter 2, but the focus of the metaphor will shift from death to the realm of ethical living in the present time. “Sleep” will denote, not death, but something related to it, *viz.*, spiritual and moral indifference, and it will be used in contrast to being “awake.” In developing this metaphor, Paul contrasts living in the night and living in the day, with, as we will argue, day being related to the final Day of the Lord.¹⁰⁸

Ephesians 5:14

In Ephesians 5:14, Paul uses the Greek word *καθεύδω*, meaning *sleep*, as a metaphor for spiritual and moral indifference.¹⁰⁹ The verse reads, 14 πᾶν γὰρ τὸ φανερούμενον φῶς ἐστίν. διὸ λέγει· ἔγειρε, ὁ καθεύδων, καὶ ἀνάστα ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, καὶ ἐπιφάσει σοι ὁ Χριστός (14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says: ‘Awake, *O sleeper*, and rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you’).¹¹⁰ Despite a variant reading with some credible witnesses, we have chosen to follow this reading, selected by Nestle-Aland, after examining the evidence.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ I owe thanks to Dr. James W. Voelz for assistance in formulating this sentence.

¹⁰⁹ See also 1 Thessalonians 5:6; BDAG, *καθεύδω*.

¹¹⁰ Wright notes that Ephesians 5:14 is “a passage full of echoes of 1 Thessalonians 5:10,” *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 237.

¹¹¹ The variant reading, according to Nestle-Aland, would read: πᾶν γὰρ τὸ φανερούμενον φῶς ἐστίν. διὸ λέγει· ἔγειρε, ὁ καθεύδων, καὶ ἀνάστα ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, καὶ ἐπιψαυσεις τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Witnesses listed are: Manuscript D, (b) Latin text, Marius Victorinus, Ambrosiaster and John Chrysostom (*The Father indicates knowledge of one or more New Testament manuscripts supporting the given reading*). Bruce M. Metzger in *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2d ed (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994) notes, “Instead of ‘Christ will shine upon you,’ strongly supported by a wide range of witnesses, several Western witnesses (*continued next page*)”

At first glance, it might appear to the reader that the metaphor “sleeper” in this sentence means “one who is physically dead.” A closer look at the metaphor in its context will reveal that the meaning in this quotation is two-fold: one meaning represents its original context; the other its current Pauline context.

Original Context of the Quotation

Recent scholarship has focused on the quotation in verse 14, with its resemblances to the Old Testament,¹¹² as a song, hymn, or saying the early Christians used at baptism, and referring to baptism, with the promises and call given therein.¹¹³ Bruce states, “The quotation is a tristich, best interpreted as a primitive baptismal hymn, in which the congregation greets the new convert

substitute either ‘Christ will touch you’ or ‘You will touch Christ.’ Apparently the readings arose from the legend that the cross on which Jesus was crucified was erected over the burial place of Adam, who was raised from the dead by the touch of the Savior’s blood,” 540.

¹¹² Although there is disagreement about the origin of the quotation between F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Pub. Company, 1984) and Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, gen. ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1999), they both agree that it strongly echoes at least two Old Testament passages, possibly more. O’Brien notes: “Most recent scholars reject the notion that v. 14b is an altered quotation from the Old Testament, and prefer to understand it as a fragment of an early Christian hymn that was originally associated with baptism,” 374. Apparently he thinks it couldn’t be both, or that scholars who favor one can’t favor the other. Both scholars single out Isaiah 26:19: “Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!” and Isaiah 60:1(2) “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. (2) For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you,” O’Brien, 374-376; Bruce, 376-377. Other passages that have been listed as possible sources are Jon. 1:6; Isa. 52:1 (cf. 51:9, 17:9 b; sleep of death: Job 14:12; Ps. 80:3, 7, 19 cf. Deut. 33:2; Ps. 50:2; ESV: (m) Isa. 51:7; Isa. 60:1; Mal. 4:2; See Rom. 13:11; (n) Isa. 26:19; (o) Luke 1:78, 79).

¹¹³ F.F. Bruce believes it to be baptismal, see *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 376-77; see also Herman Ribberbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1975), 555; Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Studies in Ephesians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 415; Joseph Plevnik, *Paul and the Parousia* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), fn 49, page 111, notes that Schiler, *Apostel*, 89, “points to Eph. 5:14 which contains a traditional fragment from a baptismal song: “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” N.T. Wright simply says in *The Resurrection of the Son of God* that it appears to be “an early Christian song or poem,” 237. But, O’Brien, *Ephesians*, states, “Even if it could be shown to be the case, the text must still be interpreted within its immediate context, and it is better to speak in terms of conversion rather than baptism,” 376. Included in this camp is T. Mortiz, *A Profound Mystery*, 108-9, as cited in O’Brien, 376. While it can be argued that the awakening from sleep refers to conversion in general, it is best, when considering all the evidence, to speak of it as referring to baptism.

as he or she emerges sacramentally from the sleep of spiritual death into the light of life.”¹¹⁴

Some evidence for this claim of baptismal origin associated with conversion can be found within Ephesians itself. Dahl notes that two expressions “explicitly and unambiguously refer to baptism,” one of which is found in Ephesians 4:5 (4-6): “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—(v.5) one Lord, one faith, *one baptism*, (v.6) and one God and Father of all, who is over all and in all” (ESV; emphasis mine);¹¹⁵ and in Ephesians 5:26 where Paul writes, “in order to sanctify and cleanse her by washing in water and with the word (ESV).”¹¹⁶

Sleep as a Metaphor and its Original Meaning

Before baptism, the “sleeper” was one in darkness (Eph. 5:8); within the spiritual realm, this person was not “alive” to God, but was “dead” (Eph. 2:1; 2:5).¹¹⁷ This leads us to interpret “sleep” metaphorically in its original baptismal context as “spiritual death.” The Ephesian Christians were called out of this “sleep” of “spiritual death,” in baptism, from darkness to light (Eph. 5:8) to be God’s children as Christ “shines” on them. The metaphorical language of verse 14 is that call: “Awake, *O sleeper*, and rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Paul

¹¹⁴ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 376.

¹¹⁵ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 336-337. Bruce argues, “As for the ‘one baptism,’ it is beside the point to ask whether it is baptism in water or the baptism of the Spirit: it is Christian baptism—baptism ‘into the name of the Lord Jesus’ (Acts 8:16; 19:5; cf. 1 Cor. 1:13-15)—which indeed involved the application of water, as John’s baptism had done, but (as its inauguration on the day of Pentecost indicates) was closely associated with the gift of the Spirit.” For more on this argument, see his footnote, 17, on page 337. Therefore, the conversion Paul speaks of happens with water at baptism, and that is to what he refers in Eph. 5:14b.

¹¹⁶ Dahl, *Studies in Ephesians*, 413. Eph. 5:26: ἵνα αὐτὴν ἀγίαση καθαρῶς τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι.

¹¹⁷ Ephesians 2:1-5: “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins (2) in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—(3) among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (4) But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, (5) even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved. . . .” (ESV).

addresses this reality of their status before God as his children of light throughout Ephesians, but especially in Ephesians 5:1-14. When he does this, we will see the metaphor's meaning change as Paul adapts it to a new context.

Pauline Context of the Quotation

Paul's paraenesis in Ephesians 5:3-14 addresses the Ephesian Christians' ethical behavior as children of light who have been rescued from the darkness. Within this new context, Paul is using the quote, and especially "sleep" metaphorically, with a new intention: to remind the Ephesian Christians of their calling to be God's children through baptism, as they became part of the unity in the Spirit of "one faith, one Lord, one baptism" (4:5; 4:4-6).¹¹⁸ This reminder is for a specific purpose: that they would bring to mind the hope "that belongs to [their] call" (4:4)—the future inheritance (5:5)—and its impact on their daily lives in the present time, which is the present evil age (Gal. 1:4). Bruce further explains Paul's purpose for the quotation in verse 14 within its new context this way:

The ethical admonition is reinforced by a call to the readers to remember their baptism and its significance, just as in Rom. 6:3-4 Paul refutes the suggestion that one should 'continue in sin that grace may abound' by appealing to the Roman Christians' baptismal experience: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized in to Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." If ever the readers of the present letter were tempted to forget that, while once they had been children of darkness, they were children of light, let them remember their baptism and the words they heard then: they would be left in no doubt about their present status and its moral implications.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Dahl states, ". . . there is reason to presume that the concept of baptism in Ephesians is to be found in its use of allusions to baptism in context. In other words, the question is not only about what the author of Ephesians says about baptism, but just as much about what he *does* with what he says in relation to it," *Studies in Ephesians*, 416.

¹¹⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 376-77.

Sleep as a Metaphor and its Pauline Meaning in the Ephesians 5 Context

The words the Ephesian Christians heard at their baptisms were, “Awake, *O sleeper*, and rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” But the “sleeper” in this current context is not one who is “spiritually dead.” Paul is now referring to the “sleeper” as one who is spiritually and morally or ethically indifferent to God’s call, its significance, and “moral implications” for their lives. The contrast to this—being “awake”—is to be spiritually and morally aware of and motivated by God’s call, as one lives well aware of and motivated by its significance and moral implications.

