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## THE MEANING OF "SLEEP" IN 1 THESSALONIANS 5:10— A REAPPRAISAL

TRACY L. HOWARD

*It has recently been argued that καθεύδω in 1 Thess 5:10 means "spiritual insensibility." However, the context indicates that the word is used as a euphemism for death. This is within the semantic range of the word and is supported by structural parallels between 1 Thess 4:13-14, 18 and 1 Thess 5:9-11 in which καθεύδω is paired with κοιμάω.*

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### INTRODUCTION

UNTIL recently, most commentators have understood Paul's reference to "sleep" in 1 Thess 5:10 as a metaphor for "physical death." This would seem reasonable since Paul frequently uses the metaphor of "sleep" to describe a believer who has died in the Lord. In fact, he uses the metaphor earlier in the same eschatological discourse in which 1 Thess 5:10 is located (cf. 1 Thess 4:13-14). However, in 4:13 he uses the verb κοιμάω whereas in 5:10 he employs καθεύδω. The question therefore immediately arises whether or not Paul uses καθεύδω as a synonym for κοιμάω; in other words, does he use both verbs as a metaphor to describe "physical death"? 1 Thess 5:10 states that Christ "died on our behalf, in order that whether we are awake or asleep (καθεύδωμεν) we might live together with Him." The commentators and lexicographers are virtually unanimous in their interpretation of καθεύδω as a euphemism for "death" in this text. However, several recent articles suggest that καθεύδω means "spiritual insensibility" instead of "physical death."<sup>1</sup> Although some of the

<sup>1</sup>Thomas R. Edgar, "The Meaning of 'Sleep' in 1 Thessalonians 5:10," *JETS* 22 (1979) 345-49; Zane C. Hodges, "The Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11," in *Walvoord: A Tribute* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982) 75-78; and B. N. Kaye, "Eschatology and Ethics in 1 and 2 Thessalonians," *NovT* (1975) 51-52, esp. n 27; this interpretation also has been proposed by Thomas L. Constable, "1 Thessalonians," in

arguments appear convincing on the surface, they reflect a failure to consider other contextual, literary, and lexical features which strongly suggest that in 1 Thess 5:10 καθεύδω does not refer to "spiritual insensibility" but instead is used as a metaphor for "physical death." Thus the purpose of this article is to reappraise the meaning of καθεύδω in 1 Thess 5:10 and to suggest that the nuance of "physical death" is most appropriate in the context.

#### THE PROBLEM

If Paul uses καθεύδω as a reference to "physical death" in 1 Thess 5:10, it is a clear departure from his customary tendency.<sup>2</sup> He normally uses κοιμάω when employing the metaphor of "sleep" for the death of a believer.<sup>3</sup> In fact, if he is departing from his normal use of κοιμάω and employs καθεύδω as a euphemism for death, it would be the only occasion in which he gives καθεύδω such a nuance. It is possible that Paul uses καθεύδω for "death" in Eph 5:14 although doubtful.<sup>4</sup> The only other two occurrences in the Pauline corpus are found in the same context as 5:10 (cf. vv 6, 7). In v 6 Paul uses the verb to describe "spiritual insensibility" while in v 7 he uses the verb for "literal sleep."<sup>5</sup>

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*The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983) 707; see also C. F. Hogg and W. E. Vine, *The Epistle to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, reprint 1959) 172; and Robert L. Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (12 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 11. 285-86.

<sup>2</sup>Such departures from "normal tendencies" are not unusual for Paul. In 1 Thess 4:14 he states, 'Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη / 'Jesus died and rose'. This phrase contains ἀνέστη rather than the usual ἠγέρθη. Paul uses ἐγείρω much more frequently for resurrection whether of Christ or of his people, ἀνίστημι being found only here and in Eph 5:14. On the other hand ἐγείρω is used forty times by Paul, normally in the passive (cf. W. F. Moulton and A. S. Geden, *A Concordance to the Greek Testament* [Edinburgh: Clark, 1975] 246-47). Certainly one would not argue that ἀνέστη has a different meaning than ἐγείρω simply because Paul employs the unusual ἀνίστημι. (Some have argued, however, that this unusual occurrence of ἀνίστημι suggests dependence on a pre-Pauline credal formula [cf. Ivan Havener, "The Pre-Pauline Credal Formulas of 1 Thessalonians" (SBL Seminar Papers, 1981) 105-28]. It is interesting that the verb seems to be used in such a credal fashion among the patristics; cf. Ign. Rom. 4:3 [ἀναστήσομαι]; 6:1 [both ἀποθανόντα and ἀναστάντα appear together, the same two words that occur in 1 Thess 4:14]; Barn. 15:9 [ἀνέστη, the same form as 1 Thess 4:14].)

