LIVING IN AN ESCHATOLOGICAL ANTICIPATION:
AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF 1 THESSALONIANS 4:1—5:11
FROM GHANAIAN PERSPECTIVES

By

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DECLARATION

This is to certify that this thesis is the result of research undertaken by GodfredNsiah under the supervision of Rev. Dr. George Ossom-Batsa, Dr. Nicoletta Gatti and Dr. Andrew Davies at the Department for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana towards the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Religions of degree.

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ABSTRACT

The eschatological teaching concerning Christ’s return in the writings of Paul has over the years attracted scholarly attention worldwide. In Ghana, the rise of Pentecostalism and the popularization of apocalyptic expectation stimulated the discourse on eschatology as evidenced in sermons, songs, and street preaching. However, it appears little attention is given to the eschatological teaching with regards to social and moral transformation. Against this background, the thesis investigates the eschatological anticipation of contemporary Ghanaian Christians through an exegetical study of 1 Thess. 4:1—5:11. It analyses Paul’s teaching in the passage and establishes the relevance of its appropriation for the socio-cultural context of Ghana. It further explores the relationship between eschatology and moral and ethical behaviour while anticipating Christ’s return.

The study employed contemporary rhetorical criticism for the exegetical analysis to understand Paul’s strategies in communicating the eschatological motif. It analysed the compositional structural elements of the text and the rhetorical features to underscore what Paul intended to communicate to his readers. Furthermore using the Contextual Bible Study model, the text was read with ‘ordinary readers’ to explore its relevance for individual and social transformation.

The study established that the text is part of a parenetic letter written to encourage and console the grieving Christian community distressed about they delayed Parousia. It contended that the eschatological teaching is a message of motivation and encouragement to persevere in faith, while offering an emotional context to appeal to moral and ethical purity, faithfulness and mutual love in eschatological anticipation. The Contextual Bible Study revealed that some Ghanaian Christians perceive Paul’s teaching as a call to a daily life of preparation, a time to live in hope. Others, on the other hand, see the life in an-
ticipation as living in holiness as God’s nature requires. The Study concludes that by appropriating the eschatological teaching, values such as perseverance, endurance, commitment, faithfulness, and accountability are developed which together lead to individual and societal transformation as they await the imminent return of Christ.

The thesis recommends an in-depth study of the cultural understanding of death and afterlife in different Ghanaian cultures as a foundation of the contextualization of Christian eschatology.

**Keywords:** Eschatological Anticipation, Thessalonians, Ghanaian, Perspectives
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Christians in Africa who are anticipating the hope of Christ’s imminent Parousia. I also dedicate it to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Nsiah, Rev. Canon and Mrs. Otoo Ayeh, Rev. and Mrs. Adam.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTORY ISSUES

1.1 Background to the Study

Christian expectation of Christ’s return is a central issue in Christian theology and biblical discourse. From the first century, Christians have been expecting the eschaton\(^1\) owing to their understanding of Jesus’ preaching on the coming of the kingdom of God. This anticipation has implications on their lives as they await the consummation of their salvation in their eschatological existence.

There is a debate among scholars about the definition of the term eschatology. While some use a more etymological description and limit the term to the ‘last things,’\(^2\) others suggest a more holistic application. For example, David Luckensmeyer observes that the relationship between the modern use of the term ‘eschatology’ and its ancient root complicates its definition.\(^3\) He posits that the modern usage of the term usually refers to more than just the last or final cosmic occurrences. It includes, among others, implications for the present and for the continuity of history itself. This implies that eschatology focuses not only on expectation, hope, death and the future, but also deals with the present and the past through the act of remembrance.\(^4\) David Fergusson observes that “Images of God’s future has the capacity to name the present, enabling authentic Christian

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1 The eschaton refers to the fulfillment and completion of Christ’s mediatory work of salvation as final or last proof of the faithfulness of God.
2 Jürgen Moltmann defines eschatology as the doctrine of “The Last Things” (τα ἐσχατά). Similarly, Bienvenu Mayemba describes it as the theological doctrine which discusses issues of ultimate things, the last or final days, of the world to come, and of life after death. Eschatology thus examines the final events of human life and history and the cosmos. See Jürgen Moltmann, “Is the World Coming to an End or Has its Future already Begun?” Christian Eschatology, Modern Utopianism and Exterminism,” in The Future as God’s Gift: Explorations in Christian Eschatology, eds. David Fergusson and Marcel Sarot (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 2000), 130. Bienvenu Mayemba, “The Notion of Eschatology in African Ancestral Religions: A Category of Deliverance, Promise, Remembrance,” eScholarship@BC, Boston College University Library (Chestnut Hill, 2009), 1.
3 David Luckensmeyer, The Eschatology of First Thessalonians (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 2.
life and witness in the world.”⁵ This, in my view, seems to suggest that eschatology is not restricted to discourse about the four last things Mayemba proposed, but the presentation of a revelation which determines what we make of the past and the present.

Contrary to the popular view that eschatology concerns the last things or final days, Karl Rahner offered a theocentric understanding of eschatology which opens the concept to any messianic religion characterized by messianic hope. Rahner defines eschatology as the doctrine about human beings insofar as they are open to the absolute future of God himself.⁶ Mayemba indicates that this understanding of the term emphasizes that eschatology is not exclusive to Christianity and not Christocentric or Christologically oriented.⁷ However, from the transcendental theological anthropology of Rahner, eschatology is Christologically founded. In his opinion, it gives expression to human beings as beings existing from the present towards the future. He affirms “that eschatology provides a view on human beings from the perspective of their experience of salvation, the experience which they now have in grace and in Christ.”⁸

According to Moltmann, the expectation of the end is Christian if the followers of Christ conceive their future horizons out of the remembrance of Christ’s death on the cross and the resurrection of the crucified Christ into the coming glory of God.⁹ Mayemba avows Moltmann’s position that eschatology provides a view of human beings base on their experience of salvation. He concludes that Christian eschatology is, therefore, Christocentric and finds its meaning from the paschal mystery. Consequently, eschatology is orient-
ed towards the glorious return of Christ, the coming of a new heaven and a new earth, which the risen and glorious Christ will bring about on his return to judge the righteous and sinners, the living and the dead.\textsuperscript{10}

This notwithstanding, Christian eschatology implies the belief that the present reality is not capable of revealing God fully; the authentic reality of God will only manifest at the end of history. This assertion is in consonance with Angus Paddison’s view on revelation as an infinite and ceaselessly progressive movement experienced through the church, an intrinsically eschatological experience, leading towards the goal of perfection in Christ.\textsuperscript{11}

Christian eschatology, therefore, reminds Christians that human history is not continuing on into infinity but has its end in the second coming of Christ. In this regard, Paddison quoted Barth as he recognized that to speak of eschatology, in all times, is to speak of Christ:

\begin{quote}
There is not a single eschatological statement even in the New Testament which allows us to ignore this One. His death, resurrection and coming again are the basis of absolutely everything that is to be said about man and his future, end, and goal in God. If this gives way, everything collapses with it.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

This means the focus of Christian eschatology is the person of Christ, in all its fullness, offering hope in the future for all who hope in Him.

In recent times research on eschatology has regained significant attention in biblical scholarship as a central theological issue. Fergusson recounts the resurgence of eschatology as a unique feature of twentieth-century theology.\textsuperscript{13} He indicates that modern theology has rediscovered the centrality of eschatology for all forms of Christian discourse in the wake of biblical criticism. Prior to this, Kant treated the subject of eschatology as

\textsuperscript{10} Mayemba, “The Notion of Eschatology,” 2.
\textsuperscript{11} Angus Paddison, \textit{Theological Hermeneutics and 1 Thessalonians} (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 22.
\textsuperscript{12} Paddison, \textit{Theological Hermeneutics}, 145.
\textsuperscript{13} Fergusson, “Introduction,” 1.
regulative images to enhance a greater moral commitment, and Schleiermacher relegated it to the tentative outworking of principles in his early dogmatics. But ever since, theology has been reawakened to the vitality and necessity of eschatology. Jürgen Moltmann’s essay outlines the way in which eschatology has recently grappled with themes such as millenarianism and the Parousia prior neglected in academic study notwithstanding the eschatological turn of modern theology. Confirming this view, Fergusson opines that studies of religious culture today divulge both the prevalence and power of eschatological images and apocalyptic rhetoric at a popular level. Eschatological imagery and discourse thus remain a central issue for theological hermeneutics.

As a central theological discourse, the concept of eschatology is very much alive in Africa and by extension in Ghana. The contextual situation of most Africans compels them to look to the final days for consolation and encouragement. As Moltmann notes “when people can’t endure the state of things any longer, have had enough of this world, when people are tormented by the economic and ecological crisis of the present world, among others then there is a cry for the end of the world.” Significantly, eschatological thinking and discourse have always been part of African Christian existence. The poor economic conditions, inter-religious conflicts, coupled with political instability in some countries make the anticipation of the Parousia alive with most people.

Focusing on Ghanaian Christianity, the expectation of Christ’s return has been part of Christian belief since the advent of Christianity. However, with the coming of Pentecostalism there has been a popularization of eschatological discourse and the introduction of concepts such as millenialism and the rapture of the ‘believers.’ This growing attention

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17 Moltmann, “Is the World Coming to an End,” 129.
is evident in the way the discourse is employed in sermons in church, street and transport preaching, movies, evangelistic crusades, billboards, among others, in the bid to communicate the message of Christ’s return to both Christians and non-Christians. Most street preachers across the country centre their message on the eschatological fear and so dwell heavily on apocalyptic and eschatological passages in the New Testament. There are giant billboards mounted at strategic places to draw attention to the imminence of Jesus’ coming and “prophecies” connected with date of his coming.18

In addition, some church hymns and popular gospel music alike clearly promote notions of eschatology and propose that Christians are strangers on this earth and that they should focus on heaven rather than the earth. Four songs, one from the Presbyterian Church of Ghana’s Twi Hymnal, a choral music and two from popular gospel musicians are noteworthy.

PHB 791 states,

\[ \text{Ohoho ne mamfrani na Meye wo fam ha (I am stranger and foreigner on this Earth)} \]

\[ M’asase mmen ha baabi (My land is nowhere near here), \]

\[ Minni fi pa wɔ ha (I do not have a home here). \]

Again, Newlove Annan’s song Wiase Awieye aben o (The end of a sinful world is near) and the gospel rap artist Malonzy’s song Yesu ba (Jesus is coming) communicates this notion. The popular Ghanaian gospel musician Florence Obinim states,

\[ Ṣoro ne me fie . . Asase so a mewɔ deey eye akwantuo (My home is above; I am in transit on this Earth). \]

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The above evidences affirm that the subject of eschatology is alive and significant among Christians in Ghana. Studies indicate that there are many types of research on eschatology in the field of biblical studies. Shalom M. Paul, for example, analyses Deutero Isaiah’s Prophetic Eschatology where the Lord himself will be Israel’s source of light.19 Some New Testament scholars articulate actualized or realized eschatology by showing that the promised events of the Old Testament have already happened, thus playing down the future element of eschatology. For instance, C. H. Dodd claims that the eschatological kingdom of God is already fully present among believers in the life, words, miracles, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In other words, the kingdom of God is already complete, active, or “realized” and nothing substantially new is to be expected in the future.20 Others present futurist eschatology, which focuses on the communal and cosmic dimensions of the final destiny of humankind by stressing the return of Christ, the rapture of the Church, and the end of the wicked world being replaced by the golden age of the glorious Jesus ruling the new earth with his disciples.21

In recent scholarship, considerable attention is paid to the eschatological teachings in the epistles of Paul, with 1 Thessalonians being a frequently researched book. The reason is that 1 Thessalonians is not only the earliest surviving Christian writing (50 AD), but it was written to address the problems facing the Thessalonian community which centered

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on eschatology. This indicates that eschatology was among the first theological problems of the apostolic community.

Furthermore, scholars such as Matthews Ojo and Frank J. Matera suggest the letter as the most extensive source of information about Paul’s preaching on eschatology. Charles A. Gieschen’s work “Christ’s Coming and the Church’s Mission in I Thessalonians” discusses the place of eschatology in Paul’s apostolic missionary preaching. Gieschen observes that eschatology remains a vital foundation of the faith, mission and daily living in hope for the church. Gary S. Selby offers a comprehensive, systematic and rhetorical analysis of I Thessalonians examining Paul’s use of eschatological discourse to evoke a symbolic worldview of his Thessalonian readers. The article explores Paul’s eschatological discourse in 1 Thessalonians, employing it as a response to the competing demands of a rhetorical situation which required him to console his readers in the face of their experiences of persecution and opposition, while at the same time warning them of the awful consequences of ignoring the ethical requirements of their Christian faith. I find his study to be one of the best contributions to the discussion to date because his use of a different methodological approach offers a new insight on the subject matter.

David Luckensmeyer and Bronwen Neil have adduced evidence in support of I Thessalonians as a consolatory letter through a comparative analysis of I Thessalonians with the

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letters of Seneca and Ancient handbooks on letter writing. They argue that Paul used the stock argument of the consolatory genre in addressing the Thessalonians over the death of their loved ones just as three of Seneca the Younger’s letters did. They expressed the view that the consolatory genre is applicable to I Thessalonians with its clear purpose of consolation and persuasion.

Selby argues specifically that Paul employs eschatological language in an effort to encourage his audience to see themselves as the people of God, living in the end-time and awaiting the sudden and unexpected Parousia of Christ. This self-identification explains the persecution they faced, while also demanding that they diligently prepare themselves for the Parousia through holy living. Eduard Verhoef confirms this assertion when he notes that the exhortation of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 was to prepare the Thessalonians for the Parousia. It stresses the imperative of the gospel of Paul which enjoins the faith community to live within the grace received through Christ.

Selby, therefore, discusses two major eschatological sections of the epistle (1Thess. 4:13–18 and 5:1–11) rightly emphasizing the dependent nature of Paul’s eschatology, and offers a comparison of 1Thess. 4:13–18 with 1Cor 15:50–58 to illustrate his point. He concludes that “By situating his vision of the end in the midst of these exhortations, Paul intended not only to alleviate the Thessalonians’ grief but, much more, to support and reinforce the imperative of holy living.” By this understanding, we note that the

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29 Selby, “Blameless at His Coming,” 401-402.

30 Paul includes these admonitions in this chapter because porneia was found in every big city including Thessalonica. But people of high moral standing should abstain from sexual immorality. The exhortations in this chapter should therefore be read against the background of a seaport town where prostitution is found more often than in small villages. Because of these specific circumstances Paul added these admoni-
primary intent of 1Thess. 5:1–11 is to further support Paul’s exhortations, and he does this within the parameter of answering questions raised by the Thessalonians.\textsuperscript{31}

Significantly, Luckensmeyer sees eschatology as a hermeneutical key to understanding 1 Thessalonians. He observes that it is the only category in which all the systematic concerns of the letter may be incorporated.\textsuperscript{32} Selby on his part holds the opinion that Pauline eschatology is a ‘discursively constructed reality’ which is intended to have a certain rhetorical effect on his audience.\textsuperscript{33} He notes that “Paul’s use of this eschatological language in 1 Thessalonians is still strategic, representing a rhetorical choice from among a range of available means of persuasion.”\textsuperscript{34} Luckensmeyer affirms that referring to an eschatological discourse rather than an apocalyptic discourse, serves as a more appropriate basis for understanding the contingent peculiarities of the letter, particularly in relation to its structure, occasion, and purpose.\textsuperscript{35}

Commenting on eschatological language, Green submits that it is not literal but imaginative, figurative, poetic, because it is the only language available for thinking and speaking of God, received as a gift of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{36} Therefore, the imaginative language used by Paul is a rhetorical devise used to help his readers understand the reality of the imminent coming of Christ and to persuade them to adhere to the principles of holy living which are imperative for them at the Parousia.

Judging from the concerns of the Thessalonians occasioned by the death of some members of the faith community, it can be construed that preaching about the Parousia constitu-

\textsuperscript{31} Selby, “Blameless at His Coming,” 405.
\textsuperscript{32} Luckensmeyer, \textit{The Eschatology of First Thessalonians}, 18.
\textsuperscript{33} Selby, “Blameless at His Coming,” 387.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 408.
\textsuperscript{35} Luckensmeyer, \textit{The Eschatology of 1 Thessalonians}, 40.
\textsuperscript{36} Green, “Imagining the Future,” 86.
tuted an important segment of Paul’s gospel proclamation in that town as in other communities he founded. Matera indicates that Pauline epistles are full of terminologies that anticipate the coming of the Lord. He employs series of nouns and verbs to express the eschatological notion. These include ‘the coming’ (παροισία), the manifestation (ἐπιφάνεια), the revelation (ἀποκάλυψις) and the day (ἡμέρα) of the Lord.

Analysing the content of Paul’s teaching, Selby discusses the necessary preparations for the coming of the Parousia through holy living, while Luckensmeyer expands holy living extensively in his analysis of Parousia in 1 Thessalonians. He even includes other eschatological motifs as part of the indicative and imperative paradigm and further developed a thesis that Paul’s pattern of exhortation on the Parousia reinforces solidarity and eschatological existence, while Matera indicates that the eschatological existence is the key to understanding the hope that believers have for the Parousia.\(^\text{37}\) The solidarity of the faith community demonstrated in the eschatological existence is well expressed when the justified wait in hope for the final appearance of God’s saving grace, as they mould and define their lives by the grace they are already experiencing in the Spirit.

Helmut Koester observes that “Parousia always occurs in contexts in which the preparedness of the entire community is in view,”\(^\text{38}\) and he uses imperial ideology as a foil, for his understanding of Paul’s message and aims in the letter, because it is the people’s perception of the world that necessitates the anticipation of the Parousia. It corroborates a view noted earlier by Moltmann that when people are ‘fed-up’ with the happenings of this world and are faced with serious economic and ecological quandary, then there is a

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\(^{37}\) Matera, God’s Saving Grace, 187.

cry for the end of the world.\textsuperscript{39} The religious and social persecutions the Thessalonian Christian community faced, and their immediate response to Paul’s message to wait for the return of the Son of God underscores this fact. In effect, Selby interprets Paul’s use of eschatological language and imagery as a means for consoling, encouraging as well as exhorting and warning. This position is shared by several other scholars who concur with this interpretation and reinforce its foundation.

However, in their detailed literary studies on 1 Thessalonians, the approaches used dwells on the rhetorical situation and literary components of the letter without contextualizing it in any contemporary context. This makes it difficult to engage the implications of the text within a contemporary situation to address the contextual realities within which the church exists. But research shows that the interpretation of the word of God is given for the transformation of human society.

For example, Justin Ukpong explains: “the actualization of the theological meaning of a text in today’s context is so as to forge integration between faith and life and engender commitment to personal and societal transformation.”\textsuperscript{40} For this reason, Eric Nii Bortey Anum asserts that “Africans most of the time would like to see biblical interpretation as a living exercise which must come into actual operation in their day to day experiences in their lives.”\textsuperscript{41} This view in my understanding implies that contextual study of the Thessalonian epistle can provide insight for individual and social transformation in Ghana because of its features of consolation and persuasion.

\textsuperscript{39} Moltmann, “Is the World Coming to an End,” 129.
As Matera observes, the church lives in a sanctified community which establishes a link between salvation and morality. Therefore, the relationship between the indicative of salvation, what God has done through Christ, and the imperative, what is required of the believer, is very significant. It is God’s grace and Christ’s death that enables the believer to live such a sanctified life and transform the society in which they live. The sanctified community to which the Ghanaian reader belongs is the African context; hence a study investigating the subject of eschatology by analysing a biblical text using contextual situation of an African society as the subject matter of the interpretation is very relevant.

Conversely, there seem to be very few works on eschatology and the interpretation of the epistle to address the contextual realities of the African context. Scholars such as Joseph Enuwosa, Justin Ukpong, Ukachukwu Chris Manus and Robert Wafawanaka have done a contextual reading of texts in Africa. In Ghana, for instance, John D. K. Ekem, Alice M. Nsiah and Eric N. B. Anum, George Ossom-Batsa among others have all studied various New Testament texts within the Ghanaian context. But I found none of these works discussing the subject of eschatology by studying the epistle to the Thessalonians.

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42 Matera, God’s Saving Grace, 156.
John S. Mbiti’s pioneer work on the subject in Africa investigated the encounter between Christianity and African traditional concepts, with emphasis on the practical and theological consequences of such encounter. He approached his discussion of New Testament eschatology in a theological manner focusing on the teaching of the African Inland Mission and some fundamentalist denominations. Similarly, Ojo’s work discusses the point of disjunction on eschatology in African Societies. Mayemba on his part analysed the notion of eschatology in African folk religion. He dwells on the beliefs of Africans regarding the future which is different from the Christian view of future resurrection. These scholars examined the subject of eschatology in Africa, but without analysing any text within the context. In this light, an exegetical study of the subject of eschatology in the Ghanaian context by analysing an epistle that was written to address the eschatological problem in a specific socio-cultural context can enhance the understanding of the subject and how it is informing the anticipation of Christians in contemporary times and its impact for societal transformation.

Furthermore, it can be observed that in 1 Thessalonians, Paul uses eschatological language in an effort to encourage his audience to see themselves as people, living in the end-time and awaiting the imminent return of Christ, hence they should live a holy life. Therefore, by living transformed lives as disciples of Christ, due to the relationship between salvation and morality, the society in which they live will be transformed by their good life. This implies that the similarities between the context of Thessalonica and Africa in terms of their social, economic and religio-cultural matrixes, suggests that an exe-

getical study of a pericope from the epistle within the context of Ghanaian Christianity will be relevant in addressing issues in the African context impeding transformation.

In fact, despite the impressive quantitative growth of Christianity in Ghana, there are still the problem of corruption, immorality, nepotism, unemployment, expensive funerals and other cultural and religious challenges. As Atiemo asserts, it seems religious revival in Ghana has failed in contributing to the social transformation of the country.\(^{53}\) His position affirms a concern that was raised earlier by Ojo as to whether African Christians do take stern note of the biblical teaching on eschatology.\(^{54}\) If they do, then he argues there is the need to investigate the frequent and deep-rooted moral failures and corruption among Christians, especially Christians in politics and leadership positions.

Research indicates that the fundamental purpose of the eschatological teaching is for Christians to see themselves as people living an eschatological existence.\(^{55}\) For this reason, scripture is given to bring the life of God’s people into conformity with the will of God and transform the human society. With the understanding that Christians live in eschatological reality, why Ghanaian Christians do not strive to live good and exemplary lives as preparation for the final events of this age and Christ’s return? One may further ask whether Ghanaian Christians by their way of life show they are ready for Christ’s return. It is important, therefore, to investigate how the Thessalonian church understood Paul’s message and to examine whether there are any implications of the interpretation of the text for the Ghanaian faith community.

The study, therefore, investigates eschatological anticipation of contemporary Ghanaian Christians through an exegetical study of 1 Thess. 4:1—5:11. It undertakes a comprehen-

\(^{55}\) Selby, “Blameless at His Coming,” 409.
sive and systematic analysis of Paul’s exhortation which contains the main eschatological discourse to the Thessalonians for insight into the subject of Eschatology within the Ghanaian context. It also explores how Paul’s use of eschatological motifs in I Thessalonians informs the moral and ethical lives and decisions of the faith community in contemporary Ghana while anticipating Christ’s return.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The research aimed at achieving the following objectives:

1. To provide an informed understanding of 1 Thessalonians 4:1—5:11 through a rhetorical analysis of the text.

2. To investigate the relevance of the interpretation and appropriation of Paul’s eschatological teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4:1—5:11.

3. To explore how the understanding of this text informs the eschatological anticipation of the Ghanaian Christian.

4. To underscore some Christian values that are perpetuated by the eschatological teaching of the selected churches.

1.3 Research Questions

The main research question that guided the study was:

What is the relationship between eschatology, and moral and ethical behaviour in 1 Thessalonians 4:1—5:11?

The sub-research questions are:

1. How do Ghanaian Christians appropriate the eschatological teaching of Paul in their socio-cultural context?
2. What are important Christian values perpetuated by the eschatological teaching of the church?

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The research is grounded on Gerald O. West’s Contextual Bible Study (CBS) model. West proposes that CBS is a communal process in which local community resources for interpreting the Bible and the specialized interpretive tools of biblical scholars are used together to read the Bible.\(^{56}\) It is a method that inspires readers to read the Bible in ways suitable to their own contexts and which offers the opportunity to dialogue with others in addressing common concerns using biblical text.\(^{57}\)

West maintains that by creatively engaging different forms of reading in a specific context, people can hear God speak to them in their own context, thereby renewing and transforming the faith of the readers. The theory argues that all people are to some extent shaped by their contexts; a person’s status in society, class, gender and his or her environmental factors shape the reading of the Bible.\(^{58}\) Hence, CBS embraces and advocates context. Implicit in the notion of contextual is a commitment to a particular context of the poor and the marginalized. However, ‘context’ in a broader sense embraces the various matrixes within the socio-cultural realities of a particular group of people. In the light of this, Contextual Bible reading acknowledges and recognizes the environmental factors that have formed the reader.

He identifies four major commitments that inform this model of reading. They are the commitment to read from the perspective of the poor and oppressed; commitment to

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\(^{58}\) West, “Contextual Bible Study in South Africa,” 595.
reading the Bible in community, which he also refers to as reading the Bible with ordinary people or readers; commitment to critical reading and commitment to social transformation. The model suggests that the Bible is read not only by scholars for the purpose of producing academic papers, but it is read by scholars and ordinary readers for survival, liberation, and life which culminate in social transformation. Therefore, CBS is a pragmatic model which is action oriented.

The stages in the CBS model involves a critical reading of the text, reading, and discussion of the text and study questions facilitated by the trained reader, engaging the understanding of the text with issues identified for transformation. This model of studying a text can contribute to achieving the objectives of the study and so it is an appropriate framework for the research.

In applying this approach to the study, the researcher conducted an exegetical analysis of the text for the scholarly or critical reading. It was followed by a contextual study of the text with ordinary readers from selected churches in three regions which constitute reading with ordinary people from different context. Then the exegetical findings and the responses from the contextual reading were engaged in a dialogue for contextualizing eschatology from the perspective of Ghanaian Christians.

The theory proposed reading the text with the poor and marginalized who could be applied to people who are political, socially, economically and culturally marginalized and exploited. This was used during the initial stages of the theory in the South African context because of the apartheid. However, as the theory developed, the focus shifted to

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60 West, “Contextual Bible Study in South Africa,” 605.
the ‘ordinary reader.’ The readers from the churches who participated in the CBS are deemed ‘ordinary’ because they are mainly church members used to non-academic use of the Bible, as compared to the researcher who has the skills for the academic study of the Bible. Anum maintains that the scholarly readers should only serve as a guide to the ordinary readers without imposing their own framework on the discussion. The researcher shares this view because that will undermine the views of the ordinary reader and no epistemological respect will be accorded them. He observes that an engagement of these various forms of reading can result in the text addressing the contextual realities of the contemporary reader. This is because central to this interpretive model is a commitment to collaborative work and interpretation, by engaging community consciousness and critical consciousness responses.

The researcher finds this theory appropriate for the study because the commitment to read the Bible with others from different contexts pays attention to community consciousness instead of the Western individualized worlds which pay little or no attention to community consciousness in their interpretation of scripture. It further addresses the opinion of the ordinary people who have no biblical and theological training. The dialogical engagement between the understandings from the ordinary readers with the exegetical findings of the rhetorical analysis provides the collaboration that leads to individual and social transformation.

1.5 Methodology and Methods of Data Collection

The study employs rhetorical criticism to reach an informed understanding of the text by analysing the rhetorical features and compositional structural elements inherent in the

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63 In his application of this model in studying some texts in the Gospel of Matthew with the Elmina Presbyterian Congregation in Ghana, Anum emphasized that epistemological respect deserves a considerable attention given it, particularly to the custodians of ordinary readings. For more details see Anum, “Exploring Religious and Ethnic Boundaries,”
biblical text. It also employs the CBS model of Gerald West to contextualize the study in Ghana using some selected churches in three regions in Ghana.

1.5.1 Rhetorical Criticism

From the available literature, there is a debate about the origin and content of the rhetorical criticism. This is because, among biblical scholars, there are different understandings of the method itself. Among ancient Greeks, rhetoric was the act of effective communication often particularized as persuasive speech. With time rhetoric came to be understood as a subcategory describing the stylistic features of language that were subjective or persuasive, and therefore inferior to scientific language. Aristotle started the discipline by cataloguing three species of rhetoric as judicial, deliberative, and epideictic. Although these categories specifically refer to the circumstances of classical civic oratory, they are in fact applicable to all discourse.

George A. Kennedy maintains that Aristotle’s rhetoric generally describes the universal facet of human communication, though the examples were drawn from the specific practice of a Greek city-state. It is therefore perfectly possible to employ the categories of Aristotelian rhetoric to study speech or text in China, India, Africa, and elsewhere in the world, in cultures much more different from the Greek. He further identified some modes of persuasion which include logos, ethos, and pathos and outlined some steps in the compositional process. Aristotle’s rhetoric was later developed by Cicero in the first century BCE.

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67 Tull, “Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality,” 156.
In contemporary times, Robert Cathcart defines it as “a communicator's intentional use of language and other symbols to influence or persuade selected receivers to act, believe, or feel the way the communicator desires in problematic situations.”

Similarly, Kennedy defines rhetoric as that quality in discourse by which a speaker or writer seeks to accomplish his purposes. Likewise, Russell also indicates that the early descriptions of rhetoric reveal that it was viewed essentially as the art of persuasive thinking and communicating. He quoted Aristotle who saw rhetoric as “the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever” to affirm his point. These descriptions imply that rhetoric is created by symbols, and have communication as its purpose. Thus, rhetoric involves symbols created by humans for representing something and used in the process of communication. Rhetorical analysis then is a day to day engagement in a practice of thinking about symbols, discovering how they work and how they affect us.

According to Cathcart, rhetorical criticism is a qualitative research method that is designed for systematic investigation and exploration of symbolic acts and artefacts for the purpose of understanding the rhetorical processes. It is, therefore, the attempt “to understand how or why a message was effective.” Kennedy intimates that

Rhetorical critics takes the text as we have it, whether the work of a single author or the product of editing and looks at it from the point of view of the author's or editor's intent, the unified results, and how it would be perceived by an audience of near contemporaries.

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68 Robert Cathcart, *Post Communication: Rhetorical Analysis and Evaluation*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1981), 2. Sonja observes that rhetoric from which this method is derived from has been used to mean flowery, ornamental speech laden with metaphors and other figures of speech. But in the context of textual study, rhetoric refers to the human use of symbols to communicate.


71 Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism, Explorations*, 3.


This agrees with the view of Tate that it is a form of literary criticism that focuses on the communication between an author and a reader through an analysis of the strategies employed by an author to influence a reader’s view or shape a reader’s response.\textsuperscript{74} The systematic analysis has acts and artefacts which includes texts as the objects of the analysis and an understanding of the rhetorical process as the purpose of criticism.\textsuperscript{75}

### 1.5.2 Rhetorical Analysis and Biblical Interpretation

The use of rhetorical criticism in biblical interpretation started from the early days of the discipline. When Cicero developed Aristotle’s rhetoric, Augustine developed his own theory of Christian rhetoric based on Cicero’s approach and applied it to interpret Pauline epistles. The method developed further and scholars such as Muilenburg, Trible, Lundbom and Kennedy employed it in studying different biblical texts. Rhetorical Criticism is viewed as synonymous to literary criticism in some fields of study based on Muilenburg’s description of it in stylistic terms. Later it was developed by the students of Muilenburg notably, Phyllis Trible and Jack Lundbom. For Kennedy, the method can be applied for various purposes, but the primary objective of rhetorical criticism is to understand the effect of the text on the readers.\textsuperscript{76} It thus enables the exegete to demonstrate great knowledge in elucidating, investigating and appreciating symbols as well as the responses to them.

There seems to be a division among scholars as to whether Paul was formally trained in rhetoric. Schellenberg draws attention to the fact that Patristic exegetes concurs that Paul’s letters did not portray marks of education in rhetoric.\textsuperscript{77} Nevertheless, scholars such as Russell, Forbes and Brinsmead argue that Paul had a full education in formal

\textsuperscript{74} W. Randolph Tate, \textit{Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach} 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publications, 2008), 286.

\textsuperscript{75} Foss, \textit{Rhetorical Criticism, Explorations}, 6.

\textsuperscript{76} Kennedy, \textit{New Testament Interpretation}, 33.

Greek rhetoric. In their works, Paul is ascribed a considerable amount of rhetorical sophistication. For instance, Russell intimates that as a rabbinical student, Paul may have been exposed to Hellenistic rhetoric as a foundational element of his training. This is due to the admission by Jewish scholars of the influence of Greek rhetorical education on early rabbinical thought.\(^78\) He substantiates this view by quoting Betz that rhetorical training in the Mediterranean was foundational in nature due to the broad and pervasive nature of the world at the time. It is, therefore, highly plausible that Paul was trained rhetorically in Tarsus.\(^79\)

C. Forbes also contended that even if this is not the case, he might have acquired his rhetorical skills during his career as an itinerant preacher and disputant, in debate and possibly by self-tuition.\(^80\) Similarly, Kennedy opined that even if he had not studied in a Greek school, there were many handbooks of rhetoric in common circulation which he could have seen.\(^81\) But in his view, Paul could not expect to be persuasive unless there was some overlap between the content and form of what he said and the expectations of his audience.\(^82\) The researcher agrees with these scholars that a careful examination of the content and form of Paul’s letters confirm the fact that he had knowledge of both ancient and Hellenistic rhetoric. Therefore, an understanding of Paul’s rhetorical prowess could illuminate the exegesis of his epistles.

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\(^{78}\) Russell, “Rhetorical Analysis of Galatians,” 345.


\(^{81}\) Kennedy, New Testament Interpretation, 10.

\(^{82}\) With reference to Betz’s work on Galatians, Schellenberg observes that Paul wrote Galatians following recommendations from the handbook for forensic rhetoric. See Schellenberg, Rethinking Paul’s Rhetorical Education, 32.
The application of rhetorical analysis in biblical discourse is informed by the fact that it is understood in a variety of ways by scholars in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. As a student of Muilenburg, Phyllis Trible rooted her use of rhetorical analysis in her study of Job on Muilenburg’s view that proper articulation of form-content yields proper articulation of meaning. She views rhetorical criticism as focusing primarily on an intrinsic reading of the text. She, therefore, stresses on the organic unity of form and content, describing a close reading of the part and whole of the text. Trible recommends that the beginning and ending of the text must be of great concern in every textual construction. This include features such as the repetition of words, phrase, and sentences; types of discourse whether narrative, epistle, or apocalyptic, design, portrayal of characters, syntax and particles among others. Though she studied an Old Testament book, her methodological description provides significant insight into what must be expected in a rhetorical analysis of a text.

Kennedy’s work gives a detail description of the use of rhetorical criticism in the studying of New Testament texts. He argues that the New Testament writers had a message to communicate and sought to persuade an audience to believe it or to believe it more profoundly. As such they are rhetorical, and their methods can be studied by the discipline of rhetoric. With a description of rhetorical criticism, he discusses the three species of rhetoric identified by Aristotle and with examples of passages from both the gospels and some Pauline epistles he demonstrates how this method can be used in studying

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84 W. Wuellner criticized Muhlenberg’s definition of rhetorical criticism which gave attention to the stylistic and aesthetic features of individual passages. He, however, asserted that a new rhetorical method has been highlighted which helps readers appreciate the various components of religious texts. For detail discussion on this, see W. Wuellner, “Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987): 448-50.
86 Ibid., 3.
the New Testament.\textsuperscript{87} Concerning 1 Thessalonians, he indicates it is deliberative having the exhortation to stand firm in the Lord and some specific lifestyles for the faith community.\textsuperscript{88} This forms the basis of his analysis but he did not do a detail analysis of the issues in the verses.

In an earlier work, Hester employed the classical rhetorical genre of funeral oration in studying the epistle. He describes the rhetorical critical method called Fantasy Theme Analysis and provides a brief account of 1 Thessalonians produced by its application. Finally, he comments on some specific examples of pragmatic expressions of Paul’s \textit{paideia} found in the letter that derive from his rhetorical version.\textsuperscript{89} Using metaphors, analogies, puns, allegories, anecdotes, narratives and other imaginative language, Hester describes some post conflicts or envisions some future conflict and interprets them so that they make sense to the group. He indicates that the message is a possible trigger of the production of Fantasy Theme. The content of the message of the epistle is made up of Fantasy Themes. He submits that themes grow out of the phenomenon of group showing and reflecting group consciousness. The language of fantasy thus characterizes the event of experiences that allows members to talk with one another. All these scholars applied various forms of neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism, which pays very little attention to the reader or audience in the communication act but focus more on the author and the methods.

Goodwin identified three types of modern rhetorical criticism that are appropriate for studying biblical texts which are Traditional (neo-Aristotelian), Transitional criticism

\textsuperscript{87} Kennedy’s book pays much attention to the study of 2 Corinthians as a judicial rhetoric and Thessalonians, Galatians and Romans.
\textsuperscript{88} Kennedy, \textit{New Testament Interpretation}, 142.
\textsuperscript{89} James D. Hester, ”A Fantasy Theme Analysis of 1 Thessalonians,” in \textit{Rhetorical Criticism and the Bible: Essays from the 1998 Florence Conference}, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Dennis Stamps (T& T Clark, 200), 506-07.
and Contemporary.\textsuperscript{90} However, contemporary rhetoricians have added a fourth element, the occasion or context in which the work is composed or delivered.\textsuperscript{91} They consider the contextual situation of the reader a necessary factor in the persuasive effect of the text on the reader. This has contributed to the concern for the reader’s response by rhetorical critics in recent scholarship. As S. Watson notes, a text cannot convey meaning without the perspective of the reader or audience. He argues that the inclination of the reader to respond to the signals sent to him by means of a text is what culminates into the meaning of the text.\textsuperscript{92}

Hence, unlike traditional or neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism which focuses on intentional persuasive discourse, looking at the effect that the communicator and the communicator’s time have on shaping the discourse, contemporary rhetorical criticism concentrate more on the examination of the product which is the discourse or text, the process and the effect which is the audience response of communicative activity. This is because language in a communicative act is adequate to communicate human intentions. Therefore, an intentional use of language, a response and a rhetorical situation together makes a communicative act complete. It reiterates the view of critics such as Wayne Booth and Mark Klyne who proposed this model that a particular text becomes rhetorical when the critic approaches it as a communicative event.\textsuperscript{93}

Kennedy outlines a six-step procedure in his work for conducting rhetorical analysis.\textsuperscript{94} They are first; determining the rhetorical unit to be studied, which corresponds to the de-

\textsuperscript{90} Kennedy underscores the fact that there are three universal factors in any rhetorical or persuasive situation: a speaker or writer, an audience, and a discourse. He posits that the Bible speaks through ethos, logos, and pathos, and to understand, there is the concern of rhetorical analysis. See Kennedy, \textit{New Testament Interpretation}, 159.

\textsuperscript{91} Kennedy, \textit{New Testament Interpretation}, 15.


\textsuperscript{93} Tate, \textit{Biblical Interpretation}, 286-7.

\textsuperscript{94} According to Russell, Kennedy’s procedure is an expansion of Greenwood’s suggested three-step procedure.
limitation in form criticism. Second is to define the rhetorical situation of the unit. This roughly corresponds to the *Sitz im Leben* of form criticism. The third step is to identify the rhetorical problem. He observes that in many rhetorical situations, the speaker may face one overriding rhetorical problem that may be particularly visible at the beginning of the discourse. Four is to determine which of the three species of rhetoric: judicial, deliberative, or epideictic is employed in the rhetorical unit. Five is considering the arrangement of material in the text in terms of its subdivisions, persuasive effect of the parts, their coordination, devices of style, etc. And the sixth step is to review the process of analysis by looking back over the entire unit and reviewing its success in addressing the rhetorical situation and what the implications may be for the speaker or audience.⁹⁵

From the foregoing discussion, a text is often written for a specific purpose. Therefore, the composition of the text, the rhetorical devices and strategies used as well as the verbal constructions contribute to the communication of the intended purpose of the text. Hence, their analysis is important for such a study. Moreover, texts by their purpose have some effect on the readers, which also have significance for the interpretation of the text.

This study, therefore, employs contemporary rhetorical criticism as an appropriate method adequate for the study because it pays attention to the communicator’s persuasive intention as found in the exegetical analysis and at the same time focuses on the readers. It was therefore suitable for studying the literary genre of the text under consideration. The pericope under study is from an epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians, and epistles are purposeful literature in which the writers make use of rhetorical devices as tools to convince their readers. It is appropriate to use this method to explore the rhetorical devices Paul used in comforting and persuading his readers in order to elicit the desired lifestyle in anticipation of the *Parousia*.

1.5.3 Data Collection

Both primary and secondary sources were used for the research. For the exegetical analysis, published books, critical and exegetical commentaries on the epistle, monographs and journal articles were used for the rhetorical analysis.

CBS were conducted in three selected churches in three regions to elicit contemporary Ghanaian views on the subject. Through the purposive sampling technique, the Methodist Church Ghana representing the Historic Mission Churches, The Church of Pentecost as a classical Pentecostal Church and International Central Gospel Church as a Charismatic/Pentecostal Church were selected. These churches are well established in Ghana and are among the fast-growing churches with branches all over the country. Their availability and cooperation facilitated the CBS process. The selected regions were Greater Accra, Ashanti and Upper East regions of Ghana. These regions gave perspectives of Christians in the northern, middle and southern contexts of Ghana. The CBS was conducted in Accra and Ashaiman for the Greater Accra Region, Kumasi, Bekwai and Sawua for the Ashanti Region, Sandema, Bolgatanga and Basyonde for the Upper East Region. The towns were selected on the basis of the availability and willingness of the ministers for the Bible Study, and also for proximity.