The Hope of the Inheritance

The hope that belongs to the call the Ephesians received in their baptisms to “awaken from sleep” is discussed in verses 5-6 of chapter 5. This hope is especially significant for our discussion of verse 14b, as Paul writes, 5 τοῦτο γὰρ ἴστε γινώσκοντες, ὅτι πᾶς πόρνος ἢ ἀκάθαρτος ἢ πλεονέκτης, ὃ ἐστὶν εἰδωλολάτρης, οὐκ ἔχει κληρονομίαν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ. 6 Μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς ἀπατάτω κενοῖς λόγοις· διὰ ταῦτα γὰρ ἔρχεται ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας. [5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.] Paul points the Ephesian Christians to their inheritance in a warning, where his rhetoric is negative, to show the contrast between the absence of hope for those who are still in darkness¹²⁰ versus its presence for those who have hope, the ones who are now “light in the Lord” (v.8).¹²¹

¹²¹ Those who do not have the inheritance are called the “sons of disobedience” and are destined for God’s wrath (v. 6). Those who are God’s children are destined for salvation and have the inheritance (Eph. 1:13-14), which is referred to as the “kingdom of Christ and of God” in the Eph. 5:1-14 context (cf. 1 Thess. 1:10, “and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come”; 1 Thess. 5:9, “For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”). They are called
(continued next page)

Although it is difficult to understand exactly what Paul means by the expression “kingdom of Christ and of God”¹²² in verse 5, both Bruce and O’Brien believe that Paul is referring to the kingdom in all its phases: the current phase and the future phase. If they are right, Paul is referring to the kingdom in all its phases in Eph. 5:5, and with it, the present Christian life and the future hope, the eternal inheritance brought to believers on the Last Day.¹²³ But, it is possible that Paul is referring to the future kingdom *only* in this verse, and has brought the language concerning whose kingdom it is together, in order to make a point about the future “goal”—the inheritance—and why it matters to those who have it.¹²⁴

“light” now, but at one time they were “darkness” when they did not belong to God. As a result of who they are in the present time, “light in the Lord” (v. 8), they are to walk “as children of light” and not have anything to do with “the works of darkness” (v. 8-9). In other words, since they are now something new, they are to act like it. For Paul, it is an issue of Christian ethics.

¹²¹ With regard to the question of “whether Paul thinks that believers will lose their salvation if they deny their profession by grossly sinful lives,” Ladd writes in *A Theology of the New Testament*: “Several passages sound like it . . . The warning that immoral or impure people or idolaters will not inherit the Kingdom of God (Eph. 5:5) is addressed to Christians. . . From these passages, and others like them, we must conclude that Paul uses the motivation of the final attainment of salvation in the Kingdom of God as a motivation to faithful and devoted Christian living. It is significant that Paul does not use the ethical sanction in any theoretical way that leads him to discuss the possibility of losing salvation; he uses it as a sanction to moral earnestness to avoid having the gospel of grace distorted into Hellenistic enthusiasm, libertinism, or moral passivity,” 566.

¹²² According to O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 364, this phrase is found no where else in the New Testament as written in Eph. 5:5.

¹²³ For example, Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* and O’Brien, *Ephesians*, note that Paul typically refers to the present time with the expression “kingdom of Christ” or some reference thereof [1 Cor. 15:24, 28; Col. 1:13 (Bruce, 372, and O’Brien, 364, list these, although O’Brien excludes 1 Cor. 15:28); cf. also Eph. 2:6; 2 Tim. 4:1, 18(O’Brien, 364), while he usually refers to the future kingdom as the “kingdom of God,” 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21(O’Brien, 364)]. If the reader follows this popular line of thinking, he will also want to take into account references that include the “kingdom of God” as referring to the present time (Rom. 14:17, Plevnik, *Paul and the Parousia*, 148; Schreiner, *Romans*, 740-41; poss. 1 Cor. 4:20), and the “kingdom of Christ”, or some reference thereto, being referred to in the future (see especially Eph. 1:20-22 as Christ being seated at God’s right hand and far above all rule, etc., v. 21 “not only in this age but also in the age to come;” cf. Rev. 11:15, Vos, in *The Pauline Eschatology*, 260. He believes that the kingdom of Christ in Ephesians 5:5 is a reference to the future kingdom). One could also use a grammatical argument, based on Granville Sharp’s Rule, that Eph. 5:5 is referring to two people since the construction includes a proper name, Χριστοῦ, and a non-proper noun, θεοῦ. (Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 276. Using this grammatical reality for the argument of two phases does not take into account the fact that two people could be in one phase.) It would seem then to be possible to compute the two and say that Paul is again referring to the kingdom in both its phases.

¹²⁴ It is interesting to note that the Nicene Creed, in the description of “our Lord Jesus Christ,” the second person of the Trinity, states: “And he will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end.”

With this in mind, one may consider baptism and the awakening from sleep to a life in the light (Eph. 5:14b) as a beginning of the future kingdom in the present life. As we will see, Paul uses the reference to the baptism of the Ephesian believers to serve his exhortation to ethical living in light of the age to come and the inheritance they fully receive when the Lord returns.

Day, Night, and Ethical Living

In baptism, God awakened the Ephesian Christians from “sleep” to life now as light in the Lord, and gave them a promised awakening from the sleep of death and destruction (1 Cor. 15) to a sleep of death in Christ with a promised awakening on the Last Day, the Day of the Lord. On that day, their awakening will be the fulfillment of the promise: the reception of the promised inheritance, “the kingdom of Christ and of God,” the future completed kingdom where there will be no more darkness or night, only light in the day.¹²⁵ Ridderbos observes:

In that sense the renewing and working of the Spirit in believers during their present life can also be understood as a beginning of the resurrection of the body, and be described by Paul in this way (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:10,11, 16, 17; Eph. 5:14; Phil. 3:10, 11). So the shining of the glory of the future life illuminates them even now (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6), a first-fruit and earnest in the present time of their resurrection from the dead (cf. Gal. 6:8; Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:5).¹²⁶

As the result of this call, Christians shine like lights ahead of the new day—they reflect the light of Christ and the Day to come in their lives already now through ethical living as Paul exhorts them in Eph. 5:14. They no longer walk in darkness or in the night. As Romans 13:12 states, “The night has advanced, and the day has drawn near. Therefore let us lay aside the works of darkness and let us put on the weapons of the light.” The present evil age continues, but the

¹²⁵ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, “Final resurrection remains in the future (the ‘inheritance’ still to come, as in 1.14 and 5.5); but those on their way to it must shine like lights even in the present time,” 238.

¹²⁶ Ridderbos, *PAUL: An Outline of His Theology*, 551.

Day of the Lord is coming, and has, in Christ, already come.¹²⁷ Thus, they live life “awake” to the reality of their call, rather than “asleep” to it. For Paul, then, ethical living is really hopeful living—hope in the promised future inheritance, and a celebration of it in the present life through thanksgiving (Eph. 5:20).¹²⁸

Illocutionary & Perlocutionary Force of the Metaphor

Therefore, the illocutionary force of the metaphor sleep for spiritual and moral indolence in Ephesians 5:14, as it was meant to be taken in the Pauline context, is that it functions as a warning to the Ephesians to “wake up” morally and spiritually in their Christian walk because of the day that is to come. Those who have the inheritance, the promised *future* inheritance, are reminded of it in order to motivate them to “faithful and devoted Christian living.”¹²⁹ It matters how the Ephesians choose to live in this present evil age,¹³⁰ either discerning what is pleasing to the Lord (v. 10) or not, *because of their destiny*.¹³¹ They have already been told to whom they belong (Eph. 1:1; 3-10) and that they have an inheritance (Eph. 1:13-14), but now Paul drives

¹²⁷ I owe thanks to Dr. James W. Voelz for the eloquent last third of this sentence.

¹²⁸ Wright comments, “As with Philippians 2.12-16, the darkness of the present world is contrasted with the light of the creator’s new day, a light which Christians, along with the Messiah, must already shine. And, as in Philippians, this echoes the promise of Daniel 12.3, but brings it into the present rather than saving it for the future – without any way implying an over-realized eschatology. . . . As the final chapter of Ephesians makes clear, Christians still have a battle to fight (6.10-10); the enemies are not yet finally defeated; but the eschatology that has been inaugurated in the resurrection of Jesus means that victory is assured,” *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 237-38.

¹²⁹ See Ladd, thesis page 46, fn. 121.

¹³⁰ The Day of the Lord is implied in the message that the days in which they currently live are evil (v. 15). It is the present evil age.

¹³¹ In this present evil age, both light and darkness still exist, but they are not to exist together in the ethical behavior of the Christian, who is light. Those who are light are to live “awake”, and not “asleep,” to this reality. Bruce notes in *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 373: Not only does Paul use light-darkness imagery within this ethical paraenesis, but the Qumran uses it as well. “The Qumran use of the light-darkness vocabulary has this in common with the NT use: it has a thoroughly ethical content. There is nothing here of the substantial dualism which the antithesis between light and darkness regularly expresses in Gnostic teaching. In the NT, as at Qumran, the antithesis is between doing right and doing wrong. The children of light do the will of God; that is what is meant by the direction: ‘lead your lives as children of light’.

home an important point about that inheritance with a quote they had first heard at their baptism in Eph. 14b: “*Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.*”

The perlocutionary force of the metaphor sleep for spiritual and moral indolence is that Paul wants the Ephesians to “arise” in this life. As Christ’s light shines on them, they are to live as “resurrection people”. When this happens, their lives are markedly different from those who walk in darkness and are without Christ. The understanding of sleep as a metaphor to call Christians to live in light of the hope they have for the future is strengthened as Paul continues in verses 15-16, where he urges the Ephesian Christians to walk wisely and make “the best use of the present time, because the days are evil” (v. 16). As Dahl concludes when examining Eph. 4:5 and 5:26, we may also conclude with Eph. 5:14b (see above), that Paul uses “the references to baptism as a motif in the service of exhortation.”¹³²

Conclusion

Not only is the inheritance that belongs to the children of God referred to as a future one in the context of Ephesians 5:1-14; it is also a future inheritance in 1 Thess. 5:1-10. There Paul writes of the future inheritance, salvation obtained through Christ (v. 9), which comes on the Day of the Lord, and our ethical response to it. Paul also writes of the future inheritance as salvation, since the Day of the Lord is near, in Rom. 13:11-14 and our ethical response as Christians to that reality. Interestingly enough, sleep as a metaphor is used again in both these contexts with the same meaning as Ephesians 5:14b, though not necessarily with a baptismal origin, as we will see in the discussion that follows.

¹³² Dahl, *Studies in Ephesians*, 413. He also writes: “In a sense all the conceptions used about the transition from the sphere of sin and death [in this case, referring to light and darkness] to a new life in Christ can be regarded as baptismal motifs.”