<sup>3</sup>Cf. 1 Cor 7:39; 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thess 4:13, 14, 15. Of the nine occurrences in Pauline material, seven appear in two major eschatological texts, 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4.

<sup>4</sup>I would agree with Edgar ("The Meaning of 'Sleep,'" 348) at this point when he writes, "It is difficult to conceive, however, that someone would command a physically dead person to rise and then go on to state that Christ will illuminate him if he does"; hence, it is preferable to view Paul's use of καθεύδω in Eph 5:14 as a reference to "spiritual insensibility" (cf. BAGD, 388).

<sup>5</sup>BAGD, 388. The metaphorical sense is clear in v 6 through which Paul conveys the idea of spiritual laziness. This figurative use is also found in classical Greek with a

Thus to attribute the nuance of "physical death" to καθεύδω in 5:10 not only would suggest a departure from Paul's normal tendency to use κοιμάω, but would ascribe a different nuance to καθεύδω than found elsewhere in his letters. For this reason, both Edgar and Hodges question whether καθεύδω can possibly have such a meaning for Paul, particularly since he just used the verb metaphorically in 5:6 for "spiritual insensibility."<sup>6</sup> Therefore, if καθεύδω is a euphemism for death in 5:10, it must be demonstrated that Paul did in fact depart from his normal tendency to use κοιμάω and that a different nuance of καθεύδω is used from that which occurs in the immediate context (cf. v 6). The question is this: are there other contextual, literary, and lexical features which suggest that καθεύδω in 5:10 is a euphemism for death?

#### SUPPORT FOR ΚΑΘΕΥΔΩ AS DEATH IN 1 THESSALONIANS 5:10

##### *The Use of Καθεύδω Both in the LXX and in the New Testament*

It has already been noted that Paul's "normal" pattern is to employ κοιμάω when he uses sleep as a metaphor for death. However, this can be misleading, particularly when the issue of verbal meaning is considered. While statistics are helpful they are not determinative for meaning. If it can be shown that the nuance of "death" falls within the semantic range of καθεύδω, the exegete must consider this as a possible meaning even if Paul's "normal" pattern is to use κοιμάω. There are passages both in the LXX and in the NT in which καθεύδω is used metaphorically for death.

The verb is used twice in the LXX as a reference for death. In Ps 88:5 (LXX 87:6) the text reads ὡσεὶ τραυματῖαι ἐρριμμένοι καθεύδοντες ἐν τάφῳ / 'like the slain, having been cast down, who sleep in the grave'. Here the reference surely means "death" since

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derogatory sense, indicating defective concentration or a deficient action (cf. Plato, *Ion*, LCL, 536b). However, in v 7 Paul uses an illustration of actual activities that occur at night and both καθεύδω and μεθύσκομαι are used in their literal sense as a basis for the metaphorical application (cf. I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* [New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983] 137). The present substantival participles of καθεύδοντες and οἱ μεθυσκόμενοι as well as the present indicatives καθεύδουσιν and μεθύουσιν are customary presents describing normal, habitual activities. It is unnecessary to suppose with Evald Lövestam (*Spiritual Wakefulness in the New Testament* [Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1963] 54) that these are metaphors for absorption in the affairs of the present world. However, I would argue that Paul is thinking of "night" as the spiritual antithesis of the coming of the light symbolized by "day" (cf. Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 138).