In each region, two branches, of the three churches were selected. Employing Gerald West’s CBS model, the text (1 Thessalonians 4:1—5:11) was studied with these churches. A total of eighteen (18) Bible study sections were conducted and the product of the study was analysed for the research.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study contributes to the discipline of African Hermeneutics in the aspect of biblical theology and ethics. African Biblical hermeneutics focuses on interpreting scripture from
the perspective of Africa and making the African context the subject matter of interpretation. This pragmatic study augments the discussion on African Christianity from the perspective of a practical Christian life taught in this epistle. The study provides a guide for further study of the epistle within Africa from a different perspective. It also offers contemporary Christians some practical perspectives to guide them as they prepare for the Second Coming of Christ.

1.7 Organization of Chapters

The first chapter addresses all the introductory issues to the research. Chapter two offers a Rhetorical Analysis of 1 Thessalonians 4:1—5:11 which entails an exegetical analysis of the text under study. It begins with the determination of the rhetorical unit followed by the discussion of the rhetorical problem, rhetorical situation as well as the rhetorical species which is the type of rhetoric used in the text. It also presents a translation of the text and discusses the rhetorical structure which guides the textual analysis and a conclusion of the chapter. Chapter three: Desirable Christian Living (4:1-12) is the first section of the Textual analysis. It analyses the first set of the exhortation under different sub-units following the rhetorical structure. It explores the verbal systems in the composition of the text, rhetorical devices, and expressions the author used in communicating his message to persuade his hearers.

The fourth chapter: Eschatological Motivation 4:13—5:11 deals with the second section of the textual analysis by exploring these verses under different sub-units as indicated in the structure. It examines Paul’s use of eschatological passages in the epistle and then focuses on the main eschatological passage. The sub-units analysed includes death before the Parousia (4:13-18), dates and times (5:1-3), living as children of light (5:3-11) and a conclusion of the chapter. The analysis examines Paul’s use of the eschatological
motif in comforting the Thessalonians while also encouraging them to prepare for the
day of the Lord.

Chapter five presents the Contextual Bible Study of 1 Thess. 4:13—5:11 in the selected
churches. It employs Gerald West’s model to study the text. The chapter elicits the
views of some contemporary Ghanaian Christians on eschatology and their anticipation
of the Parousia through a contextual reading of the text in selected churches in three re-
gions in Ghana. The product of the reading process presents the perspectives of Ghana-
ian Christians for a dialogical engagement with the exegetical findings.

Chapter six discusses eschatology from Ghanaian perspectives. The chapter engages the
findings of the textual analysis with the findings of the contextual realities. It discusses
how Ghanaian Christians appropriate the interpretation of the text in their context and
explores some Christian values that are developed by the appropriation of this text as be-
ing exhibited in the contemporary life of Ghanaian Christians. Chapter seven, Eschato-
logical hope and Holy Living, A Call to Contemporary Christians discusses the findings
of the research, provides a summary, make conclusions and recommendations for further
study of the text and for the Christian community in Ghana to enhance their eschatologi-
cal understanding.
CHAPTER TWO

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF 1 THESSALONIANS 4:1—5:11

2.1 Introduction

The chapter investigates the rhetorical elements in 1 Thessalonians 4:1—5:11. It entails the determination of the rhetorical unit, establishing the rhetorical situation in Thessalonica at the time Paul wrote the epistle. It also discusses the rhetorical species of the text and follows with a rhetorical structure that guides the analyses of the text. This analysis contributes to the understanding of the rhetorical elements of the text and how they inform the exhortation of Paul to the Thessalonians.

2.2 Determining the Rhetorical Unit

The rhetorical unit indicates the rhetorical boundaries and literary features in the text that characterizes it as a unit. From the literature available, it appears there is no consensus among commentators and scholars on the literary unity of the text. This is due to the topics that Paul discusses in the exhortation. Notwithstanding the disagreement on the subject matter in the various subdivisions, there are some rhetorical, literary and thematic features that demarcates the beginning and end of 1 Thessalonians 4:1—5:11.

First is the position and use of λοιπὸν in the exhortation. In 4:1, the author opens with the adverbial use of λοιπὸν (finally) and the transitional particle οὖν (therefore); a combination which appears to be peculiar in the New Testament. While Paul usually used the hendiadys towards the end of a letter (2 Cor. 13:11; 2 Tim. 4:8 and Phil. 3:1), in this case it is located in the middle of the epistle. Although the precise nuance of the hendiadys is debated, it serves as a transition to a new concept. Ernest Best maintains that Paul employs λοιπὸν in this context because he is moving to his final issue or series of con-
cerns. It heralds a definite change in both the type of material and the subject matter which relates to Paul’s thought implicit in the preceding chapters.

In addition to λοιπόν, we note the following literary indicators: The vocative ἀδελφοί (brothers), which frequently occurs in the letters of Paul and other New Testament writings at the opening of new epistolary units. Moreover, there are three transitional devices: the appeal formula in 4:1 (we ask you and appeal in the Lord Jesus that…”), the disclosure formula in 4:2 (“for you know…”) and peri. δὲ (now concerning) which indicate the introduction of new topics in the exhortation. Finally, in some manuscripts, the preceding paragraph (1 Thess. 3:11-13) is concluded with ἀμήν a further evidence that 4:1 begins a new section. Therefore, the presence of these transitional features in the passage suggests that 4:1 does not merely mark the beginning of a section but signals a major shift in the content of the letter itself.

Second, there are stylistic evidences. There is a shift from the form and content of the preceding chapters with its seemingly apologetic material focusing on Paul’s past and present relationship with the Thessalonians, to an exhortative material that focuses on the Thessalonians alone and their required conduct in the future, signalling a break from the previous section. Paul leaves behind the narrative style that characterized the initial chapters (1—3) of the letter and moves to the exhortative style in order to “complete the things that are lacking in their faith” (3:10).

Finally, there are thematic reasons why the passage constitutes a unit. In the passage, Paul treats different topics of holiness in sexual conduct (4:3-8) and the practice of mutual love (4:9-12). There is a change in subject matter from holiness in sexual conduct

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98 Weima, 1–2 Thessalonians, 249.
(4:3-8) to that of love for one another. However, these topics are linked by a common introduction to the subject of walking to please God. The opening verses (4:1-2) present the whole section and not just 4:3-8, so the transitional formula thus introduces smaller subunits within the major passage itself. Thus, the thematic unity of the verses affirms the boundary of 4:1-12 as a rhetorical unit within the main section. This differentiates it from the subject of the subsequent passage in 4:13—5:11 which deals less with moral conduct that please God but with providing comfort for the brethren who have lost their loved ones and they themselves of their fate at the eschaton as suggested by the concluding verses of 4:18 and 5:11. Using these literary signs, the author indicates to his readers that he is commencing a new discussion.

Considering the exhortations and the subject matter discussed, the rhetorical unit can further be divided into two sections for thematic reasons. In doing this we observe from the text that there is a change in topic from the conduct that pleases God in the areas of sexual conduct and showing love for one another (4:1-12), to the fate of believers who have died before Christ’s return (1 Thess. 4: 13-18), suggesting the beginning of a new section. This is to mark the contrast between the new information he was going to share with his readers, with what he said earlier. As it is evident from the text, the ‘you know’ formula used in 4:1, 2, 6, 11, and 5:2 addresses the same subject matter of living to please God. Therefore, he opened the section with a different disclosure formula to distinguish between 4:13-18, 4:1-12 and 5:1-11. In addition, 4:13 clearly indicates a break from the preceding verses with the introduction of the vocative ἀδελφοί (brothers) which is another important transitional device Paul employs often in his writings.

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99 The shift in topic is confirmed by several epistolary and literary features. Paul employs the disclosure formula “we do not want you not to know” as a transitional device to open the section, but he used a different version of it from what he used earlier.
There is compelling evidence from the text showing that 4:13—5:11 consist of two distinct passages. The evidence suggests that 4:13-18 is a unique rhetorical unit in 1 Thessalonians which ends with 4:18. For instance the introduction of ὅστε (therefore) in 4:18 introducing a concluding clause which brings the discussion in 4:13-18 to an end, the phrase “comfort one another” which also functions as a statement signalling the conclusion of the preceding verses in 4:13-17; as well as the introduction of the περὶ δὲ formula and the use of the vocative ἀδελφοί (brothers) as transitional markers to indicate the introduction of a new section from 5:1.

However, as much as the use of transitional devices signals a division in the unit, there are convincing similarities between these units. First, Paul started the discussion on eschatological matters from 4:13 and continued to 5:11 before introducing another subject matter in 5:12. Both units generally deal with the return of Christ, except that while 4:13-18 focuses on the state of those who have died before the parousia, 5:1-11 addresses that of those who will be alive on that day. Yet, he addressed the same characters because it was those living who were grieved over those who have died. Second, key references in both sub-units are re-echoed in the discussion of the two situations. For instance, the phrase “those who have fallen asleep” (4:13, 14, 15), the dead in Christ (4:16) and “we who are alive” (4:15, 17) are re-echoed in the phrase “whether we wake or sleep we may live with him” (5:10).

Third, there is an undeniable shift from the subject matter of eschatological matters from 4:1–5:11 to ethical concerns pertaining to the life of the faith community in 5:12-22. He uses the appeal formula (we ask you), the mildly adversative particle δὲ and the vocative “brothers” in 5:12 to indicate the ending of v. 5:11.
Finally, both sub-units employ apocalyptic motifs to contrast the preceding and subsequent verses in 4:1-12 and 5:12-22. They also contrast sharply the condition of the Thessalonian believers from the other citizens by identifying them in the letters as the rest and those who grieve without hope (4:13). In addition to the above, the use of the emphatic future negation οὐ μὴν in 4:15 and 5:3 as well as their conclusion with the exhortation, παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους, “comfort each other” (4:18 and 5:11), support this delimitation. The concluding exhortation παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους, according to Weima, forms a thematic inclusion with the opening statement in 4:13.¹⁰⁰ By repeating words or phrase at the opening and ending of the literary unit to mark its boundaries, the phrase παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους forms an inclusion¹⁰¹ with the introductory statement that “Thessalonians should not grief” to mark the boundary of the text as a thematic unit. In view of this the rhetorical unit 4:1—5:11, can be subdivided into two main sections for thematic reasons.

To sum up, there is literary, thematic and rhetorical evidence to support the coherence of the rhetorical unity. Paul used different transitional devices to indicate a change in content and subject matter of different units in the exhortation. This is evidenced by the different topics that are discussed in the exhortation to the church. He also used disclosure formulae and the vocative case to mark the end of one subunit and introduces another. These rhetorical features affirm that there are different issues being discussed in the various rhetorical units functioning as sub-units of the general unit of the exhortation. Therefore, though there are different topics being treated under the various sub-units, they could be treated together as a literary unit. In the light of the above reasons and features, we considered 1 Thessalonian 4:1—5:11 as a rhetorical unit.

¹⁰⁰ Weima, 1–2 Thessalonians, 305.
¹⁰¹ In the inclusio formed, Paul sought to solve the grieving problem of the Thessalonians which has arisen of their ignorance of the new information he was giving them. With the new information which provides knowledge and takes away their ignorance of the fate of the departed believers, the problem is solved thereby being comforted. Therefore, it has more to do with the content of the text and not by lexical link.
2.3 The Rhetorical Situation

The pericope understudy (1Thess. 4:1—5:11) presents a different pastoral approach in respect to other Pauline letters, because his authority as an apostle and the community’s founder is not undermined or challenged. Hence, unlike epistles such as Corinthians and Galatians where Paul sounded polemical in either addressing a congregation confronted with doctrinal heresy or engaged in ethical misconduct, the tone seems very calm. He avoids the strong apologetic language couched in sharp verbs used in most occasions and uses on the surface verbs, voices and tense forms that appear to be positive and encouraging in exhorting his readers to continue their present behaviour, only to increase in them by doing “so more and more” (4:1, 10).

The situation of the community which Paul addressed originates from the establishment of the Thessalonian church. Both Luke (Acts 17) and Paul in the epistle correlate in providing sufficient indications to the situation. Luke recounts that some Jews were persuaded by the discourse of Paul in the synagogue, arguing “from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead” (Acts 17:3). The impact of these meetings caused some converts to be won to the Christian faith by Paul and his team. For this reason, some Jews incited a mutinous mob against Paul and his companions. As Luke records, they “set the city in an uproar” (Acts 17:5). The volatile nature of the situation compelled the believers to send the missionaries away from the city under cover of darkness, thereby ending abruptly and under violent circumstances the mission to Thessalonica. While in Athens, Paul had much concern for the welfare of the young Thessalonian church. He decided then to send Timothy back to Thessalonica to strengthen and encourage the community in their faith (1 Thess. 3:2).

Some commentators, therefore, assert that Paul’s statement in 1Thess. 3:6 “But Timothy has just now come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and
love” (see also Acts 18:5) suggest that Timothy's return was the specific event that prompted him to write the first epistle to the Thessalonians. In his report to Paul, Timothy indicates at least three important elements which constitute the specific rhetorical situation to which Paul responds to in 1 Thessalonians.

First was the continued persecution that the Thessalonians were suffering as a result of their conversion from pagan worship (1:9). Paul on several occasions in the letter refers to the persecution. The intensity of the persecution as Selby notes compelled Paul at a point to explicitly tell the believers that they have been destined to face persecution (3:3-4). 102 The radical break of the Thessalonians suggests the formation of a community with a new set of norms and values different from what persisted in the pagan society.

According to Weima, “in a society where cultic activities were closely connected with political, economic and social interests, it is to be anticipated that there would be significant opposition to both Paul and his Thessalonian converts,”103 as they decide to break away from the social and religious ideals of the society. Their action fuelled the persecution because cultic activities were closely tied to political, social and economic interest. 104 Therefore, the decision of the Christians to renounce the former religious practices evoked anger and opposition from their non-Christian family members and the society as a whole. The society felt that their action could jeopardize the favoured relationship with Rome in terms of political and financial benefits as well as their status as a free city which they earned by their loyalty to the emperor. 105

Religiously, the pagan citizens of Thessalonica could also be afraid of negative consequences from the Greek gods for allowing such competition in the religious space be-

102 Selby, “Blameless at His Coming,” 399.
103 Weima, 1–2 Thessalonians, 22.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid., 6.
cause their conversion involved a complete break from the religious situation in Thessalonica. For these reasons, the anger and resentment of the people were strong against the Christians, leading to intense persecution from the larger Thessalonian community.

Secondly, Timothy reported the Thessalonians’ perception that Paul, whom they looked to as their “father in the faith”\textsuperscript{106} abandoned them in a moment of persecution and discouragement. This can be deducted for example, by how Paul in chapters 1—3 reassured the congregation of his concern for them and his emphasis on the closeness of the relationship in which they share. Selby maintains that even though this might not be quite explicit, it may have been the most important issue in Paul’s mind.\textsuperscript{107}

The third element from the report is the reaction of the community to the death of some members of the Thessalonian congregation before the Parousia. With the apocalyptic knowledge they possessed, the coming of Christ was to be a vindication of the faith for which they were suffering several persecutions. It was also considered as a revenge on those persecuting the Christians because of the understanding that Christ would come to take his own and punish those who had rejected the gospel of salvation and persecuted the church. This raised serious questions and concern in the minds of the congregation on the foundation of their faith with the dangers of losing their new-found faith.

In addition, the situation could have had a social impact on the congregation. The social context at the time was very volatile because of their conversion. And they were assured by the gospel that Christ’s presence would bring a change in their social situation. Therefore, when some members started dying before the return of Christ, it was difficult to face the social situation because of how their non-Christian families and society would have seen them. They could have suffered social ridicule for their faith since socially

\textsuperscript{106} Selby, “Blameless at His Coming,” 340.  
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 341.
their expectations were not met and some people had already started dying before what they were promised could happen. It could thus, have led to frustration and discouragement of some members. These accounted for the grief of the church and became a serious issue that created great worry among the church both for the fate of those who have died and that of the living. Paul, therefore, structured the letter to properly address the issues in detail. In chapters 1—3, he assured the Thessalonians of his love and care for them explaining the reasons for his absence. Chapters 4—5 addresses the exhortations in which he sought to console the church over the death of some members and encourage them to continue in their faith as they wait for the coming of Christ.

To achieve the aim, he illustrates the shameful treatment he received from the opponents of the gospel and points to his own determination to preach despite those oppositions as a proof that his appeal was genuine and “does not spring from trickery or deceit” (2:3). He mentions that his anxious desire to know of their welfare indeed, to the point that he “could bear it no longer” (3:1), constitute the reason for sending Timothy to them. Paul felt the separation very deeply: he describes himself and his companions as orphans, though he was considered a ‘father’ by the community. The congregation suffered similar abandonment because of the circumstances surrounding the sudden departure of the missionaries without any information and shrouded in the secrecy of night. It may also have been aggravated by Paul’s failure to communicate with them during the time between his departure and Timothy's return to Thessalonica.

What made matters worse was the deaths of several members of their community, and the questions the event had caused in the Thessalonians’ mind about their eschatological fate. These conditions indeed called for a response from Paul which was neither argumentative norcripplingly slanted with doctrinal instruction. Instead, Paul responds with a primarily consolatory letter which is intended to reassure the community of his love and
concern, to strengthen them in the face of persecution, and to address their questions about the fate of those who have died.\textsuperscript{108}

Very significant for this research is the fact that Paul wrote to an ‘infant’ congregation made up mainly of Gentiles who have embraced Paul’s gospel and may have had no prior acquaintance with Christian teaching (1:9). As Paul mentions in his exhortations, their conversion resulted in the turning away from a “pagan” lifestyle that included the worship of idols (1:9), sexual promiscuity (4:3-8), and drunkenness (5:7-8). Therefore, while he writes to reassure and console them, it was imperative to also exhort them to continue in their commitment to the gospel and to live lifestyles reminiscent of the moral and ethical demands of the Christian faith.

To conclude, Paul responded to a distressing situation in Thessalonica. He gave a prompt and adequate response to the perceived abandonment by their father in the faith. The persecution they suffered, the death of some members of the community and the uncertainty that surrounded the fate of the living Christians demanded such a response because the death that occurred before the Parousia threw the community into a state of despair.

2.4 The Rhetorical Problem

The specific problem that Paul sought to address in the exhortation is been debated by scholars. To some commentators, there is no clear problem that Paul sought to solve.\textsuperscript{109}

Similarly, B. C. Johanson argues that the repeated references to the good (3:6) and even

\textsuperscript{108} Elma Cornelius has indicated that in ancient consolatory letters, the consoler would always finish his consolation with an exhortation to overcome grief and, often, to take care of the daily duties which were neglected as a consequence of the various manifestations of grief and mourning. Thus, by inference Paul's continuous exhortation in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5 could be seen as a response to circumstances of sorrow and affliction, which could have put the Thessalonians at risk in the fulfillment of their Christian obligations. Paul, however, indicated that they had not neglected their Christian obligation towards God and their fellow members but only exhorted that they only should increase or do it more and more (4:1). For detail discussion on her view, see Elma M. Cornelius, “The Purpose of 1 Thessalonians,” HTS 57 (2001): 439.

\textsuperscript{109} Selby expressed the view that in the absence of a clear issue or problem, determining the precise rhetorical situation to which this letter responds is a difficult task. Selby, “Blameless at His Coming,” 387.
the exemplary character of the Thessalonian believers’ Christian life (1:6-7) makes it unlikely that Paul's instructions were aimed at correcting any concrete, current ethical breaches in the life of the community. This, he suggests, implies Paul did not address any specific rhetorical problem and that he was only encouraging them.

However, certain factors are constitutive of the rhetorical problem of Paul in the epistle. These are the criticism of Paul being absent in Thessalonica and his distance from the community which led to the church lacking ‘certain things’ in their faith (3:10). He addressed this by identifying himself with the church and by stressing the continuity of their relationship. The introductory part seeks the goodwill of the audience but requires more than that. Paul attempts to convert the goodwill he earned into exhortations that will comfort and encourage the community in the face of the persecution and to supply information to deal with the problem in the congregation. He alluded to their faith, love, and hope as self-evident characteristics, topics to be reintroduced in 3:6, and reminds them that they have been chosen by God (1:4), and so they must walk to please him as they anticipate the coming of Christ (4:1).

Concisely stated, the rhetorical problem of 1 Thessalonians was the occurrence of deaths in the community prior to the Parousia. This precipitated doubt regarding their salvation because the lack of proper eschatological understanding made the Thessalonians think those living would have an advantage over the dead at the Parousia and so were grieving over their death. Luckensmeyer observes that “The Thessalonians were under a millenarian (realized eschatological) influence such that deaths before the Parousia were thought to be permanent.” In his opinion, such reconstructions based on 4:13–18 can only con-

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tribute to understanding 1 Thessalonians as a whole, taking cognizance of the programmatic importance of salvation and resurrection throughout the letter.

Some apocalyptic eschatological texts (Matt 24:30-34, Mk 13: 27-31) founded the belief that Christ was returning at the time of the early Christians. On this account, most first century Christians, including the Thessalonians, believed that the Parousia would occur in their time. Therefore, it became a problem when some of them started dying before that event.

There is a discussion that the doubts of the Thessalonians depended on their misunderstanding of the actual teaching of Paul based on his early belief in the looming Parousia. He thus wrote to correct this perspective when he realized it was creating a problem in the church. At first, things were not very clear regarding the coming of Christ; therefore, Paul in his kerygma proclaimed the kind of eschatology which the Thessalonians were holding on to. But after reflecting on it for some time, coupled with the death of some members of the congregation, and the difficulty that it was posing to the young church, he felt the need to readdress the problem of eschatology because it was creating grievance and endangering the faith of some believers.

However, Goulder refutes this assumption and advances argument that Paul was consistent with his eschatological teaching in all the churches. He argues that the teaching of realized eschatology with all its attending difficulties might have come from Silas who from his Jerusalem background held the belief that the kingdom has already come.113 According to Goulder, Paul did not teach a realized eschatology which encouraged idleness; since he himself took the pain to work to earn a living.114 He submits that the im-

pression created that the kingdom has already come, and because of that the believers would not die, did not originate from Paul. But because they could die before the Parousia and were not sure what would happen after, there was the need for Paul to reassure them and address the problem of eschatology in the church.  

He argues further that it is difficult to comprehend the situation which could have generated this crisis. Because “Paul has taught the resurrection of Jesus (4:14), and he had been an experienced missionary in churches at Antioch and elsewhere, where Christians must sometimes have died; so he can hardly not have mentioned the matter when he spoke of the Parousia.” In corroborating this position, Best explains that as a Pharisee, Paul would have long believed in the resurrection, and some of his converts would be God-fearers who shared the same faith. In Romans and Philippians, for instance, there is an implication of acceptance of this belief and so as an experienced missionary as he was; he would have realized the danger of not making his views known.  

Goulder submits that in his estimation, Paul made the futuristic dimension of the kingdom very clear in his mission and indicates that death was part of the Christian journey (5:1-2). He rightly taught this at the time of the mission, and so could not have had a new perspective to write to them about as some people postulate. He affirms that Paul thought of an imminent and not realized eschatology as indicated by the phrase, “the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” This statement suggests that the day had not yet come and so Paul objected to the doctrine of realized eschatology.  

I share this view because Paul frequently referred to what he taught the community during his mission in Thessalonica (4:1-2, 6, and 11), which included his teaching and tim-

116 Ibid., 96.  
117 Best, Thessalonians, 181.  
ing of the Parousia (5:1-2). By this, he underscores the fact that the eschatology the Thessalonians were holding on to was not what he taught them during his mission. This suggests that even during Paul's mission, the Thessalonians showed that they misunderstood some of Paul’s teaching holding to distorted beliefs as Goulder indicates. For instance, he indicates, they thought the kingdom had arrived and so they should not work (1 Thess. 4:11; 2 Thess. 3:11), and those who have been baptized would not die.\footnote{Goulder, “Silas in Thessalonica,” 101.}

However, Paul repeatedly reaffirmed the fact of the futuristic nature of the Parousia, and the need to continue working. Goulder, therefore, concludes that this inaccurate teaching might have originated from Silas.\footnote{Ibid., 102-04.} He asserts that Matthew the Christian Jew is associated with the radical spirituality of the realized kingdom. And so the Jerusalem Theology that the kingdom has come, the call to stop working, a demand for higher sexual behavior, the immortality of the believer as well as the full requirement of the law could be in the preaching of Silas who had a strong affiliation to the Jerusalem tradition and worked with Paul in Thessalonica.

Paul, therefore, responded to this rhetorical problem in these exhortations by addressing all the eschatological concerns arising from the situation. In doing this, he persuades the Thessalonians to live to please God as an imperative of their salvation and an eschatological requirement. He also encouraged and comforted them for the grief over their members. He reiterated what would happen to the dead in Christ on the day of the Parousia to give more hope to the congregation.

\subsection*{2.5 The Rhetorical Species of the Text}

The form of rhetoric an author employs in any given discourse or speech act has implications in interpreting the author’s message. Therefore, determination of the species or
form contributes to revealing the emphases of a work and thus the intent of the author. Aristotle in his theory of rhetoric identified three species which are applicable to all discourses. They include judicial, deliberative and epideictic rhetoric. However, Kennedy observes that “a discourse usually has one dominant species which reflects the author's major purpose in speaking or writing.”

1 Thessalonians, in general, is essentially deliberative because it contains exhortations. Deliberative rhetoric, according to Kennedy, is the species of rhetoric that aims at persuading the audience to take some action in the future. This is affirmed by the exhortation to stand firm in the Lord (3:8) as well as specific advice for the Christian life given in chapters 4—5. He argues that the presence of narrative in chapters 2—3 does not portray judicial rhetoric but rather, as was also in the case of Galatians, Paul employs it as a strategy to establish his ethos. After that, he follows with the passage (4:1—5:11), which is part of the exhortations (4:1—5:22) aimed at persuading the Thessalonian congregation to live the expected lifestyle of the faith community.

Though it begins in general terms, Paul divided the sections into series of exhortations to reinforce the values they were excelling in and admonish them on the questions that they needed answers. One of them was the eschatological destiny of the dead members of the community. It is important to note that both the narratives and the exhortations end with a prayer (3:11-13; 5:25-28), which has the pragmatic function of underscoring the friendly nature of the exhortations. Based on this, Abraham Malherbe affirms that Paul wrote a parenetic letter when he received the report of the Thessalonians continuous allegiance.
and love for him. He outlines some characteristics in sections of 1 Thessalonians, including portions of the text under study to substantiate the fact that it was parenetic.

To begin with, he defines pærenesis as a type of exhortation in which one seeks to influence or persuade someone's conduct rather than to teach a new thing. This implies that pærenesis professed to contain nothing new or original and so authors used the genre to express friendship. To this effect, Paul's epistle to the Thessalonians was a friendly letter with the aim of maintaining his relationship with the congregation and an occasion which provided the context for moral instruction. It was, according to Malherbe, a pærenetic letter with pastoral function.

As a characteristic, paraleipsis which is a rhetorical device used to indicate the familiarity was often employed in pærenetic writings as we have in 1 Thessalonians. Paul often used the disclosure formula “you know” (οἶδας) in addition to the use of paralipsis to indicate the familiar nature of what he was going to discuss. An additional characteristic of pærenesis is that the author uses personal examples in his communication. This is evident in Paul's frequent references to himself and how he lived among the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:3, 8, 9; 3:4). He did this to regain the goodwill of his readers before exhorting them in the things he did which he expected them to continue and increase in them before talking about the moral instructions.

Another important justification of the pærenetic nature of the text is the assumption that the audiences are already doing what is expected of them. The text suggests that the church was doing well in brotherly love and walking in a way that pleases God: he was

126 Malherbe, Paul and the Thessalonians, 70.
127 Ibid., 71.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid., 72.
encouraging them to persevere (1 Thess. 4:1).\textsuperscript{130} It is obvious that he was not defensive against any charges levelled against him, but was on a clear mission of exhortation and encouragement.

Malherbe reiterated his conviction that 1 Thessalonians is parenetic:

Paul adopts a manner of exhortation that most likely was familiar to his readers, and he uses popular philosophical traditions with which they can be expected to have been familiar, yet he does so in a way different from the philosophical preachers of his day. … I draw attention to the Graeco-Roman tradition of moral exhortation.\textsuperscript{131}

These characteristics of a parenetic letter found in the text provide justification for the rhetorical species of the pericope as a parenesis, hence a deliberative rhetoric according to Aristotle's classification. Therefore, in light of the persuasive purpose of the text; Paul’s desire to exhort the faith community in Thessalonica to walk to please God; the focus on the future; as well as the exhortation to comfort one another in the face of persecution, the researcher considers the deliberative species the most appropriate of Aristotle's labels for the pericope under study.

2.5 Translation of the Text

Chapter 4:1 Finally brothers, we entreat you and beseech you in the Lord Jesus that just as you received from us how you ought to walk and please God, just as you are walking,\textsuperscript{132} abound in it more and more. 2 for you know what instruction we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification, to be distant from fornication 4 That each one of you knows how to control his own body\textsuperscript{133} in hol-

\textsuperscript{130} Paul's self-description in the first part of the letter contains verbs and phrases that serve a hortatory function and he follows in the second part with exhortations on moral conduct. These two sections provide a strong bond in the letter to make the advice for moral conduct have the needed effect in the community.
\textsuperscript{132} The clause καθαρὸς καὶ περιπατεῖτε (just as you are walking” is missing in some manuscripts. It was dropped either accidentally or deliberately because it is considered to be strong.
\textsuperscript{133} There is contention among scholars on the translation of σκύλος. Some commentators translate it as 'wife'.
ness/ sanctification and honour, 5 And not in passionate lust as the Gentiles who do not know God, 6 That no one trespass and take advantage of his brother in this matter, because the Lord avenges all such things just as we have solemnly warned you beforehand. 7 For God did not call us to uncleanness but in holiness 8 Therefore the one who rejects this reject not a man but God who gives his Holy Spirit to you. 9 But concerning brotherly love you have no need we write to you, for you yourselves were taught by God to love one another. 10 And even as you do it to all the brothers in the whole of Macedonia, brothers, we urge you to abound in it the more. 11 And aspire to live a quiet life, perform your own business and to work with your own hands, just as we commanded you. 12 In order that you may live a decent life towards those outside and you may not be in need.

13 Brothers, we do not want you to be unaware about those who are asleep, in order that you will not grieve like those who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who are asleep in him. 15 For this we say to you in the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord shall not go ahead of those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord, himself will come down from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet and the dead in Christ will rise first.134 17 Then we, who are alive and remain in him, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Chapter 5:1 Now brothers, concerning the times and seasons you have no need we write to you. 2 For you know yourselves that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 Whenever they say peace and security then sudden destruction comes upon them like birth pains in a pregnant woman, and they shall not escape. 4 But you brothers are

134 There is disagreement on the translation of the syntagm οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ as “the dead in Christ.”
not in darkness that the day should overtake you like a thief. 5 For you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are neither night nor darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep as the rest but let us be alert and sober 7 for those who sleep, sleep at night and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 8 but since we are of the day, we must be sober, put on the breastplate of faith and love and as helmet, hope of our salvation. 9 for God did not position us in anger but to save us through the salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us in order that whether we keep watch, or we sleep we will live with him. 11 therefore comfort one another and build each other up just as you are already doing.

2.6 Rhetorical Structure of the Text

Several structures have been proposed and used by commentators of this epistle. Timothy Milinovich has observed that there seems to be a significant disagreement among scholars and commentators on the structure of the epistle as a whole, which correspondingly reflects on the structure of our text. The most frequently used is the two-section structure. Gordon D. Fee divided the letter into three main sections as thanksgiving (1:2-10), a body explaining Paul's relationship (2:1-3:13) and a set of exhortations from 4:1—5:26. Others also add five thematic subdivisions; introduce a different category of thanksgiving and a theme of self-defence by Paul.

Weima proposed a five-section structure and discusses the epistle under five broad headings. The fourth section which he entitled Exhortations to the Thessalonians (4:1—5:22) contains the text for this study (4:1—5:11). It has four subdivisions which include In-

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135 The term κλέπτης has the support of most translators as it is witnessed by three Alexandrian codex because of ωμός which precedes it, the scribes conformed to that reading.
137 Malherbe, Paul and the Thessalonians, 76.
creasing in conduct to please God (4:1-12), Comfort concerning deceased Christians at Christ’s return (4:13-18), Comfort concerning living Christians at Christ’s return (5:1-11), and Exhortation on congregational life and worship (5:12-22).\textsuperscript{140}

Like Malherbe, Frame suggests two major subdivisions; the Apologia (1:2—3:13) and the Weak, the Idlers, the Fainthearted etc. (4:1—5:27). He divides the letter into seven main sections. Of major interest for this research is the fourth section which he titled Exhortations (4:1-5:28). The exhortations have eleven subheadings which discusses various issues in the letter.\textsuperscript{141} The pericope falls within the first six sections of Frame’s structure, followed by other units of exhortations in the fifth chapter of the epistle.

The structure of Morris is similar to that of Frame as he divides the whole epistle into eight sections, except that he captures 4:13—5:11 under two sections; section five as exhortation to Christian living (4:1-12) and six as problems associated with the parousia (4:13—5:11).\textsuperscript{142} Weima’s thematic structure is detailed, with different units organized with a thematic criterion. 1 Thess. 4:1—5:11 indicates a complete shift in the body of the letter. It shows a break from the apologia of Paul present in Frame’s structure, to an exhortative series throughout this half of the letter. It is made up of different subunits after the superscription (1:1), Thanksgiving (1:2—3:10) and prayer (3:11-13).\textsuperscript{143} These series of exhortation stretches from 4:1—5:22 and are carefully arranged to address the specific needs of the community considering the rhetorical problem which was reported to Paul both orally and by a supposed letter from Timothy after his visit.

The exhortations (4:1—5:22) closes the letter with a group of moral instructions that focus on the Thessalonians’ eager expectation of Christ, the end of their persecution, and

\textsuperscript{140} Weima, \textit{1-2 Thessalonians}, 56-58.
\textsuperscript{141} Frame, \textit{A Critical and Exegetical Commentary}, 17.
\textsuperscript{142} Morris, \textit{The First and Second Epistles vi.}
\textsuperscript{143} Frame, \textit{A Critical and Exegetical Commentary}, 17.
the hope to be reunited with their loved ones whom they have lost. These groups of moral instructions are necessary for the survival of the community in the midst of the persecution. The structure of the letter is formed from thematic and rhetorical patterns of units found within the text. The limits for the units under each section is based on Paul’s rhetorical purpose of exhortation and consolation and how they combine to develop his line of thought, as well as build a unified exhortation in addressing the issue of eschatology, holiness, and ethics for the Thessalonian congregation.

The structure proposed for this study is informed by grammatical, literary and thematic features identified from the text (4:1—5:11). At a glance, 1 Thessalonians 4:1—5:11 presents a practical section of what Paul discussed in chapters 1—3. As usual Paul exhorted the community based on his teaching in Thessalonica to encourage the congregation to persevere in their daily lives as a faith community. Therefore, considering Paul’s rhetorical strategy of encouragement, exhortation, and consolation, 4:1—5:11 has been structured into two major sections under the headings Exhortation to Desirable Christian Living (4:1-12) and Eschatological Motivation (4:13—5:11), considering Paul’s rhetorical strategy of encouragement, exhortation, and consolation. The two-section-division is similar to the structures of Malherbe and Frame. However, the subunits differ from that of these commentators. Frames structure divides the fourth unit which contains the pereicope into eleven subunits.\textsuperscript{144} Weima though has a five-section structure, the fourth section which contains the text for our study has similar verse divisions as ours but the subheadings differ slightly from ours.\textsuperscript{145}


\textsuperscript{145} Weima titled his subheadings as follows: Increasing in conduct to please God (4:1-12), Comfort Concerning Deceased Christians at Christ’s Return (4:13-18), Comfort Concerning Living Christians at Christ’s Return (5:1-11).
The first section of our structure opens with an initial exhortation unit (4:1-2), supported by the authority of Jesus. It is followed by two other units titled “Call to Sanctification by God’s Will (3-8)” and to “Brotherly Love for one another (9-12).” The second section which focuses on the questions bothering the Thessalonians about Christ’s return and its implications for both the dead and the living (4:13—5:11), is also made up of three subunits: Death before the Parousia (4:13-18), Dates and Times (5:1-3) and Living as Children of Day (5:4-11).

The first section which introduces the exhortative style begins with an initial appeal (4:1-2). As submitted by Weima and some other scholars, it introduces the whole of the chapter of exhortation, since it is set apart from the rest of the passage just as Paul generally does with his exhortations.\(^\text{146}\) Paul’s allusion to Jesus Christ as the source of authority in issuing his exhortations in both v. 1 and 2, links these verses together, as well as the use of the disclosure formula οἶδατε γὰρ in v. 2 introducing new material from what was discussed in chapter 3.\(^\text{147}\) The second unit (vv. 3-8) addresses a specific issue Paul takes up with the congregation.\(^\text{148}\)

The unit ends with statements which appeal to the work of each divine person. The author called on Jesus in 6b as the judge between those who exploit their brothers in sexual matters, the Father as the one who calls into holiness in v. 7 and the Spirit who is holy in the climax (v. 8). This Trinitarian reference links the verse to the initial three verses (3-5), which outlines the moral obligation. The third unit is marked by the change in subject matter from sexual conduct to brotherly love. He employs the transitional formula περὶ

\(^{146}\) Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 250-51.

\(^{147}\) Ibid.

\(^{148}\) Frame maintains that Paul predicated the subject θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, with τούτῳ in explaining ὁ ἁγιασμὸς ἡμῶν, in order to lay stress on the divine authority he alluded to in the first unit. Apart from the common subject matter which is being addressed in this unit, the frequent use of words from the ἁγιασμοῖς root such as ἁγιασμός (4:3, 7) ἁγιασμὸς (4:4) ἁγιασμὸς (4:8) provides a lexical coherence to this unit.
δὲ in v. 9 to signal the introduction of a new topic: brotherly love. It begins with brotherly love in v.9 to love for all the brothers in v.10 and continues with the appeal to do it more and more. Furthermore, the lexical coherence of the unit is supported by the use of the phrase οὐ χρείαν ἔχετε in verse 9 and 12 which forms an inclusion.

The second section (4:13—5:11) turns to the topic of the return of Christ. It addresses an eschatological itinerary for the Parousia event that has been anticipated already in 2:20 and 3:13.\textsuperscript{149} The location of such an eschatological discourse close to the end of a letter is not alien to Pauline corpus. A similar style is found in I Corinthians, where 15:1-58 serves as the central section of a final part (11:2—16:24) of the epistle. The specific location of this unit among others serves as the pivotal point around which Paul orients all his moral instructions. This implies that ethics and eschatology are inseparable because the instructions Paul gives are obligations for God’s eschatological people.\textsuperscript{150} They were meant to socialize the readers by teaching values and to motivate them in their eschatological existence.\textsuperscript{151}

In this section, Paul inverts the pattern of his exhortation and uses the eschatological motif of Christ’s Parousia (4:13—5:11) as the central encouragement around which he now advances his instructions. It is to ensure the maintenance of the congregation’s sanctified state and moral life commendable at Christ’s return. Paul also seeks to mitigate the community’s anxiety regarding the fate of the believers who have died before the Parousia (4:15). He addressed their concern by stating that those who have died will not be left behind at Christ’s Parousia. He then follows with the details of the eschatological itinerary which also provides some hope for the living members of their salvation as they will be caught up to meet Christ and the dead in that cosmic phenomenon (4:15-16).

\textsuperscript{149} Milinovic, “Structure of Thessalonians,” 510.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{151} Cornelius, “The Purpose of 1 Thessalonians,” 442.
As he interspersed his eschatological motif with these series of exhortations, hope remains a major theme throughout this pivotal unit in the section of the exhortations. He uses this theme to distinguish between the Thessalonians as people who have faithful allegiance to Christ and have a love for each other compared to the outsiders who do not have such relationship amongst them.

The next subunit (5:1-3) discusses further the return of Christ to underscore its importance to the Thessalonians and the relationship it has with the preceding unit. (4:13-18). In 5:1-3, the apostle employs the peri. de. formula to introduce the new topic for the unit. Weima argues that the transitional formula “now about times and the seasons” by itself is elliptical and thus rather vague in identifying what this new topic entails. Paul closes 5:1-3 with the notable use of emphatic future negation (and they will not escape) that it functions as a sequence terminator, and gives it a semantic coherence in the coming motive expressed through the use of the verb ἐρχεται.

The final unit, titled Living as Children of Day, presents reasons Paul adduced for the discussion in the previous unit. These include the fact that the Thessalonians have a unique status which he expressed in metaphorical language as sons of light and sons of day (v.4-5) and secondly, they are elected by God to obtain salvation or eternal life. He, therefore, appeals to them to be vigilant and sober-minded. He concludes the exhortation by calling on the Thessalonians to comfort and build each other with the reasons provided in the above verses. The rhetorical unit is, therefore, divided into two sections to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the text. Together they investigate how Paul used the

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153 Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 340.
154 Ibid.
eschatological motif to comfort the grieving Thessalonians and encourage them to hold
on to their faith by living holy lives in their anticipation of the Parousia of Christ. 155

Therefore, the rhetorical structure proposed for this study is as follows:

Section One: Desirable Christian Living (4:1-12)

a) Initial Exhortation (4:1-2)

b) Call to Sanctification by God’s Will (4:3-8)

c) Brotherly Love for One Another (4:9-12)

Section Two: Eschatological Motivation (4:13-5:11)

a) Death before the Parousia (4:13-18)

b) Dates and Times (5:1-3)

c) Living as Children of Day (5:4-11)

2.7 Conclusion

The rhetorical elements of the text indicate that it is a parenetic letter written to address
the grieving situation in Thessalonian community and to encourage Christians in their
faith as they await the Parousia of Christ. Paul used different text makers to delimit the
text, therefore, in spite of the different subject matters that are discussed in the exhorta-
tion, 1 Thess. 4:1—5:11 constitute a rhetorical unit. The rhetorical situation demanded
that Paul used a different approach from that of his other letters, hence his use of the de-
liberative rhetoric instead of the judicial and epideictic rhetoric. The rhetorical structure

155 This divisions makes the structure very similar to that of Morris who divides the whole epistle into
eight sections but presents 4:13—5:11 under two sections; section five as Exhortation to Christian living
(4:1-12) and six as Problems associated with the parousia (4:13—5:11). See Morris, The First and Second
Epistles, vi.
indicates that the textual analysis is carried out in two sections which together constitute the rhetorical unit. Following the rhetorical structure, the next chapter presents the analysis of the first section Desirable Christian Living (4:1-12). It discusses the exhortations Paul gave on issues that concern the well-being of the church and the lifestyle that please God in their eschatological existence. The second section is the fourth chapter which presents the analysis on Eschatological Motivation (4:13—5:11). It focuses on the issue of death before the Parousia, dates and times of the arrival of the day of the Lord, and how they should live as children of day.
CHAPTER THREE

DESIRABLE CHRISTIAN LIVING (4:1-12)

3.1 Introduction

The aim of the chapter is to examine the first section (4:1-12) of Paul’s exhortation which constitutes part of his major concerns in the second half of the epistle. As part of the probatio\textsuperscript{156} in classical rhetoric, it is made up of a range of verses (4:1-12) with different rhetorical subunits. They reveal the purpose of the author: to exhort the congregation to desirable Christian living within the Gentile community.