Romans 13:11

In Romans 13:11, Paul uses the Greek word ὕπνος for *sleep*¹³³ as a metaphor for spiritual and moral indifference.¹³⁴ This is the only occurrence of the noun in Paul, and the only instance of its use as a metaphor in New Testament. Paul writes: 11 Καὶ τοῦτο εἰδότες τὸν καιρὸν, ὅτι ὥρα ἤδη ὑμᾶς ἐξ ὕπνου ἐγερθῆναι, νῦν γὰρ ἐγγύτερον ἡμῶν ἢ σωτηρία ἢ ὅτε ἐπιστεύσαμεν (11 And with regard to this, knowing the time, because the hour (is) now for *you to wake from sleep*, for now our salvation is nearer than when we believed). There has been some discussion over a variant reading, ἡμᾶς ἐξ ὕπνου ἐγερθῆναι (*us to wake from sleep*), but both Metzger and Cranfield believe ὑμᾶς is the original text. This is our position, as Cranfield's reasoning is completely convincing.¹³⁵

“Sleep” as a Metaphor in its Romans 13 Context

When commenting on Romans 13:11 and its context Luther writes, “After the Apostle has instructed us, he now admonishes us, just as before he distinguished between indoctrination and exhortation. *Indoctrination is for those who are ignorant; exhortation for those who know.* For this reason the Apostle also uses metaphorical and figurative expressions which are not

¹³³ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, believes that Paul uses ὕπνος as a “noun-form equivalent” of the verb καθεύδω as a metaphor for *sleep*. He also observes, “Sleep as a metaphor for spiritual insensibility is widespread in the ancient world (cf., eg., Philo, *Migration of Abraham* 222; *Dreams* 1.117; 2.106, 133, 160, etc.), but was particularly popular with the Gnostics. But while the gnostics applied the concept within a cosmological and anthropological dualism (people need to become illuminated and awake from the spiritual ignorance of this world), Paul is oriented historically and eschatologically (see esp. E. Lövestam, *Spiritual Wakefulness in the New Testament* [LUÅ 55.3; Lund: Gleerup, 1963], pp. 25-27),” 820.

¹³⁴ BDAG, ὕπνος. BDAG translates the phrase ἐξ ὕπνου ἐγερθῆναι as “wake from sleep, i.e. bid farewell to the works of darkness,” and “awaken from sleep (i.e. thoughtless indolence).”

¹³⁵ Metzger, in *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* notes, “Although ἡμᾶς has strong support (P^{46vid} X^c D F G Ψ 33 1739 Byz), a majority of the Committee thought it somewhat more probable that ὑμᾶς was altered to ἡμᾶς in order to conform the person to ἡμῶν in the next clause, than that ἡμᾶς was changed to ὑμᾶς. Several versional and patristic witnesses (sy^h eth Origen^{lat} Cyril) omit the pronoun altogether, as does the AV (although the Textus Receptus reads ἡμᾶς). Cranfield agrees with this position: “Rapid changes in of person are, of course, a notable characteristic of Paul’s style: compare, for example, how in this same paragraph, after changing to the first person plural for vv. 11b, 12b, and 13, he returns in v. 14 to the second person plural,” 680.

suitied for those who first must be taught,” (emphasis mine).¹³⁶ The exhortation for believers to “wake from sleep”¹³⁷ includes not only Paul’s call in verses 11-14,¹³⁸ but also Romans 12:1-13:10.¹³⁹ The reason for this summons to “wakefulness,” the contrast of “sleep” (spiritual and moral indifference), is the nearness of the coming Age, to be ushered in on the Day of the Lord.¹⁴⁰

Eschatological Motivation

As Luther notes, Paul uses metaphorical and figurative expressions throughout these four verses, many of which are eschatological in nature.¹⁴¹ The phrase “wake from sleep” prepares the

¹³⁶ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Zondervan Publishing House, 1954; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1976), 187 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

¹³⁷ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, ed. J. A. Emerton and C. E. B. Cranfield, vol. 2. (1979. Reprint, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Limited, 1989), “Sleep is a vivid image for that state which is altogether opposed to that of readiness for the imminent crisis,” 681. The imminent crisis, as we will see, is the day of the Lord.

¹³⁸ Thomas H. Tobin, S.J., in *Paul’s Rhetoric in Its Context: The Argument of Romans*. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004) argues that Paul is using “traditional material taken from early Christians baptismal liturgies,” including hymnic material, 403-404. The problem with this view is that we have no evidence of such liturgies [See Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. by Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids; Baker Books, 1998), 696]. However, Tobin lays out a hypothetically possible case that Paul could have been using baptismal material in this section of Romans. Some of the imagery could be considered baptismal [see Ben Witherington III with Darlene Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids, MI, 2004), 317] as Tobin points out, and we agree with this view. But there is not evidence to convince this author that it is from traditional baptismal material, other than the fact that it could be, and it is, in its best sense, only hypothetical. The exhortation does rely heavily on what is true in the believer’s life because of baptism into Christ (see Romans 6 and its baptismal references), but that is all this author is willing to agree with at this point.

¹³⁹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 697, notes that with Barret, Cranfield, and Stuhlmacher, he paraphrases the first part of verse 11, *Καὶ τοῦτο* as “‘Put into practice all of the exhortations in Rom. 12:1-13:10’ in light of the imminence of the end. Romans 13:11-14, then, comprehends all of the preceding exhortations and summons the readers to urgency since the end is on the horizon.”

¹⁴⁰ Schreiner observes, “All of the imperatives in this text . . . flow from the nearness of the eschaton. Because the end is imminent, the people of God should respond with appropriate behavior,. Thus one cannot deny that imminence of the end was one basis for the ethics in Pauline thought (rightly Cranfield, 1979: 680; Käsemann 1980:362; Stuhlmacher1994: 212),” 698. Plevnik also notes, “The closeness of the completion is thus a feature in Paul’s exhortation (cf. 1 Cor 7:29, 31),” *Romans*, 293.

¹⁴¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer calls them “eschatological stage props”: *kairos*, *hora*, darkness vs. light, sleep vs. vigilance, deeds vs. armor. Note too Paul’s motivation by use for the same props in an earlier letter with more pronounced eschatological teaching (1 Th 5:1-11). See also 1 Cor 7:26-28, 30; Cf. Col. 4:5; Eph. 5:16,” *Romans*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 682.

way for the metaphorical and figurative use of time, hour, night, day, light and darkness.¹⁴² The present “time” in which Christians find themselves is the “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). “Hour” is not in itself an eschatological term, but here it is because of the context.¹⁴³ This is the “hour,” *now*, and not a minute later, for Christians to “wake from sleep” in the present evil age.

The reason for the call to “spiritual and moral watchfulness” (v. 11) is the nearness of salvation (v. 11) and the coming crisis, noted in the first part of verse 12: ἡ νύξ προέκοψεν, ἡ δὲ ἡμέρα ἤγγικεν (12a The night has advanced, and the day has drawn near). Paul refers to this passing present evil age as “the night,” and the future coming Day of the Lord as “the day.”¹⁴⁴ That “day” will usher in the “salvation” for which believers hope.¹⁴⁵ It will be the coming of the complete inheritance (see discussion on Eph. 5:14), where believers will dwell for eternity in resurrected bodies that will be “awakened” in a bodily resurrection on that Day (1 Cor 15). This coming is imminent (vv.11-12), and will not be avoided by anyone (1 Thess 5).

Rather than have the Roman Christians simply “wait” for the Day to arrive and live however they please—that is, “asleep by living in sin and being inactive (*in good works*)”¹⁴⁶—

¹⁴² See Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, 682.

¹⁴³ See Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, 680. He discusses Barrett’s observation that “hour,” as well as “time,” are eschatological terms, but “hour” is used often in the NT in a “non-eschatological sense.” However, because of the Romans context, it is thoroughly eschatological. He also notes with Barrett that ὥρα is actually used more in Daniel than in any other OT book.

¹⁴⁴ See Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, 682. He states, “Here ‘the night’ clearly denotes the present age (cf. 12.2) and ‘the day’ the coming age of God’s new order. . . . We have then in the first half of the verse an instance of the NT insistence on the nearness of the End.”

¹⁴⁵ There has been a significant amount of discussion as to whether Paul thought the Parousia would come in his lifetime, or if he thought it was simply imminent. See Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, 681-682; Schreiner, *Romans*, 698; Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, gen. eds. Ned B. Stonehouse, F.F. Bruce, and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 822. Cranfield states that “there is nothing in this verse [11] that would compel us to such an assumption [that Paul thought the Parousia would occur at most within a few decades or in his lifetime],” 682. He continues, “It is clear that, if the Parousia is really going to happen at a particular time, each hour that we live must bring us an hour nearer to it, however far off it may be. Moreover, the point of this sentence was to underline the urgency of the need to awake: the time of opportunity for faith and obedience was for Paul and his readers the shorter by this lapse of time.” Schreiner adds, “He argued that the in light of the certainty of the end, and the possibility that it could come soon, that believers should always be morally ready (cf. also Murray 1965: 167-68),” 698.

¹⁴⁶ Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, 187.