<sup>6</sup>Edgar, "The Meaning of 'Sleep,'" 345; and Hodges, "The Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11," 76.

the writer is describing those who have been killed and are now in the grave. Another important text particularly for the discussion of 1 Thess 5:10 is Dan 12:2.<sup>7</sup> The passage reads *καὶ πολλοὶ τῶν καθευδόντων ἐν τῷ πλάτει τῆς γῆς ἀναστήσονται, οἱ μὲν εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον, οἱ δὲ εἰς ὄνειδισμόν, οἱ δὲ εἰς διασπορὰν καὶ αἰσχύνην αἰώνιον* / 'and many of those who *sleep* in the dust shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to reproach and everlasting shame'. This text clearly says that those who have "died" one day will rise from that state, i.e., death. 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 eschatological discussion. One thing, however, is certain, namely, in the LXX the nuance of "death" is not out of concord with the semantic field of the verb *καθεύδω*. Furthermore, such a nuance is not out of place in eschatological and resurrection contexts, which Dan 12:2 clearly shows. This feature is also true in the NT.

All three synoptic gospels contain the account of Jesus raising Jairus' daughter from the dead (Mark 5:39; Matt 9:24; Luke 8:52). Each of the gospels (with minor variations) contain the phrase *οὐ ἀπέθανεν ἀλλὰ καθεύδει*, 'she has not died, but is asleep'. All three gospels also record the crowd's response of laughter. However, only Luke gave the reason why they were laughing. He wrote in 8:53 *εἰδότες ὅτι ἀπέθανεν* / 'because they knew that she had died'. Luke did not say "because they *thought* she had died." Instead he gave an editorial comment and clearly assumed that the girl was dead. Swete remarks, "some have declined to regard the miracle as a raising of the dead. But the fact of the child's death was obvious to the bystanders, and is apparently assumed by the Evangelists, at least by Lc. (*εἰδότες ὅτι ἀπέθανεν*)."<sup>8</sup> Edgar questions this understanding of *καθεύδω* here. He argues that the hearers of Jesus understood him to mean that she was asleep. Furthermore, if Jesus meant "death" by his use of *καθεύδω*, such a statement becomes contradictory, namely, "she is not dead, but she is dead."<sup>9</sup> On the surface this might seem to be the case, but the question still remains: was the girl dead or not? Luke said she was. Then why would Jesus use *καθεύδω* in juxtaposition to *ἀποθνήσκω* with the same meaning? Cranfield offers a reasonable explanation. He says, "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

<sup>7</sup>The Theodotion text also uses *τῶν καθευδόντων* as a reference to those who have died but who will experience resurrection (see Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *The Septuaginta* [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1935] 935).

<sup>8</sup>H. B. Swete, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1927) 108.

<sup>9</sup>Edgar, "The Meaning of 'Sleep,'" 348.

death will be no more permanent than a sleep."<sup>10</sup> Cranfield also adds a remark regarding the application that such a passage would have in the communities of the respective evangelists. He writes:

no doubt the words had also—besides their particular significance in this context—a general significance, as a reminder to Christians that death is not the last word but a sleep from which Christ will wake us at the last day, and therefore a rebuke to those who in the presence of death behave as those who have no hope.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, Edgar does not take into consideration that Jesus may be attempting to convey through this use of *καθεύδω* the "temporary" aspect of death with reference to the girl.<sup>12</sup>

The point is that *καθεύδω* is used metaphorically for death in the LXX and probably in Mark 5:39; Matt 9:24; and Luke 8:52. Hence, the nuance of "death" is not out of concord with the semantic field of *καθεύδω* and thus should be considered as a possible meaning in I Thess 5:10.

### *Contextual Uses of Καθεύδω*

Both Edgar and Hodges are correct in pointing out that in the immediate context of I Thess 5:10 Paul uses *καθεύδω* with a different nuance than "death."<sup>13</sup> In fact, Edgar asks the question "why change

<sup>10</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1959) 189; see also Swete, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 108; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke 1-IX* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1981) 749; and Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1952) 295. It is interesting that although Vine (*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* [Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1940] 80) interprets *καθεύδω* as "spiritual insensibility" in I Thess 5:10, he says it meant "physical death" in Mark 5:39; Matt 9:24; and Luke 8:52.

<sup>11</sup>Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 189.