The chapter presents an analysis of the compositional structural elements of the text; it investigates the rhetorical strategies Paul employed to respond to the rhetorical problem of the Thessalonians. It is organized into three subunits following the rhetorical structure proposed for the study. It begins with an initial exhortation which opens up the whole exhortative section of the epistle. It is followed by Paul’s call for sanctification and brotherly love among members of the church. The analysis provides a critical reading of the text to underscore how Paul addressed the problems of the Thessalonians and his pastoral vision for the community he founded.

3.2 Exhortation to Desirable Christian Living (4:1-12)

The first section comprises three rhetorical subunits (4:1-2, 4:3-8 and 4:9-12) in together Paul deals with expected behaviours that are pleasing to God. It emphasizes the imperative of the gospel of Paul enjoining the faith community to live within the grace received through Christ.\textsuperscript{157} The first unit (4:1-2) introduces the whole section and articulates the proposition to be demonstrated in the exhortation. Frame posits that it marks a shift from the defence of his failure to return to the community, to a discreet treatment of the

\textsuperscript{156} Wanamaker, \textit{A Commentary on the Greek Text}, 147.
\textsuperscript{157} Verhoef, “Thessalonians Live a Holy Life,” 348.
knowledge that is lacking in the congregation.\textsuperscript{158} The second and third units address issues that pertain to the community.

There are two scholarly positions on how Paul heard of the problem facing the community. Some commentators express the view that the Thessalonians officially wrote to Paul for counsel on how to respond to the issues. Others argue Timothy might have included them in his report. From the text it appears that they form part of the issues Timothy reported to Paul (1 Thess. 3:6-10). Hence, Paul took the opportunity after regaining the confidence of the people and reassuring them of his love for them as well as his plan for a future visit to respond directly to those needs.

3.2.1 Initial Exhortation (4:1-2)

4:1 Λοιπὸν οὖν, ἀδελφοί, ἐρωτῶμεν ὑμᾶς καὶ παρακαλῶμεν ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ, ἵνα καθὼς παρελάβετε παρ' ἡμῶν τὸ πώς δεῖ ὑμᾶς περιπατεῖν καὶ ἄρέσκειν θεῷ, καθὼς καὶ περιπατεῖτε, ἵνα περισσεύητε μᾶλλον. ὅσιάτε γὰρ τίνας παραγγελίας ἐδόκαμεν ὑμῖν διὰ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ.

Paul begins his exhortation with beautifully constructed clauses and phrases using active and infinitive verbs, together with καθὼς and ἵνα constructions. This follows the opening address with the adverbial use of λοιπὸν, the particle οὖν, and the vocative ἀδελφοί. The combination functions in underscoring the exhortative purpose of Paul’s communication in this section.

Paul used the vocative ἀδελφοί to commence his direct address to the Thessalonians together with the adverbial use of λοιπὸν and οὖν. Λοιπὸν is used in this construction because he is addressing the final issues. He used it to indicate the change in the subject matter at this point as well as signal a thematic change in the discussion.\textsuperscript{159} Verhoef

\textsuperscript{158} Frame, A Critical Commentary, 140.
\textsuperscript{159} See Best, Thessalonians, 154. Thieselton has also expressed a similar view that λοιπὸν suggests a hinge to another topic. Morris indicates that λοιπὸν not only marks the ending of the letter but also marks a transition to the way the Christian life is to be lived. He observes that λοιπὸν οὖν is a unique combination found nowhere else in the New Testament. It signifies the ending of the main section of the letter (1-
however, holds the view that the λοιπὸν οὖν construction gives an indication that Paul was not introducing any controversial issue but to exhort the community to live according to the commands he gave them in his founding mission. This implies that though it is a transitional device, it is used in the context as a signal to a change of topic. However, it is not a new concept but a familiar issue which Paul had earlier addressed.

Another important observation in this section is the sharp rise in the use of present infinitive verbs employed by Paul to explain what is required from the community. The arrangement of the verbs in the clauses indicates the presence of implicit elements of command in the exhortations. To stress home the importance of the exhortations to the faith community, he employs two active verbs in the appeal formula instead of the usual one constituting a double injunction (ἐρωτῶμεν ὑμᾶς καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν). Morris observes that these two verbs have their individual meaning, yet in the clause, they simply reinforce one another. Paul, therefore, employs this construction as a rhetorical device to emphasize his request.

There are several discussions on the use of the vocative ἀδελφοί in Paul’s address, but I share the opinion of Wanamaker that the word has both theological and sociological connotations. Theologically, ἀδελφοί emphasizes the fact that God is the Father of all Christians, and so all children of God are siblings to one another in God. Therefore, in this rhetorical situation, Paul used this filial language to affirm the fatherhood of God towards the Thessalonians, urging his readers to keep looking on to Him and live to please Him. Sociologically, the vocative ἀδελφοί portrays the Thessalonian community

3), though the remaining section it introduces may be very lengthy and important. It implies that he shares the same view with Weima that it serves as the introduction of the whole argument of the exhortations rather than the preceding words.

60 Verhoef, “Thessalonians Live a Holy Life,” 347.
61 Morris, The Epistles to the Thessalonians, 113.
62 ἀδελφοί has a metaphorical function reemphasizing the relationship that is established by Christians among themselves. Wanamaker, A Commentary on the Greek Text, 147.
as a family. Weima has shown that Paul used several terms from the family’s semantic field: beloved (1:4), infants (2:7b), nursing mother (2:7c), father (2:11), orphaned (2:17). Therefore, the use of ἀδελφοί augments the use of familial language and metaphor to emphasize a sense of community among the Thessalonian Christians.\(^{163}\) Rhetorically, ἀδελφοί is employed as a ‘boundary creating’ metaphor separating the Christians in Thessalonica who have God as their Father, Paul as a brother and are waiting for the coming of His Son from heaven, from the larger Gentile community.

Morris submits that Paul used ἀδελφοί because he was addressing people who were dear to him. But in my estimation, this reason appears to be inadequate considering the position and function of the word in the sentence. It far exceeds the friendly relationship alluded to because the bond established between brothers and sisters in such a volatile and distressing situation, as it was in Thessalonica, is stronger than friendship.

However, Thomas maintains that the use of ἀδελφοί indicates Paul’s tenderness in approaching a delicate issue, after the general address in the initial chapters (1-3).\(^{164}\) Thomas’ assertion seems convincing, because though Paul wanted to appear gentle towards the community, because of the situation at hand, the expressions he used in his appeals were implicitly authoritative. Much as the apostle wanted to be friendly in his writing, he was careful that the exhortations will not be taken for granted. In view of that, he used emphasis in his verbal combinations and repetitions in making his appeal. These enable it to have an authoritative tone. Paul exhorts the Thessalonians, whom he described as his brothers and sisters, to continue living following the behavioural patterns they received from him during the missionary visit. He summarizes the nature of his appeal using two

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\(^{163}\) Wanamaker maintains that the Thessalonians may not have had enough social engagement prior to their coming together as a faith community. This makes the use of the filial language in the exhortation very significant to the community. See Wanamaker, *A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 147.

\(^{164}\) Robert L. Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the NIV: Ephesians through Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 270.
active verbs all in the first person (ἐρωτῶμεν and παρακαλοῦμεν). These verbs are synonymous because they denote making an appeal (ask, request, entreat, exhort, beseech, comfort). However, Paul used them together to exhort the community to live in a way that is worthy of the Christian faith.\footnote{Wanamaker, A Commentary on the Greek Text, 148.}

On the contrary, Thomas argues that ἐρωτῶμεν have been used alone in 2 Thess. 2:1, and so it will not be appropriate to equate the two verbs or treat them as synonymous. He maintains that the former should be understood as a gentle, friendly request and the latter as an authoritative apostolic plea.\footnote{Thomas, 1 Thessalonians, 270.} He further elucidates that Paul used παρακαλοῦμεν when transiting from the didactic portions of his epistles to the exhortative section (for example Rom. 12:1, Eph 4:1). In the light of the above, the use of παρακαλοῦμεν in the context is more than a request but also less than a command.\footnote{Best, Thessalonians, 155.} It implies that it carries some form of ‘diplomatic’ authority and so he did not use it in the more controversial epistle like Galatians.

Weima submits that the two verbs of appeal\footnote{Evrwtw/men occur four times in the epistles of Paul: once in Philippians (4:3) and three in Thessalonians (1 Thess. 4:1, 5:12 and 2 Thess. 2:1). Parakalou/men on the other hand, appear as many as fifty-four (54) times in about fifty (50) verses in twenty-two (22) different forms.} used in the construction make the clause very distinct. Although its occurrence in the earlier verses of this epistle (2:12, 3:2, 7) expresses the idea of comfort, when παρακαλοῦμεν occur in the first person as the first element in an appeal formula, it expresses the authoritative nature of an exhortation.\footnote{Weima 1-2 Thessalonians, 255.} In effect, the combined use of the two appeal verbs in one expression is unique in Paul’s use of epistolary convention.

To stress the importance of the exhortation further, Paul anchors the appeal with a prepositional phrase ἐν κυρίῳ Θεῷ. The phrase indicates the source of authority from which
the writer of the letter is issuing the appeal. Wanamaker asserts that “the prepositional phrase serves to emphasize Paul’s position as an authoritative representative of Jesus and to remind the Thessalonians that their lives were under Jesus’ control.” The combination of the two appeal verbs and the concluding prepositional phrase has a rhetorical effect on the impact of the appeal.

Paul used double infinitive in the first and second καθός and ἵνα clauses to indicate the purpose of the verbs used. Περιπατεῖν is used as a metaphor to express the nuance of moral conduct in living the Christian life. Thus, the appeal Paul made using ἐρωτῶμεν and παρακαλῶμεν is aimed at the purpose of living the Christian life which is expressed by περιπατεῖν. The request Paul made, then is geared towards their way of living in their eschatological expectation.

From a similar standpoint, Morris asserts that Paul and John commonly use “walk” περιπατεῖν in reference to the believer’s life. He links this to the favorite description of Christianity in Acts as “the Way” (Acts 9:2, 19:23, 2:22). It means the two infinitives are connected to walking and pleasing God to exhort the Thessalonians that the whole idea of Christian living is a God-centred journey. Invariably, they were already doing this based on the instruction they received from him earlier. He, therefore, urged them to continue in like manner and abound in it.

170 Wanamaker, A Commentary on the Greek Text 148. Paul used a similar construction in 1 Cor 5:4 in his appeal to the Corinthians to handover the incestuous man to Satan to affirm his authority in Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit while giving that directive.
171 In Greek grammar, infinitive tense indicates the purpose or goal of the action or the state of its controlling verb. See Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 590.
172 This position is in consonance with the view of Weima who indicates that περιπατεῖν has the metaphorical sense of to conduct one’s self and appears to be a term that Paul often uses to describe the Christian lifestyle. See Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 252.
173 Morris, The Epistles to the Thessalonians, 115.
Paul links the second verse to the preceding one with an explanatory γάρ. Together with the disclosure formula, ὀδότε emphasizes that the apostle is not presenting a new message but reiterating what the community is already living, keeping the teaching Paul offered during his missionary visit. The construction, therefore, reinforces the appeal to conduct themselves in a manner required by children of God.

He further reaffirms the authoritative nature of his exhortation by the use of παραγγελίας and the repetition of the prepositional phrase διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ᾽Ησυχος as we have in v. 1. Frame suggests that by the use of this rhetorical device, Paul alludes to the fact that though he issued the command or instruction while in their midst, his words carries the authority the as Lord Jesus. Explaining the use of διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ᾽Ησου, Weima submits that:

It means the “Commands” the Thessalonians originally received from Paul during his original visit to their city (v.1), which they now still “know” (v.2) are connected to “the Lord Jesus” in such a way that these commands are not optional requests but authoritative requirements.

In effect παραγγελίας and διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ᾽Ησου add some rhetorical emphasis to the appeals Paul is making in v. 1 making it more authoritative in nature. With this authoritative introduction, Paul’s intention was to demand that his words are not regarded as optional requests. Rather, they should be treated with all importance because the growth and sustainability of the church stand or falls on these exhortations. Though he did not use any imperative tense in the sentence, rhetorically he employed a formula and construction that still helped him to give the exhortations the needed authoritative tone.

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174 The statement in the verse reiterates what he has already taught them regarding their way of life as Christians that he is appealing to them to do so more and more.
175 The use of παραγγελίας is very significant here because it is not a frequently used term in the Pauline corpus. The noun occurs three times in three forms in the whole of the Pauline letters. It originally applied to commands given to soldiers and also signifies strict orders issued that has an authoritative notion of something that must be done. For further discussion on use of παραγγελίας. See Weima, I-2 Thessalonians, 260.
176 Frame, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary, 144.
177 Weima, I-2 Thessalonians, 260.
In summary, Paul in this unit used emphasis by combining active verbs and metaphors in his address. These rhetorical devices enabled him to stress the importance of his exhortations and to indicate the position and relationship that existed between him, the Thessalonians and God. The use of the prepositional phrase, disclosure formula, divine names and some keywords served the rhetorical function of lending authoritative force to the appeal to make the exhortations as authoritative as he wished to communicate to the church.

3.2.2 Call to Sanctification by God’s Will (4:3-8)

After establishing the authority of his exhortations, Paul begins to address specific issues relating to the community. He begins with the proper sexual conduct by discussing it in the larger perspective of the will of God, which is their sanctification. To achieve the purpose, he calls on them to avoid *porneia*.* The need for holiness to characterize the sexual conduct of the Thessalonians was the first specific way by which they could live to please God.  

The use of γάρ in the opening verse of this unit explains and links it with the first rhetorical unit. The divine exhortation given in v. 1 and the divine command they received as indicated in v. 2, is now being communicated explicitly as divine will in v. 3, as the clause θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ suggests. Also, the demonstrative pronoun τοῦτο, that begins the sentence in verse 3, refers to ἀγιασμὸς ἰμᾶς, which serves as the predicate of the

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178 Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 260.
179 Frame, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary, 145.
subject \( \text{θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ} \). Thus, God’s will for the Thessalonians is to live a sanctified life.\(^{180}\)

The phrases constructed with divine names: \( \text{ἐν κυρίῳ, διὰ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ and θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ} \) in the three successive verses, have the pragmatic effect of establishing the divine purpose of the exhortation in ensuring their lives pleases God. These divine phrases rhetorically strengthen the authority it lends to the appeals Paul is making to the church. He presents each of them in the verses to establish the force of the will of God for the community which he indicates as \( \text{ἀγισμός} \), meaning that for the community to be sanctified as moral and religious principles require, they must remain holy. For this reason, the purpose of the exhortation as expressed by the phrase \( \text{τοῦ/το ἐκεῖνον} \) with the demonstrative pronoun \( \text{τοῦτο} \), is manifested by Paul. His intention for them to be sanctified is expressed by his use of the pairs of infinitives \( \text{ἀπέχεσθαι} \) and \( \text{εἰδέναι}, \), \( \text{κτάσθαι} \) and \( \text{ὑπερβαίνειν} \). From the text, we realize that these infinitives are put in apposition to the noun phrase \( \text{ὁ ἄγιοσμός ἰμών} \).\(^{181}\) This suggests that as a practical remedy for proper sexual conduct, the Thessalonians should prevent \( \text{πορνεία} \) by keeping their bodies in holiness and honour (4:4).\(^{182}\) Three times in this rhetorical unit the apostle used the word \( \text{(ἄγιοσμός)} \); one as a process that the church must go through. In that construc-

\(^{180}\) Verhoef argues that the interpretation clarifies the connection with the preceding clause. For \( \text{θέλημα} \) which forms the basis of the subject of the sentence looks back to \( \text{τὸ πῶς δεῖ ἰμῶν περιπατεῖν καὶ ἀρίσκειν} \) \( \text{θεῷ} \) in 4:1. This implies that the initial introduction directly links to the first exhortation which is built on holiness of the Thessalonians. Holiness as commanded by Paul in 4:2 was in order that they will please. Verhoef, “Thessalonians Live a Holy Life,” 349.

\(^{181}\) The noun \( \text{ἀγισμός} \) is derived from the adjective \( \text{ἀγιός} \) and is related to the verb \( \text{ἀγιάζω}. \) And also the \( \text{ἀγίος} \) ending verbs has a causative meaning which in this context means “to make holy” or “to consecrate”. Verhoef mentions that a \( \text{Nomina actionis} \) were often made from such verbs by the use of the suffix \( \text{–μός} \) thereby making \( \text{ἐγισμός} \) to mean “consecration”, “santification” as well as a passive meaning of holiness. \( \text{ἄγιοσμός} \) is mostly used by Paul in the New Testament. Out of about ten (10) occurrences in the New Testament, eight are Pauline with one each in Hebrew (12:14) and 1 Peter (1:2). Thieselton affirms that \( \text{ἀγισμός} \) when used to denote a process, as is the case here, has a moral implication for purity of life which reflects God and his ideal people.

\(^{182}\) Frame, \textit{A Critical and Exegetical Commentary}, 145.
tion, the personal pronoun ὑμῶν follows the noun; then twice as a state of being.\textsuperscript{183}

Thus, the phrase ἐν ἁγιασμῷ suggest a state of being sanctified. By this he called on the community to sanctify themselves and share the holiness of God for it is the source of honour. On this backdrop, Paul’s appeal for separation from sinful existence is an essential aspect of Christian living. For this reason, he describes sanctification as the will of God for them, because it is in that will that they can receive God’s salvation at the coming of His Son.

The first infinitival clause ἀπεκεχεσθαι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς πορνείας functions as a subordinate clause to ὁ ἁγιασμὸς ὑμῶν. By its position, ἀπεκεχεσθαι\textsuperscript{184} explains the noun phrase ὁ ἁγιασμὸς ὑμῶν. So by putting it in apposition to the noun phrase, emphasized the idea that ἁγιασμὸς connotes being separated, set apart or to be distinct.\textsuperscript{185} Paul was emphatic that fornication and adultery should not occur in Christian life. It is emphasized by the contrast between ἁγιασμός and πορνεία which refers to all manner of sexual immorality. By extension, it implies that all sexual contacts outside of marriage are wrong because they constitute πορνείας and God forbids them since they violate his holy nature and will for his saints. Hence rhetorically, Paul plays on the words ἁγιασμός and ἀπεκεχεσθαι in enforcing the will of God upon the church.\textsuperscript{186}

With the understanding that every kind of sexual immorality and impurity is not only against their neighbours but also against God, Paul introduced the next pair of infinitives, εἰδέναι and κτάσθαι, to appeal to the community not to commit sexual offense against other members of the community. It is important to note that the second infinitive is de-

\textsuperscript{183}See Wanamaker, \textit{A Commentary on the Greek Text}, 150, Frame, \textit{A Critical and Exegetical Commentary}, 147.

\textsuperscript{184}Ἀπέκεχω has varied meanings in the active sense. But with its usage in this construction where it is put in the middle voice, it means “to keep away,” “abstain,” and “refrain from.”

\textsuperscript{185}See Weima, \textit{1-2 Thessalonians}, 266.

\textsuperscript{186}Some commentators agree that the infinitive clause ἀπεκεχεσθαι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς πορνείας has an imperative connotation because it constitutes a requirement by God.
ependent on the first without a connecting particle (ἐίδειναι ἐκαστοῦ ὑμῶν τὸ ἐαυτοῦ σκεῦος κτάσθη ἐν ἁγίασμῷ καὶ τιμῇ). The rhetorical effect is to appeal to the community not to commit sexual immorality and to emphasize how to possess their bodies, which is in holiness and honour.

Since the patristic period there has been no consensus among scholars on the interpretation of σκεῦος and κτάσθαι as to what the Thessalonians are being instructed to do in their quest to prevent immorality, and what they should possess in holiness. Verhoef has indicated that the meaning of the phrases ὃ ἐαυτοῦ σκεῦος κτάσθαι (4:4), and ἐν τῷ πράγματι (4:6) which have generated several variations in the interpretation of the verses are not referring to anything totally different. Therefore, there is the need for considering the pericope as a coherent discourse on the call to live a holy life.

The term σκεῦος has attracted debate among scholars as to what Paul meant by ‘vessel’. For example, Weima maintains that since the earliest days of the church, σκεῦος is known to have been used in a figurative sense. He affirms that the noun σκεῦος in literal terms means “vessel,” but it is used by Paul in a figurative sense. It has the metaphorical meaning of either one’s wife or one’s body. In recent times a euphemistic interpretation is given to it as a male sex organ.

For a commentator like Frame who interprets σκεῦος as ‘wife,’ Paul was addressing the issue of the temptation of unholy and dishonourable relations with women. That is

187 Wanamaker, A Commentary on the Greek Text, 151-52.
189 Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 268.
190 Wanamaker, Commentary on the Greek Text, 152-53.
191 The pronoun ἐαυτοῦ intimates a contrast between σκεῦος πορνείας and σκεῦος γάμου τιμίου.” Frame argues that σκεῦος is used in this context as a ‘vessel’ adapted for a purpose, and so the emphasis on ἐαυτοῦ being contrasted with πορνεία suggests the woman as the vessel for honourable marriage but not sexual immorality. In effect, he considers the infinitive κτάσθαι as independent and parallel to εἰδεῖναι. He therefore suggests that a comma be put after σκεῦος so that it functions as the direct object of the first infinitive and the implied direct object of the second infinitive. He also interprets εἰδεῖναι in light of its usage in 5:12
once the men appreciate the worth of their wives it will provide a way of escape from πορνείᾳ. He maintains that estimating marriage in such a manner is essential to true consecration and constitutes the will of God. Best also interprets σκέυος as ‘wife’ by using it in the durative sense. Concerning the meaning of εἴδενα, Best queried that the term used is not the Greek rendition of the Hebrew יָדוֹ often connected to sexual intercourse in marriage.

However, I agree with Wanamaker on his critique of this interpretation that the Thessalonians were more of a Gentile background, and so Paul would not use Jewish Rabbinic traditions to communicate such important issue to them. As Gentiles, they may not be familiar with these traditions and so could miss the message he seeks to communicate.

Morris in his commentary expressed the opinion that the argument for σκέυος as “wife” should be discounted on the account that the passages in which the verbs combine with “woman” leans on the support of the reference to the wife as “the weaker vessel” (1 Pet 3:7). He argues that wife is nowhere spoken of as the husband’s “vessel” but both are “vessels” of the Holy Spirit, with the wife being the weaker. In his view “it would not be very natural for a Greek writer to speak of the wife as a vessel.” Moreover, in his quest to present a high view of marriage and the sexual relationship, Paul would not regard the wife as nothing more than a ‘vessel’ for the man to satisfy his sexual desire.
Again, Paul was writing to a Christian community which comprised of men and women, and women do not acquire “wives” as by this interpretation of σκεύος. This, in his estimation makes the interpretation flawed. He concludes that by using σκεύος, Paul was referring to “body” and so he was exhorting the church to keep their bodies pure.\textsuperscript{197}

Weima has surveyed three major interpretations that have been proposed for the exhortation of 4:4 due to the uncertainty in the use of σκεύος and κτάσθαι by Paul. Similarly, he offers two options also for the interpretation of κτάσθαι; either the ingressive sense of “to procure for oneself, acquire, get” or the durative sense of “to possess” with an extended meaning of “to control” in this context.\textsuperscript{198} These major interpretations are derived from a combination of the options available for the noun and the verb. The three interpretations are “to acquire a wife”, “to live with one’s own wife” and “to control one’s own body/sex organ.”

According to the first interpretation, Paul is exhorting the unmarried male believers to take a wife instead of remaining single as means of ensuring good sexual conduct. By this, he uses the ingressive sense of the verb and relies on the words used in the rabbinic writings of the Jews to interpret the noun. Much as there is evidence in support of it, he indicates there are nine reasons raised against “to acquire a wife” as the plausible meaning of τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σκεύος κτάσθαι.\textsuperscript{199}

The second interpretation “to live with one’s own wife” shows that the apostle seeks to exhort the married men to have a proper sexual relationship with their wives. They are enjoined to treat their wives with respect and not like vessels for satisfying sexual desire, as the Gentiles among whom they lived. Unlike the first, the second interpretation em-

\textsuperscript{197} Morris, \textit{The First Epistle to the Thessalonians}, 121.
\textsuperscript{198} Weima, \textit{1-2 Thessalonians}, 268.
\textsuperscript{199} For a detail discussion on why “to take a wife for yourself” cannot be an appropriate interpretation for τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σκεύος κτάσθαι, see Weima, \textit{1-2 Thessalonians}, 270-72.
ploys the durative sense of the verb, meaning “to continue to have or possess, keep.” By combining it with the figurative sense of σκευός as a wife, those in favour of this interpretation claim its meaning can be extended to mean “to live with one’s wife sexually” referring to sexual conduct in marriage.\(^{200}\) In spite of the various merits this option has over the first, its connection with reference to σκευός as the wife makes it inappropriate.

The third interpretation, which I subscribe to, “to control one’s own body/sex organ”, has gained much recognition among scholars. It implies that whether Paul was referring to the whole body (if σκευός is used in metaphorical sense for body) or euphemistically for a particular part (if σκευός is used as a euphemism for the male sex organ), Christians in general whether single or married must endeavor to control their sexual desires and activities. They should conduct themselves in such a manner that depicts holiness and honour. I agree with this option because considering the context of the exhortation, where the apostle is calling for separation from sexual immorality, the context that Paul was addressing centered on holiness. Thus, the call to control one’s body is laudable.

Weima has adduced further evidence from intertextual, grammatical and logical references in support of σκευός as body and not wife.\(^{201}\) Although there is much complexity involving the interpretation of σκευός and κτάσθαι, the option “to control one’s own body” has the strongest evidence in support of it, and fits well into the context that Paul was addressing. By this interpretation, the Thessalonians are to learn to have control of their sexual desires and conduct. He also used σκευός in order to employ two important rhetorical features; metaphor and euphemism, in the exhortation. Considering the rhetorical situation, Paul was mindful of his choice of words to achieve his purpose with no

\(^{200}\) Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 270.  
\(^{201}\) Ibid., 271-72.
offensive words. He, therefore, used these rhetorical devices with the infinitive in this construction.

In Paul’s estimation, the pagan world displays its depravity in the presence of sexual sin (Rom 1:24) and linked sex to pagan religious practice. In view of this, those embracing Christianity required a particular warning regarding holiness. This is because Gentile values, with regards to sexual morality, were weak and seaports like Thessalonica were known to be notorious in this respect.202

However, the text teaches that all such bodily functions require some degree of control. For just as one decides not to engage in certain natural functions for some specific reasons, the Christian community was called upon to exercise such degree of control in sexual conduct by virtue of their faith and the anticipation of the coming of Christ. So for the Christian, sexual intercourse must take place in the marriage context, hence the call to holiness in this regard. Paul, therefore, devotes a great deal of time and space to this issue; because it was of major importance to a pagan sexualized society, like that of Thessalonica. They were not to lose control of themselves and act in passionate lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God.

Paul proceeded to use an antithesis of positive and negative practices to outline the standard required for the community to control their sexual urge. By using this figure of speech, he contrasts the proposition of his opening appeal in 4:3 from what has been practiced by the Gentiles. He begins the positive part of the antithesis with two nouns ἀγαθὸς καὶ τιμὴ. As ἀγαθὸς is repeated in the rhetorical unit, it emphasis the call to holiness as the will of God for the Thessalonians. ἄγαθος in this context is applied spe-

202 In this environment controlling the body is not an easy task due to the physiological changes that occur in the human body that calls for the satisfaction of certain natural desires. This includes sexual desire because the hormones secreted into the bloodstream come with powerful drives for certain sexual activities. Even scientist agree that such sexual appetites should be satisfied like the urge for food, water, and sleep because they all constitute the composition of the human self.
cifically to controlling sexual conduct because it is following the expression ἐαυτοῦ σκεύος κτάσθαι. It serves “as a key attribute that identifies the Thessalonians as belonging to the people of God and distinguishes them from the Gentiles who do not know God.”  

Τιμή suggests that their conduct must be honourable towards others. In this context, it extends to respect for others in sexual conduct, which differs from the self-centered attitude of the Gentiles manifested in lustful passion. For this reason, Paul combines the nouns ἁγιασμός καὶ τιμή “holiness and honour” with a conjunction, and links them with a common preposition ἐν. According to deSilva, honour and shame served as code or pivotal values for reading the New Testament. In the context of Thessalonians, it is used as means of enhancing adherence to the group ideal and defusing the negative pressure put on the Christian community as a minority group within the Thessalonian community.  

Most societies prohibit socially disruptive behaviour, such as adultery, due to the threat of dishonour caused by the violation of the sanctity and peace of the bond of marriage which is foundational to society. 

In Jewish and Christian perspectives, the honour of the human person has a religious basis in the consecration of the body and its function to God. Therefore, Paul connects honour and holiness with the same preposition because to be sanctified means to be without impurity. Impurity makes the body dishonourable. Honour then becomes the platform that moderates behaviours, commitments, and attitudes which preserves a given culture and society. The quest for it encourages people to do what is right in the society. Thus, Paul’s call on the Thessalonians was that the state of their bodies devoted to

203 Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 272.  
206 Ibid.
God must be in holiness and honour as expressed by the dative clause ἐν ἁγιασμῷ καὶ τιμῇ. By so doing the good of the Christian community can be ensured as their lives please God and prepare them for the coming of Christ.

The negative part of the antithesis has two nouns joined with a genitive construction rather than a conjunction. Ἐν πάθει ἑπιθυμίας according to Weima, could connote erotic passion and fits the context of sexual conduct being discussed in this unit. We infer from the positive antithetical phrase that ἐν ἁγιασμῷ καὶ τιμῇ, emphasizes the ‘God-like’ and ‘other-centred’ approach that should distinguish believers in controlling their sexual desire. With the negative phrase, μὴ ἐν πάθει ἑπιθυμίας, Paul refers to the uncontrolled conduct of Gentiles who selfishly gratify their own sexual urges, not being mindful of the negative consequences for themselves and others.

In 4:5 Paul used a comparative clause καθάπερ καὶ τὰ ἑθνη τὰ μὴ εἰδότα τῶν θεῶν to contrast the sexual conduct of the Thessalonians and the Gentiles who engage in lustful passion. It underscores a theological reason stating that, the contrast between believers and unbelievers in sexual conduct is about their knowledge of God. For the phrase μὴ εἰδότα τῶν θεῶν suggests a lack of relationship with God. Which means the Gentiles ignorance of God leads to their sexual misbehaviour. Their failure to keep the knowledge of God which includes the will of God makes them susceptible to all forms of sexual immorality. This construction “immediately puts the verse in a covenant context”\(^\text{207}\) that makes the Thessalonians’ relationship with God of theological significance. Weima explains that “to know God,” εἰδότα τῶν θεῶν, is a technical reference in the Old Testament used in relation to the covenant relationship with God. 1Thess. 4:5, therefore, gives a theological understanding of the position of the Gentile believers of Thessalonica to be

\(^\text{207}\) Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 274.
among the chosen people of God who have a covenant relationship with him, not for
ethnical reason, but for their renewed life. By living in holiness, they are separated from
the world of the Gentiles.

To conclude, in this rhetorical unit, Paul emphasizes sanctification as an important ele-
ment of desirable Christian life. By describing it as the will of God for the faith commu-
nity, Paul seeks to indicate that it is something fundamental to their faith. The pragmatic
effects of the infinitive constructions and the use of different active verbs, as well as the
noun prepositional phrase, put in apposition to the noun ἁγιασμός underscores the place
of sanctification in the Christian’s relationship with God. To contextualize, he used posi-
tive and negative antithesis of lifestyle that demonstrates sanctification as against what
the Gentiles do. He, therefore, called on the Thessalonians to live in ways that are differ-
ent from the Gentiles, which includes keeping their bodies in holiness and honour.

The call of the community to holiness as the will of God for His elect is in line with his
nature. By His holy nature, it is His will that all those in a relationship with Him and an-
ticipates the final salvation through the coming of His Son share in this nature. The Jews,
therefore, attached serious importance to holiness and morality because of the nature of
God. For this reason, as people who have a covenant relationship with God through
Christ, Paul exhorts the church to abstain from all activities that make them unholy be-
fore God.

3.2.3 Brotherly Love for One Another (4:9-12)

9 Περί δὲ τῆς φιλαδελφίας οὐ χρείαν ἔχετε γράφειν ὑμῖν, αὐτοὶ γὰρ ὑμεῖς θεοδίκαι ἔστε εἰς τὸ ἀγαπᾶν ἦλθοι, ¹⁰ καὶ γὰρ ποιεῖτε αὐτὸ εἰς πάντας τούς ἀδελφοὺς [τοὺς] ἐν ὑπηρεσίᾳ τῆς Μακεδονίας. παρακαλοῦμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, περισσοτέρως μᾶλλον ¹¹ καὶ φιλοτιμεῖσθαι ἑσυχάζεσθαι καὶ πράσσετι σά μια καὶ ἑργάζεσθαι ταῖς ἰδίαις ἑρείπῃ ὑμῶν, καθὼς ὑμῖν παραμελεῖσθαι. ¹² ἤνα παραπλήστητε εὐσκημόνως πρὸς τοὺς ἕξω καὶ μηδενὸς χρείαν ἔχετε.
After the exhortation on sanctification, motivated by their relationship with God, Paul proceeded to the subject of love within the faith community. He begins with περὶ ὅς formula to signal the introduction of a new topic. Again, it emphasizes that the subject matter was not new, but it was part of the original teaching of Paul.\(^{208}\). Paul by that construction commended the Christian community in Thessalonica for their mutual love in their rhetorical situation and encouraged them to increase in the love for one another.

On the subject of mutual love, Paul introduces a rare term \(\phiιλαδελφία\)\(^{209}\) instead of the frequently used word ἀγάπη, utilized in the other epistles.\(^{210}\) A closer look at the opening statement reveals that Paul employs \(\phiιλαδελφία\), as a metaphor to exhort the congregation to gain a genuine feeling of kingship among the faith community. It was in effect to provide a basis for building community life among them.\(^{211}\) It implies that \(\phiιλαδελφία\) was used as boundary forming metaphor to distinguish between the Thessalonian Christians and their fellow citizens. And since it concerned all members of the faith community, he used the more inclusive term \(\phiιλαδελφία\) rather than ἀγάπη which sounded exclusive. The use of this rare term indicates a horizontal love which must exist among those within the faith community. He indicates mutual love as another specific means by which they could live to please God, in addition to holiness in sexual conduct (cf. 4:3-8).\(^{212}\)

This exhortation leans back to an earlier supplication the Apostle Paul made on behalf of the church in the transitional prayer (3:12-13) after the justification of his delay in visit-

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\(^{208}\) He mentions mutual love to affirm its importance in the exhortation. However, Malherbe notes that its usage in the construction of the opening sentence is a feature of a parenetic letter found in ancient moral exhortations. Similarly, Stowers and Weima concur and indicate that the formula is a paralipsis used when writing parenetic letters to encourage people in good conduct, as was in the case of the Thessalonians.

\(^{209}\) Statistically, \(\phiιλαδελφία\) occurs only five times in the New Testament and only twice in the Pauline epistles (Rom 12:10 and 1 Thess. 4:9, Hebrews 13:1, 1 Pet 1:22 and 2 Pet 1:7).


\(^{211}\) Wanamaker, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 160.

\(^{212}\) Weima, *1-2 Thessalonians*, 283.
ing the community. Weima argues that there is no obvious link between the issue of sexual conduct and mutual love. In his opinion, the two seem incongruent. Nonetheless, from a careful analysis of the text, I concur with Fee that there is no sharp distinction between them. Paul exhorted the community not to wrong their fellow brothers in abusive sexual conduct; take work seriously and avoid over-dependence on other members of the church as means of demonstrating mutual love. The relationship between these three actions for Paul is built on the common reason of love.

He admonished that failure to work, with the consequent over-reliance on other members of the faith community, amounts to an abuse of mutual love (φιλαδελφία). In such situation, they burden people, rather than contributing to the needs of others. It amounts to exploitation of other Christians instead of sharing love. Paul does indicate that such a life does not please God, which means Christians must not use divine principles in exploiting others for their personal gain. It formed part of the ethical life Paul expected from the church while they await the coming of Christ to become worthy citizens of God’s kingdom at the Parousia.

Paul used the paralipsis to indicate that they have been taught by God to love each other (θεοδίοντοι ἑστε εἰς τὸ ἀγαπάνε ἀλλήλους). Ultimately, as they abound in the love of God for one another as members of the faith community, they would be able to express mutual love for their brothers and sisters. Because of the love of God, they were already exercising φιλαδελφία: the exhortation is to abound in it (περισσεύειν μᾶλλον). Thus ἀγαπάω, being the love of God propels believers to exercise φιλαδελφία among themselves. We infer from the above that the relationship between φιλαδελφία and ἀγάπη cannot be underestimated in living to please God. Consequently, as the Thessalo-

\(^{213}\) Weima, I-2 Thessalonians, 283.
nians were showing love in the midst of the persecution, and even extending it to the believers in Macedonia, their action was commendable. Hence, the paralipsis was not a rebuke but a commendation and a further encouragement to increase in the practice of φιλαδελφία.

In addition, Paul exhorted them to consider it an honour to live quiet lives, concentrate on their affairs, and work with their own hands just as they were commanded during the founding mission. At the end of the pericope, Paul resumes the infinitive. The sentence is built on four infinitive verbs: φιλοτιμεῖσθαι, ἡσυχάζειν, πρᾶσσειν, ἐργάζεσθαι. The implicit command inherent in the use of the infinitive is a signal of a call to action towards a definite result. The rhetorical function of this construction, therefore, is to compel the community to excel in the things he was exhorting them about just like φιλαδελφία. Meaning the use of the infinitives was to encourage them to increase in what they were doing before and not a rebuke of these ways of life which pleases God.215

God taught them to love one another in order to develop the feeling of oneness because of their faith and the consummation of their salvation. Paul, therefore, in view of their rhetorical situation emphasizes mutual love to create a new sense of identity, sense of belonging and commitment among the members of the church. Judging from their cultural and religious background, there was no binding relationship between them outside this new Christian identity that merits such expression of love towards each other.

Moreover, the reference to expression of love towards the Macedonians fosters a positive relationship and affirms the link Paul always established between the communities he founded. For example, it made it possible for Christians traveling along the region to receive assistance from their brethren when the need arises, as the Macedonian Christians

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215 This affirms the position of Wanamaker that the paralipsis is a rhetorical device employed to indicate something they pretend to gloss over. Wanamaker, Commentary on the Greek Text, 159.
always received from the Thessalonians anytime they visited the port city and Roman administrative centre.

Wanamaker observes further that the call to live quiet lives and concentrate on their own affairs has a more public than individual sense.\textsuperscript{216} He challenged the opinion of Frame that this exhortation has no public and political connotations. In his proposition, he maintains that the drastic conversion of the Thessalonians brought a huge public outcry, because of the possible socio-economic, political as well as religious implications of their action on the community which resulted in the intense persecution against them by both the Jews and their fellow Gentiles. It positioned them in the public sphere as they faced several consequences for the action of their faith. This implies the exhortation “to aspire to live a quiet life” (4:11) was a practical admonition to avoid anything that will arouse any further public attention, by living a low-profile life that would eschew them from any further attack from the public. In effect, they were not to mingle or interfere in the activities of the other citizens to bring any attention to their Christian moral and ethical requirements, which is an affront to that of the other citizens.

The exhortation further affirms that Paul did not underrate manual labour but rather highlights it. Scholars have expressed varied opinions about what Paul meant by the phrase ἔργα τὰ ἑαυτοῦ ἐργάσθαι (4:11). Some are of the view that it was against the idleness of some members of the community because of the imminent anticipation of the Parousia. However, Roland Hock argues that Paul was offering a general advice against unacceptable occupations and exhorting them to manual labour.\textsuperscript{217} According to Ascough, the core of the Thessalonian community com-

\textsuperscript{216} Frame, \textit{A Critical and Exegetical Commentary}, 161.

prised of hand-workers who shared in Paul’s trade. He notes that Paul in the *exordium* of the letter establishes his *ethos* which covers his blameless moral conduct, accountability to God, his exhortation and encouragement. In 2:9, he emphasizes the nature of his ministry when he was with them in the founding mission that τὸν κόπον ἡμῶν καὶ τὸν μόχθον· νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ἐργαζόμενοι πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἐπιμαρησαί τινα ὑμῶν ἐκπρῆξαμεν εἰς ἰμάς τὸ εἰκαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ. The use of ἐργαζόμαι in conjunction with κόπον and μόχθον gives the inclination that his labour was very physical and challenging.

There is a parallel construction of this exhortation in 1 Cor 4:12, where Paul repeats the phrase ἐργαζόμενοι ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσίν while describing the nature of his work. Perhaps it is based on his nature of work that he exhorts his converts to engage in work that involves physical labour. Therefore, he exhorts them to continue to live in a manner which is pleasing to God as they were taught to do (4:1) and adds further that they should work with their own hands. In doing this, he reemploys ἐργάζομαι in the infinitive present with the rhetorical function of exerting implicit command to take to work. Although he did not repeat κόπος and μόχθος in the infinitive clause, the reference to ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσίν ὑμῶν alludes to strenuous physical labour which characterized his own work.