Paul exhorts them, because of the coming crisis in 13:12b: ἀποθώμεθα οὖν τὰ ἔργα τοῦ σκοτός, ἐνδυσώμεθα [δὲ] τὰ ὄπλα τοῦ φωτός (Therefore let us lay aside the works of darkness and let us put on the weapons of the light).¹⁴⁷ What belongs to the night, the present evil age which is nearly over, are the works of darkness. They no longer have a place in the lives of believers who belong to the “day.” These works of darkness (v. 13) are fitting only for those who sleep in spiritual death (see discussion on Eph. 5:14). But to those who have been awakened in baptism from spiritual death to new life in Christ (Romans 6), spiritual and moral “sleepiness” are no longer appropriate. Rather, the weapons or armor of light, are to be donned by the believer.¹⁴⁸ This armor is not specifically described here, but in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 it is described as “faith, love, and hope” (cf. 2 Cor 6:7; 10:4; Eph. 6:13-17).¹⁴⁹ These things naturally lead one to a life of

¹⁴⁷ Metzger states, “Instead of ἀποθώμεθα several Western witnesses read ἀποβαλωμεθα (P⁴⁶ D*³ F G Old Latin vg). Since the use of ἀποθέσθαι is normal in formulas of renunciation (see E. G. Selwyn, *I Peter*, pp. 394 ff.), and since the verb ἀποβάλλειν recurs nowhere else in the Pauline Epistles and its middle voice is entirely absent from the New Testament, a majority of the Committee preferred the reading ἀποθώμεθα,” *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 467. However, Cranfield seems to believe that either reading is possible, while somewhat favoring the variant reading. Nevertheless, he notes that the difference in meaning is “very slight” and would not change the theological meaning of the verse in any way. See Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, 685-686. Schreiner believes that since the support for the variant is predominately Western, “the support of P⁴⁶ is not sufficient to argue for its authenticity (contra Zuntz 1953: 94; Cranfield 1979:686) since the preponderance of the external evidence favors ἀποθώμεθα, and Pauline style, as Metzger (1994: 467) observes, also supports the reading in NA²⁷. This last argument is not decisive, since the variant represents the harder reading,” *Romans*, 701. Based upon Schreiner’s argument for external evidence, we have chosen to favor the reading of ἀποθώμεθα, while recognizing that the theological meaning is not effected with either choice.

¹⁴⁸ Ridderbos observes, “The life of those who have been made free by Christ now bears this same character of military service. It is indeed *militia Christi*. It also occurs as such in the context of Romans 6: do not place your members as ‘weapons of unrighteousness’ at the command of sin, but of God as ‘weapons of righteousness’ (v. 13). And the same thought is to be found in Romans 13:12, where there is mention of putting on ‘the weapons of the light.’ Here in the first place it is the moral struggle that should be thought of, as is evident from the context of Romans 6 and from the parallel (268) ‘works of darkness’ – ‘weapons of light’ in Romans 13. That battle must be fought by believers placing their ‘members,’ that is to say, their whole manifestation of life, at the service of God. There is thus no question of having already left the ‘stage of sin’ behind. In the strength of Christ’s victory sin is precisely to be combated,” *PAUL: An Outline of His Theology*, 267

¹⁴⁹ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 683. He notes, “The dualistic contrast of day and night and of light and darkness is symbolic of good and evil, just as in 1 Th 5:5-8 (cf. Eph 5:8-11). These pairs are commonly used in contemporary Jewish apocalyptic writings, especially in the sectarian QL (1QS 2:7; 3:20-4:1; 1QM 15:9, “in darkness are all their deeds,” i.e., the deeds of the sons of darkness who are dominated by the prince of demons, Belial). Contrast to Eph. 6:2,” 683.

repentance and good works, a life that is watchful and awake to time, both the present and the future.

Walking in the Day

As Paul continues his call to believers to “wake from sleep” in light of the Day to come, he writes in verses 13-14:

13 ὡς ἐν ἡμέρᾳ εὐσχημόνως περιπατήσωμεν, μὴ κώμοις καὶ μέθαις, μὴ κοίταις καὶ ἀσελείαις, μὴ ἔριδι καὶ ζήλῳ, 14 ἀλλὰ ἐνδύσασθε τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν καὶ τῆς σαρκὸς πρόνοιαν μὴ ποιεῖσθε εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν. (13 Let us walk decently as in the day, not in excessive feasting and drunkenness, not in sexual excesses and licentiousness, not in strife and in envy, 14 but clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not make for one’s self forethought for the flesh to arouse desires¹⁵⁰).¹⁵¹

There is considerable discussion with regard to what Paul means when he writes, ὡς ἐν ἡμέρᾳ.

Cranfield lists four possibilities of interpretation, while defending his choice (also ours) of “as in the day”, meaning “with reference to the coming Age, the day being thought of as in some sense already here for Christians.”¹⁵² If believers are “asleep,” they will not be able to see the “light” of day, let alone walk in it. Therefore, Paul first calls them to “wake from sleep,” then to “walk as in the day.” The already-not-yet feature of the day being already here, but not fully here, creates

¹⁵⁰ Schreiner translates the last part of this verse as “make no provision for the flesh and its desires,” *Romans*, 696.

¹⁵¹ Wright explains, “This adds little to what we have seen, but it is particularly interesting for it echoes of 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, with its imagery of the night which is passing away and the day which is already dawning,” *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 264.

¹⁵² Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, 686-687. He lists the possibilities in this way: “(i) with reference to the relative respectability of what men do in broad daylight, as opposed to the revelries and debaucheries of the night-time; (ii) with reference to the Coming Age and with an ‘if’ understood ‘as if in the day’, ‘as if the day were already here’, the day being thought of as not yet come; (iii) with reference to the coming Age, the day being thought of as in some sense already here for Christians; (iv) ‘day’ being used, quite independently of its use in the previous verse, as a metaphor for the state of enlightenment and regeneration in which the Christian is at present, contrasted with the condition of paganism. The fact that they involve taking ‘day’ in a quite different sense from that in which it is used in the previous verse would seem to tell against both (i) and (iv), though (iv) is widely supported. While (ii) fits the context (ἡ δὲ ἡμέρα ἤγγικεν) more smoothly, (iii) is probably to be preferred, on the ground that it is more forceful and more in line with Paul’s manner of exhortation generally. The element of unreality in (ii) tells against it. It is not Paul’s custom to appeal to Christians to behave as they would if something were true, which in fact is not true.”

a tension in the life of a believer, between that which is holy and that which is not.¹⁵³

Putting on Christ and Ethical Living

In verse 14, Paul calls on believers to clothe themselves with or “put on” the Lord Jesus Christ. At first, it might seem as if Paul is saying the same thing he said in Galatians 3:27, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”¹⁵⁴ But as Cranfield observes, “We must distinguish different senses in which in which the believer may be said to put on Christ¹⁵⁵. . . So in Gal 3.27 Paul uses the indicative. But here in the present verse he used the imperative [*sic*], since putting on Christ has here its moral sense. . .”¹⁵⁶ The imperative is grounded in the reality of the indicative, as the imperative “appeals to it, and is intended to bring it to full development.”¹⁵⁷

The indicative reality in the spiritual status of the believer is what Paul appeals to in Romans 13:14 when he calls on believers to “clothe themselves with Christ.” It is their “new man,” their status “in Christ,” and what Bruce calls “the embodiment of the new humanity.” He continues, “Therefore to ‘put on the new man’ is to ‘put on Christ’: if Paul can say that all who were baptized into Christ ‘have put on Christ’ (Galatians 3:27), he can also urge such people to ‘put on the Lord Jesus Christ’ (Romans 13:14) and thus be in practice what they already are by the call of God.”¹⁵⁸ For the Romans, to “clothe themselves with Christ” is to sleep no longer—it

¹⁵³ See Schreiner, *Romans*, 700.

¹⁵⁴ Gal. 3:27: ὅσοι γὰρ εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε.

¹⁵⁵ See Paul R. Raabe’s very helpful article, “Who Died on the Cross? A Study in Romans and Galatians,” *Concordia Journal* 23, no. 1 (January 1997): 201-212, for a discussion on the theological grammar of such dilemmas.

¹⁵⁶ Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, 688.

¹⁵⁷ Ridderbos, *PAUL: An Outline of His Theology*, 255.

¹⁵⁸ F. F. Bruce, *PAUL: Apostle of Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 205.

is another way of calling on the believers to “wake up” in light of the coming day, and to live in a way that is congruent with their spiritual status.¹⁵⁹

Illocutionary and Perlocutionary Force of the Metaphor

The illocutionary force of sleep as a metaphor for spiritual and moral indifference is that it functions as warning to “wake from sleep” because of the present time. That time is explained in three ways. First, it is explained as the time when The Day of the Lord has come near and is, in fact, nearer than when they first believed (verse 11). In this way, “salvation,” deliverance from sin in its totality, is closer than it used to be.¹⁶⁰ Second, the time is described as the “night,” which has advanced. This is the present evil age which continues to go on until the Day of the Lord. Third, the time is described as “the day” being “at hand.” It will fully come when salvation is completed on the Day of the Lord. In this way, all time is described in relationship to and with direction toward to the Day of the Lord.

Through his metaphorical exhortation to “wake from sleep,” Paul gives a summons to holiness in living.¹⁶¹ This is the metaphor’s perlocutionary force. Believers are to “lay aside the works of darkness,” and “put on the weapons of light” (v. 12). They are to live as “in the day,” and to put on Jesus Christ. As Cranfield observes:

It means to follow Him in the way of discipleship and to strive to let our lives be moulded according to the pattern of the humility of His earthly life. It means so trusting in Him and relying wholly upon the status of righteousness before God which is ours in Him, that we cannot help but live to please Him. It means being ‘defended

¹⁵⁹ Ben Witherington III, with Darlene Hyatt, observes: “In short, believers are to clothe themselves with Christ, and not give any forethought to the desires of the flesh, by which Paul means sinful inclinations. On putting on Christ, one should compare Gal. 3:28-29. There is an interesting parallel in Dionysius of Halicarnassus 11.5 where to ‘put on Tarquin’ meant to play the role of Tarquin. Perhaps this is part of what Paul has in mind here: imitation of Christ. (See Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, p. 790),” *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 318.

¹⁶⁰ BDAG, σωτηρία: “σωτηρία is plainly expected to be culminated with the second coming of the Lord Ro 13:11.”