<sup>12</sup>A similar expression is found in John 11:11 in connection with the death of Lazarus. Jesus says, *Λάζαρος ὁ φίλος ἡμῶν κεκοίμηται* / 'Lazarus our friend has been sleeping'. Here Jesus uses the perfect of *κοιμάω*, a verb that certainly is used metaphorically in the NT for "physical death." Lest one be inclined to take this use literally, John informs the reader of the exact meaning of the Lord's words. He writes in v 13 *εἰρήκει δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς περὶ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ* / 'now Jesus was talking about his death'. There is no question that in this passage *κοιμάω* is used as a metaphor for death. Similarly, *καθεύδω* should be taken as a metaphor for death in Mark 5:39. In both passages Jesus states that the one who had died "sleeps." Furthermore, John 11:13 and Luke 8:53 have interpretive statements to the effect that "sleep" means "death."

<sup>13</sup>Edgar, "The Meaning of 'Sleep,'" 349; and Hodges, "The Rapture in I Thessalonians 5:1-11," 76. They make this observation in order to support the idea that if the nuance of "spiritual insensibility" is found in v 6 for *καθεύδω* then the same

meanings in the immediate context?" The question is legitimate but somewhat misleading because in 1 Thess 5:6-7 Paul uses *καθεύδω* two times yet with *two* different senses. Thus the same question regarding the change of meaning in the same context could be asked about Paul's use of *καθεύδω* in v 7. In v 6 he uses *καθεύδω* as a metaphor for "spiritual insensibility" whereas in v 7 he uses the verb in its literal sense to denote "sleep."<sup>14</sup> Thus in two verses Paul uses the same verb with two different meanings. 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 just 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. It is possible that the recurrence of *καθεύδω* is due to the fact that *καθεύδω* was still on Paul's mind when he wrote v 10. Regarding this literary feature, E. Laughton points out that in less formal literature, both ancient and modern, "a single word or phrase persists in the writer's mind by its own force, independently of any sense-recurrence."<sup>15</sup> However, it is also possible that Paul is using a word play, intentionally picking up on the preceding occurrences of the verb, particularly in v 6. As Ellingworth and Nida comment, "Here Paul cleverly uses two terms (*γρηγορέω* and *καθεύδω*) which he had been using to speak of alertness but which at this point he transposes to mean 'alive/dead'.

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meaning is probable in v 10. However, Moisés Silva (*Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983]. "Literary and contextual features" could be added to Silva's list of modifiers ["phrase and syntactical features"]) has cautioned about the danger of this kind of reasoning. He writes, "one is rather likely to ignore what may look like small differences between the ways the word is used; that is, one may import into a particular passage a meaning discovered elsewhere, without noticing that the word in the latter passage is modified by a particular phrase or by some syntactical feature" (p. 26).

<sup>14</sup>BAGD, 388. Cf. n 5 above.

<sup>15</sup>E. Laughton, "Subconscious Repetition and Textual Criticism," *Classical Philology* 45 (1950) 75. Very little has been done in the area of "subconscious recurrence." Other than Laughton's work this writer is aware of only two others that address the issue specifically; see A. B. Cook, "Unconscious Iterations, with Special Reference to Classical Literature," *Classical Review* 16 (1902) 146-58; 256-67; and F. W. Hall, "Repetitions and Obsessions in Plautus," *Classical Quarterly* 20 (1926) 20-26. The writer is indebted to David Baker who recently presented the results of his own research in a paper entitled "Subconscious Repetition" (for the class Advanced Greek Grammar; Grace Theological Seminary: April, 1985). He defines subconscious recurrence as "the unintentional, unnatural repetition of a word or phrase which was used naturally in the immediately preceding context" (p. 3). By "unintentional" he means "subconscious repetition" and by "unnatural" he means that the second occurrence of the word is strained, or stretched, in relation to its semantic field. It is interesting that of the several NT examples he cites, one is *γρηγορέω* which occurs as a parallel to *καθεύδω* in both 5:6 and 5:10. Although the meaning of "alive" is unusual for *γρηγορέω*, this nuance might be explained as a "subconscious recurrence."

In this way he brings us back to 4:13."<sup>16</sup> Therefore, I would argue that although Paul normally uses κοιμάω as a metaphor for death, his choice of καθεύδω in 5:10 can be linked to the two preceding uses of καθεύδω in 5:6-7 and in no way necessitates a different nuance than κοιμάω in 4:13-14.