In summing up, while many people may have a negative attitude towards manual work, Paul presents it as a way of life that is pleasing to God. In effect, Paul describes work as an ethical and moral conduct that brings honour to the person and fosters mutual love. In their daily occupations, God would be glorified, and the community can live in holiness in anticipation of the return of Christ.

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3.3 Conclusion

The exhortations to the Thessalonians communicate an important message. They are ethical exhortations given to support the congregation on their way to meet the *eschaton*. More importantly, the construction at the opening of the exhortation using λοιπόν ὁυν and ἀδελφοί, in addition to the quiet tone of the wording in this exhortation, refers to the specific situation in Thessalonica. Based on the report he received, there is nothing Paul could blame the community for. Rather, he wants to challenge them to a higher form of life, characterized by holiness, honour and love. To reach the aim, he warned them against immorality, impurity and from any behaviour that is not pleasing to God. Therefore, he employs these verses to exhort them to be pure, live holy life, be hard working to please God, to testify of their faith and to prepare for the Parousia of Christ.

This chapter establishes that the prevailing circumstances of the Thessalonians and the expectation of the Parousia accounted for Paul’s frequent use of the root ἁγιαζ- to describe the life that is pleasing to God which he indicates as the will of God for the community. Thus, the exhortation sought to warn the people against such excesses that might occur among them which are contrary to what is required of them as people living in an eschatological existence.

The synthesis points out that the socio-cultural background of Thessalonica, a big city and an important seaport, was conducive to all manner of immoral acts. To prevent the community to follow the common path, Paul reminds their call to ‘holiness’ as preparation for the imminent Parousia.

Furthermore, it explains that holiness of life includes φιλαδελφία on the basis of reciprocal love (ἀγαπάω ἀλληλου). Thus, the love of God, which is expressed in the love

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220 Ibid., 359.
towards those who share the same faith and filial relation with God, must increase among them. This love in my view is universal as it spreads among and within members of the faith community without any consideration of blood relation. It is solely on the principle of God’s love which binds them together through faith in Christ. In demonstrating this love the believers are exhorted to live quiet and peaceable lives, mind their own business and also engage in acceptable work.

The use of infinitive verbs in the various subunits of the section as well as the rhetorical devices helps to underscore the exhortative purpose of the epistle. The rhetorical functions of the devices he employed enabled him to present his ideas as an exhortation that carried implicit commands and demands compliance by the faith community. The various subunits were linked together with the disclosure formulae to present a coherent exhortation which establishes the purpose of the author. Paul, aware of the rhetorical situation which encompasses the socio-cultural, economic and religious context of Thessalonica, exhorts the church to live in a manner worthy of salvation at the Parousia of Christ.

The next chapter continues the textual analysis. It presents an exegesis of the eschatological motif in the text. It analyses 4:13—5:11 to discuss Paul’s presentation of the Parousia, death before the Parousia, dates and times in the eschatological anticipation.
CHAPTER FOUR

ESCHATOLOGICAL MOTIVATION (4:13—5:11)

4.1 Introduction

Having believed Paul’s gospel that God’s Son will return soon and rescue them from the impending wrath, the Thessalonians became disconcerted about the fate of some members of the community who had died before the Parousia. Does their death mean their faith had been in vain and for that matter will not receive the final salvation upon Christ’s return? This constitutes the rhetorical problem that confronted Paul in this text.

This chapter analyses Paul’s eschatological teaching to the Thessalonians in 4:13—5:11. It examines Paul’s use of eschatological passages in the epistle; it discusses death before the Parousia (4:13-18), which was the major issue of contention among the members, the issue of date and times (5:1-3), and the call to live as children of the day (5:4-11). A summary of the chapter and a conclusion of the exegetical analysis complete the chapter.

4.2 The Use of Eschatological Passages in 1 Thessalonians

The use of eschatological motif by Paul is important for the interpretation of this passage. In fact, the larger context offers six brief eschatological passages placed at important points in Paul’s discourse.\(^{221}\) We observe, however, that when the content of these citations is analysed, it is evident that they function more than simply punctuating the epistle. In addition to their role as structural discourse markers, first, they evoke concepts and images with which the Thessalonians are already familiar. They contain phrases such as “wait for His Son from heaven” and “the wrath that is coming” (1:10), as well as Paul's frequent reference to Jesus’ “coming” (παροσζία, 2:19, 3:13, 5:23).

\(^{221}\) The epistle contains six brief eschatological passages (1:10; 2:12; 2:16; 2:19; 3:13; and 5:23), each of which occurs at important points in the discourse.
They appear to function as something of a “code” for a larger body of eschatological information which the audiences already know. Furthermore, these concepts and images replicate many of the significant themes of early Christian eschatology, for instance, the expectancy of the looming return of Christ. Thus, Paul reminds them that their conversion has led to an eager expectation for the return of Christ “from heaven,” an event his discourse indicates is imminent. These eschatological passages also presume the separation between the righteous and the wicked at the judgment, as well as the punishments and rewards that each is expected to receive from God. The Thessalonians, Paul reminds, have been rescued “from the wrath that is coming” (1:10) because of their faith.

In addition, these brief eschatological pronouncements look forward to the themes which Paul discusses in greater detail in the major eschatological passages. For instance, 1:10 emphasizes the resurrection of Christ, which Paul uses as the basis for his argument relating to the resurrection of those believers who died before the Parousia (4:14). They also emphasize the ethical and moral imperatives of the Christian life (2:12; 3:13; cf. 5:23), which forestall Paul's elaborate appeal to sombreness and self-discipline in anticipation of Jesus’ imminent return (5:1-11).

Finally, judgment is often implied in a number of these verses, with its promise of wrath for the wicked and salvation for the righteous (1:10; 2:12, 16), which also anticipates a similar emphasis in the exhortation of 5:1-11 (5:3, 9). Thus, from a rhetorical perspective, Paul gives the impression of invoking familiar ideas and images in order to weave a continuous thread of eschatological message which runs throughout the epistle, until it is fully developed in the final chapters. It underscores the fact that the eschatological mo-

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222 Selby, “Blameless at His Coming,” 396.
223 Ibid., 397.
224 Ibid.
225 Ibid.
tif is communicated from the beginning to the end of the epistle with the aim of providing a well-informed understanding of the relationship between the indicative of salvation and the imperativeness of the Christian life. To this effect, the statement by Luckensmeyer that eschatology is the best hermeneutical key for understanding the epistle is plausible.\footnote{Luckensmeyer, \textit{Eschatology of I Thessalonians}, 174.}

Consequently, by interlacing these familiar languages about the end throughout the entire epistle, Paul provides a logical and emotional context for his appeals to faithfulness, brotherly love, and, especially, moral and ethical purity. His intention is to provide comfort in their life, characterized by the eschatological anticipation, and to respond to the rhetorical problem of their situation.\footnote{Selby, “Blameless at His Coming,” 397.} He uses the motif to exhort them in the strongest terms possible, insisting that they hold unwaveringly to their faith and, principally, to the ethical, moral, and communal requirements which their faith demands as evident by the rhetorical function of the verbs \textit{éρωτώμεν} and \textit{παρακαλοῦμεν}, as well as the infinitives \textit{περιπατεῖν} καὶ \textit{ἀρέσκειν} discussed in the initial exhortation (4:1-2).

The subsequent section presents an analysis of the major eschatological passage in the exhortation. It discusses the issue of death which had caused the community grief and examines how Paul used the eschatological motif to respond to the crisis situation in the church and the call to action by the church in their anticipation of the Parousia.

4.3 Death Before the Parousia (4:13-18)

\textit{4:13} Οὐ θέλομεν δὲ ἵμας ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, περὶ τῶν κοιμώμενων, ἣν μὴ λυπηθεὶς καθὼς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ οἱ μὴ ἔχουσιν ἐλπίδα. \footnote{Luckensmeyer, \textit{Eschatology of I Thessalonians}, 174.} Εἰ γὰρ πιὸ τεῖσομεν ὅτι Ἡσυχός ἄπεθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη, οὕτως καὶ ὁ θεός τοὺς κοιμήθητας διὰ τοῦ Ἡσυχοῦ ἔξει ὑμῖν καὶ ὑμῖν τῶν λογίων, ὅτι ἡμεῖς οἱ ἔχοντες οἱ περιελποῦμεν εἰς τὴν παροῦ σιὰν τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μὴ φθέγγομεν τοὺς κοιμήθητας. \footnote{Selby, “Blameless at His Coming,” 397.} Τοῦτο γὰρ ἵμας λέγομεν ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου, ὅτι ἡμεῖς οἱ ἔχοντες οἱ περιελποῦμεν εἰς τὴν παροῦ σιὰν τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μὴ φθέγγομεν τοὺς κοιμήθητας. Οὕτως ὁ κύριος ἐν κελεύσατι, ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ, καταβησθείται ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστήσονται
With the rhetorical problem in view, Paul discusses another subject matter in response to the major issue confronting the community after exhorting them to live in a way desirable by God. He addresses the issues of Christ’s return and other issues related to the fate of the dead in Christ prior to the Parousia. This section looks at matters relating to the resurrection at the Parousia, a description of the events of the coming of Christ and the call to encourage the believers in their eschatological anticipation.

4.3.1 Those Who Have Fallen Asleep (4:13)

Paul immediately sets out to address the problem of death, which is a cause of social disintegration (4:13-18). He begins with a combination of two transitional devices: a vocative and a disclosure formula. The use of the vocative ἀδελφοί is not new because it has occurred several times in the pericope. Best maintains that it adds no new significance to the meaning of the text but only functions as an epistolary convention to indicate transitions in the text.

In this section, Paul does not introduce the theme with a point of departure, but instead with the semi-formulaic construction, Οὐ θέλομεν δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελθοί (4:13), combined with an introductory περί. This announces the theme of the paragraph, οἱ κοιμωμένοι (“those who are asleep”). He used the verb θέλω to open the formula in a unique way. In most constructions, in fact, θέλω takes a complementary infinitive, but in this expression, he places the pronoun ὑμᾶς between the verbs in a normal position as the subject of the infinitive; making it a unique construction. Rhetorically, this construction

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228 This is the ninth appearance of the vocative in the letter where Paul uses this filial language to address the Thessalonians. See 1:4; 2:1, 9, 14, 17; 3:7; 4:1, 10b; 5:1, 4, 12, 25.
229 Best, Thessalonians, 184.
makes the address specific to the Thessalonians to elicit their utmost attention to the subject he was going to address. The position of ἀγνοέω (not to know; be unaware) makes it contributes to the verbal idea of the clause to make the brothers (ἀδελφοί) aware of the fate of the dead members of the community. The verb coming after the vocative strengthens the call to the ἀδελφοί and helps in emphasizing that they are the focus of the discussion since they were the ones grieving. Invariably, Paul introduced the first theme of the section on not leaving the Thessalonians to be ignorant about the Christian dead.

As indicated above, the disclosure formula appears with two negative particles which rhetorically serve as an emphatic equivalent of the positive formula “we want you to know” or “I make known to you”\(^{231}\) (1 Cor. 12:3; 15:1, 2 Cor. 8:1; Gal 1:11). The use of the double negative strengthens the argument of the parenetic nature of the epistle as he was being mindful of the rhetorical situation.

Scholars such as Weima and Morris posit that the disclosure formula introduces a new topic taken up within the document. It indicates that the subject matter Paul introduced in the sub-unit is a new material, which has not been taught to the Thessalonians. Thus, affirming the fact that the discussion on the death of the Thessalonians was a new argument.\(^{232}\) But other commentators have challenged the function of the disclosure formula in this sub-unit. They argue that the construction δὲ …… περὶ τῶν κοιμωμένων, (“now concerning those who are asleep”) suggests that the matter discussed in 4:13-18 was either raised in communication from the community to Paul where they asked questions which included the fate of the dead, or more probably in the report of Timothy.\(^{233}\)

\(^{231}\) Paul uses the positive form of this formula in some other epistles (1 Cor. 11:3; Phil 1:12; Col. 2:11).

\(^{232}\) Weima, I-2 Thessalonians, 307, Best, Thessalonians, 184, Morris, I and 2 Thessalonians, 135.

\(^{233}\) Wanamaker, Commentary on the Greek Text, 167. Frame, Critical and Exegetical Commentary, 140, Malherbe, “Exhortation in 1Thessalonians,” 217. As discussed under the rhetorical problem, there is no reference to an earlier communication between Paul and the community prior to Timothy’s visit and this letter.
Conversely, Weima citing the work of Mitchell indicates that the formula was frequently used in letters that do not respond to any earlier questions in a correspondence. Therefore, it is conceivable that the formula introduces the new subject matter Paul discusses in reaction to Timothy’s report. Although it could be plausible, Timothy reported it based on his interaction with the church. There is no evidence to that effect in the text. Hence, between Paul and the community, it is a new subject, because they never discussed these details of the resurrection at the Parousia in their earlier encounter.

From the larger context of the text, the material is unfamiliar because the subject matter of 4:13-18 is new compared to that of 4:1-12 and 5:1-11, where the author repeatedly alludes to the fact that these were part of his teachings during his founding mission in Thessalonica (4:1, 2, 6, and 11, 5:2). As a result, the expressions “you know” and “there is no need to write to you,” which the apostle often used to refer to previous knowledge, are not present in 4:13-18.234 Probably because Paul’s teaching on the resurrection among the Thessalonians did not provide sufficient details on the specific manner of the resurrection at the Parousia, it contributed to the grief over the deceased members. Therefore, the explication on the manner and position of the dead at the Parousia constitutes a corpus of new information. This view corroborates the position of scholars235 who identify this as the rhetorical problem that confronted Paul, and it forms part of the elements that were lacking in their faith which he sought to supply (cf. 1 Thess. 3:10).

It is worthy to note that other expressions of similar nature appear in five other passages in the writings of Paul (Rom 1:13; 11:25; 1 Cor 10:1; 12:1; 2 Cor 1:8). Fitzmyer opines that “it introduces something that he considers important and wishes to make explicit.”236 For instance, in 2 Cor 1:8 and Rom 1:13, the formula is used to disclose information

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234 For more discussion on this position see Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 307-8.
235 Best, Thessalonians, 180, Wanamaker, Commentary on the Greek Text, 62.
about Paul’s personal circumstances which was hitherto unknown to the recipients of the letter. This confirms Collins’ observation that:

Paul uses two variants of the classic disclosure formula, one with the double negative … the other in a positive form. He uses the positive form when he supposes that the information is already known to his addressees (11:2; cf. 12:3; 15:1; Gal 1:11). The form with the double negative is used to impart new information (12:1; Rom 1:13; 11:25; 2 Cor 1:8).237

This suggests that in 4:13 Paul was indeed disclosing new information, or at the least provides a more comprehensive discussion of his earlier eschatological discourse.238 The Thessalonians expressed their anxiety for the death of at least a member of the congregation. We can infer that probably Paul’s initial eschatological teaching did not elaborate on the issue of believers who die before the Parousia. Foster posits that perhaps for his hasty departure, Paul had insufficient time to relate the complexity of his eschatological teaching, or perhaps more likely, given his belief in the imminence of the Parousia,239 he may not have previously contemplated this possibility.240

Dunn on one part agrees that it is a prominent feature in 1-2 Thessalonians but denies its presence in 1 Corinthians, Romans, and Philippians. I share the view of Dunn that Paul considered the possibility of death before the Parousia. Because Paul’s usage of the first personal pronoun ἡμῖν (1 Thess. 4:17) is an inclusive term, which affirms his expression of the possibility of the event occurring at his time. Therefore, the fact that the date and time are unknown, and the coming of the Lord is taught to be imminent, Paul was right in putting all his readers, including himself, in a state of readiness for the event, as sug-

239 Parousia is a frequent term used by Paul used by Paul. Out of about 24 usages in the New Testament, 14 occur in Pauline writings with 7 in Thessalonians. Thrice in 1 Thessalonians the Parousia is used in relation to Christ where he uses the dative construction of the term together with the genitive of Θροοῦ.
gested by the presence of ἠμείζ. Hence, the formula was used by Paul to introduce the discussion on the details of the Parousia present in this subsection.

The new topic was introduced with the aorist participle of κοιμάομαι, an euphemism for dead. This rhetorical device has the function to suggest the real situation of the dead members: they are not lost (dead) but they are in a ‘between’ situation (sleeping). They are waiting a new day; the Parousia of the Lord. It also precludes a direct reference to the death of the members of the church, which was causing grief. Probably for the same reason, our hypothesis is confirmed by vv. 14-15, where Paul used ἀποθηνηκόω in reference to the death of Jesus, and κοιμήθηντας for the dead of the Thessalonian believers.

By inference, the death of Christ caused them no grief, because it has already been overcome by His resurrection. So, he could speak about it in plain language; but he had to shroud that of the Thessalonian believers in a figure of speech because of the impact of the deaths on the community. On the backdrop of the rhetorical situation, Paul used this rhetorical feature to insist on the “sleeping’ state of the dead in order to give the right perspective to the community.  

4.3.2 Concerning the Resurrection of the Dead (4:14-15)

In response to their uncertainty, Paul provides a description of the end-time that places the righteous dead in a favoured position at the Parousia. Paul stays focused on the con-

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241 The verb in the literal sense means “those who are asleep.” It is used figuratively by biblical authors to refer to the state of being dead. The literal meaning of κοιμάομαι “to fall asleep” has no Pauline reference, but the figurative meaning is found in some of Paul’s writings as well as some New Testament writings. Example of references in Paul (1 Cor. 7:39; 11:30; 15:6,18,20, 51; 1 Thess. 4:13, 14, 15) and other New Testament passages (Matt 27:52; Acts 7:60; 13:36; 2 Pet. 3:4).

242 Weima notes that the description of death as sleep was pervasive in the Greco-Roman world as it appeared in the writings of both Greek and Latin scholars. The euphemism is also found in many Old Testament and intertestamental writings. For references on the usage of this euphemism see Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 309.

243 The combination of δικ with κοιμήθηντας is therefore consonant with the thinking of Paul as demanded by the parallelism of the sentence. It affirms the Pauline belief of the resurrection of Christ as basis for the resurrection of those who are asleep (ie. died in Christ).
tent of the Thessalonians’ concern, by describing the process by which the faithful dead will be raised from their slumber. The foundation for his argument is grounded in the belief that Jesus was resurrected, a belief both he and the Thessalonians (living and dead) held in common (εἰ γὰρ πιστεύομεν ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη). Its logical consequence was the expectation that ὁ θεὸς τοὺς κοιμήθηντας διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἀξεῖ σὺν αὐτῷ (“God will bring with Jesus those who have died.” v. 14). Therefore, in the conditional construction, he declares to them the state of those who have died (v. 15). V.14 contains three significant clauses: 14a, εἰ γὰρ πιστεύομεν; 14b, ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν; 14c, καὶ ἀνέστη. Together they constitute the protasis of the conditional construction. The construction begins with γὰρ, indicating that the verse explains and supports the claim made in v.13.

Substantial to this analysis is the shift to the “inclusive we” (πιστεύομεν) in the protasis. The use of πιστεύομεν in referring to the death and resurrection of Jesus appears more of a creedal formula than a ‘kerygmatic’ assertion. He, therefore, cites this formula as a rhetorical strategy with the effect of increasing the authority of his words. The term πιστεύομεν, “we believe,” alludes to the fact that the death and resurrection of Jesus is a generally accepted element of the Christian faith. It is also a rhetorical device to create a feeling of unity in faith, a common ground or as a shared belief.

The belief in the resurrection correlates with the implication that those who died in Christ will resurrect with Him. Paul underlines the common faith in the death and resurrection of Christ as the basis of his teaching about the resurrection of the believers. This inclusive language leans support to the comfort he sought to offer to the Thessalonians.

244 Foster, “Eschatology of the Thessalonian Correspondence,” 8.
245 Selby, “Blameless at His Coming,” 401.
246 Jackson, “Greek Word Order,” 17.
247 Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 317.
For once they know that the dead in Christ who shared the same faith with the living and Paul himself, will resurrect, the hope of the living would be kept alive. For death, which became the cause of grief to the faith community, does not alter the purpose of God for those who live to please him. Therefore, Jesus’s resurrection affirms that the purpose of God cannot be halted by death; the future then is always hopeful for all who remain in Christ or die in Him.

The phrase ὅηι Ἰηζοῦς ἀπέθανεν can be viewed as a confessional clause used to support the claim made in v.13. Though the reference to Ἰηζοῦς is not new,248 it is significant in this subunit because Paul in the attempt to comfort the church used familiar information. He placed Ἰηζοῦς in a preverbal position as an introductory topic249 for this second, clause to mean that as they believed that Jesus is the Son of God who died to give them salvation, the dead in Christ will also be saved by their faith in Him. The third clause, καὶ ἀνέστη which concludes the protasis is joined to the second clause with the conjunction καὶ which presents the nuance of what the Thessalonians know and have believed about Ἰηζοῦς. It implies that Jesus’ death and resurrection were foundational to the faith of the Thessalonian community.250

Hence, he combines ἀπέθανεν and ἀνέστη to reaffirm and assure them of the fate of the dead in Christ. By implication “For if we believe that concerning Jesus, he died and rose….” (14a-c), then there is hope for those who died in Him. This may explain why in v.15b the apostle uses the strongest form of negation by combining οὐ μὴ with the aorist subjunctive φθάσωμεν to construct an emphatic future negation, in asserting the position of the dead at the Parousia. He expresses the notion that those who are alive at the Parou-

248 Paul has used the word Ἰησοῦς ten times in 1 Thessalonians, and thus it is old information to the Thessalonians.
250 Morris indicates that the resurrection is the guarantee for the Christian hope; it is the great triumphant act that concludes the divine quality of the Christian gospel.
sia will certainly not precede those believers who have already died having faith in Christ’s resurrection. Such an emphatic negation serves as a good corrective tool considering the degree of grief the community was experiencing.

To correspond to 4:14a-c, Paul begins the next clause with οὔτως followed by καὶ. The conjunction καὶ is acting additively and marks the clause that follows.\(^{251}\) It also suggests the elision of the words πιστεύομεν ὅτι in the construction of the clauses 14d-e. Linking these clauses together, Paul suggests that God will raise the dead because of their belief that Jesus died and rose. The statement, in my opinion, is new information that explicates the cause of the resurrection of the dead.

This interpretation is tenable because the last clause has three elements that aid this interpretation. First, the nominative noun ὁ θεός and second, the substantive participle τοῦ Κομμηθέντας which are joined in this construction. The relationship between them is explained by the rest of the clause. Thus, Paul indicates that the prepositional phrase διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, which is the third element, explains the relationship between God and the Christians who have fallen asleep which makes the interpretation of 14a-c centered on faith in Jesus. It is because 14a-c focuses on Jesus, whom Paul indicates that he died and rose (ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη). He therefore inserts ὁ θεός in the protasis to indicate who raised Jesus from the dead. Hence, if they believe this fact about Him, then they should also have faith in what he says in 14d-e which is about God and those who have fallen asleep.

What is significant in this verse is the focalization in διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, a theological statement describing the manner of the dead resurrection. Hence, the hope of the Thessalonians for their dead members should be based on their faith in God who is working through

\(^{251}\) Jackson, “Greek Word Order,” 18.
Jesus, as one who has already fulfilled the hope of resurrection in His own resurrection. Frame corroborates this view:

As we are convinced that Jesus died and that God raised him from the dead, so also must we believe that since the indwelling Christ is the guarantee of the resurrection of the believer, that God will raise from the dead those who died through Jesus and will lead them on along with him.

We can infer from this statement that with Christ and the Spirit being present in the Christian, there is the guarantee that when believers die the believers will continue to be in Christ until the Parousia, when they will be raised to life by the same indwelling Spirit of God that raised Christ (Rom. 8:11).

The assurance Paul gives is founded on two justifications: the acceptance of Jesus’ resurrection as victory over death (4:14), and the fact that the dead in Christ will rise first since they died in Christ. Morris argues that the understanding of the prepositional phrase διὰ ής Ἰησοῦ poses some difficulty as to who will be resurrected since it modifies the participle τοῦ κοιμηθέντας. Explaining the two views of death in the New Testament (those who die in Christ and vice versa) he indicates that Christ transformed the position of all those who are in Him by his death because he bore the wages of sin and endured the worst consequence of death. This act demystifies the horror of death in the case of those who die in Him, for this reason Paul refers to their death as sleep.
Therefore, in the words of Bruce cited by Morris, he maintains that “Death ‘through Jesus’ is but a prelude to resurrection ‘with Jesus.’”

The second assurance with the phrase “by the word of the Lord” (ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου), however, has generated debate among scholars as to what is the precise nature of the ‘word.’ Pahl maintains that the phrase “a word of the Lord” does not denote a specific tradition, but Paul used the expression in an encompassing manner, to refer to his proclamation of the gospel. Wanamaker suggests two interpretations for the reading of the expression. First, that Paul may be quoting what he believes to be an actual saying of Jesus. Second, that Paul employed a saying uttered in the name of the risen Lord or by an early Christian prophet or it probably originates from Paul himself.

Similarly, Weima advances various propositions for the interpretation of the expression but adduces more evidence to support the second option. The second proposition is that Paul cited a saying of Jesus in the gospels, though he does not quote it in the manner with which he employs scripture passages from the synoptic tradition in some of his other epistle (1 Thess. 4:15-16). He argues that Paul usually distinguished his teachings from that of Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 7:10-12). Therefore, the reference to “a word of the Lord”, suggest that he was making specific reference to a teaching of Jesus he received. Furthermore, it signals a sentient use of material that is traceable to the historical Jesus rather than a prophetic message in the name of the Lord.

256 Morris, Thessalonians, 139.
258 For more discussion on the interpretation of the phrase “a word of the Lord”, see Wanamaker, Commentary on the Greek Text, 169-71. In my view, the statement could have come from Paul himself and not a word uttered in the name of the Lord or any prophet as Wanamaker suggests. This is because knowing how straightforward Paul is in his speeches and writings, he could go forward to say it.
259 Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 320.
260 Ibid.
261 Ibid.
The scholars present similar interpretation of the phrase ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου, except for the fact that Wanamaker seems to employ an apocalyptic motif in his interpretation. I am inclined to agree with him based on a comparison of Matt. 24:29-31 and in 1 Thess. 4:16-17 as illustrated in the table below.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Thess. 4:16-17</th>
<th>Matt. 24:29-31</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος ἐν κελεύσματι, ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ Εὐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ, καταβήσεται ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστήσονται πρῶτον,</td>
<td>29 ρῶν ἐκεῖνων ὁ Υἱὸς σκοτισθῆσεται, καὶ ἡ σελήνη οὐ δύσει τὸ φέγγος αὐτῆς, καὶ οἱ ἀστέρες πεσοῦνται ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, καὶ αἱ δυνάμεις τῶν οὐρανῶν σαλευθῆσον.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 ἐπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἀμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀρπαγράμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἁέρα· καὶ αὗτος πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ ἐσόμεθα.</td>
<td>30 καὶ τότε φανεῖται τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν οὐρανῷ, καὶ τότε κοίσουνται πάσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ὁφθοῦνται τῶν υἱῶν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενοι δυνάμεως καὶ δόξης πολλῆς: 31 καὶ ἀποστείλεται τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ μετὰ σάλπιγγος μεγάλης, καὶ ἐπισυνάξουσιν τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν πεσάρων ἀνέμων.</td>
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Table 4.1: Synopsis of Matt. 24:29-31 and in 1 Thess. 4:16-17

The two passages have similar poetic structure. Matthew presents the coming of the Lord with apocalyptic imagery of cosmic disorder and darkness. Paul, on the other hand, avoids any reference to cosmic disorder because of his intention to comfort his readers. However, both writers employ similar elements: the Lord appearing in the clouds (1Thess.4:17c; Matt. 24:30c), from heaven (1Thess. 4:16c; Matt. 24:30a), with angels (1Thess. 4:16b; Matt. 24:31a), a trumpet call (1 Thess. 4:1b; Matt. 24:31a), and gathering of the people of God (1 Thess. 4:16c-17b; Matt. 24:31b). It is, therefore, plausible that Paul used the teaching of the Lord concerning the end time in this exhortation, and also because apocalyptic genre was very common in the first century.
Nevertheless, despite these specific exegetical disagreements, the overall meaning of Paul's assurance to the Thessalonians is evident. Thus, in this earliest surviving teaching on the Parousia in a Christian context, the assurance concerning the participation of the dead in the events of Christ’s second coming is connected with the theological basis of the confidence in the resurrection of Jesus. Paul by this construction reaffirms that Christian believers are different from the Gentiles since they have eternal hope. Death cannot obstruct such hope, for Jesus’ death and resurrection is definitive. Therefore, “If God had the power and graciousness to raise Jesus, they can be confident that God will bring with Jesus the believers who have fallen asleep when Jesus returns.”

Furthermore, the instrumental use of ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου is a rhetorical strategy employed to make the exhortation on the Parousia authoritative. Judging from the rhetorical situation, Paul needed an emphatic message that is able to assuage the fears of his readers. His argumentation, therefore, is not only dramatic and poetically constructed, but is passionately stimulating and backed with divine authority as Wanamaker states “by placing his assurance that the living would not have precedence over the dead at the coming of the Lord under the rubric ‘a word of the Lord,’ Paul attributed the highest possible authority to his assertion in v. 15b.”

After Paul summarized in his own words the authoritative word of the Lord to highlight its significance for the rhetorical situation, he cites this word of the Lord in v. 15

Τούτῳ γὰρ ὑμῖν λέγομεν ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου,
οτί ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶμες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μὴ φθάσωμεν τοὺς κοιμηθέντας.

263 Wanamaker, Commentary on the Greek Text, 171.
He, thus, explicates what he presents earlier in v. 13 as the explanatory nature of the clause demonstrates. The position of τούτο functions as focal element marker and points to a new information emphasizing its importance in the long clause on the second line. The second clause contains, in fact, the reason why they must not grieve but be comforted. The pronoun ἡμεῖς appears again v. 14 where the pronoun is inclusive referring to Paul, the living, and the dead Thessalonians. But in this clause, its usage is exclusive denoting only those who will be alive at the Parousia. This means τούτο marks those who will live until the παροσία of Jesus as important, but they will by no means precede the deceased Christians.

The construction explicates v. 13: the dead will precede the living in participating in the events of the Parousia. The rhetorical effect of this construction is that Paul reverses the conclusions that the Thessalonians may have reached, causing grief, and anxiety, that the dead are not disadvantaged, but rather, will be privileged at the Parousia.264 Thus, Paul’s response offers a vision of the end in which the dead actually come first.

Paul begins his explanation of why dead believers will precede the living by employing a very long marked focal element in v. 16a: ἐν κελεύθερῳ, ἐν θωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλῳ καὶ ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ which provides vital information on the events of the Parousia. It shows that the manner of Christ’s coming was apparently important to Paul, even though this does not seem to relate directly to the issue at hand, which is the position of dead Christians at the παροσία.266

265 Foster indicates that, “Paul’s expression ‘we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord’ (1 Thess. 4:15), is perhaps the clearest indication in the Pauline corpus that, at least at this stage of his life, Paul expected the Parousia to occur within his own lifetime. See Foster, “Eschatology of the Thessalonian Correspondence,” 8.
266 Jackson, “Greek Word Order,” 25.
Considerably, καὶ at the beginning of the clause in v.16b and πρῶτον at the end has an important motivating function. They suggest that the dead will rise when the Lord comes, and they will rise first. The phrase οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ functions as the topical point of departure. It is preverbal information and signals a shift from αὐτός ὁ κύριος.

To conclude, by these verses (14-15) Paul took the argument to the dead, which is the concern of this whole section.267

4.3.3 Description of the Events of the Parousia (4:16-18)

In reaction to the Thessalonians' grief over the deceased members, Paul did not only explain their fate, but also offers a powerful vision of the end (4:16-17) intended to appeal to their emotions, so that they can indeed “encourage one another with these words” (παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις - v.18). Rather than being primarily informative or argumentative, the strategic function of this eschatological vision appears to appeal to the emotions of the Thessalonians. The exhortation is structured so that a vivid, emotionally provocative vision of the Parousia is offered to corroborate what is first stated in more direct prose.

As illustrated above, in vv. 16-17 he elaborates the assertion made in v. 15 and presents it in the form of a dramatic, poetically structured, and image-filled vision. The description he provides aims at supporting the explanation in v.15. Therefore, Paul repeats verbatim in the open clause of v.17a a phrase in 15b (ἡμεῖς οἱ ζωντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι).

This takes him back to that verse in order to indicate his intention to conclude on that

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subject with the support of the detailed description provided in v. 16. By placing the adverb ἔπειξα after πρῶιον, the purpose of the clause in v.16b is made clear. What he intended to say concerning ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι follows just after that: ἀμα σὺν αὐτοῖς.

We observe from this construction that Paul used this emphasis in assuring the Thessalonians that with reference to believers who will be alive at the coming of Christ, they will together with the deceased Christians be at one place when they are ‘caught up’. It is comforting to them as he affirmed the futuristic nature of the Parousia and the fact that “those who are dead” have not missed the coming of the Lord. Therefore, as Jackson notes:

These three clauses together, which deal with the Lord, the dead in Christ, and the ones alive at the παροσζία respectively, support the claim that the living will not precede the dead in 15b and the larger statement by Paul that the Thessalonians should not grieve for their lost brothers.268

By this, we establish that there is a development in the exhortation not only to stop grieving but to live in readiness. In my opinion, it is an important point because Paul is preparing to discuss the moral implication in “facing” the Parousia. Considering the relationship between the moral implications which he intends to discuss and the Parousia, he concludes the section with the idea that those who will keep the moral implications, expressed by the inclusive ‘we,’ “will be with the Lord.” He supported it with the claim that the living will not precede the Christians who died in the Lord at the resurrection. And so with these motivating words, their fears were not only allayed but were also giving apposite hope of eternal life.

Having clarified these, he sums up by exhorting them to παρακαλεῖε ἀλλὴλους ἐν ηοῖς λόγοις τούτοις. The clause indicates another transition in the use of pronouns in this sec-

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268 Jackson, “Greek Word Order,” 27.
tion. Instead of an inclusive “we” as in v.15a (λέγομεν), he uses “you” (παρακαλείτε).
That means he transits from “exclusive we” in 13a (θέλωμεν) to “inclusive we” in 14a
(πιστεύωμεν), back to “exclusive we” in 15a (λέγομεν ) and returns to “you”
(παρακαλείτε) in v.18. These transitions suggest the closeness at which Paul identified
with the Thessalonians. Rhetorically it emphasizes his strong attachment to his converts
and supports the usage of filial language in the exhortation. The process of the Parousia
presented, as well as the discussion on resurrection, should be motivating factors to take
away every fear and sorrow because nothing bad will happen to the dead members since
they will be privileged at the Parousia.

Weima observes that “the material of vv. 16 and 17 constitute the most explicit descrip-
tion of the events surrounding Christ’s Parousia found anywhere in Paul’s writings and
probably anywhere in the whole New Testament as well.” He describes the events out-
lined in three stages as follows:

The first stage is the opening clause, ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος ἐν κελεύσματι. It begins with
ὅτι, a causal conjunction followed by the personal pronoun αὐτὸς which adds emphasis
to the noun ὁ κύριος, to stress that the Lord “himself” will come down from heaven.
Rhetorically, this is significant, because the word of the Lord which Paul cites is fol-
lowed immediately with a construction which emphasizes that not just angels but the
“Lord himself” will appear at the Parousia. This should strengthen the hope of the Thes-
salonians that the dead Christians will come with Him at His return. As Paul aims at
comforting the faith community, such a construction was appropriate in responding to
the rhetorical problem.

269 See Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 325. It is essential in any text, but especially in the apocalyptic lan-
guage that marks these two verses, to distinguish between meaning and referent: the words found here
clearly mean “trumpet,” “shout,” “snatched,” “clouds,” and so on, but may refer to other things as well. It
is, therefore, dangerous to read such passages literally, especially when the main goal is to distinguish all
the activities described so that exact the timetable of future events emerges.
There are three related apocalyptic phenomena in the first stage: the Lord descending with a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God acting as summoning calls to the dead.\(^\text{270}\) Paul used these biblical apocalyptic images of trumpet and clouds to assure the Thessalonians that God has plans for his creation and that he will not simply destroy it.\(^\text{271}\) The text reveals that the images refer to real events on the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead which will occur in the future. The images used by Paul are suggestive of an eschatological event which is both in space and time, and yet transcends space and time.\(^\text{272}\) This affirms the position of Hays that the images must not be understood literally but must be interpreted according to the context. The context in which the images are used thus suggests the kind of interpretation that must be given.\(^\text{273}\)

The second stage entails the resurrection of deceased Christians. The conjunction καί introduces the outcome of Christ’s Parousia which forms the next stage of the eschatological drama. For the first time, Paul describes the dead Christians in plain language (οἱ νεκροί) rather than the euphemistic description in the preceding verses (13, 14, and 15). The prepositional phrase οἱ νεκροί ἐν Χριστῷ describes the dead that will be resurrected at the Parousia: ἐν Χριστῷ “in Christ.” The phrase implies that those who belonged to Christ or expressed faith in Christ at the moment of their death will be resurrected. That is also to say they died as believers in Christ.\(^\text{274}\) The command may be addressed to the dead, perhaps through the agency of the archangel’s voice, since the next event described is the rising of “the dead in Christ.”\(^\text{275}\)

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\(^{270}\) Foster, “Eschatology of the Thessalonian Correspondence,” 8.


\(^{272}\) Ibid., 66.


\(^{274}\) Paul used a similar expression in 1 Cor. 15:18. Also see Rev. 14:13.

\(^{275}\) Yarbro, “Paul’s Contribution to the Hope,” 204.
The third stage of the eschatological drama is when the resurrected and living Christians will be ‘taken-up’ together in the air for the reception of the Lord. This sequence is indicated by the presence of the temporal adverb επείτα following πρῶτον. Wright observes that the expression of meeting in the cloud in a spatial sense evokes Daniel 7:13, to convey a sense of the covenant people who after enduring suffering on earth, will join the Lord’s reign in heaven.276

To correct the misunderstanding of the Thessalonians on the resurrection of the dead, he used the future middle of the verb ἀνίστημι,277 followed by the adverb πρῶτον. Compared to other usages of the adverb, its position in this phrase seems unusual because Paul often used it in the opening sections of verses. It is again followed by another adverb επείτα in v. 17. Together they help emphasize the fact that the deceased Christians will not simply rise, but they will rise first.278 With the help of these adverbs, Paul elaborates on the manner of the resurrection to encourage them that the dead will not be disadvantaged at this triumphal event but will rise first in order to participate fully in joining those alive to meet the descending Lord in the clouds. This explicates the Parousia event to take away the fears of the community.

Significant in addressing the rhetorical problem is the adverbial sense of the prepositional phrase ἀμα σὺν αὐτοῖς. The expression intimates an identical share between the dead believers and the Christians alive at the Parousia, as σὺν αὐτοῖς occurs earlier in the sentence before the future indicative of ἀρπαξώ. The addition of ἀμα to the prepositional phrase marks a simultaneous occurrence so that the dead in Christ and the Christians

277 ἀνίστημι occurs only five times, while ἐγέρω is used about thirty-five times in the Pauline writings.  
278 This affirms the position of Weima that the Thessalonians grieved not because of the resurrection but about how their resurrection will coordinate with the Parousia. See Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 330.
alive will be taken-up at the same time. By this construction, Paul seeks to reaffirm the fate of the deceased:

This adverbial sense fits the context well: just as Paul earlier summarized ‘the word of the Lord’ by asserting in the strongest language that the living believers “will certainly not precede” deceased believers (v. 15b) such that the latter group will be at some kind of disadvantage at Christ’s return, so here his loose citation of the Jesus logion similarly asserts that both the living and the dead will be taken up for the reception of the descending Lord “at the same Time.”

Paul thus used the adverbial construction to lay emphasis on what the community was struggling to comprehend which he discussed in this section. Ἀρπάζω has a positive connotation describing the taking up of believers for the purpose of receiving the Lord. To this effect, he concludes with the call to encourage one another.

Perusing the available literature, we observe that the position of this vision at the end of the epistle suggests that Paul has more in mind than simply addressing the Thessalonians’ grieving condition. Just before this text, he presents the first of two major exhortations of the epistle which focus on desired Christian life. He calls the Thessalonians to moral purity (4:1-8) and brotherly love (4:9-12). Then following this passage (4:13-18) is an additional exhortation to sobriety and watchfulness (5:1-11). These exhortations are made in view of the imminence of Christ’s return. Paul’s usage of the eschatological motif in anchoring the exhortations affirm the view of Selby that Paul’s “vision of the end” presented in the eschatological text strategically adapts the content of early Christian eschatology to meet the particular need at hand. It establishes that there is a strong relationship between this eschatological passage and the exhortations Paul presented to the Thessalonians. In his quest to comfort the community, the eschatological passage pro-

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280 Sleeper has argued that there is no suggestion in the text of a “rapture” of faithful Christians before the time of tribulation. In other words, there is no hint that Paul is referring to anything except the day of the Lord. See Sleeper, “Christ's Coming and Christian Living,” 133.
281 Selby, “Blameless at his Coming,” 403.
282 Ibid., 401.
vides some motivation for living out the ethical and moral issues discussed in the exhortations.

From the discussion of the phrase ἐν Χριζῇ and the emphasis he placed on the resurrection, it becomes imperative for Christians to live out the exhortations in order to be prepared for the coming of Christ. This is why according to Selby Paul's "vision" of 4:13-18 further contributes to his strategy of evoking an eschatological ideal in which the Thessalonians are urged to see in their lives a framework in which the call to moral purity takes on special urgency. Christians are urged to persist in faithfulness, enduring all persecutions and hardships that stand the chance of making them unqualified to be with the Lord. The believer is further encouraged to avoid the danger of losing his distinctiveness, being lukewarm and in losing the holiness required between the period of Christ's resurrection and return.