¹⁶¹ See Schreiner, *Romans*, 697.

on every side by the power of His Spirit, and thus rendered fit to discharge all the duties of holiness'.¹⁶²

Conclusion

As we continue to look at sleep as a metaphor for spiritual and moral indolence in Paul, we will return to the Greek verb *καθεύδω* in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. We will look especially at verses 6-8, which bear strong resemblance to our Romans text, and 1 Thessalonians 5:10. Here again it will be displayed, as in Romans 13:11-14, that “awaiting the Lord’s coming and being ready for it go hand in hand (see also 1 Thess. 3:13; 5:23; 2 Cor 5:10; Rom 13:11-14).”¹⁶³

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, Paul uses the Greek word *καθεύδω* for *sleep* three times: v. 6 ἄρα οὖν μὴ καθεύδωμεν ὡς οἱ λοιποὶ ἀλλὰ γρηγορῶμεν καὶ νήφωμεν (6 Therefore then *let us not sleep* as the others but let us keep awake¹⁶⁴ and be self-controlled¹⁶⁵); v. 7 Οἱ γὰρ καθεύδοντες νυκτὸς καθεύδουσιν καὶ οἱ μεθυσκόμενοι νυκτὸς μεθύουσιν· (7 For *those who sleep sleep* at night and those who get drunk get drunk at night); and v. 10 τοῦ ἀποθανόντος ὑπὲρ¹⁶⁶ ἡμῶν, ἵνα εἴτε γρηγορῶμεν εἴτε καθεύδωμεν ἅμα σὺν αὐτῷ ζήσωμεν (10 who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live together with him). We will see that Paul’s use of sleep in the context of 1 Thessalonians 5 is complex—and in one instance, contentious.

¹⁶² Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, 688-89.

¹⁶³ Joseph Plevnik, *Paul and the Parousia* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 110.

¹⁶⁴ F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary, gen. ed. Bruce M. Metzger, vol. 45 (Nelson Reference & Electronic: 1982), 107.

¹⁶⁵ Bruce uses the translation, “let us be sober” here, which shows an interesting contrast to verse 7 and drunkenness. BDAG translates the verb *νήφω* as “be well balanced, self-controlled,” but adds that it primarily means ‘be sober’; “in the NT only fig. = be free fr. every form of mental and spiritual ‘drunkenness’, fr. excess, passion, rashness, confusion, etc.”

¹⁶⁶ Leon Morris, *The First and Second Letter to the Thessalonians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991) notes, “Moule sees *περί* here (read by X * B 33) as synonymous with *ὑπὲρ* (*IBNTG*, p. 63), so that it does not matter greatly which we read (but *ὑπὲρ* should probably be accepted),” 161. Metzger does not even address this variant reading in (*continued next page*)

“Sleep”: The Opposite of Watchfulness

In his paraenesis on the Day of the Lord, Paul instructs his hearers for the first five verses about the consequences of its coming “like a thief in the night”¹⁶⁷ (verse 2) for believers and unbelievers. This arrival of the Lord will be a great surprise, an inescapable event as “labor pains come upon a pregnant woman” (verse 3). “But,” says Paul in verse 4, it does not have to be this way for believers. They know full well that it is coming (verses 1-2). Even so, some will be surprised despite their status as “sons of light” and “sons of the day” *if* they are not ready (verse 5).

“Therefore then,” exhorts Paul in verse 6, “*let us not sleep*”¹⁶⁸ as the others but let us keep awake and be self-controlled.” As in Romans 13:11-14, Paul summons the believers to “wakefulness,” a metaphor for “watchfulness,” the opposite of sleep, in light of the Day of the Lord. Since believers are not “the others”—that is, “the Gentiles who do not know God” (4:5, cf. 4:13)—they have no excuse for “sleep,” a metaphor here for “spiritual and moral indifference,” in light of the coming of the Lord on “that day” (verse 4). If they do not sleep, then they will not be surprised by its coming.

Sons of Light, Sons of the Day

Paul’s call to “wakefulness” from “sleep” in verse 6 is not without good reason. In fact, his summons to watchfulness could not be grounded in anything more definite than their status¹⁶⁹ before God as “sons:” ὅτι πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς υἱοὶ φωτός ἐστε καὶ υἱοὶ ἡμέρας. Οὐκ ἐσμὲν νυκτός

his textual commentary, indicating it is a minor issue.

¹⁶⁷ Jesus uses the imagery of the “thief in the night” for his return in Matt. 24:43 and Luke 12:39; see also “prophetic utterances in Rev. 3:3; 16:15; cf. 2 Pet 1:10; for a “similar figure” see Luke 21:34-36; “general teaching to the same effect” in Luke 17:24-32 where “the point of comparison is the call for vigilance” in Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 109.

¹⁶⁸ Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 111, “let us not sleep” – cf. Matt 24:43 par. Luke 12:39, cf. Mark 13:35, 36.

¹⁶⁹ It is, as in Eph. 5:14 and Romans 11:14, an imperative grounded in the indicative.

οὐδὲ σκότους· (5 For you are all sons of light, and sons of the day.¹⁷⁰ We are not of the night or of the darkness). Unfortunately, the ESV translates this as “children” (with a footnote “or sons”), but we believe Paul uses the metaphor “sons” quite intentionally as he does in Romans 8:19 to convey an important message as we will see.

In the verse preceding Paul’s call to wakefulness he writes: 4 ὑμεῖς δέ, ἀδελφοί, οὐκ ἐστὲ ἐν σκότει, ἵνα ἡ ἡμέρα ὑμᾶς ὡς κλέπτῃ καταλάβῃ· (4 But *you are not in darkness*, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief) (emphasis mine). As Paul goes on in verse 5, he adds “*We are not of the night or of the darkness*” (emphasis mine).

In our discussion on Romans 13:13 we observed what is also true here, that “what belongs to the night, the present evil age which is nearly over, are the works of darkness. They no longer have a place in the lives of believers who belong to the ‘day.’ These works of darkness are fitting only for those who sleep in spiritual death.”¹⁷¹ Those in spiritual death belong to the night, the present evil age—they are “the others,” the “Gentiles who do not know God” (1 Thess. 4:5). They are “spiritually and morally indifferent” because of their ignorance of God. The Thessalonians, however, “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, (10) and to wait for his Son from heaven, who he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1:9b-10, ESV).

Those who are “sons of light” are characterized by “light,” in ethical terms. Morris observes:

In Semitic languages generally to be a ‘son’ of something means to be characterized by that thing. It is this manner of thinking which underlies the apostle’s expression at this point. He does not say only that they walk in the light or live in the light, but that

¹⁷⁰ According to Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*, the expression “sons of the day” is “found only here in the New Testament,” 155.

¹⁷¹ See page 53.

they are ‘sons of the light,’ that is, they are characterized by light. It points us to the complete transformation that takes place when anyone believes.¹⁷²

The phrase “sons of light” also echoes Jesus’ words in John 12:35-36: “So Jesus said to them, ‘The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. 36 While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become ‘sons of light’” (ESV).¹⁷³ Here we see that Jesus is the light, and those joined to him in baptism (Eph. 5:14 relates this to baptism¹⁷⁴) inherit his “light,” all that he is and all that he has, because they are “sons of light.”¹⁷⁵ This is also illustrated in Ephesians 5:8, “for at one time you were darkness, but now you are

¹⁷² Morris, *The First and Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*, 155. He also writes in footnote 20: “For this idiom in Semitic or Greek use see the note in A. Deissmann, *Bible Studies* (Edinburgh, 1901), pp. 161-166. It is not without interest that one of the Qumran scrolls is called ‘The War of the Sons of Light with the Sons of Darkness.’ Turner speaks of the construction as ‘the Hebrew genitive of quality. (M, IV, p. 90). With regard to light, Bruce writes in *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, “The Qumran use of the light-darkness vocabulary has this in common with the NT use: it has a thoroughly ethical content. There is nothing here of the substantial dualism which the antithesis between light and darkness regularly expresses in Gnostic teaching. In the NT, as at Qumran, the antithesis is between doing right and doing wrong. The children of light do the will of God; that is what is meant by the direction: ‘lead your lives as children of light’ [Eph. 5:8],” 373. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, also observes: “The dualistic contrast of day and night and of light and darkness is symbolic of good and evil, just as in 1 Th 5:5-8 (cf. Eph 5:8-11). These pairs are commonly used in contemporary Jewish apocalyptic writings, especially in the sectarian QL (1QS 2:7; 3:20-4:1; 1QM 15:9, “in darkness are all their deeds,” i.e., the deeds of the sons of darkness who are dominated by the prince of demons, Belial). Contrast to Eph. 6:2.”

¹⁷³ See Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 111.

¹⁷⁴ See discussion pages 44-46 on the meaning of this verse.

¹⁷⁵ cf. Gal. 4:7; Rom. 8:17. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, “υἱός,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. III, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), “Ψῆδος” is considered as a term of relationship, with a “positive evaluation” in this sense: 1 Th. 5:5 with φῶς. . . [the reality of the day v. 4] “confers vigilance,” 365. Also “υἱός”: “Those ἐν Χριστῷ are one person with Christ. Believers are united to Him. They are thus heirs, G. 3:28f.; R. 4:16 ff. God sends his Son (Gl. 4:4; R. 8:3 f.) in order that the curse and power of the Law may be broken (Gl. 4:5; R. 8:3 f.) and the community may live (Gl. 4:6; R. 8:4b-13 . . .) through his substitutionary death. Their sonship rests on this or is shaped by it, Gl. 4:5; R. 8:14. In this sonship they cry Abba, Gl. 4:6; R. 8:15b; . . . Hence they are no longer slaves but free, Gl. 4:7a; R. 8:15a. . . They are thus heirs too (Gl. 4:7b; R. 8:17), *though this will be fulfilled, (392) of course, only at the eschaton, R. 8:18ff. . . Only then will they be manifested as sons (R. 8:19), though they are this even now. Up to then their proleptic being is a matter of faith, not sight* (emphasis mine). Plainly, then, Paul bases the sonship of the community on that of Jesus (see 390, 18 ff) Hence what R. 8:15 calls the ‘spirit of sonship’ is the ‘Spirit of the Son’ in Gl. 4:6. The historical background . . . is still visible in R. 8:29. The fact that Christ, as Logos, is God’s image underlies the possibility that believers will be fashioned in His likeness and can thus return to the world of God. . . But once again this background has been completely reconstructed in terms of apocalyptic thinking. *Believers already live as a new creation* (emphasis mine). This is the work of the Son of God who in His Spirit (Gl. 4:6) embraces a whole world and brings into being a new creation. Man is set in this at baptism and
(continued next page)

light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.”¹⁷⁶ As “light in the Lord,” the Thessalonians are to be characterized by Christ, the light, and to be that which they already are, “light.”¹⁷⁷ Bruce observes, “But the children of light—those whose lives are lived in the sight of God and in conformity to his will—are always in a state of preparedness for the great day: they do not know when it will come, but it will not take them at a disadvantage.”¹⁷⁸

As “sons of the day,” believers are inheritors of the Day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:5, 8-10).¹⁷⁹ They do not belong to this present evil age, as they are not of the “night” which is passing away (1 Thess. 5:1-5, 8).¹⁸⁰ In contrast to the “sons of the day,” those who belong to the night will receive the wrath of God (1 Thess. 5:3, 9).¹⁸¹ Since believers will not receive God's wrath, they are called to live as those who belong to something else—someone else who is eternal, in whom they obtain salvation—Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 5:9-10).