### *The Preceding Exhortations to Moral Sensibility*

One of the strongest arguments for taking καθεύδω as "death" in 1 Thess 5:10 is based on the preceding exhortations to "moral sensibility." If one renders καθεύδω as "spiritual insensibility" it greatly weakens all the preceding exhortations to spiritual alertness found in vv 6, 8. In 4:13-5:5 Paul describes a great eschatological event which is imminent, namely, the Parousia of Jesus Christ which for the believer will be a time of great blessing but for the unbeliever a time of judgment.<sup>17</sup> Paul says that it will come suddenly and unexpectedly

<sup>16</sup>Paul Ellingworth and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1976) 114.

<sup>17</sup>I have argued elsewhere that 1 Thess 4:13-5:11 is a single literary and theological unit describing the same eschatological event from two perspectives. Thus Paul employs παρουσία in 4:13-18 when he describes the *believer's* relationship to this great eschatological event, yet he uses "Day of the Lord" in 5:1-5 (a judgment context) because of the reference to *unbelievers* and their relationship to this eschatological event. He says this event will overtake them as a "thief in the night" (cf. 5:2-3). However, believers are of the "day" and not in darkness and will not be surprised when the event occurs. Nevertheless they should maintain spiritual alertness in view of the imminent and sudden nature of the event (cf. 5:6). Cf. "The Literary and Theological Unity of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11" (unpublished M.A. thesis; Texas Christian University; May, 1983); a shortened form was presented under the same title to the Southwest Regional Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Dallas, Texas, March 1983; see further John A. Sproule, "An Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism" (unpublished Th.D. dissertation; Grace Theological Seminary; May, 1981) 144-54; he also argues for the literary and theological unity of this entire eschatological discourse. He makes the important observation, particularly in light of the pretribulationist versus posttribulationist debate, that many come to this passage with the assumption that Paul's eschatology is refined. He writes, "Paul had no refined eschatology. Nowhere does Paul differentiate between two aspects of the Lord's second coming; however, that neither disproves pretribulationism any more than it proves posttribulationism. The modern mistake is to impose the refined eschatological thinking and methodology of the twentieth century back *into* the Scriptural data. . . . Other considerations, such as later revelation (e.g., Rev 3:10) or contextual evidence, must be appealed to in order to make differentiations" (pp. 144-45). The general nature of Pauline eschatology, particularly in 4:13-5:11, seems to be overlooked by both Edgar ("The Meaning of 'Sleep,'" 349) and Hodges ("The Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11," 76) who suggest that objections to their understanding of 1 Thess 5:10 are frequently based on a posttribulationist view of eschatology. However, that is beside the point if one understands Paul's description in 1 Thess 4:13-5:11 as a single eschatological event portrayed from two perspectives. For further discussion on the general nature of Pauline eschatology, see H. A. A. Kennedy, *St. Paul's Conceptions of the Last Things* (London: Hodder and



(cf. 5:2). Therefore, it is important for the believer to be spiritually alert as he or she anticipates its arrival.<sup>18</sup> Paul describes the believer's ethical responsibility in 5:6 through the use of three hortatory subjunctives: μή καθεύδωμεν . . . γρηγορώμεν . . . νήφωμεν / 'let us not sleep . . . let us be alert . . . let us be sober'. He also repeats νήφωμεν in v 8 with the sense of "let us be vigilant." In the context Paul desires that these believers not become spiritually insensible but be morally upright and maintain spiritual alertness. Why? Because the Parousia is both imminent and sudden in its appearance. Thus to come down to v 10 and render καθεύδω as "spiritual insensibility" would negate everything Paul has said in vv 6, 8. 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. Bruce draws a similar conclusion when he writes, "It is ludicrous to suppose that the writers mean, 'Whether you live like sons of light or like sons of darkness, it will make little difference: you will be all right in the end.'"<sup>19</sup> Edgar recognizes this to be a problem, yet argues that the focus of v 10 is not on the issue of vigilance but the fact that the believer's hope depends on Christ's death, not on watchfulness.<sup>20</sup> Hodges likewise says, "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."<sup>21</sup> I do not for one moment question the fact that a genuine believer's hope is secure regardless of his watchfulness. However, I seriously doubt that is the meaning of v 10 in light of the preceding context.<sup>22</sup> If Hodges is correct, why did Paul even give the series of ethical injunctions in vv 6 and 8? 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

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Stoughton, 1904); and W. Baird, "Pauline Eschatology in Hermeneutical Perspective," *NTS* 17 (1970-71) 312-27.