4.3.4 Paul's Pastoral Concerns (4:18)

In v.18, Paul concludes the sub-unit by returning to the pastoral concerns that commenced this section (1 Thess. 4:13). He encourages the Thessalonian believers to "comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:18). The particle ὅστε, which also functions as a conjunction superordinate points to the conclusion of the discussion in vv. 13-17 because the particle introduces an independent clause. For this reason, the two verses (13 and 18) form an inclusio in the structure base on the idea of hope. Whereas v.13 encourages the community not to grieve because the dead in Christ will not be disadvantaged at the Parousia, v. 18 calls on them to encourage one another with the detail description of the Parousia he has provided (vv. 14-17).

283 Selby, “Blameless at his Coming,” 403.
284 Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 336. Similarly, Paul used the particle to draw conclusions to important issues he discussed in some other epistles. See 1 Cor. 7:38; 11: 27, 33; 14:39; 15:58.
The verb παρακαλέω is a term Paul used frequently. It has two sets of possible interpretations. The first which denotes a command could mean “appeal, exhort, request, implore” (cf. 2:12; 4:1, 10; 5:14). The second has to do with comfort (encourage, comfort, console, and cheer up: cf. 3:2, 7; 4:18 and 5:11). The second meaning is implied in this construction since he was addressing the context of grief over deceased believers of the community.

The bases of the consolation stem from the assurance of Paul, on a word of the Lord indicating the privileged position of the deceased Christians, and that they all together will be with the Lord. The verb also affirms the parenetic nature of the text by offering consolation to the grieving Christians. This information Paul thinks should urge them to be dynamic in seeking one another out and strengthening one another. The thought of the dead and remaining Christians to be united in the presence of the Lord offers a meaning to existence and advocates the certainty of ultimate triumph for which reason they must encourage one another. Therefore, at variance to the hopelessness or despondency characterizing the manner in which non-Christians face the death of the members, Christians grieve for dead believers with hope.

In effect, in 4:13–18, Paul interprets the problem of death in positive terms. He uses the eschatological motifs not to address or explain the Thessalonians’ social disintegration (as he does, for example, in 2:13–16), but to offer a positive means for community identity and existence. Thus, the motifs of hope of resurrection, Parousia of the Lord, meet-

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285 Παρακαλέω appears fifty-four times in fifty verses in the whole of the Pauline corpus. Out of this appearance, eight of them can be found in this epistle and four times in this pericope (4:1, 10, 4:18 and 5:11)
286 Wanamaker, Commentary on the Greek Text, 176.
287 Malherbe notes that consolation was conceived of as belonging to Paraenesis. See Malherbe, “Exhortation in First Thessalonians,” 254.
288 Morris, The First Epistle to the Thessalonians, 146.
289 Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 337.
ing and being with the Lord, among others, are all intended to encourage solidarity and identity as they anticipate the coming of the Lord.290

4.4 Dates and Times (5:1-3)

The Apostle continues with the eschatological discourse in this sub-unit but shifts his focus from the deceased before the Parousia to exhort the faith community on the need for vigilance and readiness in their anticipation of the Parousia. The subject concerning the times and dates (τῶν χρόνων καὶ τῶν καιρῶν) is related to the day of the Lord. Though some scholars have tried to interpret it from the perspective of Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic and eschatology dimensions, in the context of this sub-unit, Paul uses this eschatological motif to promote his pattern of exhortation.291

In discussing this subject, he refuses to be trapped into a discussion of a precise time of the event and informs them οὐ χρείαν ἔχετε ἵμιν γράφονται. The change in subject is signaled by the use of three text markers. First, the use of the “now concerning formula” (περὶ δὲ). There is a debate on the function of the formula as to whether the subject it signals is new information or an old one. Thrice in this pericope, Paul uses the περὶ δὲ construction to introduce a new topic (see 4:9, 13).292 As explained earlier, it may be in response to the issues Timothy reported to Paul based on his visit, or what he perceived

290 Luckensmeyer, Eschatology of 1 Thessalonians, 275.
291 Ibid., 286.
292 Weima indicates that the περὶ δὲ formula is an epistolary convention not peculiar to Pauline writings but was also used by secular writers as well. This clarification is important because Paul uses this formula in several places of his letters in signaling a change in topic (1 Cor. 7:1, 25:8:1.4; 12; 16:1; 1 Thess. 4:9,13; 5:1).
to be a problem, according to his interaction with them. 293 Foster supports this assertion as he argues that the section is closely linked to the discussion on the fate of believers discussed earlier and so may appear to be old information. But the central theme of this sub-unit is an address to prepare for the day of the Lord as they were anticipating it. 294 Therefore, since the central theme of the sub-unit is different, the epistolary convention can be said to indicate this new subject that Paul was discussing in the sub-unit.

Jackson concurs that περὶ δὲ presents a new topic level in the theme though it differs from its usage in 4:13. In 5:1, the clause is preverbal and must be a marked focal element or point of departure. He submits that it is articular and accessible, implying it is old information based on the previous subject. He indicates further that χρόνων and καιρῶν refer to the timing of the day or παροσνεία. Paul thus used the two words for time simultaneously in this phrase. When used individually the words have different meanings, but in this context, they should be understood as synonyms and not hendiadys. Therefore, the clause is a thematic point of departure shifting the discussion from the previous subject. 295 Thus, though the theme is not completely new, there is a change in topic.

Conversely, Selby observes that Paul sets out to answer questions raised by the eschatological vision described in 4:13-18. He argues that the epistolary convention suggests that they already knew what he was going to respond too. That is why he follows it with the disclosure formula οὐ χρείαν ἔχετε ἵμαρτε γράψομαι and the emphatic construction (αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἄκριβῶς ὄντεο). 296

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293 Weima affirms that though some commentators expressed the notion that the epistolary convention points to a letter from the Thessalonians which Paul responded too, it is probable that the formula is in response to the report of Timothy. See Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 344.


296 Selby, “Blameless at His Coming,” 404.
Second, he uses the vocative ἀδελφοί which has also been used frequently in the letter in addressing the faith community. The position of ἀδελφοί appears to be irregular in the sentence. In most usage by Paul, it comes early in the clause. However, as a vocative, ἀδελφοί can be preverbal and unmarked. This affirms its function of the direct address of the readers and providing emphasis on the issue being discussed.

Third, the new subject is introduced by the disclosure formula οὐ χρείαν ἔχετε ἵμιν γράφεσθαι. The expression affirms Paul's reiteration of a previous instruction which he might have communicated in the founding mission. The construction functions in introducing the new theme which he says the Thessalonians have no need he writes to them. In addition, the disclosure formula has an important rhetorical function in this sub-unit. The clause οὐ χρείαν ἔχετε ἵμιν γράφεσθαι indicates Paul’s repeated use of para-leipsis. In v. 1:8 and 4:9, he used this rhetorical device to refer to certain matters there is no need to discuss but went ahead to address the subject in the subsequent verses. For example, mutual love (4:9) and times and seasons (5:1). Similarly, he employs the same device in this formula to assert he has no need to write to the faith community about the days and times of the Parousia. Yet, in the next couple of verses (5:1-3), he takes up the subject. The rhetorical function of this device is to prepare the readers to concentrate on the exhortations and take them serious in order to be prepared at the Parousia. By this claim he implies they have sufficient information about the Parousia such that they need not be afraid of its coming.

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297 As indicated earlier ἀδελφοί has the nuance of describing the filial relationship between Paul and the converts of Thessalonica but in this usage, it marks a change in topic as it is used as a direct address of the readers. For more discussion on this, see Wanamaker, Commentary on the Greek Text, 117.


299 Wanamaker observes that it is a common feature of parenetic style affirming the rhetorical species of the text. He has positioned χρείαν near ἔγω in the phrase thereby incorporating χρείαν into the verbal idea of ἔγω. By this construction χρείαν pragmatically functions as a complementary infinitive. This explains why he introduced the infinitive γράφεσθαι because it modifies χρείαν. See also Jackson, “Greek Word Order,” 30.

300 Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 345.
The Apostle begins the discussion concerning the day of the Lord and the anxiety of the community on the timing of the eschatological event with the clause αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἀκριβῶς οἴδατε. The clause laid bare the knowledge of the Thessalonians about the day of the Lord which is implicit in the paraleipsis of 5:1b. With γὰρ introducing this causal clause, the other words αὐτοὶ, ἀκριβῶς and οἴδατε have significant functions in emphasizing the subject Paul discusses.

Αὐτοὶ emphasizes that it is the Thessalonians who know accurately because it is an intensive pronoun. It, therefore, augments the initial claim about why they need not be written to since they “themselves” know. Ἀκριβῶς is rightly positioned before the verb, to modify it in order to present the extent of knowledge they already possess about the day of the Lord. As a disclosure formula, οἴδατε has been used in each chapter of the epistle to refer to the Thessalonians’ previous knowledge on several issues. Therefore, the clause stresses their possession of not just “knowledge,” but the essential one about the day of the Lord as the adverb ἀκριβῶς suggests. Paul asserts that his readers “know quite well” (ἀκριβῶς οἴδατε) what is to be known about the Parousia.

The ὅτι clause expresses what the Thessalonians know: “…that the day of the Lord comes like a thief.” To reiterate this, he uses two metaphors in vv.2 and 3 to communicate the information. The expressions κλέπτης ἐν νυκτὶ and ἢ ὡδὲν τῇ ἐν γαστρί ἐχούση, which contains the metaphors, emphasizes the day of the Lord as a threatening event. As implied in the two principal images, “it brings out the unexpectedness and consequently its unpredictability and yet its inevitability.” He applies the syntagm

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301 For Paul’s usage of οἴδατε in 1 Thessalonians to refer to previous knowledge, See 1 Thess. 1:5; 2:1, 2, 5, 11; 3:3, 4; 4:2; 5:2.
302 Wanamaker, Commentary on the Greek Text, 178.
303 Ibid., 179.
304 Best, Thessalonians, 203.
The phrase ἡμέρα κυρίου (1 Thess. 5:2b) appears a couple of times in the New Testament (Matt 7:22; Acts 2:20; Rom 14:6; 1 Cor 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Pet 3:10) and the LXX (Isa 2:12; 13:6, 9; Jer 32:33; Ezek 7:10; 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; 3:4; 4:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obad 1:15; Zeph 1:7, 14bis; Mal 3:19, 22; cf. Jer 26:10.). A number of variations arise in the NT, including ἡμέρα κυρίου Ἱεροσόλυμα (2 Cor. 1:14), ἡμέρα κυρίου Ἱεροσόλυμα Χριστιανῶν (1 Cor. 1:8), ἡμέρα Χριστοῦ (Phil 1:10; 2:16), and just ἐκείνη ἡμέρα, ἡμέρα ἀγίας (Rom. 9:22) and ἡμέρα σωτηρίας (2 Cor. 6:2).

305 The phrase ἡμέρα κυρίου has its root in the Old Testament, where it refers to a future time when God would come both to punish the wicked and to vindicate his people. However, the notion of judgment is commonly stressed than that of deliverance (see Isa. 2:1-4:6; Jer.46:10; Eek. 30:2-3; Obad. 15; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31-32; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph. 1:14-18; Zech. 14). The two-twofold significance of the concept permeates Paul’s use of the concept in his letters.

306 The day- of- the-Lord concept has its root in the Old Testament, where it refers to a future time when God would come both to punish the wicked and to vindicate his people. However, the notion of judgment is commonly stressed than that of deliverance (see Isa. 2:1-4:6; Jer.46:10; Eek. 30:2-3; Obad. 15; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31-32; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph. 1:14-18; Zech. 14). The two-twofold significance of the concept permeates Paul’s use of the concept in his letters.

307 Wanamaker, Commentary on the Greek Text, 179.

308 Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 346.
verb λέγωσιν,\(^{309}\) in the present tense, affirming the apocalyptic nature of the text. But in my opinion, the apocalyptic nature of the text is indicated not only by the impersonal verb but also by describing the day as a day of disaster or judgment. The theme of sudden destruction expressed by the metaphor, when there is supposed peace been communicated in the community is a popular apocalyptic saying. It relates to the sudden onslaught of the flood on men engaged in their normal activities. Similarly, the house owner who is unaware of the thief’s coming suffers disaster when the thief comes to steal. Therefore, the two metaphors connect to express the danger of failing to prepare for the day of the Lord. This is apocalyptic in style and communicates a sense of danger and urgency.

In such an eschatological context, the expression “like labour come to a pregnant woman” is appropriate since the context is concerned with judgment just as Wanamaker submits that “The metaphor of v. 2, amplified by the proverb and the metaphor of v.3 stresses the unexpectedness of the day of the Lord, and its ineluctability and destructive potential for those unprepared for its arrival.”\(^{310}\) The apostle used this metaphor to exhort the community of the inevitable and startling nature of the coming of Christ. For just as labour pains come to pregnant women unexpectedly, and once it comes it cannot be stopped or avoided, in a similar manner the coming of Christ will be. And in such a situation, people who live unprepared for the arrival of the day, because of their reliance on the assurance of security and Pax Romana, will have no means of escape. Perhaps it might have resulted from the fact that Roman peace and security was promoted in official proclamations that were drafted, adopted, and inscribed for posterity. It, therefore,

\(^{309}\) According to Wanamaker the usage of the verb λέγωσιν has led some commentators to classify v. 3 as apocalyptic, owing to the fact that the impersonal verb characterizes an apocalyptic style of writing. For more discussion on the use of λέγωσιν. See Wanamaker, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 180.

\(^{310}\) Ibid., 180.
might have accounted for the assurance of peace and security of those ‘outside’ to reject call of any sudden destruction.

Hence according to Weima,

Given the widespread nature of Roman imperial propaganda, the predominantly Gentile believers in Thessalonica would have immediately recognize in Paul’s brief phrase “peace and security” a clear allusion not to the warnings of the Old Testament prophets, who spoke only about false claims of “peace” but the sloganeering of the Roman state and its claim of providing its citizens the same two benefactions highlighted by the apostle. Paul’s citation of such imperial is particularly appropriate for his Thessalonian readers in light of the close relationship between their city and Rome, as well as the financial and political benefits that this relationship offered.311

In this sub-unit, Paul presents a sense of urgency for the anticipation of the eschatological event to establish the idea of the possibility of the Parousia taking place in the lifetime of the readers.312 For this reason, they are urged to be alert and ready for it anytime it occurs. The moral advice grounded in this eschatological anticipation discourages prediction of dates.313 As much as Paul believes the coming is imminent, there is no point in trying to predict when it will come because it will come unannounced like a “thief in the night.” And the unprepared will be taken by surprise when the disaster strikes since it will be a day of judgment for those outside. The preparation for this day, therefore, makes the moral imperative of the next section (5:4-11) of Paul’s exhortation very important to this eschatological teaching.

4.5 Living as Children of Day (5:4-11)

5:4 ἰμαὶς δὲ, ἀδελφοί, ὦκ ἐστέ ἐν σκότει, ἵνα ἡ ἡμέρα ἰμάς ὡς κλέπτης καταλάβῃ: 5 πάντες γὰρ ἰμαὶς ὦκοι φωτός ἐστε καὶ ὦκοι ἡμέρας, ὦκ ἐσμέν νυκτὸς οὐδὲ σκότους; 6 ἀρα ὦκοι μὴ καθεύδωμεν ὡς οἱ λοιποὶ ἀλλὰ γηγορῶμεν καὶ ἐνήφωμεν. 7 οἱ γὰρ καθεύδουσις νυκτὸς καθεύδουσιν καὶ οἱ μεθυπόκομοι νυκτὸς μεθυπόκοι. 8 ήμεῖς δὲ ἡμέρας ὄντες ἐνήφωμεν ἐνδύσασιν θώρακα πίστεως καὶ ἁγάπης καὶ περικεφαλαίαν ἐπίδα σωτηρίας. 9 ὅτι οὐκ ἔθετο ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς εἰς ὄργην ἀλλὰ εἰς περιποίησιν

311 Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 351.
313 Sleeper, “Christ Coming and Christian Living,” 133.
Having established the imminent but unexpected coming of the day of the Lord, Paul issued out some significant moral imperatives in vv. 4-8 in expectation of this future event. Even though the precise timing of the day’s arrival cannot be predicted or calculated, its coming is not unexpected for believers who are watchful and prepared (vv.6-8), so that this day will not overtake them like a thief (v.4). These words which provide comfort and assurance come at the latter part of the passage. The apostle inserts a direct address with the vocative, ὑμεῖς ἀδελφοί (v. 4a), together with another instance of δὲ. It signals the starting of a new syntactical unit which continues the theme introduced in v. 1. The presence of ὑμεῖς in this clause functions as a point of departure and the contrastive particle δὲ with ἀδελφοί marks the transition to the new subject in this sub-unit. Therefore, the Christians who are living need not fear their fate at the Parousia because of the dramatic change in status compared with that of the unbelievers.

This distinction is expressed first by the clause in 5:4a that they are “brothers.” The vocative ἀδελφοί314 apart from it functioning as a literary marker of the syntactical transition also serves to remind them of their familial status as members of a new social group.315 They are identified as a family of “brothers” and “sisters” who will not be judged on the day of the Lord because they are not in darkness and are preparing for the coming of this day in earnest anticipation. Second, twice in v. 5 the phrase οὐκ ἐστε ἐν σκότει contains the present tense of the verb to be (ἐστε). It is to remind them of their new status as people who have turned away from the worship of idols (1:9) to serve the living God. This locates them in a privileged position of no more being in darkness. In

314 This usage marks the eleventh out of the fourteen times Paul uses this vocative in the letter to directly address his Thessalonian converts. See 1:4; 2:1, 9, 14, 17; 3:7; 4:1, 10b, 13; 5:1, 4, 12, 14, 25.
315 Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 354.
v.2, the initial mention of the thief in the night in relation to the day of the Lord was used by Paul to develop the metaphorical distinction of the contrast between their corresponding qualities of “light” and “darkness.” In the light of this, the topical shift is indicated by the remaining clause in 4b. This is because Paul just said in 5:2-3 that the Day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night and that those who think they live in peace and safety will be suddenly overcome by inescapable destruction.

He then begins discussion on ὑμεῖς “you,” and notes that “you” are not in darkness. Indeed, the allusion to σκότος (darkness) resonate ἐν νυκτί in 5:2, but there is no clear connection between what has already been said in 5:2–3 and what is said in 5:4a until the clause in 4b is added. To this effect, he introduces 4b with ἵνα, a resultant conjunction with three preverbal elements: ἡ ἡμέρα, ὑμᾶς, and ὡς κλέπηης which are all repetition because they appear in v. 2. Paul has already referred to the metaphors of “thief” and “night” (v. 2b); and now he refers to “darkness”, οὐκ ἐστε ἐν σκότει, (v.4b), which serves as a metaphorical extension of the ἡμέρα κυρίου. The “day” is now also “daylight” as opposed to “darkness” and the “night” (v. 5).

Rhetorically, the double usage of ὑμεῖς (vv. 4a, and 5a) marks a strong contrast between the Thessalonian community and those for which there shall be no escape. He thus states the present condition of the Thessalonians in positive terms as ὅλοι φωτός ἐστε καὶ ὅλοι ἡμέρας. In order to bring more comfort to them, he precedes the clause with the adjective πάντες. This is because the knowledge that “all of you are sons of light and sons of day” provides assurance that none of them is excluded from their current status and its associated blessings at the coming of the Parousia.

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316 Luckensmeyer, Eschatology of 1 Thessalonians, 279.
317 Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 355.
The contrast between “they” and “you” provides motivation for the community. The distinction indicates that though they were grieving, they have hope due to the relationship they have with Christ. Moreover, the contrast is affirmed by the knowledge they possess about Christ’s coming (“like a thief in the night”) and so they need to be in readiness. As Paul switches to talk about ἵματίς he indicates that while others will be suddenly overtaken, the Thessalonians will not be surprised or suffer the same fate. All of this is in reference to the times and dates of the day of the Lord presented in 5:1. Thus, the “thief,” “day,” “night” and “darkness” metaphors are rhetorical devices functioning to convince or give a strong base to their faith. They are aimed at providing comfort and encouragement to the Thessalonians. This confirms the view of Foster that:

Paul motivated his audience by the promise of the eschatological blessing of being with Christ, rather than haranguing them with the threat of apocalyptic punishment and wrath. While the day of the Lord has negative consequences for unbelievers, its unexpected nature is employed by Paul as an admonition to motivate believers to engage in morally appropriate behaviours.\(^\text{318}\)

In v. 5, there is a change of subject between ἵματίς and ἐομεν. Paul changes from second to first person and includes himself in the metaphor descriptions. Then the negative conjunction οὐδὲ (v. 5d), joins two negative clauses where ἐομεν (v. 5c) is elided in the second clause. He introduces another uncommon construction in the exhortation where he combines ἄρα and οὖν (v. 6a).\(^\text{319}\) άρα is inferential and οὖν marks a transition. Together they spell out the behavioural result of the status described earlier, and the logic of v. 8. Its rhetorical function is to indicate Paul’s shift from the indicative; that is their status or

\(^{318}\) Foster, “Eschatology of the Thessalonian,” 9.

\(^{319}\) This construction is rare in the New Testament. Though ἄρα is used a couple of times in the New Testament, its combination with οὖν occurs only in the Pauline writings, most frequently in Romans and ones in 1 Thessalonians. See Rom. 5:18; 7:3; 25; 8:12; 9:16; 18; 14:12, 19; Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2: 19; 1 Thess. 5:6; 2 Thess. 2:15.
who they are, to the imperative; what they must do now. In this way, Paul introduces direct exhortation as a result of his previous statements.

The change from the indicative to subjunctive mood is typical. The volitive, hortatory and subjunctives appear in quick succession, καθεύδωμεν (v. 6a), γρηγορῶμεν (v. 6b), νηφώμεν (v. 6b), and all three are repeated in the verses which follow (vv. 10b, 10b, 8a, respectively). The function of this construction in v.6 probably is to prepare for the exhortations of the following verses and emphasize solidarity within the Thessalonian community by including himself, hence the change from the second person to first.

In vv. 6-8, Paul elaborates on what this entails with an exhortation to live soberly. The exhortation begins with an antithetical statement that develops in detail the cognitive and moral dimension inherent in the metaphors of day/night and light /darkness in v.5. In the first part of the antithesis, expressed in negative terms, the Apostle introduced the verb καθεύδω “sleeping.” Weima posits that “The apostle's choice of καθεύδω which is a rare term, over κοιμάμαι likely stems from the fact that the former verb, although also used figuratively of death, has the additional metaphorical meaning of being spiritually apathetic.” This is the interpretation Paul seeks to invoke in v.6.

Implying that καθεύδω connotes to sleep (v.7), a figurative reference to death (v.10) and as a metaphor of being spiritually indifferent (in v.6 this metaphorical interpretation applies to the metaphors described in v. 2 and 4 as well as v.4 and 5). They make implicit reference to the thief metaphor where Jesus alludes to the fact that the house owner would keep watching if he knew when the thief would come. In effect, the expression

320 Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 357.
321 Luckensmeyer, Eschatology of 1 Thessalonians, 280.
322 Ibid.
323 This is different from κοιμάμαι which he used three successive times (4:13, 14, 15) in this pericope.
324 Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, 358-59.
“let us not sleep like the rest” (5:6) communicates the idea of spiritual alertness instead of spiritual laziness and indifference like the unbelievers who have no information about the day of the Lord.

The second part of the antithetical statement introduces two verbs with metaphorical meaning. They are γρηγορέω and νηφόω which are used together in this construction to contrast the earlier verb. Γρηγορέω literally means “to stay awake” and figuratively “to be in constant readiness, on the alert” and “to be alive.” 325 Though the literal meaning provides a perfect contrast with the interpretation of καθεύδω, from the context of the text, the former metaphorical meaning is more applicable, so that the imperative “let us stay awake,” refers to spiritual alertness or watchfulness contrary to spiritual indifference which can cause the day of the Lord to come as a surprise.

The second verb Paul employed in this antithesis νηφόω literally meaning to be sober, which is the opposite of μεθόω “to be intoxicated.” Figuratively, it is used in the New Testament as being free from every form of mental and spiritual excess and confusion, be self-controlled, be clear-headed, be self-possessed, to be vigilant and circumspect. 326 However, Weima observes that Paul’s usage of νηφόω and γρηγορέω together in an eschatological contexts, suggest that the self-control concerns not only the moral behaviour of the Thessalonians but has a specific reference to the attitudes and practices connected to the coming of the Lord. 327 Thus, the command “let us be sober” is not prohibiting drunkenness but a call for the community to be “sober-minded.” As a rhetorical strategy, Paul used this device to accentuate this exhortation so that, the virtue of patience and so-

325 Perschbacher, Analytical Greek Lexicon, 82.
326 Ibid., 284. The verb occurs six times in the New Testament (1 Thess. 5:6, 8; 2 Tim 4:5; 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7; 5:8). Weima indicates that the verb never has the meaning of being sober but always the metaphorical sense of being well balanced, self-controlled.
327 Weima. 1-2 Thessalonians, 359.
briety will be perpetuated. Hence, just as the first statement enjoins them to be alert and prepared in anticipation of the day of the Lord, the second command warns against any excessive concern or rash conduct in light of the eschatological event.

He then offers them a final reason for their need to live soberly and righteously: “For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him (vv. 9-10).” This refers to the emphasis he made in the previous subunit (4:13-18) that the dead and living members of the community will live with Christ.

Paul discusses the triad of values: faith, love and hope twice in this letter because of their significance to their eschatological life. These values which are gleaned from the eschatological teaching are imperatives aimed at helping to prepare the faith community for this event. He also clarifies what he sees as the key social and ethical implications that must attend the community during this period of anticipation. Clarification is not the only way Paul modifies his previous teaching concerning the Parousia.

Finally, in v.11, he concludes the section with a similar exhortation (cf. 4:18) and climaxed the discussion that in order to share their doubts and not ‘destroy’ each other, they need to share their hope, and to build their faith up. This probably according to the father of the community was to be “brothers.” There is a similarity in structure between 4:18 and 5:11 which leads to the conclusion that 5:11 may serve as a conclusion not only to the subject of the times and seasons (5:1–11) but to the literary unit (4:13—5:11). However, Luckensmeyer points to a significant difference between the uses of eschatological motifs in 4:13-18 and 5:1-11, due to the introduction of the negative element of judg-

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328 Sleeper, “Christ Coming and Christian Living,” 133.
This notwithstanding, he maintains that Paul refocuses his teaching on the day of the Lord in such a way to emphasize social cohesion within the group. He notes that with 5:1-11, “Paul does not overtly address the Thessalonians’ social disintegration by linking it to current or recently passed experiences. Rather, the pattern of exhortation is more indirect. Social disintegration is now understood symbolically, in terms of the day of the Lord.”

Therefore, the rhetoric of eschatological teaching is employed by Paul to emphasize the necessity of a sober lifestyle (5:6) and that soteriological transformation is inaugurated in the present age (5:9-10). He suggests that Paul, “chose this eschatological motif [of the day of the Lord] precisely because of its application to his pattern of exhortation,” which employs positive and negative elements of deliverance and judgment. A similar view is shared by Sleeper who posits that, as children of light, patience is required in their preparation for the Parousia. In his opinion, the proper attitude for waiting in such an eschatological existence should be that of watchfulness (5:6) and sobriety (5:6, 8).

In addition to the views expressed by these commentators of the exhortation, I observe that Paul used the eschatological language for two purposes. First, he used it for motivation in the sense that the detail description of the event of the Parousia was not only to give the community information but an assurance that all hope is not lost. Second, it was to urge them to continue observing the moral imperatives of their faith. After the message of hope and comfort in the assurance presented in a visionary form, he calls on them to observe the moral imperatives of the faith using the positive and negative elements of

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329 Luckensmeyer, *Eschatology of 1 Thessalonians*, 275-76.
330 Ibid.
331 Ibid., 315.
332 Sleeper, “Christ Coming and Christian Living,” 133. Διό is an inferential conjunction, it articulates the imperative mood of the verbs παρακαλέστε and οἰκοδομεῖτε (v. 11a). Also, the subject and object of the second verb, ἐξ τῶν ἐνα, (v. 11a), is an unusual construction and it is debated whether it should be understood as synonymous with ἄλληλοις (v. 11a), the object of the first verb. He then closes the verse with the phrase, καθὼς καὶ ποιεῖτε (v. 11b).
deliverance and judgment, which will come on those who refuse to heed to these imperatives.

In terms of eschatology, Paul’s key convictions appear to be twofold. These are that believers are waiting for the day of the Lord, and at the Parousia, those who accepted the gospel will be with the Lord. Apparently, Paul had provided more instruction on eschatological matters than these two core affirmations. This is suggested in his comments that, with regards to “times and seasons,” he does not need to write to the Thessalonians (5:1), and regarding the day of the Lord, the Thessalonians should simply recollect his previous teaching (2 Thess. 2:5).

As argued above, the brief eschatological passages situated strategically throughout the epistle combine with Paul's “vision of the end” in the main passage (4:13—5:11) to create an eschatological context in which the Thessalonians are motivated to persevere in their circumstances. Implicit in those passages is this fact of reality that they live in the end-time, awaiting the Parousia of Christ. Paul thus provides a powerful emotional incentive for the Thessalonians to pursue lives of moral purity lest they find themselves among the unprepared on which God will pour out his wrath. The rhetorical function of these eschatological passages is that Paul used them as a strategy to respond to the rhetorical situation.

The situation arose from the state of persecution and death of some members, and Paul had the desire to encourage them to pursue a desirable lifestyle as Christians. Their background required that as young Gentile converts in the Christian faith, they pursue lives of moral purity and be warned of the negative consequences if they refuse to do so. In order to achieve this dual purpose with his exhortation, he uses the eschatological pro-

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333 Selby, “Blameless at His Coming,” 405.
334 Ibid.
nouncements to offer a strong message of comfort and moral imperative in their eschatological anticipation. Much as they were not to lose faith due to the death of their loved ones, they could not also lead any life that was not pleasing to God as they await the Parousia. The use of the end time language and imagery, with the apocalyptic tone of judgment and destruction, help him to achieve this purpose. Selby observes that “Together they function to establish a framework in which the Thessalonians are invited to see their lives and circumstances in a manner which has serious ethical and communal implications.”

4.6 Conclusion

The content of this section (4:13—5:11) concerns the problem that has arisen in the community. It is in reference to those who died before the Parousia of Christ.336 First, he addressed the concern of the community on the fate of those who have died prior to the Parousia (4:13-18). In his response, he explicates the implications of their faith in Christ’s resurrection to reassure them of the fate of all those who believe in Christ both dead and living (4:13-15). He reminds them that faith in Christ’s resurrection is the basis for their own resurrection. After that, he offers an outline of the events expected to happen at the event (4:16-18).

Second, with the assurance that the deceased members of the Christian community will not be disadvantaged at the Parousia, he admonished the community on how to live in lieu of the Parousia (5:1-11). He stresses the moral imperative of the saving grace they have received from God through Christ as they expect His sudden and unexpected return. By their knowledge of the arrival of the day as a “thief in the night” (5:1-3), which

335 Selby, “Blameless at His Coming,” 406.
336 Wanamaker observed that the pericope raises several extremely difficult questions with the most problematic one being: “why did the Thessalonians grieve over their brothers and sisters who have died?” Paul responded to the problem in two ways to reinforce their eschatological hope. Wanamaker, Commentary on the Greek Text, 164.
stresses the sudden but imminent coming, they are to live in vigilance and sobriety as people who belong to the day and not the night (5:4-11).

The major section and sub-units culminate in an eschatological pronouncement so that a strongly eschatological tone permeates the entire section of the exhortation. With this motif, Christians are invited to comprehend their state and circumstances. That they are living near the end of time and awaiting the imminent return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the judgment before God, and the final reward and punishment which will be meted out at that event. Much more, this eschatological vision heightens the need for faithfulness to God and holy living. For despite Paul’s reassurances, his language makes clear that the Thessalonians' state of being “blameless before God” at the judgment is not assured.

The eschatological motif teaches the believer to persevere in his/her faith in the face of persecution. Sleeper submits that “throughout the world, Christians are being persecuted and oppressed in diverse ways. For them, the biblical message of hope and deliverance speaks directly with the kind of power it must have had for the Christians in Thessalonica.” Despite the fact that today some Christians may not suffer physical persecution for their faith, perseverance is still a required virtue in eschatological anticipation. To persevere still means to resist the powers of evil, even if those powers manifest themselves in different forms. For an apocalyptic moral stance requires believers to be involved in the struggle against the forces of evil in our world and to do so without giving up hope.

I share the view that one way to persevere is to oppose corruption and waste in private, public as well as in corporate life. It also means working against pollution and for a sus-

\[337\] Selby, “Blameless at His Coming,” 398.
\[338\] Ibid.
\[339\] Sleeper, “Christ's Coming and Christian Living,” 139.
tainable environment. It means exploring alternatives to violence at every level, from family conflicts to international confrontations.\textsuperscript{340}

In Paul’s response, moral advice and theological instruction are interwoven. The rhetorical situation of the text reveals that they faced unavoidable moral and ethical demands. It was so because a decisive element of what set them apart from the children of darkness and prepares them for the soon coming of the Lord was their commitment to the Christian lifestyle. The Christian life entails important moral imperatives as a result of their acceptance of the saving grace of God. We observe that the believers had hope in being with the Lord on His return, but they were not guaranteed a blameless life before God, should they fail in keeping the moral standard required of them as Christians. This called for a vigilant and sober lifestyle, as well as daily preparation through desirable behaviour that is pleasing to God, grounded in holiness and love. In other words, for all readers of the epistle, participation in the events of the Parousia is contingent on their way of life prior to the arrival of the day and their preparation to meet the Lord. It, therefore, places on them the demand of obeying the moral imperatives embedded in the exhortations in the eschatological sections of the text. It cautions the church against complacency; empowers mission and gives comfort in the face of suffering and death.

In conclusion, the exegetical analysis of the text (4:1—5:11) reveals that Paul calls the community to action in various ways. Firstly, the text calls on them to live in holiness in a relationship with self. This is evident in the call to abstain from sexual immorality by controlling their bodies in a way that is pleasing to God. The eschatological hope provides Christians with the motivation and insight to live the moral imperative in the present age since the eschatological hope is an outcome of God’s saving grace in Christ. Believers, who will be either alive or dead at the Parousia, but lived holy lives, will have

\textsuperscript{340} Sleeper, “Christ's Coming and Christian Living,” 141.
the same eternal destiny since they remained ever with Him in their eschatological existence. It also calls on them to maintain their self-image by earning the respect of outsiders. They are to respect themselves by working hard to earn a living so that they will be respected by others when their lives are not dependent on other members of the community. Though he exhorted them on the sense of belonging and commitment among the members of the church, he expected that they will be self-dependent and not be a burden on anyone.

Secondly, there is the call to holiness in relationship with others. In this call to action, the faith community is admonished that sexual relationship of members must be characterized by holiness. They are to be holy in their general conduct, not to be rowdy or meddle in matters that will arouse dispute considering the intensity of the persecution against them. Again, Paul indicated that the Thessalonians should not grieve because God through Christ will raise the dead on the day He appears. Hence, instead of grieving over the dead, they are to be mindful of the way they live with one another as they anticipate the coming of the Lord.

Thirdly, there is the call to mutual love among the faith community. He exhorted them to love one another and encourage each other as they anticipate the Parousia. In exhorting them on mutual love, Paul introduced a rare term φιλαδελφία. As one of the powerful images of solidarity in the culture of Greeks and Romans, Paul used it as a metaphor to exhort the congregation to gain a sincere feeling of kingship among members of the church. They were to love each other as their own blood brothers and sisters.

Finally, Paul employed cultural expressions in communicating his message in the text. He expressed the new faith using cultural metaphor the Thessalonians could understand. The metaphors and imageries were elements within the Greco-Roman world that the
Thessalonians could comprehend in their eschatological context. Therefore, they are not to be taken literally but should be understood within the context in which they are employed. Paul, therefore, used the eschatological motif not to instil fear in his readers as some authors do, rather he encourages them, stressing on the hope they have that they will be with the Lord.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY OF 1 THESSALONIANS 4:1—5:11

5.1 Introduction

The fifth chapter presents the second stage of the research according to the framework. It focuses on reading the biblical text with ordinary people after the critical study of the text. The Contextual Bible Study (CBS) of 1 Thess. 4:1—5:11 was carried out in three branches each of the selected churches (Methodist Church Ghana, International Central Gospel Church, and Church of Pentecost) in three Regions (Ashanti, Greater Accra, and Upper East). The CBS was conducted to elicit the perspectives of some contemporary Ghanaian Christians on the text (1 Thess. 4:1—5:11) in their contexts. It discusses the Contextual reading process, including the mode of reading the text and presents a report on how the CBS approach was used in the selected churches. The section includes comments on the reading process and the products of reading by the selected churches. It then concludes with a summary of the Contextual Bible Study product.

5.2 The Mode of Reading the Text

Contextual Bible Study is part of what J. Ukpong described as the third phase of African Biblical Hermeneutics. The method was introduced by Gerald West. The aim is two-fold: to encourage participants to develop tools and skills for a critical reading of the Bible and to appropriate the meaning. Reading the text in a specific context brings appropriation and consequent transformation of readers and their context.

West argues that there is not only one way of reading the text. He discusses three modes of reading the Bible: reading behind the text, reading the text itself and reading in front

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West maintains that the text type, the characteristic of the ordinary readers, the resources available for the study, as well as the interpretative interest of the trained reader, are factors that determine what mode could be a preferred choice for studying a text. He concludes that the modes of reading vary, and each type can be strategic and appropriate to the trained reader for various reasons but no mode of reading is better than the other. At the same time, the trained reader is free to combine different modes depending on the objectives of the reading process he seeks to archive with his/her ordinary readers.

In this study, we combined two modes of reading the text. We studied the passage by reading the text itself and in front of the text based on the objective of the research. These modes were chosen in order to examine how the ordinary readers interpret 1 Thess. 4:1—5:11, paying attention to the literary elements. It also focused on how they are able to use themes, symbols, and metaphors as interpretive keys to understanding the text in their contexts. In view of that, the questions were designed to examine the literary world of the text, thereby encouraging a close and careful reading to identify the inherent metaphors and themes. Such reading examines the internal relationship of the elements in the text. This was evident by the participants’ frequent reference to the text when asking or responding to questions.

The combination of these modes of reading was appropriate for studying the text because it helped the readers to concentrate on the major metaphors, symbols, and themes Paul used in addressing the questions and challenges faced by the Thessalonians in their socio-historical context. The identification of such elements helped the ordinary readers in the critical appropriation of the text in the context in which they live.

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342 For detail discussion on these modes of reading see West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 29-47.
343 Ibid., 73.
The readers were encouraged to read the verses carefully and closely in order to pay attention to the internal relationships within the text. That is how the clauses, phrases, and sentences constituting the components of the text relate to communicating the eschatological message of Paul in this section of the epistle. These modes of reading sought to enable readers to focus on what the text mean for their present context in order to bring about transformation in their lives and societies.

5.3 The Contextual Bible Study Process

The reading process involved reading the text together with the church members and the discussion of related questions. After reading the text aloud in a language agreed upon by the members, the researcher facilitated the CBS session by first giving background information about the text. The information consisted of historical background and social and literary context of the text to provide the church members with some basic idea about the text. This was followed by the discussion of questions based on the text to elicit responses of the members.

The responses of the discussions were examined with the Pastors and Ministers of the churches for clarification. Thus, the process of reading the text involved the discussion of the text using questions, answers, and clarifications aimed at ensuring critical reading of the text. The product of the reading is the summary of reflections on all the responses from each group's reading and discussion as well as the clarifications and the critical impact that it makes on the context of the contemporary Christian. The process enabled the Bible study to provide information helpful for the hermeneutical exercise as the researcher collaborated with ordinary readers of the Bible in their local context in languages that are familiar to the readers.

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344 The language used for the reading and discussion varied from church to church and the community. The languages used for the study included English, Twi, Buili, and Kusaal depending on the language that is spoken by the majority of the readers and the language used for their church activities.
5.4.1 Formulation of Questions

An important constituent of the CBS process is the discussion of questions. West maintains that the mode of reading chosen for studying a particular text to a large extent influences the kind of questions asked in the Bible study process. He explains that each mode of reading integrates a variety of critical questions to the text.

The questions for this study were designed for three basic reasons depending on the modes of reading we chose as this table illustrates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of Reading</th>
<th>Questions Asked</th>
<th>Purpose of Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Front of the Text</td>
<td>1. What is the text about? 2. What title will you give to the text?</td>
<td>Community Consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Text Itself</td>
<td>3. What do the following expressions stand for in the text: a. “A thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2) b. “Labour pains come to a pregnant woman” (1 Thess. 5:3) 4. What does “darkness” and “light” stand for in the text? (1 Thess. 5:5) 5. What are the problems associated with the second coming of Christ in the text?</td>
<td>Critical Consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. What does the text say about your cultural context? 7. What is the relevance of the text to your church? 8. How do you relate the destiny of the dead in the text to that of the dead in your culture? 9. Do you see any difference between your cultural perceptions about the dead and the Christian perception?</td>
<td>Contextual Understanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 75.
In Front of the Text | 10. Does the text in anyway influence your daily life and decision making? | Individual/Societal Transformation
---|---|---
| 11. What action will you take as a result of reading the text? |

Table 5.1: The mode of reading the text and the corresponding questions asked

Firstly, they were to enable the readers of the various churches to read the text communally and closely. Secondly, they were designed to assist the group members to draw out the relationship of the text to their context as well as the context of the text itself. In view of this, there were some questions on critical consciousness and contextual questions which were discussed during the reading process. Thirdly, there were questions which solicited transformation. Such questions were activity based requiring the carrying out of an action on the part of those who participated in the reading process. By these, the people could hear God speak to them in their own context.346

The questions we used for the study were also formulated taking into consideration the dialogue partners in this research.347 The members of the various churches were of different educational backgrounds, yet they were all people who read the Bible for devotional purpose. Therefore, the questions were formulated in a way that helped these ordinary readers to read the text critically and closely by returning to the text frequently in the reading process.