As “sons of the day,” believers are also to be characterized by the Day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:8).¹⁸² Bruce notes, “The day [has] not yet arrived, but believers in Christ [are] children of day already, by a form of ‘realized eschatology,’ through the life, ministry, and saving work of Jesus.”¹⁸³ N. T. Wright observes:

What signs are there of continuity and discontinuity between the present life and that final resurrection state? In 5.4-8, Paul states boldly that Christians are already

therewith becomes God's son,” 391-392.

¹⁷⁶ ἦτε γὰρ ποτε σκότος, νῦν δὲ φῶς ἐν κυρίῳ· ὡς τέκνα φωτὸς περιπατεῖτε

¹⁷⁷ See also 1 John 1:5-6.

¹⁷⁸ Bruce, *1 & 2 Thess.*, 115.

¹⁷⁹ cf. Romans 8:15-25; 1 Cor. 15:12-57; Eph. 5:5

¹⁸⁰ cf. Romans 12:13

¹⁸¹ In their baptism, believers are “sons of the day,” as they have been called to “(4b) the *one hope* that belongs to [their] call—(5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism, (6) one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all,” (Eph. 4:4b-6, ESV). Their hope is for the return of the Lord on that Day and for the Resurrection (Romans 8:25).

¹⁸² cf. Romans 13:11-14

¹⁸³ Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 111.

‘children of light, of the day’. When he speaks of not falling asleep, but of staying awake, he is not envisaging someone staying up later and later into the night, but of someone getting up very early, while it is still dark before dawn. This, he insists, is the present condition of the Christian believers. When the day dawns – the biblical ‘day of the lord’, now reinterpreted as ‘the day of the lord Jesus’ – those who are already up and awake will not be startled by it. As in Galatians, this has a strong ethical implication: it is important to be conducting oneself as though it were already daytime. The passage thus offers an *inaugurated eschatology* in which Paul draws on the (Genesis-based) imagery of night and day to say that Christians are *already*, as it were, resurrection people’. Their bodies still need to be transformed, but in terms of the resurrection-related imagery of sleeping and waking they are already ‘awake’, and must stay that way.¹⁸⁴

With Paul’s next use of *καθεύδω*, we will see that he continues to use the imagery of night and day in service to his exhortation for believers to wake from sleep.

“Sleep”: Literally

As Paul summons his hearers to watchfulness with the metaphor “sleep” for spiritual and moral indifference in verse 6, he follows this summons with a basic, yet powerful illustration of “sleep” in verse 7 of 1 Thessalonians 5: *Οἱ γὰρ καθεύδοντες νυκτὸς καθεύδουσιν καὶ οἱ μεθυσκόμενοι νυκτὸς μεθύουσιν* (7 *Those who sleep sleep at night and those who get drunk get drunk at night*). Here he is speaking of “literal sleep,” what one usually does at night.¹⁸⁵ Since this was most likely a universal reality for his hearers, they could easily know it to be true. But, his illustration was not made in order to “educate” his hearers about sleep or drunkenness, which they would also know as a typical nighttime behavior.¹⁸⁶ Rather, it was made to reinforce his metaphorical use of the same word, “sleep,” in verse 6. Since believers belong to the day and not to the night, they should do “daytime” things: be “awake,” be sober, “self-controlled,” and

¹⁸⁴ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 216-217.

¹⁸⁵ BDAG, *καθεύδω*, def. 1.

¹⁸⁶ See Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 112.

therefore watchful for the Lord's coming so as to not be surprised by it. Therefore, his literal use of "sleep" reinforces the metaphorical use of "sleep" and its ethical dimensions.

When one is literally "sleeping," one cannot be watchful (v. 7). When one is "drunk," one cannot be "sober" or "self-controlled" (v. 6-7). However, when a believer is "awake" (metaphorically) and "sober" (v. 6, 8), he can demonstrate in his life that which characterizes a "son of light," the "armor of light",¹⁸⁷ and therefore a "son of the day." It is because of their status as "sons of light, sons of the day" that Paul can exhort them to "wear" this armor of light now in verse 8: ἡμεῖς δὲ ἡμέρας ὄντες νήφωμεν ἐνδυσάμενοι θώρακα πίστεως καὶ ἀγάπης καὶ περικεφαλαίαν ἐλπίδα σωτηρίας. (But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of *faith* and *love*, and for a helmet *the hope of salvation*, emphasis mine). Not only is the believer to live in faith and love, but also in hope—hope for the salvation that is yet to be fully realized on the Day of the Lord.

"Sleep": Dead or Just Living Like It?

In verses 9-10 of 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul continues to explain what it means to belong to "the day," the Day of the Lord, and *why* he exhorts them to be "awake" and "sober" in light of it. "The hope of salvation" (v. 8) is expressed as hope for the believer's ultimate destiny on that day (v. 9), whether the believer is "awake" or "asleep" (v. 10). Paul writes: 9 ὅτι οὐκ ἔθετο ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς εἰς ὀργὴν ἀλλὰ εἰς περιποίησιν σωτηρίας διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν, Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ 10 τοῦ ἀποθανόντος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, ἵνα εἴτε γρηγορῶμεν εἴτε καθεύδωμεν ἅμα σὺν αὐτῷ ζήσωμεν (9 For

¹⁸⁷ Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 112. The "armor of light" is referred to in Romans 13:12, as believers are called to "put on the armor of light," but is not defined in the way we find Paul do so in 1 Thess 5:8. In Rom. 13:12 it is a parallel to 13:14, "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." See discussion pages 53-54. Morris notes that this metaphor reminds the Christian that he is a soldier. However, here Paul lists only "defensive armor"; "mainly, a defense against surprise," 158. Cf. this verse to Rom. 13:11-3; Eph. 6:14-16; Isaiah 11:4-5; 59:17. See Williams, *Paul's Metaphors*, 221.

God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us so that whether we are awake or *asleep* we might live together with him).

The second use of “sleep” in 1 Thessalonians 5:10 is the contentious passage mentioned earlier. We believe that Paul uses *καθεύδω* in this passage for sleep as a metaphor for “death,”¹⁸⁸ just as he used *κοιμάω* in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 14, and 15 for “death.”¹⁸⁹ Therefore, a literal rewrite of the verse could read, “[the Lord Jesus Christ] who died for us so that whether we are alive or dead we might live together with him.” However, some argue that Paul refers back to his usage of the metaphor in verse 6, so that *καθεύδω* is translated “spiritual and moral indifference.” This view fails to take into account all the evidence for a second possible metaphorical use of *καθεύδω*.¹⁹⁰

Non-Pauline use of the Metaphor

While Paul himself does not use *καθεύδω* as “death” in any other instance,¹⁹¹ *καθεύδω* is used as a metaphor for death in the Septuagint, Daniel 12:2¹⁹² and Psalm 88:5 (LXX Ps. 87:6). It

¹⁸⁸ Tracy L. Howard, in his article, “The Meaning of “Sleep” in 1 Thessalonians 5:10 – A Reappraisal,” *Grace Theological Journal* 6.2 (1985) 337-348, notes that the “majority of lexicographers and commentators” support *καθεύδω* as “physical death,” 346. Scholars reviewed whom we understand to support this definition include Bruce, Ridderbos, Morris, Howard, Williams, Wright, and Plevnik. There may be others, but they could not be determined based on their writings. See BDAG, *καθεύδω*, def. 3.

¹⁸⁹ Thus they are synonyms. It is interesting to note that Paul uses *κοιμάω* three times in 1 Thessalonians 4, verses 13, 14, and 15, and three times in 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 6, 7, and 10. It is uncontested to our knowledge that Paul uses *κοιμάω* for “sleep” as “death” all three times (see chapter 2 of this thesis, pages 31-35). In chapter 5, *καθεύδω* has three different meanings, according to our view.

¹⁹⁰ We examined John Paul Heil and Piotr J. Malysz, who have this view. Daniel P. Leyrer, “Exegetical Brief: 1 Thessalonians 5:10—Whether We Are Awake or Asleep,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 96.4 (1999): 286-289, believes *καθεύδω* could mean either “death” or “spiritual asleep” with a moral sense. In other words, he takes both views, which means he takes neither. See these authors’ works listed in the bibliography for references to other scholars who take the view of “spiritual and moral indifference” in verse 10.

¹⁹¹ John Paul Heil, “Those Now ‘Asleep’ (not dead) Must be ‘Awakened’ for the Day of the Lord in 1 Thess 5.9-10,” *New Testament Studies*, 46 (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 464-471. In defense of an opposing reading of v. 10, he makes an incorrect statement, if one considers both the LXX and the Gospels, saying, “In all of Greek literature there is no instance where *καθεύδω* in itself means ‘to be dead’,” 465.