<sup>18</sup>Paul introduces 1 Thess 5:6 with the strong inferential ἄρα οὖν; thus he exhorts (imperative) the believers to live out what they are (indicative) by virtue of their identity with Christ, namely, sons of light.

<sup>19</sup>F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco, Texas: Word, 1982) 114.

<sup>20</sup>Edgar, "The Meaning of 'Sleep,'" 349.

<sup>21</sup>Hodges, "The Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11," 76.

<sup>22</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert (*The Thessalonian Epistles* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1971] 225-26) makes a similar evaluation when he writes, "while participation in the rapture will not be determined by any advanced spiritual attainments of believers but solely because of their union with Christ, that is not the point here."

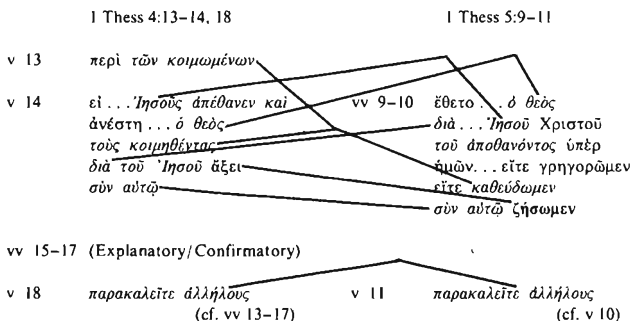
motivating factor for spiritual alertness is not that which Hodges suggests but is found in vv 2–5, namely, the imminent and sudden character of the Parousia of Jesus. This is clear from the ἄρα οὖν which introduces v 6. Paul draws the strong inference that since the Parousia is imminent and sudden the believer should not be spiritually insensible but morally alert and vigilant (cf. vv 6, 8).

Both Hodges and Edgar have overlooked the strong connection Paul makes between the coming Parousia/Day of the Lord and the exhortation to moral alertness. They also, it seems, overlook this same connection elsewhere in the epistle. 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.<sup>23</sup> The imminent and sudden nature of the Parousia is the motivating factor for "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."

### Structural and Literary Patterns

I have already pointed out that I Thess 4:13–5:11 is one literary and theological unit. One of the reasons for this conclusion is the presence of an *inclusio* between 4:13–14 and 5:9–10 (see Chart I). These texts serve to bracket the entire eschatological discourse and contain several stylistic and semantic parallels.

Chart I



<sup>23</sup>The preposition ἐν is used in both texts to denote "the point of time when something occurs," cf. BAGD, 260; see also A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 586–87. The preposition ἐν is used similarly in the phrase ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ (I Cor 15:23; I Thess 2:19; Phil 2:12; I John 2:28).

Although all the parallels do not exhibit identical order and form, their semantic equivalence throughout strongly argues for intentional parallelism. In each passage the resurrection of the believing dead is connected to the death of Christ. Each text stresses the believer's presence "with Christ" (σύν αὐτῷ). Each text asserts that Jesus is the intermediate agent through whom God performs the action (διὰ . . . Ἰησοῦ). Also God is the author of both actions (ὁ θεὸς ἄξει and ὁ θεὸς ἔθετο). Furthermore, in vv 13–17 the major problem is the relation of the dead to the Parousia, i.e., vv 13–14 give the essential assertion, followed by an explanation in vv 15–17. Then v 18 follows with an exhortation "to comfort one another." In the same manner, 1 Thess 5:9–10 reiterates the same promise of 4:13–17, i.e., the believer will live with Christ even if he or she has died prior to the Parousia, and then v 11 follows with a corresponding exhortation "to comfort one another."

These parallels offer good reason for taking Paul's use of καθεύδω in 5:10 in the same way as his use of κοιμᾶω in 4:13–14, namely, a reference to those over whom the Thessalonian believers are grieving. In essence, Paul returns to his initial parenetic concern which he began in 4:13.<sup>24</sup> In 5:10 he answers the same question addressed in 4:13–17: does the one who dies in the Lord suffer any disadvantage at the Parousia? Paul answers that question in 4:13–17 with a resounding "no." He also answers it in 5:10 by assuring the Thessalonian believers that whether they live or whether they die, they would live with the Lord at his return.