5.4.2 Questions for the Bible Discussion

As a principle of the Contextual Bible Study, the community, congregation or group must be allowed to set the agenda for the reading process.348 They are, therefore, required to call the trained reader, choose the text for the reading depending on the issue in

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346 West, Contextual Bible Study, 7. According to Anum, the questions are normally discussed in small groups and report the feedback in a plenary section. However, in this study, the researcher discussed the questions together with the group members in the Bible study setting because of time constraints.

347 West, Contextual Bible Study, 75.

their context they want to challenge. They also choose the theme and set questions that are relevant and within their ability to understand as non-scholarly readers of the Bible. Anum posits that the questions are created by the readers in order to avoid asking questions from the academic context of the trained reader. However, for the purpose of this research, the text, the theme, and questions were all chosen and designed by the trained reader because of the objectives of the study. This notwithstanding, the questions when analysed reveals that the motivations behind them were directed by the commitments for reading the text as proposed by West.

On the account of this, questions one and two were asked to solicit community consciousness responses from the readers in the church groups. These questions were meant to elicit the perception of the readers from each church about the text as they read together with the researcher. They were mainly related to reading in front of the text. Similarly, questions three, four and five were aimed at soliciting responses of critical consciousness from the readers in the churches.

The questions required the readers to delve into the social context and the literary context of the text because they involve reading the text itself. Some of the readers had difficult in understanding and answering the questions, due to the complexity of some verses of the text. Questions six, seven, eight and nine were all contextual questions that elicit the understanding of the text within the cultural context of the readers. Finally, questions ten and eleven aimed at seeking answers related to transformation which West observes is the last commitment of the CBS process. These are application questions which called for action(s): the readers are to suggest concrete ways to incarnate the eschatological anticipation, central theme of 1 Thess. 4:1—5:11 in their life and in the life of their com-

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350 West, Contextual Bible Study, 12.
351 Ibid.
munity to transform it. These questions also sought to investigate the effect of the interpretation on the readers by examining how they were going to live after the study in their anticipation of Christ’s second coming. Finally, the researcher also asked follow-up questions to find out the readiness of the readers for the Parousia.

5.5 Report on Using CBS in the Selected Churches

After formulating the questions for the reading process, the researcher followed the model of Gerald West as applied by Anum, to conduct the Contextual Bible Study using 1 Thess. 4:1—5:11 with the selected churches. We contacted several Pastors of the selected churches in the three regions to discuss the organization of the reading and to agree on a date for the study of the text with their churches. Two branches of each church were selected from the three regions. The branches were selected based on the Pastors who accepted the request and could allocate time for the study. Upon the responses we received from the pastors, churches from high urban and some semi-urban centers were selected to elicit views from people of different contexts.

In all eighteen (18) Bible Study sections were conducted with a minimum attendance of twenty-three (23) to as many as forty-five (45) readers. Fifteen of the meetings were held during an evening service of the churches in a Bible Study setting and three on Sundays after service. The period of the study lasted three months, from December 2017 to February 2018. The duration of each Bible study section varied depending on the number of members present and the contributions to the discussion. It, however, ranges between one hour, thirty minutes and one hour, fifty-five minutes.
5.5.1 The Context of the Church Groups for the Reading Process

The churches we chose for the study were selected from the Upper East, Ashanti, and Greater Accra Regions. These regions were selected to represent perspectives of some Christians in the Northern, Middle and Southern sectors of Ghana respectively. The context of the regions portrays that of the towns as they present the general socio-economic, political and cultural matrixes of the people. It is in such contexts that the researcher engaged them in the reading of the text. The contexts of these regions vary; therefore, their perspectives enhanced their understanding of the text. The towns where the CBS were conducted are shown in the red dots in the map below:

![Figure 5:1 Map showing the towns of the readers in the CBS](image)

The locations of the various churches are indicated in the subsequent sections on the study of the text with the selected churches.
A. Upper East Region

The Upper East Region was carved out of the Upper Region which was itself carved out of the Northern Region in 1960. The Upper Region was later divided into Upper East and Upper West regions in 1983 under the reign of the PNDC. This makes it one of the new regions in the country with thirteen (13) Municipal and District Assemblies. The Regional capital is Bolgatanga which is fondly called Bolga. The region is located in the north-eastern corner of the country between longitude 00 and 10 and latitudes 100 N and 110 N. It is boarded in the north by Burkina Faso, the Republic of Togo in the east, Sissala District of the Upper West and the West Mamprusi District of the Northern Region in the west and south respectively. The head of the political administration, like all the other regions, is a Regional Minister who heads a Regional Coordinating Council (RCC) which manages the activities of the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies.

The topography of the land is flat with few hills covering a total land area of about 8,842 sq km. It has savannah vegetation characterized by short scattered drought-resistant trees and grass. The nature of the land makes farming thrive in the region during the raining season. The most common economic trees in the region are sheanut, dawadawa, baobab, and acacia. The major economic and living conditions of the inhabitants of the region are agriculture, hunting, and forestry. It is indicated that about 72% of the population who are economically active are engaged in farming. They produce cereals, vegetables, livestock, and poultry. There are two seasons: the rainy season which is erratic spatial in duration and the harmattan. There are low industrial activities in the region, and the gold

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mining industry is not very developed. By many indicators, it is one of the poorest regions in Ghana.\footnote{Blench, Working Paper, 1.}

Socially the region is characterized by a pattern of social relationships and institutions that compose a complex society. They have rich chieftaincy institution, lineage and systems of inheritance, language, festivals and others in their traditional society. They have a largely rural population of about 79\% in 2010.\footnote{Ghana Statistical Service, 2010 Population and Housing Census Summary Reports of Final Results (Accra: Ghana Statistical Service, 2012), 4.} Religiously the people adhere to the three main religions: African Indigenous Religions, Christianity and Islam.\footnote{Analytical Report, Upper East Region, 2.}

### B. Ashanti Region

The Ashanti Region is a core area of the Asante nation whose boundary in the 18th and 19th centuries stretched southwards towards the Atlantic Ocean and northwards to the Gonja and Dagomba lands. Through wars and annexation of lands, they increased their territorial expansion to the present boundary.\footnote{Samuel K. Gaisie, 2010 Population, and Housing Census: Regional Analytical Report, Ashanti Region (Accra: Ghana Statistical Service, 2013), 1.} The people originate from eight clans and through inter-marriage among the clans; they created alliances and the original nucleus of the Asante nation which was officially born during the reign of King Osei Tutu, the first king of Asante.\footnote{Gaisie, Regional Analytical Report, Ashanti Region, 1.} The region lies in the southern half of the country and occupies 24,389 sq. km. or 10.2 percent of the total land area of Ghana making it the third largest region after the Northern and Brong Ahafo regions, respectively. It is boarded by the Western, Central, Eastern and Brong Ahafo regions.
More than half of the region, which is the south-western part, lies in the semi-equatorial forest zone and a small savanna zone in north-eastern part. The capital of the region is Kumasi and has thirty (30) administrative districts. In addition to the political administration, they also rely on chiefs and elders who constitute the Asanteman Traditional Council for social administration. The Asantehene is the head of the council and the paramount chief of Kumasi. He is the only King of Asante with other paramount chiefs and chiefs of different levels. They practice the matrilineal system of inheritance through which chiefs and traditional leaders are appointed. The people speak mainly a major dialect of Akan which is Asante Twi. They are predominantly Christians of different denominations with a small percentage of Muslims and African Indigenous Religion adherents.

The main economic activity is agriculture producing cocoa, forestry, and fishing. Livestock rearing and timber also thrive in the region. Wholesale and retail trade is very active in the region especially the capital because of its central position in the country. Manufacturing, accommodation, and food services are other economic activities in the region. The region has the largest gold mining site in the country located at Obuasi. This makes large and small-scale mining another source of income for most people.

C. Greater Accra Region

Although the smallest region, Greater Accra is the most densely populated, containing the two great metropolitan areas of Accra and Tema: Ghana’s major industrial and commercial centers. Accra is the regional capital and serves as the national capital.

The main language spoken by the indigenous people is Ga. But as a cosmopolitan city, there are many migrants with different ethnic languages spoken by the migrants. Gas al-

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361 Gaisie, Regional Analytical Report, Ashanti Region, 1.
so practice the patrilineal system of inheritance. The Ga Traditional Council is the highest traditional authority headed by the Ga Mantse (Chief of Ga). Its membership comprises eight chiefs of various communities in the Metropolis. The capital Accra is the economic hub of the region and the rest of the country. It hosts a number of manufacturing industries, oil companies, financial institutions, telecommunication, tourism, education, health institutions and other important establishments. These institutions provide employment opportunities to residents of the city. Majority of residents in the region are engaged in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy.

5.5.2 Church Group Dynamics

West identifies four commitments that the CBS must address. First among them is the concern of reading with the poor and marginalized or ordinary people,\textsuperscript{363} who invites the trained reader to study a text with them in their context.\textsuperscript{364} The general usage includes all readers who read the Bible pre-critically.\textsuperscript{365} This commitment is to ensure that the perspectives of the poor and oppressed are considered in the hermeneutical process since contexts influence the reading of the Bible.\textsuperscript{366} By this approach, we acknowledge the environmental factors that have formed the readers, thereby making the text and the life of the ordinary reader relevant to each other. The second is to study the text with others of different educational context. This commitment is to ensure a community consciousness where we listen to the views of those who are not theologically or biblically trained so

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{363} The poor and oppressed according to West are those who are social, politically, economically, or culturally marginalized and exploited. These are people believed to be of particular concern to God.

\textsuperscript{364} West, Contextual Bible Study, 12.


\textsuperscript{366} Eric Nii Bortey Anum and Ebenezer Quaye, Intercultural Reading of John 10:1-21: The Shepherd-Sheep Metaphor as a Leadership-Followership Model (Amsterdam: Foundation Dom Hélder Câmara Chair, 2016), 4-5. See also West, Contextual Bible Study, 13.
\end{footnotesize}
that we can learn from the ordinary readers of the Bible studying together to address issues in their community.\textsuperscript{367}

In this study, the ‘ordinary readers’ cannot be classified as poor and marginalized, with exception of few churches which had some few members who are peasant farmers and low-income earners. In fact, the members of the selected churches belong to different social classes: middle, working class. Some members have high professional jobs and are graduates with well-paid jobs. The readers belonged to different ethnic, cultural, economic and social contexts which fulfils the second commitment of the CBS and made the study inter contextual. They are mainly Christians who read the Bible non-academically. Although some had a good educational background, they were considered ordinary readers because unlike the trained reader, they were not trained in biblical exegesis and hermeneutics and they were not interested in the academic reading of the Bible.

In the context of the study, we define ordinary readers as those who read the Bible from their experience, based on their social contexts. Their perspectives were, therefore, necessary for the CBS, and helped the researcher to understand how the call to action of 4:1—5:11 was perceived by different Ghanaian contexts.

5.5.3 Reading 1 Thessalonians 4:1—5:11 with Methodist Churches

The selected Methodist churches from the three regions were:

a. Good Shepherd Methodist Church, North Kaneshie, Accra

b. Ebenezer Methodist Church, Ashaima, Accra\textsuperscript{368}

\textsuperscript{367} West, Contextual Bible Study, 15.

\textsuperscript{368} The church is located at Ashaiman-Lebanon, Tsui Bleo in the Ashaiman Metropolitan Area. It has a total membership of about 1000 with an average attendance of 500 at service. It has been in existence for the past 16 years. It is a cosmopolitan church with people of different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds because of the nature of the city. Though on a Ga Adangbe land, the members are predominantly Akans with some Ada, Ewe and Ga populace. They are mostly engaged in business and petty trading with
c. St. Andrews Methodist Church, Sawua, Kumasi

d. Freeman Methodist Church, Kwadaso, Kumasi

e. Methodist Church Ghana, Sandema Society, Sandema

The CBS was organized according to the churches’ convenience. All the studies were held during evening services of the churches in a Bible Study setting. The Good Shepherd Methodist and Freeman Methodist Churches opted to hold the study with the Youth Fellowship of the societies. Therefore, the study was held on Mondays, the meeting day for the Youth Fellowship. Apart from Sandema Methodist Church where the study was conducted in English and translated into Buili by an interpreter, the rest of the societies agreed to read and discuss the text in Twi since it is the language used by majority of the members of the churches. At the Good Shepherd Methodist Youth Fellowship, the study was conducted in English and interspersed with Twi for the few members who could not express themselves fluently in English.

few civil servants. There are others who are self-employed such seamstress, hairdressers, artisans and about 40% students at different levels in the university and other tertiary institutions.

St. Andrews Methodist Church is at Sawua in the Ahensan Circuit of the Kumasi Diocese. It is located in the Bosomtwe Constituency of the Bekwai District in the Ashanti Region. The society was established in the year 1959 by the Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman as second to the Wesley Cathedral society. This makes it the second society to be established in the Kumasi Diocese. Their membership stands at 300 adult and 200 children with an average attendance of 170 on Sundays. About 70% of the congregation is youth who are mostly students at different tertiary levels and institutions. Economically, they are made up of apprentice, students, skilled labourers and menial farmers who produce foodstuffs in relatively low quantities. It is a predominantly Akan speaking church with most of the members of the Ashanti tribe and few Ewes.

Freeman Methodist Church was formerly known as Kwadaso Nsuom Methodist. It was established in the year 1996 but due to the problem of space, they became well established in the year 2000 when the chapel was built, making it 18 years of active existence. It is located at Kwadaso North, a suburb of Kumasi in the Kumasi Metropolitan area of the Ashanti Region. The total membership is about 400 adults and over 120 children. It has about 95% of the members being Akans with about 5% from other tribes. They speak mainly Asante Twi as it is the language of the majority of the members.

It is located at Abil-yeri in Sandema, the Capital of Builsa North District with a total membership of 95. It has been there for 29 years now. Majority of the members are market women and peasant farmers and few public servants and health workers. There are also tertiary students at different levels of their studies. They are mainly drawn from the Builsa tribe and few Akans and Frafra.

This was because the majority of the members were tertiary students and workers and they use English mostly in their activities during fellowship meetings.
5.5.4 Reading 1 Thessalonians 4:1—5:11 with International Central Gospel Churches

The selected branches of International Central Gospel Churches we chose for the study are:

a. ICGC New Heights Temple, Dome, Accra
b. ICGC Kharis Temple, Odorkor, Accra

c. ICGC Santasi Assembly, Santasi Kumasi

d. ICGC Rhema Temple, Bekwai Asante

e. ICGC Faith Temple, Sandema

f. ICGC Rehoboth Temple, Bolgatanga

With exception of Kharis Temple, Odorkor, all the ICGC branches agreed to conduct the study in English which is the language used by the branches for all programs including their teaching service. At Kharis Temple the study was held in Twi, the language spoken by most of the members present, who were mainly female adults with

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373 The church is at Dome in the Accra-Northwest District of the Greater Accra Region. It has a total membership of one hundred (100) and has been in existence for the past seventeen (17) years. The members are largely businessmen and women, entrepreneurs, public servants, lawyers and teachers, average class. They are drawn from the Ga, Ewe, Ashanti, Fante tribes and some few Nigerian nationals. They speak Ga, English Fante and Twi but service is conducted mainly in English which is a common language for all the members.

374 The location of the church is at Odorkor waterworks in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area. It has a total membership of 250 and has been in existence for the past six (6) years. The members are drawn from the Akan, Ga, Fante, Ewe tribes and some Nigerians which make it a mixed congregation of people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Some members have high education and others semi-educated. The majority are businessmen and women, health personnel, government workers, traders, self-employed and some students at the different level of education.

375 The Santasi Assembly of the ICGC is located at Santasi-Ayinam in the Kumasi Municipal Assembly of the Ashanti Region. The total population is about one hundred and sixty (160) and was established twelve years ago. The economic backgrounds of the members are bankers, nurses, teachers, engineers, businessmen, and women as well as students at different levels of education. They are drawn from Ga, Fante, Ewe and mostly Asante tribes with English as the common language used for all church activities although the majority of the members could speak the Asante Twi dialect.

376 The Rhema Temple ICGC is at the center of the Asante Bekwai Township, near the SSNIT office. The church has been in existence for 25 years now making one of the early branches of the church. They have about 170 members who in economic wise are mainly public servants, students, and petty traders. The tribes of the members are predominantly Ashanti with few Northern, Ewe, Brong and Fantis who are there on occupational transfers to the town. The language spoken by the people are mainly Asante Twi, but because of the other minority tribes in the church, they use English as the language for all services in order to allow active participation and involvement of all people groups.
few male adults and youths. Occasionally English was used to explain any difficulty to those who were not very conversant with the Twi. All the branches hold regular Teaching Services on Tuesday evening, so the CBS was conducted on Tuesday evenings. At Rhema Temple, the participants decided to conduct the study on Friday, the day of their prayer meeting, in order to get more participants.

5.5.5 Reading 1 Thessalonians 4:1—5:11 with Church of Pentecost Assemblies

The selected Assemblies of the Church of Pentecost were:

a. Church of Pentecost English Assembly, Tantra Hill, Accra
b. Church of Pentecost Central Assembly, Sapeiman, Accra
c. Church of Pentecost Central Assembly, Apatraapa, Kumasi
d. Pentecost International Worship Center, New Tafo, Kumasi
e. Church of Pentecost Central Assembly, Sandema
f. Church of Pentecost Central Assembly, Basyonde

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377 This assembly of the Church of Pentecost is located at Tantra Hill in the Ga-West Municipal Assembly, Greater Accra. It is an English Assembly with about 254 memberships. It was established in 2011. The tribes of the members are Akan, Ga, Ewe, and Northern tribes. Their occupations are teaching, health workers, accountants, politicians, graphic designers as well as students in different tertiary institutions.

378 The church is within the Tano District of the church of Pentecost. It has a total membership of about 278 and the church has been there for the past thirty (30) years. The occupations of the members are mainly petty traders, few civil servants, and farmers. The major tribes of the people are Akans who are in the majority with few Frafra, Grushie, Dagati, Basare, Gruma, and Ewes who have come to settle there because of farming. The language predominantly spoken is Asanti Twi, with the other minority tribes speaking their respective dialects but not at church.

379 The church is located at Yenyawoso, Asore Nkwanta around Dechemso in the Kumasi Metropolitan Area. It is within the center of Kumasi, in a high business center. The congregation is a cross-cultural one following the rationale behind the establishment of PIWC of providing well-organized cross-cultural churches for people of non-Ghanaian cultural backgrounds. And Ghanaians who for one reason or the other wants to worship with the English language. The members are drawn from the tribes of Akan, Ewes, Fantes, Nigerians and few Northern tribes. It has a total membership of about 957 and was established in 2010. The members are mainly students and businessmen and women, bankers, teachers, health workers and other professionals. The language spoken by the people are Asante Twi and English.

380 The church is located at Sandema Balansa with a total population of 436. It is the District head of the Sandema District of the Church of Pentecost which includes churches in areas like Balansa, Bilinsa, Fiisa, Kori, Suwarinsa, Kandema, Sawansa, Takunsna among others. Politically it is in the Buielsa District of the Upper East Region. The church was established in 1976 with very few members but has developed to the current number. The occupations of the members are predominantly farming and petty trading. The membership is drawn from mainly the Bulsa tribe, with few Akans and Ewes. They speak Buli, English, and Twi by the few southern migrants
The Contextual Bible Study in the assemblies of the Church of Pentecost followed the same pattern as indicated earlier with some few modifications. At the Church of Pentecost, Tantra Hill and PIWC New Tafo, the study was conducted in English on Sunday after church service. At Sapeima in Accra and Apatraapa in Kumasi, Twi was used for the reading and discussion of the text. At Sandema and Basyonde, the study was conducted in English with translation into Buili and Kusaal respectively by two assistants who worked with the researcher in the two communities to overcome the language barrier. At Sandema, the text was read in English, Twi, and Buili to respect the different ethnic background of the members. But the discussion was done in English and Buili with occasional use of Twi for the few Akans who could not express themselves very well in English or Buili.

5.6 Comment on the Reading Process

The researcher participated in the singing, prayers and other activities of the churches before the CBS. He introduced the discussion by thanking the leadership and members of the churches for the opportunity to conduct the Bible Study with them. With the help of the resident pastors, secretaries were appointed to record the responses of the members during the discussion of the questions. With the permission of the Pastors (and the participants) each section was audio recorded.

After each section, the trained reader listens to the audio recording and read the written responses. The researcher compared both and composed the product of reading for each church without adding any comments. The Pastors were again contacted for their com-

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The Basyonde Central Assembly of the Pentecost church is located at the outskirt of the Basyonde Township. Basyonde is a farming community within the Garu Tempane District of the Upper East Region and very close to Northern Togo. The church was established in 2003 and has a total membership of one hundred and ninety-one (191). The members are largely from the Kussal and Bimomba tribes with few Akans, who are normally teachers and health workers posted to the district. The main occupation of the members is farming. They produce vegetables like onion, tomatoes, and cereals in large quantities. Some of the farmers are into livestock and poultry production.
ments on the response. Some views of the Pastors were added as a note to the responses of the participants to constitute the product of reading of that particular church. After carefully analyzing the responses from the various church groups, the researcher categorized the responses under the various churches and commented on the product of the reading.

5.7 Comments on the Product of the Contextual Study Process

Below are the comments on the product\(^{382}\) of the reading of the text with the church groups from the selected churches in the three regions.

5.7.1 Product of Reading with Methodist Churches

Most readers understood the text as a message about the second coming of Jesus and what Christians are expected to do in anticipation of his coming. In the light of this, one group drew attention to the issue of faith and perseverance as something that is implicitly emphasized in the text. Majority of the readers in the various societies expressed the understanding of preparation towards the coming of the Lord. In two of the churches, their emphasis was on living a holy life as the way contemporary Christians ought to prepare in anticipation of Christ’s coming. They were of the view that “there is so much evil in the society” that there is the need for conscious effort to live a holy life. Thus, it is a reminder to “continue in the things they are been taught as Christians.”

In one society, the readers expressed the understanding that the text “encourages them to wait for Christ.” It offers the hope that Christ will come again, so believers should encourage each other as they anticipate the Parousia. In two other societies, there were discussions on the issue of encouragement. Some readers felt the second coming is a threat-

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\(^{382}\) The product of the reading process in CBS is the summary of the reports from the groups that participated in the reading and discussion of the text. It presents the outcome of the reading and the action plan of the readers.
ening issue since some people will be left out that day, hence it is not encouraging. Yet others argued that it is encouraging because it helps the Christian to know that whatever he/she is enduring on account of their faith will not be forever. There is a day that it will end and those who endure will be given rest in the Lord from their labour.

In this passage, the call to preparation by the readers was expressed in their way of life after reading the text. The challenge Paul threw to the Thessalonians in 4:3-6 underscores the preparation he anticipated, and it is a challenge to the present reader too. Hence, the Thessalonians and every reader of the text in any context now, have the challenge of living a holy life in preparation for the day of the Lord. They are to keep away from sexual immorality and keep their bodies in holiness and honour.

The titles suggested by the readers such as “Prepare for the second coming,” “How prepared am I for the coming of Jesus Christ?” “Preparation for the coming of the Messiah,” “Prepare yourself for you don’t know the day the Lord will come,” further indicated the issue of preparation for the second coming of Christ. The way forward as they examined the exhortation of Paul was to delve into the various metaphors and themes, he used in communicating the idea of preparation in the eschatological discourse. The challenge to the Thessalonians as the first recipients of the letter (then) and the readers in Ghana today (now) was to live in readiness for Christ’s imminent coming. The preparation according to the reports embodies different areas of life which can be summed up in daily holy living that is pleasing to God.

When the ordinary readers in these societies read 5:2-3 carefully in relation to question 3 (a and b) there was a general agreement that the metaphors of “thief” and “labour pains” were concerned with the timing of Jesus’ second coming. They expressed the understanding that it will be unknown to people and unpredictable. They used expressions such as
unannounced, unaware, unexpectedly, without prior notice, not pre-determined among others to denote the uncertainty in the time of his coming.

One society had a lengthy discussion on the issue of His coming without prior notice. Some readers were of the view that there are some signs in the Bible that points to the second coming and by that, Jesus have ‘served a notice’ of His coming. Others however, shared the view that though the signs are there to draw the attention of believers, the exact time of the coming is not stated and remains without notice. The researcher intervened in the discussion by giving a background to the text to guide the debate.

A reader from the society drew on the analogy of labour pains on a pregnant woman and argued that when a woman is pregnant, she knows she will experience pains when in labour. At times even doctors use technology to determine the day of labour for her. This notwithstanding sometimes the date fails or changes. Even on the day of labour, the exact time the labour pains will start is never known to the woman.

Hence, though there is knowledge and notice of the labour pain, yet one cannot determine exactly when the labour will start. This analysis affirmed the earlier view that there is the awareness of Jesus’ coming, but the exact timing remains unknown. They concluded that there is no prevention, or solution rather than preparation. For the level of an individual’s preparation determines whether the day of the Lord will be surprising, painful, and deadly as the groups suggested. They maintained that just as a thief does not have mercy on the people he goes to steal from, when Christ will appear, he will not show mercy to those who have not prepared themselves to live daily in anticipation of his coming. The event leading to Christ’s coming will be deadly as labour is to pregnant women, but those who have prepared themselves will not suffer, for it is not easy for thieves to break into houses with good security systems in place. In answering the questions on the
metaphors of “darkness” and “light” as used by Paul to contrast between the Thessalonian Christians and the larger society of their time, the groups used terminologies such as sin, sinners, unbelievers, the un-regenerated, uncleanness for darkness and salvation, believers, holiness, righteousness, cleanliness to represent light.

In one society, there was a discussion on the darkness and light metaphors representing sin and salvation respectively. One reader argued that you cannot claim to be saved and continue to live in sin and unrighteousness. Therefore, he submitted that the contrast between darkness and light is not simply between those who have accepted Jesus as their saviour or not, but between those that after accepting Him make constant effort of living a sanctified life and have salvation in His name. So, darkness has to do with sin and unrighteousness because believers who still engage in sin and unrighteousness are not living to please God, hence are not readily anticipating Christ’s return since they are not prepared for His coming. This position thus makes the preparation of Christians towards the second coming of Christ problematic according to some of the readers.

On the question of the problem of eschatology in the text, some readers identified problems connected to preparation such as some denominations not believing and teaching the Parousia because of diverse interpretation of the Bible. To others, the problem is the excessive focus on worldly things. Again, impatience leading to lack of faith among many contemporary Christians is a problem, because it impedes their preparation. Two societies, however, saw problems connected with the modalities of the Parousia. They see the unexpected nature (His coming as a thief, without any notice), and the unpredictable nature of the time in which He will come to be a problem. In the opinion of some of the readers, there is the tendency that many Christians might miss the day because of the occurrences of this world which can eschew Christians' from their daily preparation. This realization, in turn, called for considerable debate as the readers explored for more pre-
cise problems in the text associated with the second coming. In doing this, the readers frequently returned to the text for a closer reading in order to examine problems, making the discussion very interactive.

When it came to the message of the text to their cultural contexts, there were conflicting views which resulted from their diverse cultural context. Those from the societies in the high urban contexts did not appear to see much of the cultural issues influencing their understanding compared to those in the less urban contexts. It was perhaps because some readers in the urban contexts were not much informed about the cultural issues due to the cosmopolitan nature of their context. Some did not appear to know the cultural elements since they are more familiar with modern and Christian ways of living. Yet, the less urban contexts still encounter such practices in their contexts and so influence their reading of the text. According to the reports, the text warns believers to flee from certain sins in their context. Though they may not be culturally motivated, they need to be mindful that whatever they do culturally or socially is part of their preparation. To some of the readers, Christians must note that they are visitors and sojourners in their contexts so they must be guided by laws and conduct of their eternal kingdom and not by cultural and social demands that are inconsistent with what God requires of them.

One society debated extensively on the way people grieve in their context over the dead and some of the things they do when a member dies. They argued that in the context of the text there is hope for those who die in Christ; therefore, when one dies they should not mourn like unbelievers who do not have hope, because death is inevitable and can come anytime till Christ appears.\footnote{In one group the readers indicated that some families hire people to be crying at the funeral of their loved ones to demonstrate their love for the person.} They have to be alert and prepared at all times be-
cause any of the two (death of an individual or the coming of Christ) can occur at any
time.

Conversely, some of the churches maintained that some of the practices during funerals
and at other rites of passages are not cultural because they were not part of their rituals
and celebrations in the past but are due to the preferences of the bereaved family. For
instance, there were issues of expensive funerals in some contexts due to practices such
as procession from the mortuary to the house of the deceased amidst brass band music,
changing the dress of the deceased twice or thrice before burial, serving food and drinks
before burial, and undertakers who carry the casket dancing around with it. This notwith-
standing, they concluded that from the context of the text all such practices must not be
continued as Christians when we understand the position of the dead in Christ.

There was also the issue of life after death and reincarnation. Some cultures believe their
dead family members will go and join their ancestors in the afterword, but do not believe
in the resurrection. Some participants believe that most of the rituals and practices they
carry out when someone dies are as a result of this belief in ancestors and the hereafter.
Concerning reincarnation some readers were of the view that their dead members contin-
ue to live with them and answer the requests of those living in diverse ways, which in-
clude childbearing. They expressed that some departed members of the family are reborn
for other members of the family who need children, so that they will continue to be
members of the family and ensure its sustenance.

They, therefore, concluded that the destiny of the dead and their roles in some cultures is
at variance with the teaching of Paul in this epistle. The dead as ancestors are involved in
the activities of the living, mediating between them and God and also punishing and re-
warding good and evil behaviours in the society. This is contrary to Paul’s, teaching in
the text, therefore, as Christians there is the need to let the word of God guide them in their activities regarding the dead in their context.

On the application of the text to their daily lives, many readers saw the study of the text as a wake-up call. Some were of the view that the text serves as a reminder to be chaste, not to live in ignorance of Jesus’ coming and to do things right. In one society, the ordinary readers were of the view that it helps them to take right decisions in their commitment to God. Some also felt that by this text they are warned to be careful of their activities, both in church and at home because Christ can come and meet them anywhere.

Finally, as they discussed the text and examined themselves in the light of Paul’s exhortation, the readers saw the urgency of the need for daily preparation. This was demonstrated in their action plans which were expressing what they will do after the study to ensure transformation. It was an indication of the tension between the awareness of Christ’s imminent return and their readiness in anticipation of his coming. Some members resolved to stop sinning, and others indicated that they will now start to do what is pleasing to the Lord.

Most of the readers saw the need to re-examine their lives and assess their activities “to put things right.” They decided to eliminate whatever they know can be obstacles to their being with the Lord when he appears. To some readers, it is a call to prayer and intensive study of the Bible to do what is right keeping to God's instruction. Others indicated that there is the need to pray for grace to be awake at all times, being obedient to God and doing away with evil. Some readers saw in it a duty to preach the gospel to others who are still in darkness, while also encouraging each other in the faith as they await the coming of the Lord.
When the researcher asked a follow-up question about their readiness to be with the Lord if he should appear immediately, there were mixed reactions from the various societies. Some members were very quiet and did not react in any way to the question. Majority of the readers indicated that they needed some time to decide, while others said they still needed more time to prepare. Only a few of the readers reluctantly raised their hands up. Even though these Christians in the various societies of the church are aware of the second coming of Christ, most of them would, however, want to be given some more time to prepare for the second coming which is likened to the coming of a thief in the night according to the text.

5.7.2 Product of Reading with International Central Gospel Churches

The product of the reading process by the selected branches of ICGC suggests an understanding of the way of life of Christians in view of the second coming of Christ as a source of hope for Christians. Some branches expressed the understanding that the text indicates that no matter what happens Christians should have hope; therefore, it is an encouragement to strive forward and move in the right direction towards God. Some readers opined that the second coming of Christ is the hope of the Christian's calling in Christ. Therefore, Christians should live and walk bearing in mind that Christ is coming soon. The ordinary readers from the various branches of the ICGC read the text carefully to suggest titles for the text. Their reports suggested the theme of “encouragement” as some of them saw the text as part of a letter of encouragement. However, some groups suggested “the way of life for Christians which is pleasing to God.” Though the issue of preparation was mentioned by some readers, it was mostly discussed in the context of “life and living it to please God in anticipation of the second coming.”

The readers extensively discussed the metaphors of “a thief in the night” and “labour pains” since it was a threatening message for some of them. One branch upon a careful
reading and deliberations concluded that by the use of the metaphor, Paul communicated a sudden and surprising coming. They mentioned that it will be surprising to some people because they will not know of His coming and will not be ready or prepared to meet Him.

According to others, the metaphor indicates it will be “impromptu.” One reader also argued strongly that it means the coming of the Lord will be a surprise because “He will come to destroy,” based on the fact that thieves are destructive. It generated a debate in that branch that thieves do not come always to destroy but to take things that are valuable and important to them. Therefore, metaphorically Paul was trying to say that Jesus will come to take the people he cherishes and are important to Him. So, though it will be destructive for some people, to those who have lived to please Him it will be a joyful moment since they will go and be with the Lord. This agrees with the view of one branch that suggested that Jesus will come with a purpose just as every thief enters a house with the purpose to steal. But in the event of Jesus’ coming, “the purpose will be the salvation of the Christians and punishment or destruction of unbelievers.”

On this account, the darkness and light metaphors used in the distinction between the Thessalonian Christians and the non-believing community was expressed by most branches as denoting evil and good, what does not please God as against doing what is pleasing to God. Some of the churches also saw that it is in relation to “sin and righteousness,” “worldliness and life in Christ.” One group, however, saw the metaphor of darkness as “ignorance” and light as “knowledge about Christ,” hence implying those who are not saved and others who have salvation in Christ. The discussion on ignorance and knowledge brought to light the expression of darkness as death and light as life. They argued that the ignorant ones are dead in Christ; while those with knowledge about him have escaped death to life through their expression of faith in Christ.
This brought to light the in-depth understanding of the ordinary readers on salvation in Christ, for which reason most of the readers see the second coming as a time of hope which should encourage Christians to continue in holiness of life unto the Lord. The readers of the branches shared a similar view on the problem of eschatology in the context of the text. Majority of the readers expressed the concern of the uncertainty surrounding the second coming. This is because to some of the branches, some Christians are unprepared and there are problems of “small sins” such as “holy lies” among them which makes his unannounced coming (as a thief in the night) a problem because of the lack of preparation.

One reader expressed the view that Christians today are not able “to kill the flesh to live in the Spirit,” so most people do not “want to listen or study the word of God.” He commented that “all they want is prophecy and motivational messages where they can receive promises.” It implies that through prophetic ministrations they receive prophecies of hope and solutions to problems which do not demand any moral imperative. Therefore, some Christians are interested in quick solutions rather than studying the Bible. This according to him does not help in the preparation to meet Christ.

Notwithstanding these issues identified, one branch indicated they have no problem with the second coming of Christ as Paul taught the Thessalonians. In a discussion on this position, some of the members submitted that as a follower, all one needs to do is to obey and do what the Lord says in order that whatever happens they will not be affected negatively. Hence, the absence of a date should not affect those who live righteous existences, preparing daily for the Parousia.

From the reports, the relevance of the text to their cultural context centred more on their way of life within their context. Some branches indicated it is a wake-up call to repent of
anything wrong they are doing in their daily life. For instance, the groups from the high urban churches commented more on the issue of sexual immorality. Some readers felt that Christians living in the city perceive sexual immorality as ‘normal behaviour;’ indulging in it while frequenting the church, because of that though they go to church they still indulge in such sins. Perhaps because there are different cultures in the city, people are easily influenced by the behaviours of others. Some readers also submitted that it calls on them to put their houses in order by not living anyhow as the non-Christians are living in their contexts.

Some readers further saw the need to help other ICGC members to prepare for the coming of the Lord. They were of the view that just as Paul wrote to encourage the Thessalonian church, there is the need to offer encouragement to others when they are facing challenges in their faith. To them, the culture of criticizing and pulling others down is gaining root in their context instead of building others up. They cited examples of how some musicians and footballers, as well as Pastors, are always being criticized negatively in the society just to bring them down. In their view, there is the need to show love to people especially when in difficulty.

This view is similar to the relevance of the text to their branches, because they indicated from the discussions that whatever happens in the larger communities often happen in their churches. Some readers saw the text as an awakening to the church from sleep to the anticipation of the second coming. The church should not be ignorant about this but pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to live in a manner pleasing to God. Some readers expressed the understanding that the text encourages them to “know who they are,” “where they are and where they are heading towards.”
In their submissions, the distinction Paul made between the Thessalonians and the Gentiles using the darkness and light metaphors as discussed earlier encourages them because it offers the assurance to be in a unique position: “whether they die,” or “Christ appears,” they have a better place in the Lord. The text, therefore, motivates them not to be ignorant about the times but rather be vigilant and be awake at all times as they await His coming. To be awake, they indicated, includes abstaining from sexual immorality because of who and where they are and also because of where they are aspiring to go. It also means showing brotherly love and committing themselves to the things of God. It inspires them to be committed to themselves and others by being faithful, transparent and keep all necessary values as Christians.

There was, however, discussions on the issue of brotherly love as something that makes some Christians lazy and unable to take work seriously. It was revealed in the discussion that demonstrating love goes beyond giving material assistance, but rather includes comforting others in pain, empowering people to be self-sufficient, not cheating, among others.

The readers also saw in the text a call for outreach or “soul winning” as an expression of love to the outside world. The groups concluded that preaching the gospel to non-believers is an important component of the Christian's preparation for the second coming of Christ. However, most readers submitted that in recent times it is difficult for Christians to be actively involved in evangelism. Preachers on radio and television focus more on themselves and their churches than the gospel of Christ and salvation. They asserted that most preachers in the media often preach motivational and prosperity messages, performing miracles and giving directions. The church must rise up to the eschatological reality and encourage members to take to the act of seriously preaching the gospel.
The understanding of the dead becoming ancestors recurred in the discussions in almost all of the branches. Majority of the readers expressed that in their cultures they believe “that when one dies, it does not end there but the dead has somewhere to go.” Meaning they join the ancestors in the spirit world while being still actively involved in the life of the family. One reader commented that they become gods to the living because of their influence. However, they indicated “that if you die a ‘useless' death, Satan's agent will beat you.” They explained that when the course of the death is not natural, for example through curses, special rites must be performed before the burial to qualify the person to become an ancestor.

Some readers again indicated that the ancestors are believed to be reincarnated. The readers believe in reincarnation that is why in some cultures when a child is born, they consult to know which of their ancestors has been reborn and were given special names. Thus, the fate of the dead within their cultures is different from that of the text. In a discussion with one branch, the readers indicated that culturally they know that when one dies s/he moves to another world and that it is good people that can go into that world. But there is nothing in their culture like the resurrection where the dead person will rise; rather they believe that the person transitions into the world of spirits. From the discussion, we could perceive a sort of double belonging; to the Christian faith and the cultural belief although it was not emphatically expressed.

The ordinary readers upon the discussion of the text suggested various ways by which the text and understanding of the coming of Christ influences their lives. Some readers see the text as a reminder of the second coming which encourages them to live holy lives each day. One reader also noted that he envisages the glory that is ahead of him, however, thought of the second coming makes him scared so he always asks for forgiveness any moment he realizes he has sinned. That is to say that, in order not to miss the glory
associated with Christ’s appearing, he is required not to live with any sin but rather confess. To some readers, it influences them by creating the awareness of the Parousia thereby becoming vigilant. They are motivated by the text to shape their life by becoming doers of the word of God. Some readers emphasized the call to “soul winning” as a result of the influence from the text. They observed that the text always reminds them of the need to reach out to others who are still non-believers of the gospel. Since the coming will be sudden, they are motivated to preach Christ continually, knowing that he can come at any time. Again, preaching the gospel is a core mandate of all Disciples of Christ, so they must do it as worthy servants.

Other readers maintained that the text helps them to appreciate that salvation is in progress and that they must live each day working on their salvation which will be consummated on Christ's second coming. For this reason, some readers mentioned that they are encouraged to pray always for the grace of God, and for Him to sustain them against the evils in their context and they are constantly renewing their minds with the word of God. As part of working out their salvation, they also seek to help and encourage other Christians to serve God no matter the challenges as they await the Lord to come and consummate their salvation at His appearing.

The ordinary readers expressed different call to action from the text. Some readers indicated the need to put on the whole armour of God, study the Bible and live practical Christian lives. Others also said they have to double their efforts to live holy and committed lives to please God. In one branch the readers felt the need for self-examination and reassessment of their lives in the light of what Paul taught the church. This underscores the need for adequate preparation as others attested to. Specifically, one reader noted that she will have to reconsider her decisions and actions bearing in mind that death can occur anytime even before Christ’s return as it was in the case of the Thessalo-
nian church. According to this reader, she always took decisions based on the knowledge she has acquired in her field of study as a lawyer. Some readers indicated their intention to commit themselves to evangelism to create awareness of the imminent coming and share what they have learned in the CBS with others.

To sum up, the selected ICGC churches understand the text to concern the second coming of Christ as a message of hope and encouragement for them in their anticipation of Christ's coming. It thus calls on them to prepare themselves through showing of love to one another, offering encouragement to people to hold on to their faith since Christ's return will be glorious and imminent.

Although the issue of reincarnation and ancestral belief within their contexts stands in contrast to what is taught in the text about the dead, the good values in them can be adapted to enhance the understanding of the text. Through the study, they appreciated the need to hold on to the biblical position and ensure that their cultural approach to eschatology will be influenced by the biblical understanding.

5.7.3 Product of Reading with the Assemblies of Church of Pentecost

The selected Assemblies of the Church of Pentecost expressed different perspectives of the text in their contexts which were all related to the coming of Jesus. All the assemblies affirmed that the text is about the Parousia of Christ but highlighted some particular aspects of the coming. One reader in an assembly expressed the notion that the text is about “assurance for Christians and their way of life.” Similarly, in another assembly, the readers saw the text as expressing “the hope of Christians after eternity.” Though other views were expressed in the various groups, these two featured prominently in the discussion. In addition, some of the readers observed that the passage is about the preparations Christians must make in anticipation of the coming of the Lord. They submitted that the
text enjoins Christians to live to please God, live righteous and exemplary lives which should be characterized by holiness.