¹⁹² Tracy L. Howard notes, “In light of the eschatological nature of Dan. 12:2, Paul may have even employed the language of Dan. 12:2 in 1 Thess 5:10 and then adapted it to his own theological discussion,” in “The Meaning of ‘Sleep’ in 1 Thessalonians 5:10: A Reappraisal,” *Grace Theological Journal* 6.2 (1985), 340.

is also used in the three Synoptic Gospels by Jesus concerning Jairus' daughter, after she died: Mark 5:39; Matt. 9:24; Luke 8:52.¹⁹³ Since in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 he already echoes some of Jesus' words,¹⁹⁴ as well as some Old Testament passages,¹⁹⁵ it does not seem so unusual that Paul would choose a word that was known to be used in those passages for the metaphor death, even if he did not use it before now.¹⁹⁶

1 Thessalonians 5:10 and 4:13, 14, 15

As noted earlier within the 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 context, Paul uses *καθεύδω* two times, once in verse 6, meaning "spiritual and moral indifference, and a second time in verse 7, meaning "literal sleep." While he could have used the verb *κοιμάω*, "sleep" previously employed in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 14, and 15, as metaphor for death, he chose to continue to use the verb *καθεύδω*, meaning "sleep," as a metaphor for death. Thus, he continues the play on words¹⁹⁷ he began with verses 6 and 7, and brings us back to the idea begun in 4:13, though now in a new context.¹⁹⁸ Howard observes that it is possible that he was also employing a literary technique, noted by Laughton, "in less formal literature, both ancient and modern, 'a single word or phrase

¹⁹³ These references are noted by Howard, "The Meaning of 'Sleep' in 1 Thessalonians 5:10: A Reappraisal," 340 and Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 114-115. Although the issue of whether or not Jairus' daughter was really dead or not has been disputed, Howard notes that according to Luke 8:53 she was clearly dead. Howard also quotes Cranfield as he offers an explanation for Jesus using *καθεύδω* in juxtaposition with *ἀποθήσκω*. "It is more natural to take the words to mean that, though she is dead, yet, since he is going to raise her up, her death will be no more permanent than a sleep," 340-41.

¹⁹⁴ Bruce in *1 & 2 Thessalonians* notes Jesus' teaching about his coming like a thief in the night, Matt. 24:43, cf. Luke 12:39; see also with reference to a call for vigilance Luke 21:34-36 and 17:24-32, 111.

¹⁹⁵ Bruce notes that "the armor metaphor may go back to Isaiah 59:17, where Yahweh himself puts on righteousness as a breastplate and wears the helmet of salvation on his head . . .," 112.

¹⁹⁶ Leyrer, "Exegetical Brief: 1 Thessalonians 5:10—Whether We Are Awake or Asleep," 287-288.

¹⁹⁷ See Howard, "The Meaning of 'Sleep' in 1 Thessalonians 5:10: A Reappraisal," 342. He agrees it is possible that Paul is using "word play" to bring us back to 4:13.

¹⁹⁸ See Howard, "The Meaning of 'Sleep' in 1 Thessalonians 5:10: A Reappraisal," 342-43. "Why then would it be so unusual for Paul to employ a third nuance of the verb in v. 10, namely, that of 'physical death'? I would suggest the contrary, namely, that the preceding uses of *καθεύδω* probably explain why Paul chose *καθεύδω* rather than *κοιμάω* as a metaphor for death in 1 Thess 5:10," 342.

persists in the writer's mind by its own force, independently of any sense-recurrence'.¹⁹⁹ In the context of 1 Thess. 4:13-18, κοιμάω persists, as it appeared three times. In 1 Thess. 5:1-11, καθεύδω persists, as it is found three times, and with three different meanings.

1 Thessalonians 5:10 and the context of 5:1-11

Within the context of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul is addressing a different issue than the one addressed in 5:1-11. In the former he is concerned with giving comfort, hope and encouragement to believers with regard to those who had "fallen asleep" or "died" before the Lord's return. They would not be left out of the Resurrection.²⁰⁰ But in 5:1-11, Paul's attention shifts to addressing those who are still waiting for the Resurrection on the Day of the Lord. They knew that no one would know for sure the time or the season of his arrival (vv.1-2), but Paul did not want a lack of knowledge to lead to spiritual and moral indifference among those who were waiting for it. Rather, he calls them to vigilance, both spiritually and morally, in light of the coming Day of the Lord. As a result, they would then be ready for it, no matter when it came, and not be surprised by it.

If Paul were using καθεύδω for "spiritual and moral indifference" in verse 10 as he did in verse 6, he would then have "greatly weaken[ed] all the preceding exhortations to spiritual alertness found in vv 6, 8."²⁰¹ Howard writes, "If one did give καθεύδω such a nuance, a paraphrase of v 10 might be, 'although I desire you to maintain spiritual alertness in view of the imminent Parousia, Jesus died so that whether or not we are spiritually alert, we might still live with him.' The weakening of the previous series of hortatory subjunctives is obvious. . ."²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ E. Laughton, "Subconscious Repetition and Textual Criticism," *Classical Philology* 45 (1950) 75, in Howard, 342.

²⁰⁰ See discussion pages 32-35.

²⁰¹ Howard, "The Meaning of 'Sleep' in 1 Thessalonians 5:10: A Reappraisal," 343.

²⁰² Howard, "The Meaning of 'Sleep' in 1 Thessalonians 5:10: A Reappraisal," 344.

Considering a paraphrase of how the verse might read if one were to use such a definition, Bruce comments, “It is ludicrous to suppose that the writers mean, ‘Whether you live like sons of light or sons of darkness, it will make little difference: you will be all right in the end.’”²⁰³ Howard observes:

“If the *best way* to motivate one to spiritual alertness is to show that his or her hope of deliverance could not be forfeited by a failure to watch, why then did not Paul begin v 6 with such a theological assertion? The reason is because the motivating factor for spiritual alertness is not that which Hodges suggests²⁰⁴ but is found in vv 2-5, namely, the imminent and sudden character of the Parousia of Jesus. This is clear from the ἄρα οὖν which introduces v 6. *Paul draws on the strong inference that since the Parousia is imminent and sudden the believer should not be spiritually insensible but morally alert and vigilant (cf. vv 6, 8) (emphasis mine).*²⁰⁵

If one does not see the “strong connection Paul makes between the coming Parousia/Day of the Lord and the exhortation to moral alertness” in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, then it is easier to understand how καθεύδω could be understood as “spiritual and moral indifference” in verse 10. This definition also fails to understand or see his use of the metaphor sleep in verse 6 within its

²⁰³ F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* Word Biblical Commentary; Waco, Texas: Word, 1982), 114. In response to this, Piotr J. Malysz, “Paul’s Use of the Imagery of Sleep and His Understanding of the Christian Life: A Study in the Thessalonian Correspondence,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 67.1 (2003), writes that this interpretation is “too restrictive in that it isolates 1 Thess. 5:1-11 from the rest of the epistle, and the rest of Paul’s theology, for that matter,” 77. This seems to be a cop-out. Our current conversation, as well as previous discussions on Ephesians 5:14 and Romans 13:11 refute this. Also, an understanding of Paul’s use of the imperative in light of the indicative within his theology as he uses eschatological motivation in calling believers to holy living defends Bruce’s position as well as ours. Malysz continues, “Voluntarily to plunge back into it [sin] would be to reject God’s salvation. But this does not mean that there is no forgiveness for those who out of weakness fall into sin. . . . Thus, in a conscious attempt to preserve the integrity of justification, rather than fostering un-Christian behavior, Paul caps his whole discussion with a wonderful statement of the gospel. Even those who fall asleep have forgiveness in Christ,” 77. We believe the need for justification at this point is Malysz’s issue, not Paul’s, as that is how Malysz would like this section to end. Paul does not leave us this way because he is not directly addressing the need for people to feel forgiven at this point, though he does imply justification in the sense that we are not destined for wrath. If Paul were doing what Malysz’s suggests, would Paul not also add this “qualifier” in Eph. 5:14 and Rom. 13:11-14 where his purpose for calling believers to vigilance is much the same?

²⁰⁴ “Hodges says likewise [like Edgar], ‘the apostle felt that the best way to stimulate a watchful spirit was to show that ‘the hope of deliverance’ could not be forfeited even by the believer’s failure to watch for it’. I do not for one moment question the fact that a genuine believer’s hope is secure regardless of his watchfulness,” Howard writes in “The Meaning of ‘Sleep’ in 1 Thessalonians 5:10: A Reappraisal,” of Hodges’ position on the metaphor sleep in verse 10, 344. But with Howard, we do not believe that was Paul’s issue here.

²⁰⁵ Howard, “The Meaning of ‘Sleep’ in 1 Thessalonians 5:10: A Reappraisal,” 344-45.

context and why Paul is exhorting his believers to “watchfulness” in light of the Day of the Lord. “The relationship between eschatology and ethics is quite clear in both 3:13 and 5:23. In both texts Paul prays that the Thessalonian believers might be ‘blameless’ at the time of the Parousia. The imminent and sudden nature of the Parousia is the motivating factor for the ‘blameless’ behavior. This emphasis throughout the book as well as in 5:6, 8 thus makes it inconceivable that Paul uses *καθεύδω* in 5:10 for ‘spiritual insensibility.’”²⁰⁶

In light of the call to vigilance in 1 Thess. 5:1-11, it may be argued that Paul addresses the previous concern of those who died in the Lord before his coming in 5:10.²⁰⁷ But, he does not do it in exactly the same way. In this context, now addressed to and concerning those who are currently alive, Paul answers the question of whether those who die before the Lord’s return will miss out even if they watch for the Day of the Lord to come. Will *they* miss living with the Lord forever?²⁰⁸ Absolutely not. Rather, he assures “the Thessalonian believers that whether they live or whether they die, they would live with the Lord at his return.”²⁰⁹ As Bruce states:

²⁰⁶ Howard, “The Meaning of ‘Sleep’ in 1 Thessalonians 5:10: A Reappraisal,” 345. Here he is refuting scholars Hodges and Edgar, see 344-345.