### *The Majority Opinion*

Although the "majority" opinion does not prove my conclusion regarding the meaning of καθεύδω in 5:10, it cannot simply be dismissed as inconsequential that the majority of lexicographers and commentators support the conclusion that καθεύδω is a reference to physical death.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, when one surveys those who hold such

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Ellingworth and Nida, *Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians*, 114; regarding Paul's use of καθεύδω for "death" in 5:10, they write, "In this way he brings us back to 4.13." Although they do not use the word, they support some kind of *inclusio* between 4:13 and 5:10.

<sup>25</sup>John W. Bailey, "The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians," (*IB*; 12 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1956) 11. 310; Ernest Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistle to the Thessalonians* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972) 218–19; Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 114–15; Charles J. Ellicott, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Thessalonians* (London: Longman, 1880) 85; Ellingworth and Nida, *Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians*, 114; George G. Findlay, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1891) 114; James E. Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Thessalonians* (ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, reprint 1975) 190; Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, 225–26; W. Kelly, *The Epistles*

a position it is evident that they have not ignored either the lexical data or the immediate context as both Edgar and Hodges imply.<sup>26</sup> Instead, after evaluating both the lexical and contextual data the conclusion is consistently drawn that the meaning of καθεύδω in I Thess 5:10 is "death." After evaluating the evidence inductively, I feel that on this issue the majority decision is correct. As a result, I also conclude that γρηγορέω in 5:10 should be interpreted metaphorically as "alive" in order to achieve balance semantically with καθεύδω in the grammatical construction.<sup>27</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article has been to reevaluate the meaning of καθεύδω in I Thess 5:10. While the majority of commentators support the meaning of "death" a few recent interpreters have taken the verb to mean "spiritual insensibility." Indeed, the immediate context may suggest this, but the lexical, contextual, and literary evidence presented here argues strongly for taking καθεύδω as a metaphor for death. This means that Paul is returning to the issue which is behind the entire eschatological discourse beginning in 4:13, namely, the future

*of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians* (London: Hammond, 1953) 62; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus, and to Philemon* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1937) 351; Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 141; George Milligan, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952) 70; James Moffatt, "The First and Second Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians," (*The Expositor's Greek Testament*; 5 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 1979) 4. 40; Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952) 187; and William Neil, *The Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950) 109; see also G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1937) 223; BAGD, 388; A. Oepke, "καθευδω" *TDNT* 3 (1965) 436; L. Coenen, "Sleep," *NIDNTT*, 1. 443; J. H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, reprint 1962) 313.

<sup>26</sup>Edgar, "The Meaning of 'Sleep'," 345; and Hodges, "The Rapture in I Thessalonians 5:1-11," 76.

<sup>27</sup>BAGD, 167; Baker, as previously noted (cf. n 15), cites the instance of γρηγορέω in 5:10 as an example of "subconscious repetition." He argues (p. 10) that if Paul had taken a little more time to choose the more proper word, he would have used some form of ζάω, a word used by Paul elsewhere to speak of physical life as contrasted with physical death (cf. Rom 6:10; 7:2, 3; 14:7-9; 1 Cor 7:39; 2 Cor 1:8; 4:11; 6:9; 13:4; Phil 1:21, 22; 1 Thess 4:15-17; 2 Tim 4:1). However, while "subconscious repetition" may be a possible explanation of Paul's use of γρηγορέω in 5:10, other explanations are also possible such as an intentional word play with the preceding use of γρηγορέω in 5:6 or even the attempt to avoid a redundancy with ζάω in the last phrase of 5:10 which says, "ἄμα σὺν αὐτῷ ζήσωμεν." If this is the case, γρηγορέω would take on the nuance of "physical life" whereas ζάω would refer more to "eschatological life with Christ at the Parousia."

of one who has died in the Lord. In 1 Thess 5:9–10 Paul gives the same response as he did in 4:13–17. He states that whether a believer is alive or dies he will not experience disadvantage at the Parousia but will live with Christ. Then Paul exhorts the believers in 5:11 to do the same thing he stated in 4:18, “therefore comfort one another.”