From this background, the readers suggested titles that underscore these understandings of the text. The readers proposed titles such as “Preparation towards the Second Coming of Christ,” “The State of the Believer after Death,” “Holiness to meet the Lord,” “Prepare to meet the Lord,” “After Death what Next?,” “Setting myself apart for the Lord’s Coming,” “Be ready for the Lord,” “Living a holy Life and Death as gain for the Christian,” among others. However, analysing the responses from the various assemblies, the majority of the titles connote the idea of preparation for the second coming and focuses on the benefits the Christians can enjoy if they prepare for his coming.

Prominent in the discussions on preparation was the theme of holiness which they commended as the main proof that one is in readiness for the coming of Christ. What was conspicuous in their discussion on holiness was that it was much centred on sexual purity. They used phrases such as “setting yourself apart,” “righteous living and an upright life,” “total consecration,” to underscore the need to abstain from all manner of illicit sexual relationships that makes one unholy which does not please God. Their submission suggests that living to please God to a large extent depends on how holy you are in all you do especially in the matters of sexual behaviour. Their emphasis was as a result of the understanding that sexual sins destroy the body which is the temple of God. The researcher, however, intervened to bring to their attention the need to see holiness in holistic terms covering all aspects of their life and relationship with others.

The ordinary readers expressed related understanding of the manner of Christ’s return as they analysed the expression “a thief in the night” and “labour pains come to a pregnant woman” in the text. Some indicated that it will be unexpected, without notice, it will be a
surprise. One reader emphasized that it means the coming is unpredictable. He argued that just as one cannot predict when a thief will come to his/her house, the metaphor suggests that the Parousia is unpredictable. Another reader suggested that Christ’s coming will be a scary moment. He recounted a personal experience of a robbery attack to emphasize his point that it will be scary for those who will not be prepared. These understandings emphasize the need for preparation as they echoed in earlier discussions.

Similarly, “labour pains” was understood to be the reality of Christ’s return and the uncertainty surrounding the time of his return. Some readers proposed that it means the coming is certain, that whether people like it or not he will come; “whether we know the time or not” He will come. For just as a woman cannot run away from or stop the labour pains from coming, Christians can also not escape or resist the Parousia. They noted that every pregnant woman knows she must go through pains at labour, so though she will expect it, the exact moment is unknown, and she cannot stop it when the pains begin no matter where and when it will start. In effect it means it cannot be avoided, postponed or escaped: it is certain.

Nevertheless, one reader explained that using this expression, Paul was referring to the mixed feelings that will occur at the return of Christ. In his view, when a woman is in labour she experiences pain and discomfort, yet there is an inner joy of the fact that she is going to have a child. This becomes evident with the joy they experience when the baby is born. Relating this to the return of Christ indicate that the day will be sad and difficult for many people, but to some, it will be full of joy knowing that they are going to be with the Lord. A woman in one of the assemblies opined that due to the anticipation of pain at labour, women are taught to prepare themselves ahead of time to meet the pain anytime. Some take up some exercises and medications during pregnancy that enables them to gain strength and endure the pain of labour. In the same vein, Christians are sup-
posed to prepare for the coming of the Lord at all times. On the metaphors of darkness and light, the readers used contrasting words such as ‘sin and righteous life,’ ‘unbelievers and believers,’ ‘blindness and vision,’ ‘bad and good,’ among others to explain.

Furthermore, there was a debate in one assembly regarding the use of these metaphors in relation to the second coming. The readers had varied opinions about what “darkness and light” could possibly mean depending on the context in which they are used. One reader, in contributing to the discussion, indicated that in the context of the text, darkness means ignorance and light stands for knowledge about the second coming of Christ. In her submission, she noted that those in darkness have no knowledge of Christ and the second coming; as a result, they live to please themselves and not God. They do what they like thinking they are not accountable to anyone. But those in the light have such knowledge and so are not living ignorantly.

Others opposed this view arguing that everyone in this world knows they are created by God and expect that they believe in Him and live the way he expects of them. Therefore, as long as the person has not come to accept this fact s/he is still in darkness. But those who believe and accept this position are in the light. Thus, to be in the light is linked to salvation. Some readers noted that inferring from Paul’s description of the Thessalonians as in light; the expression is more about the unsaved and the saved. Upon further discussion and intervention by the researcher, they concluded that being in the light is not only about being saved but also being aware of the imminent coming of Christ and being prepared for that day which is not known to anyone.

Concerning question five (5), problems associated with the second coming of Christ according to the text, the responses that were given were not focused on the text. Rather they concerned the way of life of Christians and what can pose a challenge to them on
the day of the Parousia. To some of the readers how to sanctify themselves in preparation for that day is problematic because obeying the teachings of the Bible is difficult. They indicated that the pleasures of life, the temptations that Christians are confronted with, as well as lack of self-control and lust, shows that Christians are not prepared for the coming of the Lord. This position notwithstanding, two readers from two different assemblies raised concerns with the delayed Parousia. Quoting from one reader, he said “I heard that Jesus is coming when I was a child. Now I am old, so when is Christ coming?” He expressed a kind of frustration over the delay of the Parousia. In connection with the delay, another reader said: “we can see the fulfilment of some signs given in the Bible though not in this text, but they are all not telling the specific day and he is not coming.” They submitted that it is a problem because there is the tendency to sleep, forget being watchful and sober as Paul admonished in this letter, since there seemed to be so much delay in His coming.

The ordinary readers discussed the relevance of the text to their various cultural contexts. Some expressed the understanding that culture cannot take them to heaven, so they have to put Christ first. There was a debate in one assembly about what really constitutes the cultural context. The researcher intervened to clarify the situation for the discussion to continue. A reader indicated that when they believe in Christ, their culture changes so they are not attached to any cultural elements. Therefore, in his view, the cultural context does not matter.

However, in the same assembly, another reader commented that there are cultural elements in their activities such as funeral and marriage rites. He said they must not take them for granted because they are all part of their preparations for the second coming. In another assembly of a high urban area, the readers observed that the text exhorts them to stand in the midst of temptation. They should be aware of good and evil deeds in their
context and try to be examples of Christ. They indicated they must let their deeds be good to challenge all the evils that are happening in their communities. Other readers expressed the understanding that they must not cheat people, stop immorality and live with their own spouse. In one of the assemblies in the Ashanti region, one reader drew an analogy from the preparation one makes to meet the King of Ashanti each time he requests to meet his people; in a similar way Christians must prepare for the second coming of Christ. Some were of the impression that the executioners, elders, messengers, and drummers who play appellations for the King’s arrival can be likened to the events of the coming of Christ.

A reader expressed the view, that according to the text some of the practices in their culture which are against the Christian faith must be avoided. They mentioned practices such as idol worship, the killing of people at the burial of royals and executioners, early or forced marriage. In a discussion on this issue, they concluded that it amounts to taking advantage of the girls because they are vulnerable and have no one to come to their rescue. So, the Christians should set an example by challenging such aspects of the culture. Also on burial and funeral rites, there were debates in most of the assemblies on what is done because of their cultural contexts. In the assemblies in the Ashanti region, they were particular about widowhood rites and argued that the Christians should do it differently from the non-Christians. With their understanding of the text that the dead are not lost, their spouses should not be subjected to any inhuman treatment. Some readers

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384 In the Upper East region, a reader noted that with the issue of early marriage, sometimes the parents do not approve of it, but as a cultural practice, the parents cannot do anything about it.

385 During the discussion in one assembly, the pastor narrated a scenario where he had to intervene when a girl runs to him to save her from the men who were chasing her to forcefully take her in marriage. According to him, the girl runs to him while in the pulpit preaching to save her because the man and some relatives were pursuing her to give her to marriage to a man far older than her. The pastor said he reported the matter to the police after he went to consult the parents who said they never authorized the marriage. He had to resist the pressure of the men on the girl and even took her to stay at the mission house to avoid further attacks of that nature. The girl was sent to school and is still staying with the Pastor.
argued, however, that these practices are being modernized and not like in the past. People restated the need to look at them from the biblical point of view.

In the Upper East Assemblies, there were discussions on the burial practices where the dead are buried sitting in the grave and in their compounds because of their belief that they are still part of the society. It is for this reason they bury them in their compounds instead of a cemetery. The readers were divided on this cultural element though they have accepted the gospel. This suggests that some of them still hold to their cultural beliefs and practices.

All the church groups attested to the relevance of the text to their local assemblies. Some of the readers saw that as a church they should not be ignorant about the second coming but be in readiness for it. To some others, it is a reminder that as light, others are watching them, in view of that they must live in order to be example to others and prepare for the second coming. They should not rebel against the church, their leaders and the teachings of the church as they remain watchful and sober, because as Christians, “they will have a big question” if they are left behind in the coming of the Lord.

Again, it is a reminder to the church that they have hope in Christ so every member must be hopeful. As a follow-up to this relevance, in almost all the assemblies they expressed the need to help and encourage one another as a church because the coming of Christ according to the text is real and there should be joy after enduring suffering today. Some readers expressed the relevance of evangelism by the church. In their view, it is a call to the church to intensify evangelistic activities knowing the coming is imminent. One reader indicated that they now focus more on other programs than evangelism; hence there is the need to return to active evangelism.
Concerning the fate of the dead in their culture, as compared to what Paul describes in the text, the readers responded that culturally if one dies it is believed the person has gone to be with the ancestors. Some also said the person travels to another world that is why they bury the dead with certain personal effects. They also noted that this belief informs the kind of burial rite that is performed for different people in the society. They, however, observed that according to the text they sleep, awaiting the return of Christ. In the cultural understanding, there is no resurrection because they go to continue their life in the next world but those who die in Christ have the hope of resurrecting. Another reader expressed the understanding that they believe when one dies, he/she is going to rest, so it is an end to the life on earth. As to where the person will go it depends on the kind of life the person lived while on earth but according to the text, the dead goes to wait for a day of judgment.

There was a lengthy discussion in one assembly on the issue of accountability for the dead in the text but not in the culture. Some readers were of the view that from the text the dead are accountable to God when Christ returns, but there is no accountability for the dead according to the cultural understanding. They argued that once the dead moves to the next world to continue their lives, there is no judgment showing how they lived. However, some readers indicated that there is accountability in the cultural belief as well because the life a person lived determines where he/she will go when dead. Therefore, though there may be no mention of heaven and hell in the cultural understanding, there is still accountability and judgment.

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Some readers in the assemblies in the Ashanti region indicated that when a Chief or member of a royal family dies the burial is different from an ordinary member. Also, when a pregnant woman dies especially at labour, they perform certain rites before they bury her. And when someone dies through cursing, they have rites that they perform before the burial.
This view resulted in a discussion in some of the assemblies as to what should be their attitude after studying what the text says about the dead. After several deliberations, the readers concluded that they should not worry so much about the dead just that sometimes it is difficult to lose someone so close to you. This understanding must inform their practices and rites at burial and funerals because they are only going to wait for the Lord's return.

A greater section of the readers admitted that the study of the text influences their lives in diverse ways: reminders, motivation, and resolutions they made. Some readers indicated that the study reminds them to live righteous lives knowing the Lord can appear anytime. It also reminds them that they can also die before the Lord appears, so they must always live righteous lives. Some also noted that it calls on them to live for Christ and influence others positively with their lives because there is assurance of life after death or at Christ's return for them.

Some of the ordinary readers also noted that the text motivates them to improve their service to God in whatever work they are doing in the society and to remain righteous. One reader said he is motivated by the text to live always in the knowledge that “he who has promised of His coming will surely come:” this knowledge encourages him in all he does as a Christian. Also, the text motivates him to comfort others who are dejected because the journey is not easy. Others submitted that it helps them to appreciate that “there is a place prepared for them.” By this motivation, they are inspired to hold on to their faith in difficult times and help others too.

Other readers indicated that the text helps them to make some resolutions that are helpful in their preparation for the second coming. Some explained they resolved to “say no to fornication” after reading the text. While others resolved “to stay alert and in readiness
for the coming of the Lord at all times,” others resolved to “do frequent analysis and examination of their lives” to be sure they are always in the right direction. Some of the readers saw the text as a call to be serious about their Christian lives and be cautious in their work for God. Yet to others, it is a call to absolute obedience to the word of God because it is through it that they can be holy always as they await the Parousia. One reader stated that the text recalls the need to pay heed to some basic occurrences in life which we often overlook. He cited the example of our telephone conversations: he observes that Christians often do not speak the truth while on the phone because they know the person cannot see them.

From the understanding that came out of the discussions of the text, the readers took different personal decisions. Some of them decided they will analyse their lives again and preach the gospel to the unsaved. Similarly, some other readers affirmed that though they have been preaching the gospel, they are going to do it more effectively. One reader decided that in his evangelism he will emphasize that death is in the ‘air’ so they must prepare. Some elders of the assemblies decided they were going to give the teaching about the second coming prominent attention in the programs of their assemblies. They also pledged to offer encouragement to their congregations in their preparation for the Lord's return.

After referring to the text several times in the discussions and looking at the exhortations Paul gave, some of the readers indicated their decision to study the word of God often, go to church regularly to be encouraged and to be able to encourage others. Others also determined that having studied this text, they will be watchful, alert, prayerful and pay heed to the word of God, live by the standards of Christ, since He is coming soon. Again, they will look up to God and His word because salvation is not in any oil but in the word
of God, while they also remain mindful of the activities of false prophets in this eschatological period.

Conversely, some readers indicated that they will forget about the world and live a Christ-like life. Other readers said they were going to give their lives completely to Christ after the study, while some also submitted that they were going to “do away with sexual immorality.” Majority of the readers affirmed that they were going to “patch up any differences” they have with others and work out their salvation with “fear and trembling.” Some of the readers confessed they were going to check their lives to see if “they are on track” so that if there is anything they have to do, they will do it now because “tomorrow may never come.”

When the researcher asked a follow-up question on how many of the readers were ready for the second coming as they were seated in the auditorium, the reactions were not too different from that of the Methodist and ICGC branches. However, in the assemblies where there were a lot of adults, the readers were confident to indicate their readiness. Those who indicated their readiness were very convinced with their decision and happy with their response to the question. One reader remarked, “We are tired of this world.” On the contrary, in the assemblies where there were a lot of youths, especially in the English assemblies, majority of the readers were very quiet and in a very reflective mood.

In an interaction with the Sandema District Pastor in relation to their reaction, he indicated that the church takes the teaching on eschatology very seriously and makes every effort to create eschatological awareness in their members. He mentioned the church has a policy that every year one month should be devoted to teaching on the second coming, which he personally ensures that it takes place. He, however, mentioned that his teaching
does not always base on 1 Thessalonians though he sometimes refers to it. This position was confirmed by the pastor in charge of the Tantra Hill Assembly in Accra. He indicated further that to create this awareness in the members, all announcements in the church are started with the phrase “should the Lord tarry.” He explained it is to let members know that as they close from the service, there is the possibility of the Lord appearing before their next meeting and so they must go and live in anticipation of his return before their next meeting.\textsuperscript{387}

5.8 Conclusion

The CBS reveals the major role language plays in the interpretation of a biblical passage. When the text was read and studied in the language chosen by the people, most readers were able to express their understanding without any hesitation.\textsuperscript{388} This notwithstanding, the different languages used in the study of the text brought into bare cultural diversity in the hermeneutical process. The study was conducted by studying the text itself and in front of the text. These modes of reading contributed to the critical appropriation of the metaphors and themes Paul used in communicating the eschatological message to the church. It enabled the readers to observe the dynamic nature of the text so as to examine what the text meant for them in their present context. The readers were motivated by the modes to read the text carefully and closely and pay attention which facilitated the understanding of the text and how it applies to them today.

The three regions had different socio-cultural and economic matrixes. Their contexts brought different perspectives to the discussion of the text similar to that of the churches from the same region. The churches from the high urban centres gave perspectives that

\textsuperscript{387} The use of the phrase ‘Should the Lord Tarry’ in the announcement was observed by the researcher in all the assemblies the study was conducted.

\textsuperscript{388} Where interpreters were used, the researcher could only decipher the clarity of the interpretation by the expression of the readers and the responses that were given in relation to the question that was asked.
emphasize the influence of modern social lives on Christians in their contexts. They appeared to have no much challenges with cultural issues but the social influence was what featured prominently in their responses. Some did not express any interest in the cultural issues, while others manifested inadequate knowledge of them. Contrarily, the churches in the less urban centres presented understandings that focus on the cultural concepts present in their context and their influence on the understanding of the text. Despite the differences in the socio-economic and cultural contexts, their responses did not seem to portray any economic implications in their reading. This perhaps was because the text was more focused on the coming of Jesus.

The product of reading from the selected churches highlights some significant perspectives of the readers in the various contexts, although they all understood the text concerns the second coming of Christ. They also indicated the understanding of what the text enjoins Christians to do as they anticipate the second coming of Christ. There were some specific issues that each of the selected churches emphasized in their understanding of the text considering the responses that came from the readers.

In their responses, the selected Methodist churches were keen on the preparation of Christians in the eschatological anticipation. They were of the notion that iniquity has abounded so much in our contemporary time that it takes a conscious effort to live a holy life. In this light, majority of the readers affirmed that the text reminds them of the teachings they have received and the fact that they must endeavour to keep to what they have learned. The preparation according to the reports embodies different areas of life which could be summed up in daily holy living that is pleasing to God.

Dwelling on the metaphors of darkness and light, as well as the expressions “thief in the night” and “labour pains,” the societies reaffirmed the need for daily preparation since
the coming of the Lord cannot be predicted and is imminent. They maintained that whatever they do culturally or socially has an impact on their preparation. In view of that the Christian ought to be mindful of all cultural and social engagements in this eschatological time of the church. They concluded on the basis that in everything they must consider it from the position of the Christian faith and what scripture teaches. The call to action by the readers emphasized more on the need for preparation. Most of the action they decided to take after the study centred on eliminating practices that were not pleasing to God, and could be a hindrance to them at the coming of Christ. Therefore, in their perspective, the text is an exhortation for adequate preparation. This underscores that some of the participants considered themselves not ready for the second coming and required more time for preparation.

With reference to the selected branches of ICGC, their responses resonates the hope in the second coming of Christ and the motivation to persevere in the faith while encouraging others to hold on to Christ. They emphasized the second coming as the hope of the Christian’s calling in Christ and as such must provide the believer with the necessary encouragement not to give up amid difficulties in this eschatological existence, knowing Christ will return soon. The titles they suggested as well as their understanding of the metaphors and expressions affirm this understanding that Jesus will come and take those who are His. Although it will be disastrous for some people, to those who are waiting for His coming it will be a joyful moment. For this reason, their perspectives re-echoed the need to encourage members of the church and not critique. Therefore, they should always be motivated by this fact of Christ’s return to continue walking in Christ.

Their perspective indicates that the glory awaiting the believer at the return of Christ motivates them not to live with unconfessed sin. The study of the text, in their understanding, helps them appreciate their salvation that it is in progress but will surely be con-
summated at the second coming. As part of working out their salvation, they seek to help and encourage other Christians to go through it no matter the challenges as they await the Lord to come and consummate their salvation at His appearing. Judging from their call to action, their activities were centred on their understanding of the text as a message of hope and encouragement. The various activities they decided to carry out were part of preparations in their bid to strengthen themselves and to serve as encouragement to engage more in the things they are doing for God.

The Church of Pentecost assemblies presented perspectives which affirm the two positions echoed by the two churches earlier with some nuance. They expressed the understanding of assurance for the Christian after death or at the coming of Christ as well as hope for Christians at eternity. Again, they emphasized the idea of preparation for the second coming by living to please God. However, their discussion on hope was based on the preparation of the Christian in living a holy life which was more centred on sexual purity. To them to prove that one is ready for the coming of Christ is determined by how holy you are in all you do with the emphasis on sexual behaviour. This position, therefore, requires preparation as discussed earlier.

From the metaphors and themes used by Paul, they expressed the certainty of Christ’s return and indicated its unpredictability. As they used contrasting words to describe those who can be with the Lord and those who cannot, they emphasized the need for holiness in one’s preparation as there will be no escape for the unprepared at the coming of the Parousia. Their strong emphasis on holiness makes the delayed Parousia a problem for some of their readers. Because there is the tendency to sleep, forget being watchful and sober as Paul admonished in this letter since there seems to be much delay in His coming, and sin and iniquity keeps abounding in their contexts.
The call to action also reflects these perspectives of the readers. Some took decisions that focus on motivation to be more active in their service to God. Others also made resolutions which were to enable them to prepare themselves with emphasis on holiness. In this course, some readers resolved to avoid sexual immorality, while some indicated a complete surrender to Christ. Others too saw they were called on to self-examination and assessment to ensure that they were living right.

The CBS also indicated that the churches generally understood that the text communicated the call for preaching the gospel. By calling people to Christ, the Christian is demonstrating love towards non-Christians so that in the second coming of Christ they will also be with the Lord.

Conclusively, through the metaphors and imageries used by Paul the concept of hope, perseverance, endurance, and commitment are implicitly taught in addition to holiness. The understanding of the readers reveals the need to hold on to these values in the eschatological anticipation. It would be very important to clarify how these concepts can be developed for the transformation of the individual in their eschatological anticipation.

There were also some cultural issues emanating from the interpretation of the text which influences their understanding of the second coming of Christ. The readers indicated that there is a belief in ancestors, reincarnation, the afterlife and that the notion of resurrection is not present in their contexts. The belief in the ancestors and reincarnation informs some of the practices and rites the members perform which also aids in their understanding of the fate of the dead at the second coming of Christ.

Therefore, how does the supposed lack of the concept of resurrection in some cultural contexts affect their understanding of the second coming of Christ? How can the cultural elements underscored be engaged by the text in a dialogue to bring about transformation
in the society and aid the preparation of the Christians for the Parousia? Culturally they believe it is good people who can join the ancestors when they die. Relating this to the analysis of the text, it is those who live to please God that will be with the Lord at His coming. Similarly, there are requirements regarding the kind of death a person must die as well as certain qualities to possess before one becomes an ancestor.

According to the text it is those who die in Christ that will resurrect to meet the Lord in the clouds at His return. In the light of the above, how can these virtues ingrained in the context of the readers be engaged by the textual understanding to address some of society’s problem of corruption, social evils, and immorality of all forms? Can the product of the engagement in anyway help to promote a good way of life that can lead to transformation and contribute to the preparation of Christians in their anticipation of Christ? Are there some cultural elements that the church can incorporate or accept to enhance the understanding of the text by Ghanaian Christians in their eschatological life? The next chapter explores these issues in a dialogical engagement of the text and context in an attempt to understanding eschatology from a Ghanaian perspective.
CHAPTER SIX

ESCHATOLOGY FROM GHANAIAN PERSPECTIVES

6.1 Introduction

The chapter engages the call to action that emerged from the exegetical analysis in dialogue with the ordinary readers understanding and appropriation of the text, which includes preparation for the second coming, mutual love in eschatological anticipation, Parousia and hope, Parousia and holy living employing the Contextual Bible Study approach. It further discusses the challenge of the text to some cultural understanding of death and afterlife and some Christian values that are developed through the appropriation of the understanding of the text in the Ghanaian context.

6.2 Dialogical Engagement of Text and Context

As a process of studying the biblical text contextually, the relationship between scientific exegesis and the context must be enhanced, in order not to make the Bible essentially “dumb for the present,” unable to address the problems of society as Gatti has indicated. Ekem earlier submitted that “in the history of biblical interpretation, various approaches have been adopted with a view to facilitating effective communicative interaction between authors and their [potential] readers/listeners.” Hence the effort of contextualization is an attempt to present the Christian message in a culturally relevant way.

Therefore, to address the problem of distance between the official exegesis and fundamentalist approach which is characterized by a literal reading of scripture, Gatti has pro-

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389 The use of Ghanaian Perspectives in this study refers to the views of actual readers who are Christians in Ghana expressed in the CBS.
391 Ekem, “Dialogical Exegesis,” 76.
posed a dialogic reading of scripture. Anum similarly affirms that “there is the need for effective dialogue between ordinary readers and scholarly readers in order to arrive at a representative and meaningful interpretation.”

Thus, the text and cultural context function as dialogue partners to address the community of believers in a particular context. This is relevant because the language, beliefs, and practices of any culture contain their philosophical ideas which have influence on the reception of the text. For this reason, in Africa, even in Asia and Latin America dialogue has always ensued between the biblical text and cultural as well as socio-political realities of the communities receiving the biblical message.

However, Ossom-Batsa submits that too much stress on context and culture runs the risk of generating a “pseudo-biblical theology,” not concretely founded on the Scriptures. We can think of a theological reflection oriented towards “fundamentalism” and “syncretism.” Where an adequate social analysis is not carried out before an eventual contextualization, there is the likelihood of mixing Christian ideas with African Tradition. In addition, it runs the risk of anachronism, making reference to a culture of the past that no longer exists as the frame for interpretation.

To guard against such challenge of overemphasizing the context, the chapter engages the call to action from the exegetical analysis and the issues evolving from the context in a dialogue to underscore the relevance of appropriating the text for contemporary Ghanaian Christians in their anticipation of Christ’s imminent Parousia. Such a dialogical engagement between the text and context possess the characteristic of producing transformation for the individual and the receiving cultures of the text.

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396 Eken, “Dialogical Exegesis,” 76.
6.2.1 The Ghanaian Christian and Preparation for the Parousia

The analysis of the text and the product of the Contextual Bible Study indicate a shared faith among the original recipients of the letter and the contemporary readers in Ghana. As part of the expression of faith in Christ and His impending Parousia, there is the call to daily preparation as they anticipate his coming. The ordinary readers maintained that just as one must prepare before meeting the Chief whenever he calls, similarly, they must prepare to meet Christ’s return.

The initial exhortations of Paul in the pericope (1 Thess. 4:1-12) emphasized the way of life of Christians as they await the Parousia. The appeal to holy living in order to please God, by abstaining from sexual immorality, living decent lives in the community and working hard to earn their living, were all lifestyles required in their preparation for meeting the Lord. This is supposed to be a constant commitment because as the text indicates, the day and time are unknown.

Against this background, the ordinary readers repeatedly echoed the need for adequate preparation for the Parousia during the CBS. The readers expressed that the text calls for immediate preparation in every area of their lives which they summarized as “living daily to please God.” Paramount in this preparation is abstinence from sin and immorality as Paul exhorted the Thessalonians. According to them, the metaphors Paul used in the exhortation reaffirm the need for daily preparation. Hence, they must pay attention to every detail of their lives, including all cultural and social engagements, since everything they do is part of their preparation.

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398 The Ghanaian Christians as used here is in reference to the perspectives of the ordinary readers who participated in the Contextual Bible Study process from the selected churches in the three religions indicated.
With the knowledge and the hope that Christ is coming soon, every activity they engage in must be considered from a biblical perspective and conducive to the eschatological meeting with Christ. It is for this same reason that the readers indicated they will “abstain from sexual immorality,” put “things right,” “examine their lives,” “reconsider their decisions” in their call to actions. Their actions indicate daily activities that will make them “right with God” and place them in a position of readiness for the eschatological event.

The day-to-day life preparation involves activities that demonstrate faith in Christ and His sudden return. It includes devotion and commitment to God and His work. As part of their daily preparation, the ordinary readers indicate the need to be committed to God in their Christian lives and “take the work of God seriously.” For this reason, the CBS report indicated they will frequently or daily assess their lives. In their view, preparation entails a re-examination of every activity each time to “ensure they are on track.” They observed “they must go to church regularly,” “do more for God,” “and practice what they are taught in church.” In effect, the Ghanaian Christian is to live a transformed life each day in anticipation of the return of Christ, as by the daily assessment and re-examination, they are able to change from behaviours and lifestyles that are detrimental to their salvation, thereby leading to a transformation in the context in which they live.

From the discussion on “light” and “darkness,” they expressed the understanding that in their preparation they must live as light, which they noted “they must be examples to those in the ‘world’” and other Christians. This expresses a commitment to self and others in their anticipation of Christ. By being committed to others, they were emphatic on the need for evangelism or “soul winning” and on encouraging others in the faith as Paul frequently did in the text. Although Paul was not explicit on the need to evangelize, the readers saw it as a commitment to the outside. This decision perhaps might have resulted
from the eschatological dimension of evangelization in Ghana. Their commitment to others is also indicated in their decision not to “cheat others or take advantage of people” but to be transparent when dealing with others.

They indicated the need for preparation by improving their spiritual life. They discussed the need for spiritual emphasis through studying the Bible, paying attention to the teachings of Christ and praying daily for sustaining grace. As they discussed the exhortations of Paul during the CBS, the ordinary readers upheld that the only way to know and do the will of God, to prepare adequately for his coming, is by paying attention to scripture and making a conscious effort to appropriate the message of the Bible in their daily lives. The readers indicated in their action plans to study the Bible frequently and to endeavour to live in conformity with the scriptures. To do this, they asserted it requires the grace of God to sustain them. They said “there is the need to pray to God daily to sustain us” considering all the occurrences in the contexts, they noted.

In summary, as a perspective of the anticipation of the Parousia by Ghanaian Christians, their daily lives in their contexts should be lived in preparation for Christ’s return. The exhortation calls for a sustained effort of consistently living according to the imperatives of the Christian faith which amounts to their daily preparation for the return of Christ.

6.2.2 The Parousia and the Hope of the Ghanaian Christian

The study again brings to light a shared faith in the hope of Christ’s coming. Faith in Christ and His pending return gave hope to the Thessalonians and based on that Paul encouraged them to persevere in their walk with God in the face of persecution. In the same way, the ordinary readers discussed the theme of hope as an important element in eschatological life in their context. The analysis of the text and the product of the CBS both underscore the assurance of hope for Christians based on the person of Christ: His death
and resurrection, as well as his promised return in the _eschaton_. Hope is also assured from the resurrection of the dead, and from the fact that those alive at his appearing will be taken up to be with the Lord.

O’Callaghan posits that the content or object of hope for the Christian faith is based on four important eschatological facts: the coming of Jesus Christ in glory at the end of time, which is the Parousia, the resurrection of the dead, the renewal of the universe and judgment of humanity, followed by eternal life for those who have been faithful to God or eternal loss for those who have not. This supports the claim that Christian eschatology is founded mainly on Christ. Mbiti affirms the Christological orientation of New Testament eschatology indicating that the phenomenon is better understood to be Christological based on fulfilment in Christ. The fulfilment, he notes, is partly revealed in the incarnation. And the church as an eschatological body partially experiences this hope. This implies that the church experiences some dimension of the fulfilment through the relationship they have with God through the incarnation of Christ.

The hope of Ghanaian Christians according to the CBS is based on the salvation they have experienced in Christ. From the discussion on the metaphors of “darkness” and “light,” the ordinary readers expressed their understanding of salvation in Christ. From this insight, they saw the second coming as a time of hope which should encourage them to live in holiness. The understanding of their salvation “encourages them to know who

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399 O’Callaghan, _Christ our Hope_, 11-12.
400 The doctrine of the Christian faith holds that God’s Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, who lived and died among men and after his resurrection from the dead ascended into heaven for the purpose of sending the Holy Spirit, will surely come to the earth again in his risen glory after the elapse of a period of time that God alone knows. In order to definitively judge the whole of humanity. This event is normally called the _Parousia_, or final “manifestation” of Christ. The Christ will come to judge not only those who have died before his coming, but also those who are still alive when he returns, the Church teaches. These four elements of eschatology: Christ’s coming or _Parousia_, universal resurrection, the destruction and renewal of the cosmos, and final judgment—are closely linked with one another.

402 Ibid.
they are, where they are and where they are heading towards.” It thus calls on them to prepare themselves by showing love to one another, offering encouragement and support to people to hold on to their faith as Paul exhorted, since Christ's return will be glorious, imminent and will consummate their salvation.

Convincingly, Christian hope is a virtue that underscores the essence of salvation. Christian eschatology deals with the divine promise of eternal salvation at the Parousia realized by the power of God made manifest in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. In this eschatological expectation, the church does not promise a perfect state of being, happiness or fulfilment. Neither does it claim the solution to the numerous problems and disconcertion of the world. Rather, through Christ God has offered salvation from sin leading to eternal, loving relationship with the Trinity and mankind. It requires a perfect, conscious union with God, which is dependent on grace. Benedict XVI also observes that

> to come to know God—the true God—means to receive hope. God, by infusing grace, provides believers with a stable, positive inclination of the will by which they hope to obtain their eternal happiness and fulfilment from him. For this reason, when as Christians we say “we are saved,” we are saved in hope.

It implies that without salvation, a person may entertain all kinds of hope, but ultimately is without hope. S/he lacks the unflinching hope that sustains the whole of life. True hope that overcomes all disappointments can only be deeply anchored in God. God through the redemptive work of Christ has made this hope available to Ghanaian Christians. This gives them hope for the consummation of their salvation at the appearing of Christ.

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403 O’Callaghan, *Christ our Hope*, vii.
Again, from the CBS discussion on the resurrection of Jesus, Ghanaian Christians are assured that the purpose of God cannot be halted by death. Paul, in responding to the grief of the Thessalonians, alluded to the resurrection of Christ as the basis for the resurrection of those who have died in Christ. Jesus’ resurrection is a victory over death (1 Thess. 4:14) and assures Christians that there is a good future for them even if they die before Christ returns. The foundation for his exhortation is built on the belief that Jesus was resurrected, which implied that God will bring with Jesus those who have died in Him (1 Thess. 4:14). Therefore, as Ghanaian Christians proclaim their faith in Christ’s resurrection, it provides great hope in their expectation.

The Readers in the CBS identified the promised return of Christ as another element that stimulates hope in the eschatological anticipation. This was underscored in their responses with expressions such as “The second coming is source of hope for Christians,” “the second coming of Christ is the hope of the Christian's calling in Christ,” “There is a day that it will end and those who endure will be given rest in the Lord from their labour.” That is they are assured of better future at the Parousia as Paul indicated the privileged position of those who die in Christ. Believing in the faithfulness of God that all His promises will be fulfilled, is a fact that helps to build hope. Perhaps is for this reason that “rapture” as a phenomenon is prominent in Ghanaian eschatological thought.

We infer from these responses that hope ensues from the fact that God is faithful and that in all circumstances, the faithfulness and gracious purposes of God remains persistent and unrelenting. God’s faithfulness is attested to by the resurrection of Christ.

Therefore, the eschatological elements in Christian belief make hope a stimulus in the period of the Christian’s anticipation of the Parousia. It stimulates the Christians’ present life by influencing their moral behaviour, shape their experiences and inspire the passion
for Christ in the face of anxiety. The reason for the ordinary reader's decision to persevere in their faith and to live a holy life is based on this hope.

Furthermore, it provides a meaningful framework in order to proceed with life in terms of an enduring faith and courage to existential boldness and spiritual empowerment. The biblical message of the last days gives hope to Ghanaian Christians because as they indicated “it helps us to know that whatever they are enduring on account of their faith will not be forever.”

To sum up, hope for Christ’s return plays a fundamental role in the daily life of Ghanaian Christians. The knowledge that Christ’s return is unexpected and sudden, influences their way of life and makes them conduct themselves as people who are anticipating God’s final victory. This conviction impels Christians to apply their energy to overcome the difficulties in obtaining the consummation of their faith at the Parousia of Christ.

For many centuries, Christians have associated the coming of Christ with fear rather than with joy, with anguish rather than with hope. But for some Ghanaian Christians, the anticipation of the return of Christ is a time of hope based on their salvation in Christ, the resurrection of Jesus and his promised Parousia. These elements of their faith in Christ propels them to carry out all Christian activities and encourage others in the faith because it puts them in a privileged position either in death or at the appearing of Christ. In this hope, death is viewed not as a cause for mourning, but for celebrating their salvation in Christ.

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406 O’Callaghan, Christ our Hope, 40.
6.2.3 The Parousia and Holy Living

The study further underscores a shared value of holiness among the original recipients and the contemporary readers in their eschatological expectation. The analysis of the text establishes that the prevailing circumstances of the Thessalonians and the expectation of the Parousia accounted for Paul’s frequent use of the term ἁγιασμός to describe a life that is pleasing to God. In a similar vein, the CBS report emphasized holy living, as the readers observed that “there is so much evil in the society,” and “some Christians in the city see sexual immorality as normal and so they go to church and still indulge in such sins.” Thus, the recurrent use of ἁγιασμός (holiness) in the exhortation is important for contemporary Ghanaian Christians as well.

In most Ghanaian societies, chastity is a virtue that is greatly cherished and preserved. To ensure this, special initiation rites are performed in most cultures for young people before they progress into adulthood. The honour of it is seen in the celebration of puberty rites such as Dipo by the Krobos and Bragorɔ by the Akans.407 They are instituted to ensure young people stay chaste before marriage which also helps to inculcate in them the virtue of fidelity which is somehow linked with holiness. They bring honour to the girl, her family, and the society. The problem is that the rites are for ‘females’, which makes it look as if the culture inculcate the virtue of chastity and fidelity only in women. From the text Paul spoke about holiness to both male and female members of the community, this needs to be examined.

deSilva submits that honour serves as a broader term which extends over the complex of behaviours, commitments, and attitudes which preserves a given culture and society. The desire for honour becomes the means by which one can motivate the members of that

society to seek the good of the larger group in order to be fulfilled. For such honour and fulfilment as virtuous women in the society, most Ghanaian females abstain from sexual misconducts to go through the desired puberty rite. In the light of this, we concur that the call to live in holiness and honour was a conscious effort by Paul to demand that Christians live in a way that will preserve the Christian community. It was also to motivate them towards achieving the goal of their salvation which was to occur at the Parousia of Christ.

In the CBS report, holiness was a major theme that kept resonating in the responses of the churches. Some of the titles they suggested for the text such as “setting myself apart for the Lord’s coming,” “be ready for the Lord,” “living a holy life and death as a gain for the Christian,” reflect this idea. They applauded holiness as the main proof that one is in readiness for the looming Parousia. This perspective perhaps stems from the understanding that God will come and take only sanctified people into his kingdom.

From the CBS discussions, they saw Paul enjoins Christians to live sanctified and model lives characterized by holiness in order to please God. Base on this, their submissions suggested that living to please God to a large extent depends on how holy you are in all you do, especially in matters of sexual behaviour. Some of the discussions on holiness emphasized sexual purity as indicated in the text. They used phrases such as “setting yourself apart,” “righteous living,” “an upright life,” and “total consecration,” to express the need to abstain from all manner of illicit sexual relationships. They were emphatic on the need to abstain from irresponsible sexual relationships that make one unholy in their eschatological existence because it destroys the body which is the temple of God. As a result, some readers resolved to “say no to fornication” after reading the text.

\[408\] deSilva, “Worthy of His Coming,” 52.
However, with the understanding that they must be holy in everything they do, they were made to appreciate that holiness must be demonstrated even in their workplace; their relationship with other people and ensuring that justice prevails in all matters in which they are involved. More importantly, the demand that Christians live in a manner characterized by holiness while anticipating the return of Christ is based on the indicative of salvation.\textsuperscript{409} The CBS discussions affirm that the readers know they have to live holy lives because they are saved. Nevertheless, they indicated that “the pleasure of life,” “temptations,” as well as “lack of self-control and lust” threatens the quest for holiness. But Christians are required to live morally upright lives because they have been justified, they have been reconciled to God, they have been sanctified, they are a new creation in Christ, and they have died to the old self.\textsuperscript{410} This understanding is evident in the expressions the readers used in the discussion on abstinence from sexual immorality indicated above. They, however, noted the Christian can live this life of holiness by depending on the grace of God and living according to the dictates of the Spirit of God. The love of Christ, as well as the indwelling Spirit, should form the moral guide that enables them to live in a manner reminiscent of the new nature they have received in Christ now, while they await Christ’s return in the future.

From the analysis of desirable Christian living (1 Thess. 4:1-12) Paul establishes a relationship between election, the Spirit, and moral life. In 4:7-8, he explains that the call to holiness, which is the will of God, is made possible by the Spirit which they have received from God. It is in the light of this that the submission of the Ghanaian Christians to depend on the grace of God and rely on the direction of the Spirit in their quest to live in holiness is significant. As they are challenged daily with situations that can cause them

\textsuperscript{409} Matera, \textit{God’s Saving Grace}, 158.
\textsuperscript{410} Ibid., 156.
to be unholy and miss the imminent return, their reliance on grace and the Spirit matters most.

Again, Paul’s call for holiness as the will of God for his elect is in line with His nature. In 1Thess. 5:3-8, Paul constructs an elaborate contrast between the believers and outsiders using the “darkness” and “light” metaphors. It makes the need for holiness an imperative for the Christian at the Parousia. God’s holy nature requires that all those in a relationship with Him and anticipates the final salvation at the coming of his Son must share this nature. The focus on sanctification then emphasizes the boundary between the Christian community and the unbelieving world, by virtue of the new nature the Christian possess in God through Christ.

Similarly, Ghanaian Christians see the call to holiness as a value that separates them from the “world.” They also expressed this distinction using the metaphors of “darkness” and “light.” The readers used contrasting words such as “sin and righteous life,” “unbelievers and believers,” “blindness and vision,” “bad and good,” to stress the fact that they must live differently from non-Christians and to suggest the need for one to be set apart in holiness for God. The readers saw in the metaphors a distinction from a way of life that is against God’s will to that which is attractive to God, because those in “darkness” live to please themselves and not God, but those in the light have such knowledge and so do not live ignorantly. This underscores the need to live a holy life set apart for God, free from sin and unrighteousness to please Him because holiness is His nature. From this understanding and the social context of the text, we concur that the nature of God in the regenerated man demands holiness. It is a value that underscores one’s preparedness for the impending return of Christ. Therefore, Christian life in this eschatological moment should be characterized by holiness.

To conclude, the grace of God that brought salvation propels the Christian to renounce impiety and worldly desires in their eschatological life. They are to live a self-controlled upright and godly life described by the readers as they await the hope of Christians and the revelation of the glory of God at the appearing of His Son Jesus Christ. Although the Ghanaian Christian is challenged every day with temptation, the demand of their faith and the looming Parousia requires that in their anticipation, they live in holiness.