²⁰⁷ Morris in *The First and Second Epistle to the Thessalonians* notes verse 10 as “whether they live or die,” 161. Also, “From 4:14 on, Paul has been insisting that death is not victorious over the believer, and this is his thought here, too. The believer is in Christ, and death cannot affect that relationship,” 162. Malysz, “Paul’s Use of the Imagery of Sleep and His Understanding of the Christian Life: A Study in the Thessalonian Correspondence,” disagrees with what we believe Paul to be doing here with “sleep” in v. 10: “It is quite likely that in doing so Paul desired to make a justification statement that would crown his entire exposition of both the Lord’s second advent and the Christian life. Ultimately, and this is what all Christians are to keep in mind, salvation is not by works, but proceeds from God’s gracious election in Christ. It is a gift of God’s grace through faith,” 77. While it is true that salvation is by faith and not by works, that is not the issue here. What Paul ultimately wants them to keep in mind is that they need to wake from sleep of spiritual and moral indolence in order to be ready for Christ’s return so it will not surprise them as those of the night and darkness will be surprised, and that is grounded in Christ’s saving work and the hope of the inheritance that is ours in (future) salvation. The imperative (call) is grounded in the indicative (their status).

²⁰⁸ Ridderbos, in *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, notes 1 Thess 5:10 as believers being with Christ “after the resurrection,” 507; Leyrer, “Exegetical Brief: 1 Thessalonians 5:10—Whether We Are Awake or Asleep,” notes, “like the ‘salvation’ of v 9, the ‘life’ of v 10 is eschatologically definitive,” 114.

²⁰⁹ Howard, “The Meaning of ‘Sleep’ in 1 Thessalonians 5:10: A Reappraisal,” 346. Ridderbos makes this observation: re: 2 Cor. 5:9 – ‘whether by our remaining or by departing’ – can scarcely be understood otherwise than as: whether by our living or by our dying. Paul does not place his won preference above everything else, but the manner in which he can best serve God and be well pleasing to him. This ‘whether. . . or. . .’ apparently has the same significance as the corresponding expressions in 1 Thessalonians 5:10; Romans 14:8; cf. Philippians 1:23,24.
(continued next page)

The writers endeavor to encourage their converts to maintain their faith and fervor, to cultivate and practice the Christian graces, and thus to be ready for the Advent of their Lord and the enjoyment of eternal bliss with him. Death before his Advent would make no difference to this sure prospect: 'If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's' (Rom. 14:8).²¹⁰

The words of Paul in verse 10 are followed by words in verse 11 that may be considered a closing of the entire section of 4:13-5:11: Διὸ παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους καὶ οἰκοδομεῖτε εἰς τὸν ἕνα, καθὼς καὶ ποιεῖτε (Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing). This entire section addresses the fate of both the living and the dead in Christ, either before his return or after, with a call to vigilance in light of that reality. It is hope and comfort, as well as a warning and summons to be ready, whether one dies before the Lord returns or sees his return for himself. "The eschatological hope, then, is not an excuse for idling but an incentive for action, and especially for mutual aid. Every church member has a duty to help in 'building up' the community, so that it may attain spiritual maturity."²¹¹ This spiritual maturity is a life of watchfulness, "awake" to the realities taught by Paul in this powerful eschatological section of 1 Thessalonians.

Illocutionary and Perlocutionary Force of the Metaphors

In light of the context of 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 as discussed above, the illocutionary force of the first metaphorical use of sleep for spiritual and moral indolence in verse 6 is that it

And with that it is said therefore that, in expectation of the glorified life of the resurrection, he sees as his highest desire whether by his life or by his death to be well pleasing to God. . . 2 Cor 5:8 – "taking up abode with the Lord" – "Above and beyond all else it is the hope of the resurrection," 505.

²¹⁰ Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 116.

²¹¹ Bruce, *1 & 2 Thess*, 115. David J. Williams, in *Paul's Metaphors* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999) notes, "This is love—a concern for the well-being of others that translates into action at whatever cost to oneself," 19. He lists examples of Rom. 15:1-2; cf. 14:19; 2 Cor 12:19; Acts 20:32; 1 Thess. 5:11. He continues, "Build one another up"—"Gifts of ministry serve the church to that end. They are the gifts of God through Christ to his church that it might 'build itself up' in love (Eph. 4:11-16). . . ." The idea of "building up" is "always in Paul metaphorically," 29. See Williams, 29, footnote 76.

functions as a warning for believers to be “awake,” watchful, and vigilant spiritually and morally. They are to be so because of the nature of the arrival of the Day of the Lord, as it will surprise all those who do not heed his call. The perlocutionary force of this use of the metaphor is to behave in a way congruent with those who are “sons of light, sons of the day.” When they put on their “armor of light,” faith, love, and hope as a result of this call, they will not be surprised by the Day of the Lord, but will be ready for it.

The illocutionary force for the second metaphorical use of sleep for death in verse 10 is to bring comfort and encouragement to the Thessalonians, as he states, “whether we are awake or asleep we might live together with him.”²¹² Their eschatological destiny is salvation, as they have been saved from God’s wrath through the Lord Jesus Christ. If they are alive or dead, they are Christ’s, now and at His coming on the Day of the Lord. As a result, the perlocutionary force of the second metaphorical use of sleep for death is that Paul wants the believers to live in that hope, building one another up, focused on the salvation that is theirs now as a promise, and fully then at the resurrection in the parousia. They will not be surprised by this coming, as their hope and mutual admonition will prepare them.

Conclusion

In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, Paul illustrates a complex and full theology of the Christian’s life and eschatological destiny through two uses of sleep metaphorically: for spiritual and moral indolence (v. 6) and for death (v. 10). In this life, believers are called out of “sleep” to be “awake” for the Lord’s return. Wright observes:

When the day dawns—the biblical ‘day of the lord’, now reinterpreted as ‘the day of the lord Jesus’—those who are already up and awake will not be startled by it. As in

²¹² This is almost the same illocutionary force as found in chapter 2 for the metaphor sleep for death. ²¹² Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 216-217.

Galatians, this has a strong ethical implication: it is important to be conducting oneself as though it were already daytime. The passage thus offers an *inaugurated eschatology* in which Paul draws on the (Genesis-based) imagery of night and day to say that Christians are *already*, as it were, ‘resurrection people’. Their bodies still need to be transformed, but in terms of the resurrection-related imagery of sleeping and waking they are already ‘awake’, and must stay that way.²¹³

And when their bodies are transformed, whether alive or dead at the Lord’s coming, they will live together with Him in His Kingdom for eternity, for the dead only “sleep,” waiting for their Savior from heaven to wake them up one last time.

²¹³ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 216-217.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, when Paul uses sleep as a metaphor for death, he gives it a new, theologically conditioned meaning, one different than that of any other writer before him. By placing the metaphor in a new context, that of the Parousia, or the Day of the Lord,²¹⁴ and what we know to be the biblical witness according to the New Testament, he differentiates it from the Greco-Roman cultural context of his day. He gives his hearers a new narrative in which to “hear” the metaphor. This narrative is the story of the Lord Jesus Christ and his saving work in the past, present, and future, to be completed on the Last Day.²¹⁵ On that Day, the sleepers will be awakened; this is a hope and promise known fully to no one except those who hear Paul’s message of the Savior and place their faith in the One who will awaken the sleepers, Jesus Christ.²¹⁶ Death is not final for them.

From within this biblical context, Paul’s use of sleep as a metaphor for death becomes a launching pad for sleep as a metaphor for spiritual and moral indolence. It is because the sleepers in death will one day be awakened that Paul can exhort his hearers to awaken “ahead of time” in this life; that is, ahead of the Day of the Lord when the New Age fully comes. It is, however, already here in a very real sense—begun in Christ’s salvific work and given to

²¹⁴ This is done in *all* contexts where Paul uses sleep as a metaphor for death and sleep as a metaphor for spiritual and moral indolence.

²¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 15

²¹⁶ 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 5:1-11. They will then receive salvation complete.

believers through baptism.²¹⁷ As sons of God, believers live in the New Age “ahead of time” in the present evil age. They are in a state of the “now-and-not-yet;” “resurrected” in this life, but not yet resurrected in the next. Because of their destiny, believers are exhorted to live as faithful, watchful people belonging to God.²¹⁸

While this study shows the importance of Paul’s new use of sleep as a metaphor for death, and sleep as a metaphor for spiritual and moral indolence in his cultural context, it also speaks to those who would believe and proclaim the hope of an afterlife in the context of the twenty-first century, especially in the West. It has become all too common to hear not only those with some sort of “spiritual belief” to speak of an afterlife as only going to “heaven,” if one goes any place after death, but also to hear those in the Church use “heaven” exclusively as the common refrain when speaking of an afterlife. One only has to hear the hymn “I’m But a Stranger Here” (Lutheran Worship 515) and its repetitious refrain “Heav’n is my home” to sense that something may be awry.²¹⁹ “Not only is a disembodied existence in ‘heaven’ not our home; this kind of existence is not our goal. Rather, our goal is to be raised from the dead and to live with Christ forever”.²²⁰ And, whether awake or asleep when he comes again, we will receive with Christ our ultimate hope: a resurrected body and life with Him for eternity in a new heaven and new earth.²²¹

²¹⁷ Romans 6, especially vv. 3-4.

²¹⁸ 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

²¹⁹ See Jeffrey A. Gibbs, “Regaining Biblical Hope: Restoring the Prominence of the Parousia,” *Concordia Journal* 27 no. 4 (October 2001): 310-322, for other examples and excellent observations.

²²⁰ 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10. This sentence was given by thesis reader Jeffrey A. Gibbs as a suggested clarification in the closing paragraph with regard to “heaven,” March, 2007.

²²¹ 1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 5:10; Revelation 21.

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