6.2.4 Mutual Love in Eschatological Anticipation

Another shared value among the recipients of the text is mutual love. In their eschatological hope, Paul mentioned mutual love among the faith community as another way of pleasing God with their lives. The term φιλαδελφία which he used to exhort them on love denote several practices, which when carried out, will make the Christian demonstrate love as taught by God. Φιλαδελφία entails not to wrong fellow Christians by their sexual conduct, to engage in honourable work, to avoid idleness and over-dependence in order not to burden other brethren, and contributing to the needs of others. These are all things that are important to God and essential for their salvation. Furthermore, they are means of showing solidarity in the harsh reality confronting the community. By such disposition, the members of the faith community would receive strength from each other to persevere in their faith, enduring all the difficult times and qualify to meet the Lord at the Parousia. It taught the Thessalonians to love one another in order to develop the feeling of oneness because of their faith and its subsequent developments.

Similar to the exegetical insight, the ordinary readers reiterated the need to love and support each other. From their perspectives, the need to love one another is enshrined in the moral values of their cultural contexts. In their expression of mutual love, the readers noted that it entails comforting others in pain, care for the needy, fairness, empowering others to be self-sufficient as well as preaching the gospel to non-Christians. The under-
standing from the text thus expands the horizon of mutual love during this eschatological period beyond the giving of physical assistance. It embodies a holistic expression of love.

Ghanaian societies hold love and interrelationship as a core value. Kwame Gyekye observes that an underlying concern for African people is the welfare of each member of the society. They, therefore, encourage non-individualistic moral values. They emphasize this concern with maxims such as “A man must depend for his well-being on his fellow man,” and “A human being needs help” (That is to say deserves- and therefore ought to be helped). From a cultural perspective, an individual does not become a person by living an individualistic life. This agrees with Mbiti’s assertion that for Africans, “To be human is to belong to the whole community and to do so involve participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, and festivities of that community.”

It emphasizes the idea of togetherness and communality which characterizes the African perception of humanness. This culture of belonging is rooted in love for all members of the community. It is for this reason that in most Ghanaian (African) traditional cultures it is only relating to the other can the individual become a person, cognizant of his/her own dignity, duties, and rights, of his/ her own responsibilities towards society and himself, just as Gatti notes

> When a person suffers, s/he suffers with his/her community; when s/he rejoices, s/he does so with the community; not even one’s own wife/husband, daughters/sons “belong” to the individual: they are generated by a history that continues beyond death and into the future.

Similarly, the closeness emanating from mutual love unites the faith community so that they can render needed help, support and encouragement to members of the faith and

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others while awaiting the return of the Lord. This communal idea is expressed differently as one single idea: the individual is not self-sufficient. Every individual has desires and needs that can be fulfilled only in a relationship with other human beings as expressed in the maxim “life is a mutual aid.”  

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It does not matter how gifted and well-resourced a person may be, the individual cannot live all by himself, s/he needs the other, just as others also need him/her. Therefore, the mutual relationship among Christians in their eschatological life strengthens the humanness of Christians in their Ghanaian contexts.

In summary, as Wanamaker notes that Paul employs φιλαδελφία as a metaphor to exhort the congregation to gain a genuine feeling of kingship among the faith community,  

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Ghanaian Christians see mutual love as a unifying force that binds them together as a community of faith. The text reinforces the need to love as taught by their societies and highlights important areas they must exhibit mutual love for each other. Just as the Thessalonians were exhorted unto such life because of the rhetorical situation, similarly, Christians today experience different forms of persecutions that demand love and encouragement from other members of the faith to persevere. The period of waiting for the appearing of Christ is full of challenges and so must be a life lived in mutual love with one another as people of the same faith. The expression of love within such a period gives encouragement, comfort, and enthusiasm to members whose faith may be dwindling.

However, it calls for a symbiotic relationship rather than an individualistic or dependent life that will pose challenges to the individual and the community. With the understanding of love and communitarian lifestyle within the contexts of the readers, the text enforces this cultural value with new dimensions. Therefore, when Ghanaian Christians

416 Gyekeye, African Cultural Values, 58.
417 Wanamaker, Commentary on the Greek Text, 160.
explore these dimensions of expressing mutual love, their individual lives can be transformed to further impact their societies as they wait for the day of the Lord.

6.3 Eschatology and the Belief in Afterlife among Ghanaians

The product of the Contextual Bible Study identified concepts of the afterlife rooted in the traditional African worldview that challenges the appropriation of the eschatological teaching of the church. In most Ghanaian contexts, people believe in the concept of the afterlife in a way which is at variance with what the biblical text teaches. Their understanding of the fate of the dead in relation to the belief in ancestors, reincarnation and the resurrection within the context of Ghana differs from what Paul taught in his exhortation.

The basic notion of the afterlife is present in Ghanaian (African) societies. In all the CBS discussions, the readers alluded to the general belief of the afterlife. They indicated the fact that death is not the end of life, but a transition from this present life to another life in the land of the spirits. It is described as a journey taken in order to reach the life beyond and continue to live as an ancestor. The readers noted that the deceased family members go to join the ancestors in the next world. For that matter, all necessary rites are performed. They expressed the challenge that even though they are Christians they cannot stop these rites because they form part of their cultural beliefs and other members of the family will not allow. For instance, the practice of burying the dead with gifts and some personal effects. This is because of the belief that death is a difficult journey to the spirit world. To express the belief in the afterlife, some of the readers indicated that in their context they bury the dead in their compound and in some special position. Because they believe though they are in the spirit world, they are still part of the family. Some of these practices are in contrast to the eschatological teaching of Paul and the resurrection.
The dead according to Akan cosmology, for example, does not remain in the grave, but turn into spirits and proceeds to the spirit world, Asamando.\textsuperscript{418} It is the hereafter beyond physical death. From the CBS discussion, we inferred that the African attitude towards death, expressed in the burial rites, reveals their attitude towards life after death. Their expression affirms the view that death is not annihilation but a departure from the physical to the spirit world.\textsuperscript{419} Sarpong, further describes the ambivalent nature of death in Ghanaian life. It is seen as a journey for a better life but with the implication of inevitable physical separation between people.\textsuperscript{420} For this reason Africans do not accept death as a positive event, because the goodness of God and the malice of death are in sharp contrast to see death as something good from God except as a punishment for an evil committed.

The readers also discussed the concept of reincarnation and the absence of the concept of resurrection. Sharing about ancestors, they noted that some of them are reborn into the family to complete their responsibilities, as answers to prayers of people looking for children and also to perpetuate the family lineage. These beliefs make the teaching of resurrection a challenge to some Christians because it contradicts a traditional belief.

The African belief in the afterlife is founded on the Traditional conception of life and time. Contrary to the Christian view that human existence is linear, African Traditional cultures believe that this world will not end and that all things continue in a cyclical manner.\textsuperscript{421} For Mayemba, time according to African religions is viewed as timeless infinity.\textsuperscript{422} Mbiti also observes that “African peoples expect human history to continue for-

\textsuperscript{418} Opoku, \textit{African Traditional Religion}, 133.
\textsuperscript{419} Mbiti, \textit{New Testament Eschatology}, 129.
\textsuperscript{422} Mayemba, “The Notion of Eschatology,” 3.
ever.\textsuperscript{423} [They expect the events of the rain, planting, harvesting, dry season, raining season again, planting again, and so on to continue forever.]\textsuperscript{424} and there is nothing to support that this rhythm shall even come to an end; the days, months, seasons and years have no end, just as there is no end to the ontological rhythm of human life.\textsuperscript{425}

Mayemba confirmed that

\begin{quote}
The fundamental belief underneath this is that human beings, as individuals, die; but human race survives time and it is embarked on an endless journey toward the future of abundant life sustained by endless generations made of the living, the dead and the yet-to-be-born. And time continues uninterruptedly, alongside this world whose existence and history will never end.\textsuperscript{426}
\end{quote}

These views portray that the Christian eschatological position is alien of African thought. They believe in what is termed ‘existential eschatology,’ which is more individualized than generalized eschatology that deals with general interruption of the events of life. They view eschatology as the end of the historical life on earth and transitions through a cosmic journey to commence a new enhanced life with additional force and power in the world of the ancestors.\textsuperscript{427}

The challenge with the appropriation of the eschatological teaching of the church lies in the fact that some Ghanaian Christians seems to have dual religious belonging. It affirms the assertion that the vast majority of Africans are namely traditionalists and Christians at the same time.\textsuperscript{428} Much as they profess the Christian faith, their traditional beliefs feature prominently in their eschatological thought.

\textsuperscript{423} Mbiti, \textit{African Religions and Philosophy}, 23-4.
\textsuperscript{424} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{425} Mbiti, \textit{African Religions and Philosophy}, 24.
\textsuperscript{426} Mayemba, “The Notion of Eschatology,” 4.
\textsuperscript{427} Ibid., 4-5.
These cultural elements make scholars argue that the notion of the Parousia has no positive meaning and relevance for Africans.\footnote{Mbiti, New Testament Eschatology, 64.} However, understanding the fundamental teaching of Christ’s imminent Parousia and its engagement with African traditional concepts is essential to the understanding and appropriation of this subject among contemporary Christians in Ghana.

\section*{6.3.1 Death and the Afterlife from Ghanaian Perspective}

The perception of Ghanaians (Africans) about death and the afterlife is a contributing factor to the challenge of the appropriation of the eschatological message of the church. Death, from the CBS report, is a journey out of the physical world which all will embark on some day. It affirms Sarpong’s view that “death is regarded as an occasion when a deceased person sets out on a journey to the underworld or spirit world to which his ancestors have already gone, a place where he must settle any account with those who have gone before him.”\footnote{Sarpong, Ghana in Retrospect, 22.} The readers in the CBS understood that it translates a person’s present life to another and changes his/her movement from the physical to the spiritual world.

The readers indicated that death is viewed as the separation of the components of the human being. Africans, in general, believe the person has two main components. It comprises the physical part buried in the grave at death, and the non-physical part which survives and bears the personality traits of the individual in the hereafter.\footnote{Opoku, African Traditional Religion, 91.} The two parts (physical and spiritual) may be further divided into composite parts by different cultures but fundamentally, the components together constitute the human personality. For
instance, among Akans, human beings are composed of ɔkra (the soul or bearer of destiny), sunsum (spirit or personality), ntorɔ (fatherhood) and mogya (blood).  

In the Akan language, the human body is referred to as honam, but the other two concepts, ɔkra, and sunsum, together with honam seem to suggest the belief in the existence of two distinct components of the human being. ɔkra (soul) is regarded as the most important one believed to be given by God at birth. Therefore, when it is separated from the body, the person dies.

The readers discussed different categories of death that befall people. There are deaths caused by wicked forces such as witches and sorcerers who claim the lives of people by different means. Sometimes it may be through sickness or by other tragic means. It is often out of selfish ambition of these agents or as means of punishing people for wrongs. Such deaths can be averted by a spiritualist who has more power than the witch and sorcerer. There is also death pre-determined by fate. This type is believed not to be alterable by anyone or to some extent God Himself. It may be death caused by apparently no diseases or so ever and occurs accidentally at an early or prime age. In their view, “destiny is unavoidable.” They expressed the belief in self-imposed fate which is taken by a person before birth, and divinely instituted fate which is given by God, may cause what is term inexplicable or mysterious death. There is also what they regard as shameful death. It includes death caused by diseases such as leprosy, epilepsy or smallpox. Suicide, death at labour, the death of one alleged to be a witch/wizard; childlessness and death through curses are all associated with shameful death and does not qualify a person to become an ancestor.

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432 Ibid., 91-2.
433 Majeed, “The Concept of Quasi-Physicalism,” 23. According to traditional Akan anthropology, all human beings receive ɔkra and sunsum from the Supreme Being, while ntorɔ is derived from the biological father and mogya from the biological mother.
434 Opoku, African Traditional Religion, 94-95.
These types of death are deemed unfortunate. From their understanding, it is expected that one must grow in age, bear many children, and acquire properties for his /her children, become prominent and rich and also die through a normal sickness. It is on this account that old people are often accused or suspected as witches and wizards responsible for the deaths in the family when they are alive while the young ones rather die.

It was affirmed, however, that Ghanaians cherish noble death and such people become ancestors. To die a noble death is to die when the person lived a meaningful life. It means to live for many years, have children, be able to tell how his/her properties should be shared, reveal secrets to his close relatives, disclose those responsible for their death and call for their death to be avenged, tell how, when and where he/she will want to be buried among others. Such people are deemed to have died a noble death and their honour has been vindicated. Such people are celebrated with elaborate funeral rites.

Generally, deaths of children are not celebrated among Ghanaians. They are not considered to have fully abandoned the spirit world, therefore no full funeral rites are performed for them. The parents are not to exhibit external sign of grieve and required to wear white clothes, depicting joy and happiness to demonstrate they are not grieving. In some communities, neighbours slaughter a fowl and prepare a meal with it for the parents. This is because it is a meal eaten on festive occasions so by that it is assumed they are not grieving.

Death is expressed in Ghanaian thoughts as an arduous unavoidable journey to be embarked on by all people someday. According to Sarpong, expressions like ‘To be in the hands of death is to be in the hands of someone indeed;’ ‘I call him but in vain;’ ‘I would weep blood if that would bring you back;’ ‘Oh father, do not leave me behind, I will go

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435 Sarpong, Ghana in Retrospect, 39.
with you;" that mourners use in dirges underscores such notion. Due to this, it is a revered obligation to give dying person water to prepare him/her for the difficult journey ahead. They are also given all kinds of gifts and personal items for use on the journey and on arrival.

Death is also generally believed to be an unseen social evil which disturbs or disrupts social equilibrium. It is viewed as an undue, callous enemy which delights in taking away people’s loved ones against their will without any real replacement. It is wicked and irresistibile by all men when it strikes. The saying “If your father- in- law and death appoint a day for you to do some work, it is death’s you will go about first,” is used to describe how wicked and irresistibile death is. It has an agonizing effect on the individual and society. In describing the tragic and destructive nature of death, Opoku submits that

> Death is also regarded as a wicked destroyer, a killer and a curse which frustrates human effort. It brings about complete physical separation and constitutes a great loss not only to the immediate family in which it occurs but also to the whole community. Death drives a man to sorrow and despair and has no respect for beauty and intelligence.\(^{439}\)

Thus, as social evil it has no respect for persons when it strikes. This view is expressed by Ghanaians by the expression “death has no respect for beauty, wealth or power” and with the proverbs “\(\text{owuo atwedee \(\varepsilon\text{baako nifo}\)}\) (The ladder of death is not climbed by one man), \(\text{Onyankop\(\varepsilon\) \(\varepsilon\text{oce no \(\varepsilon\text{bo owuo}\)}}\) (when God created the thing, he created death). In dirges, women express this feeling with expressions like, “call him, and you get no reply,” “speak to him and he does not answer; shake him and he is stiff and cold; smile at him and he is irresponsible.”\(^{440}\)

\(^{436}\) Sarpong notes that that when mourners express wish to go to the land of the dead, it should not be taken literally, but rather as a way of underscoring his/her distraction or the degree to which the loss is felt by the mourner at the time.

\(^{437}\) Ibid., 23.

\(^{438}\) Ibid., 23.


Despite the distressing experience of death, it is a general belief that death is not the end of all that concerns one’s existence. They are of the belief, s/he only changes the earthly life for one perceived to be better. For in the next life, there is no cheating, no physical pain or deformity, there are no evil intentions or machinations. It is due to such impressions that perhaps some of the CBS readers equated death to rest. For death may separate the two parts and annihilate the physical component of a person but not the second part. The ṣкра continues to live even after death and the sunsum returns to Onyame (God).

In relation to the above, Mbiti asserts that a person has a spirit, but he is not a spirit himself, and at death, he does not turn into a spirit. His whole being, with exception of the physical body, moves into the spirit world. There, it receives another body which is identical to the body left in the physical world. He becomes a living-dead and begins to live in another mode of existence. This view is shared by many cultures in Ghana. The ancestors continue to live in the spirit world; asamando (a place of rest), while those who do not qualify as ancestors roam about as ghosts until certain rituals are performed or until they are reborn. Against such background of misery, sorrow and despair, as was shared by the Thessalonians, Paul exhorts Christians to the hope of the resurrection of the dead. Unlike the traditional understanding of death with its hopeless agony, as expressed in the CBS and the Ghanaian context, the eschatological teaching encourages the Christian to a world of hope and everlasting communion with the resurrected Christ. The movement from the physical world into the spirit world will be that of a meeting with the Lord and to always be with Him (1Thess. 4:16-17).

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441 Sarpong, Ghana in Retrospect, 22.
6.3.2 Eschatology and the Belief in Ancestors

In his exhortation, Paul assured the Christian community about the positive fate of the dead in Christ hence, they were not to grieve. For at the Parousia they will rise first to meet the Lord and be with Him. However, in the discussion on the destiny of the dead during the CBS, the participants indicated that some Christians hold the view that the dead move to join the ancestors in the afterworld. This is a fundamental belief among most African societies.

Gyekye defines ancestors as “Certain individuals of the past generations of a lineage who are said to have led a virtuous and exemplary life worthy of emulation by succeeding generations of the lineage.” From Ghanaian worldview, the spirit world is inhabited by beings that were part of the physical world. Through death, they have departed into the past. Their life is seen as a mere continuation of the human existence. The world of the ancestors is seen simply as a continuation of the present life.

The ancestors go to the spirit world having fulfilled the needed mandatory conditions of the society, considering one's quality of life in the land of the living. The factors which qualify a person as an ancestor include living a good life; not to have committed crimes like murder, rape, incest, etc. S/he must have lived long enough, been married and have had children, and must have died a good death. In these requirements, much value is given to the faithful respect of ancestral traditions and customs, and to the remembrance of the clan’s dead. The defeated and the successful, the rich and the famous wise and the

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445 Their views underscored that when one dies it does not end there but “has somewhere to go.” In the sense that they go to join the ancestors, but they are still part of the family.
unknown victims of war, all become ancestors because of their virtuous contribution to society.

This belief in ancestors contributes to the strong belief that life continues when one dies. It is believed that they continue to live the life they ones lived while on earth, and so do not break the relationship with their families. They are considered active members of the family and both the living and the dead share some mutual benefits. From their understanding, there is no end to human relations since death cannot break the links between the living and the dead as they continue to share symbiotic relationships with mutual benefits. They come home to visit the living members of the family occasionally, so those living leaves food and water in the home for them when retiring to bed. And the ancestors are obliged to protect and guard the living, as they believe that more power is given to them when they die. This makes responsibility in African societies unending in their communal life.

Africans revere and honour their ancestors. This is done as they preserve their culture and practices as well as their memories. However, Gyekye argues that the intensity and unrelenting manner in which Africans revere the ancestors led scholars’ characterization of African Indigenous Religion as “ancestor worship.” He, therefore, critiques the understanding of ancestorship and proposes a closer look at the interpretation of an ance-

450 Opoku, African Traditional Religion, 37.
451 Ibid., 38.
452 Communality among African societies is further expressed by the belief in ancestors. For ones humanness depends on belonging to a community, which also entails involvement in the ceremonies and rituals and other important activities of the community. The ancestors constitute the supernatural part of the human community. They are therefore not left out in any communal activity.
His position reveals that there are negative and positive consequences of the belief in ancestors. Some are incompatible and others compatible with Christian eschatology.

The challenge of the eschatological teaching of the Christian faith to the belief in ancestors comes because death extends the family ties into infinity. This is emphasized by the ceremonies and rituals performed for the dead by the living members of the family. The ancestors are also believed to be close to God and serve as mediators between the living and God. They receive libation from people and honour their requests. Africans believe ancestors functions as friends to intercede between them and the Supreme Being at court. They contribute to the rapid response to prayers by virtue of their position with God and relationship with the living. Ceremonies involving the ancestors form part of the religion of Africans. Also, most of the festivals celebrated in many cultures are centred on feeding the ancestors as means of the living seeking their well-being.

Opoku indicates that the ancestors are honoured, revered and respected not as gods but as spirits, elders, and predecessors of the present world. This is because they are not the final authority in all matters, nor are they accorded the same attribute of God as creator. They are only spirits who are next to God so are not worshipped. This means they have no power to determine the final destiny of people. Gyekye, therefore, queries the over-reliance and excessive attention paid to the belief in ancestors as negative to the African culture. He submits that

In fact, some aspects of what I regard as cultural values may require some refinement. I regard the focus of African cultures on the ancestors as undue, excessive, and unrewarding, and I feel that the notion of ancestorship

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454 For the details of Gyekye’s argument against the interpretation of Ancestors as ‘Moral Paragons,’ see Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, 162-68.
456 Ibid., 53.
457 Ibid, 53.
would take on real and respectable significance if it were understood as a surrogate for tradition.\footnote{Gyekye, \textit{African Cultural Values}, 171.}

He argues further that, “Certain features of the ancestral customs or practices or modes of thought need not, in fact, should not be tenaciously adhered to if later generations have reasoned not to hold to them.”\footnote{Ibid., 167.} For instance, he argues that the idea that they continue to live as they were in the physical world, for which reason people like chiefs are buried with slaves and workers with their tools and personal effects, must be reviewed.

Furthermore, he argues that some of the dead people did not really live good moral life, some chiefs were tyrants, dictators and committed so many atrocities but when they are pouring libation the names of such dead people are equally mentioned as ancestors because they were chiefs. He, therefore, proposes an evaluation of some traditions of the African culture which must include the status of ancestors.

With these negative implications, Gyekye recognized the positive side: ancestors are revered as promoters of morality in African contexts which is also compatible with the Christian faith. They are renowned people who have lived distinguished moral lives in the societies they lived. They are, therefore, respected and seen as models for a moral living, “moral paragons,”\footnote{Gyekye, \textit{African Cultural Values}, 161-62.} and incentive to good conduct. Thus, in underscoring the significance of the African community, the ancestors contribute to the understanding of the morality of the community.

Some Ghanaians believe the ancestors are the watchdogs over morality and punish people for bad moral behaviour as they supervise the daily activities of the living.\footnote{Abotchie, \textit{Traditional Ghanaian}, 100.} Hence, according to Wyk,
Most African societies regard their social morality as a gift from their ancestors. They believe their progenitors passed a good lifestyle, taboos as well as rules and regulations for the community on to them. As the “living-dead”, they also guard over this morality. They punish those who do not respect the accepted morality by bringing all kinds of calamities and misfortunes onto them.\textsuperscript{462}

That is to say, the ancestors use punishment as a medium for enforcing morality. Through that the social morality of the society is sustained.

This does not mean the morality among African Christians should be based solely on the customary practices of the people. The presence of the ancestors in the community is considered as part of the frame of reference for morality among Africans; however, their presence serves as guidance which may be sought by the people, but regarded as an extension of the community and not as part of the deity.\textsuperscript{463} This implies that the morality of the Ghanaian Christian cannot be dependent solely on the belief in the ancestors in their eschatological existence. This makes the moral imperative in Paul’s eschatological teaching relevant for this contemporary world. Much as lessons can be learnt from the good lives of the ancestors in their communities, the same can be done of Christians who have contributed positively to the development of Christianity in the church or society.

Moreover, Ghanaian Christians (and Africans) also believe that God punishes people for moral offenses. In this light, judging from the understanding of the text, the Ghanaian Christian can incorporate the moral requirements of the text and that of the culture into forming a moral standard that is acceptable both by the Christian faith and the culture of the people. In this respect, the text enlightens the understanding of morality in the context of the reader.

\textsuperscript{462} Wyk, “The Final Judgment,” 708.
\textsuperscript{463} Nel, “Morality and Religion,” 44.
From the studies, there seems to be a similarity between the concept of ancestors in the spirit world and the belief in the communion of saints. However, a nuance occurs when Jesus Christ as judge and the mediator of the new covenant appears and occupies the centre.\textsuperscript{464} This transforms the situation into an arena of worship and communion for the Christian believers at the resurrection where they will be with the Lord.

To sum up, the ancestors serve as custodians of morality and examples of good moral conduct for most Africans. In the light of this the concept of ancestor should enable the Ghanaian Christian to appropriate the moral imperatives of the eschatological discourse of the church. The requirements for one to become an ancestor, though not based on the teachings of the gospel, reiterates the need to hold to good morals in the Christian faith. It also contains values that produce good life in the society. Therefore, as the moral imperative for meeting the Lord at the Parousia entails living a good life to please God, which in turn leads to a better life in the society, the belief in ancestors should be evaluated in the light of the biblical teaching on the Parousia to deepen the Ghanaian Christian’s understanding of the eschatological teaching.

6.3.3 Eschatology and the Belief in Reincarnation in Ghana

In addition to the belief in life after death and ancestors, the belief in reincarnation is another concept in the Ghanaian culture which is challenged by the eschatological teaching. Belief in reincarnation presumes belief in the ability of the human being or, to be more specific, part of the human being to live beyond death.\textsuperscript{465}

The product of the CBS indicated that there is a commonly held belief that some of the ancestors are reborn into their families. When members of the family marry, and they


need children, as they pray to the ancestors, some of them are reincarnated into the family to guarantee the survival of the clan. The belief is in contrast with the teaching of Paul: while 1Thess 4:15-17 explains that the dead in Christ awaits the Parousia to meet the Lord and dwell with Him eternally, the context suggests that they come back to be reborn and to begin another new life like the dead ancestor.

Opoku observes that belief in reincarnation is demonstrated by certain names that are given to children at birth. For example, the Akan name Ababio which means “the person has returned or come again,” and Ewe names such as Degbo, “master has come back” Afetgbo, Noviegb “sister has come back” all illustrate the belief that the person has been reborn. Among the Bulsa people and other tribes, children are named after their grandparents for the same reason. They believe that when someone is given a name, it has an influence upon his/her life, so names of ancestors and dead grandparents whom they deem to have been of good reputation and lead exemplary lives are given to the children as good model in the family.

Describing the belief in reincarnation among West Africans, Opoku writes

The West African belief in reincarnation is, however, quite distinctive, for it is only the dominant characteristics and the spirit of the ancestor which are believed to be reincarnated in his descendants and not his soul. For each soul remains distinct and each birth represents a new soul, and even though the ancestor is believed to be reincarnated in the grandchil-

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There different categories of reincarnation normally that take place in Ghanaian contexts. There are the dead who do not get admitted into the world of the spirit. They manifest as ghost who hover around until they are conceived and born again into the world. If they again fail to satisfy the required conditions to the spirit world, they will have to be reborn again to do so before they are admitted. They also believe that any ancestor who considers his work on earth incomplete before death may decide to comeback to complete it. These ones come in answer to request by couples praying for children or by their own volition. Many people are of the view they are reincarnation of their ancestors.


The naming of children who die young and come back to be reborn by the same parents a couple of times differ from those who have come to stay. Though they are also known to be reincarnated, they are given funny names like Donkor (slave), Bosuo (Dew) by Akans; Ayoma in Buli all meaning slave. The Bulsas also name some Ayongtie (senior slave), Azong (kraal) and Anangbang (cow dung). Such names are given when they are reborn to deter them from dying young so that they will stay. But they all express the belief that they have been reincarnated.
This implies that they notice the recurrence of certain dominant characteristics of the family or clan through the birth of new a child. The characteristics the children inherit are what guarantees continuation and sustenance of the vital existence of the family and not the soul. For a similar reason, Mbiti argues that the Akamba people do not believe in the reincarnation of the ancestors as such. For a child may inherit the likeness and qualities of a particular departed family member. Certain traits of character or physical resemblance may be different but the two continue as separate individuals. This is to say the belief that the ancestors are reborn is not based on the soul of the ancestors which is given by God or moved to the spirit world, but the character traits of the ancestor immanent in the child. Through heredity, such features can be transferred to other younger ones through a dominant gene in the lineage. This suggests that their souls stand as separate individuals created by God without any reference to their final destiny.

However, from the synthesis of the text, the dead in Christ will resurrect as people with transformed bodies to meet the Lord and be with Him. Therefore, in this way, the eternal destiny of the soul is preserved in God’s presence. The characteristics that are manifested in another person in reincarnation do not guarantee the final salvation of the soul as Paul suggests of those who die in Christ. Ghanaian Christians must therefore come to the understanding that the two beliefs are incompatible. In the end, the whole human person matters to God for which reason He has made provision for its salvation in Christ. The personal characteristics and spirit of the dead inherited by the reincarnated child cannot secure the soul in the afterlife, but rather believe in Christ as the one to usher them into final salvation at the Parousia. For this reason, the belief in reincarnation should not be...

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adapted into Christian eschatological thought, because it does not appear to offer any insight for the appropriation of the subject of eschatology.

Therefore, if by the belief in reincarnation the soul of the ancestor remains in the afterlife, then the Christian must not rely on reincarnation but appropriate the eschatological teaching in keeping to the imperative for meeting the Lord at the Parousia. This ensures that in the end, the soul can enjoy permanency with God.

6.3.4 Eschatology and the Resurrection from Ghanaian Perspective

Prominent in the CBS was the absence of the concept of bodily resurrection in the cultural context of the readers as against what is taught by the text. African traditional religions generally do not subscribe to the belief of a future resurrection of the body but life after death lived in the spiritual world. As discussed earlier, from the African perspective of life, death does not destroy man. At death, their physical bodies are disposed in the grave and they assume new body in the spirit world with which they continue with their lives in the new existence. The old body is of no use after death and so will not resurrect again in the future since they take on a new body.

However, from the exhortation of Paul, a different teaching is given about the destiny of the dead. The pericope mentions two resurrections; the resurrection of Jesus and that of Christians. That of Christ is in the past and the other is in the future. The emphasis in the eschatological teaching is on the future resurrection. It stresses the fact that belief in Christ leads to the resurrection at the return of Christ. Paul elaborates the reason and manner of the resurrection in 1 Thess. 4:17 indicating that Christ’s resurrection gives meaning to the future resurrection of Christians. This makes it inconsistent with the eschatology of Africans.

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The resurrection of Christ is the decisive issue in the Christian faith. Describing the exclusiveness of the resurrection to Christianity, Mbiti said:

The resurrection is an intensely Christological phenomenon, bringing everything into the present before God and in Christ. For individuals, it is the union between creatures and their creator. Thus, the resurrection is a personal experience flooding mankind and the cosmos with the dimension of the present, in the presence of God, clothing them with immortality, incompatibility, unchangeability, lifeness.\(^472\)

That is to say, the resurrection brings the Christian believer into a new personal experience with God. Christ appears as a conqueror who did not only die but rose again. His resurrection inspires faith in the eschatological life of the faith-community and sustains hope in the future resurrection.

Contrary to the African belief of death as a transition into another world with a new body, the dead in Christ will resurrect into a new life of transformed existence in communion with the Lord. In the light of this, Ghanaian Christians must perfect their understanding of the transition into the afterlife, with the biblical teaching of participating in the resurrection of Christ. It is a means of entering into eternal fellowship with the Lord and having communion with the heavenly community.

Furthermore, the resurrection gives the assurance that the dead in Christ will have a privileged position at the return of Christ. They are to be united with Christ and other believers to participate in the divine presence of God. For when the Christian is baptized, he is incorporated into the body of Christ, and so his existence is in corporate solidarity within the description of Christ’s body. As a result, the resurrection of Christians is appropriated sacramentally to begin, guarantee and anticipate the final resurrection of all mankind.\(^473\)

Hence, the resurrection of Jesus inaugurates the eschatological resurrection for Christians as part of the Parousia events. It is an assurance established on the faithfulness of God in


raising Jesus from the dead and upholding the will of God for mankind against the power of death.

6.4 Implications for Moral Life of Ghanaian Christians

Joseph Donders in his seminal work blames Christianity for the moral decay in Africa. He argues that the message of “heaven” or “eternal salvation” in the Christian eschatological teaching misleads people to be unresponsive towards their earthly responsibilities. He maintains that the message of the “last judgment,” in particular, confuses people as far as their moral duties are concerned. Contrasting aspects of the Christian eschatological teaching with the African culture, he argues that in traditional Africa, the authorities punished people immediately after transgressions. This practice in his view created moral certainty, stability, and security. The message of the “last judgment,” he adds, misinforms people into thinking that because there is no instantaneous punishment for their actions; they can commit evil in this present life. Therefore, he concludes that the only way to moral regeneration in Africa is by rejecting the eschatological message of the New Testament, to return to a religious system where the community immediately punishes people for transgressions according to the community’s familiar moral principles handed down to them by their ancestors.

In defence of Christian eschatology, Wyk argues that the final judgment at or after death is a more radical impulse for responsible morality than is the judgment of the ancestors in the here and now. He refutes his argument by indicating that Christianity is not only intolerant of moral transgressions, but also encourages social responsibilities. In addition, when people know that no human being, but God is the final judge, they would be in-

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475 Donders, *Non-bourgeois Theology*, 711.
477 Ibid.
clined to live more responsible lives. Hence, in view of this Paul’s description of the Parousia event emphasizing that the “Lord Himself” will appear is a strong motivation for the moral imperative of the Christian faith. The eschatological message of the Christian religion influences the moral life of the Christians positively as it focuses on the present life of the Christian in preparation for the future. This was attested to by the readers in the CBS.

Similarly, from the text, Paul does not make any sharp contrast between the present life of the Thessalonians and the future, just as the New Testament does not make a clear difference between the present and the future. What Christians expect in the future is already a reality in the now and what is already a reality in the now will be fully revealed in the future. The indicative of Christ redemptive work is the grace of salvation which believers enjoy now and awaits its final consummation in the future when Christ returns.

Also, the perceptions of Christians about who God is and who they are, shape their daily actions in the direction of a just and sustainable society. Wyk thus remarked that it is not possible to draw a clear line between faith and morality because these two aspects of religion are inseparable. When the texts in the exhortation of Paul deal with faith, the morality of the believer is definitely not excluded. Apparently, Christians can never presuppose that there are no associations between their moral actions and God’s judgment in the present. In the Christian practice of faith, morality plays a significant role because one cannot distinguish clearly faith from morality. Though some scholars argue for a separation of the two, the context of the text draws a close relationship between them. One, therefore, cannot assume his present life can be lived outside the moral principles of the faith because there is no immediate punishment for the negative action.

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480 See Nel, “Morality and Religion,” 43.
Again, the eschatological teaching does not primarily concern itself with the future and the end of the age, but with the One who is coming in the future. Implicit in Paul’s eschatological discourse is the knowledge that Christians constantly live before the sight of God who judges moral behaviour and will send His Son for their final salvation. For these reasons, they are not to live ‘anyhow’ but in order to please God. Christians should, therefore, not focus too strongly on the question of the time the Parousia is going to take place, instead on the question of the person who is coming. The One who is coming is the Lord Himself, and he is going to judge as the one who brought them salvation. As Saviour, he expects people to live according to high moral standards. The CBS confirmed Wyk’s opinion and attested that the eschatological message of the Christian religion influences the moral life of the Christians positively as it focuses on the present life of the Christian in preparation for the future.

The readers in the CBS indicated in their action plans activity that leads to moral life because of their understanding that God is holy by nature and requires holiness from all his elect. The decisions and resolutions of the readers as discussed earlier affirm strongly that there is a strong link between the eschatological teaching and good moral life. It is for this reason that Paul laced his eschatological teaching with the moral imperatives because they are the requirements that will prepare them for the sudden return. Therefore, the argument that New Testament eschatology gives people the freedom to lead immoral lives is untenable. A person, who is conscious of the fact of a life to please God and in anticipation of the return of Christ, as indicated in the CBS, lives with the knowledge that this God is the ultimate judge of all moral behaviour. This implies that the appropriation of the eschatological message should generate in Ghanaian Christians good moral values as they enforce the moral imperatives in the text.

Moral values are preserved and enforced in African societies. Among Ghanaians, belief in the deities and Supreme Being as well as the ancestors who are believed to be spirit beings with the power to punish and reward contributes to shaping the moral life of people. The belief in these spiritual entities should be evaluated in respect of Paul’s exhortation and the understanding of morality in the context of Africa, to bring about transformation in the lives of African Christians by the virtue of their faith in God and the cultural requirements of morality within their context. The encounter with the Christian teaching of eschatology should, therefore, lead to a transformation of the moral life of the people as they await the imminent coming of the return of Christ.

6.5 Christian Values Perpetuated from the Appropriation of the Text

From the exegetical analysis and CBS reports, the study underscores that values such as perseverance, endurance, faithfulness, commitment, and accountability are developed in Christians as they appropriate the eschatological teachings. Judging from the moral implications resulting from the understanding of the eschatological discourse and the relationship of the text and the contextual responses from the readers, these values can be perpetuated in Christians as they anticipate the coming of the Lord. The subsequent sections discuss these values.

6.5.1 Perseverance and Endurance

The values that come to mind at hindsight are perseverance and endurance. Perseverance is a resolute continuation of something, an action or belief, usually over a long period amidst difficulties or impediments. Endurance, on the other hand, is the ability to persist or survive despite the consequences. It is the ability to tolerate protracted persecution, pain or hardship. Both virtues are often translated from the Greek word ὑπομονή interchangeably. This word was employed in the religious setting of Judaism to denote the expectation of God among Israel, by persevering in faithfulness to God on the basis of
the assurance of the covenant relationship.\footnote{Benedict, Encyclical Letter, 22.} It is a basic attitude or frame of mind which denotes patience and steadfastness. It is seen as steadfast adherence to a course of action in spite of difficulties and testing, with an element of hope and confidence. These virtues are used synonymously with patient endurance, steadfastness, constancy, and fortitude.

In the New Testament usage, \(\upsilon\omicron\alpha\omicron\mu\omicron\omicron\eta\) refers to the characteristic of a man who is unswerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the extreme trials and sufferings.\footnote{Thyer, Greek Lexicon, Bible Works Version 7.} It connotes a patient, steadfast waiting for something that is deemed significant and imminent. Three times in his writings Paul used this term in the Thessalonian correspondence (1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:4, 3:5). In all the references Paul alludes to perseverance in Christ and in their faith despite affliction and persecutions they were enduring on account of their faith. Endurance and perseverance are virtues required in this eschatological moment due to the problem of the perceived delayed Parousia and challenges encountered by Christians.

The threesome values: faith, love, and hope of salvation with which Paul exhorts the Christian converts, help develop in them the virtue of perseverance and endurance in this eschatological life. For hope is built on faith in Christ and love of God. It adds to desire the inner conviction that it is possible to obtain or possess what is desired in spite of the difficulty in doing so. This constitutes a summation of the Christian lifestyle described by the term \(\upsilon\omicron\alpha\omicron\mu\omicron\omicron\eta\) translated as patient endurance or perseverance.

We observe from the CBS discussion that the expressions “to watch,” “be alert and sober” denote that patient endurance and perseverance conjoin. By them, Christians are taught to hold on fast or bearing up in this eschatological period. These are qualities Christians develop in their eschatological expectation because they are admonished to...
remained faithful even to death (Rev. 2:10). Sometimes it may happen, of course, that the absent good, though perceived and desired, is considered simply impossible to obtain. However, knowing how to wait while patiently enduring trials is necessary for the believer to be able to receive what is promised in the end. It is, therefore, revealing how some readers in the CBS clearly indicated that the metaphors Paul used help them to know “who they are, where they are and where they are going.” This is a demonstration of a sense of perseverance and endurance in their faith in anticipation of Christ’s return.

Louw posits that hope is deemed hope only in suffering and not an escape from suffering or an attempt to bypass suffering. The hope of the expectation of the Coming of Christ exposes the Christian to suffer many things on account of the faith. The difficult veracity of suffering remains an inherent critique against hope that tries to circumvent tension, anxiety, despair through a defense mechanism. Yet, as the believer faces these realities by focusing on the hope in Christ, he is able to endure the suffering and persist in the holiness of life required for his/her preparation.

Sleeper, therefore, affirmed that as children of light, patience is required in the preparation for the Parousia. The proper attitude for waiting in such an eschatological existence should be that of watchfulness (5:6) and sobriety (5:6, 8), which all culminate into perseverance. In his opinion, the New Testament relates the expectation of Jesus returns to the Christian moral life. Hence, any attempts to predict the end are worthless. Christians are summoned to patient confidence in a sovereign God and to perseverance in the face of evil. The future of faith, therefore, belongs to the Christians who have the ca-

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486 Sleeper, “Christ’s Coming and Christian Living,” 133.
487 Ibid.
pacity to cope. This thus makes perseverance and endurance important virtues developed in this eschatological moment.

**6.5.2 Faithfulness**

Implicit in Paul’s eschatological teaching is the call to faithfulness, which is in close relation to the values of perseverance and commitment. It is from the Greek word πιστός which means more trustworthy, faithful, dependable, inspiring trust or faith. It is an adjective which defines the quality of someone that can be trusted, and it is used of persons who have kept their plighted faith and that they can be relied upon.

Implicitly, in the initial exhortation, Paul called on the Thessalonians to be faithful to the things he taught them (1 Thess. 4:1). They were to keep the doctrinal traditions and moral instructions he presented to them as illustrated by the use of παρελθέντες. The instructions he gave to them were like a fixed tradition to follow. It is on these bases that he concludes the first exhortation with the injunction that whoever rejects the exhortation is rejecting a divine authority (1 Thess. 4:8). Invariably, it was a test of their faithfulness to God in whose name he was issuing the instructions and a proof of their loyalty to Him as his subjects. Base on this demand of faithfulness and obedience Paul often grounded his exhortation on divine authority as he employed divine attributes and names in issuing the moral imperatives.

From the understanding of the text in the CBS, the readers indicated the need for faithful obedience to God in their action plans. The activities the readers of the various churches decided to carry out to a large extent were to develop the Christian value of faithfulness.

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488 Friberg’s Greek Lexicon, *Bible Works software*. This adjective refers to being consistently loyal and trustworthy especially to a person. It is also used in relation to a conscientious person. That is one having a sense of responsibility to a deity, devotion to something or to be committed to someone. In the New Testament usage, it is often in reference to one’s faith, Christ, God and also to a responsibility on account of the faith (1 Cor. 4:2; 17, 2 Cor. 1:8, Eph 6: 21, Col 4:7, 1 Thess. 5:24, 2 Thess. 3:3, 1 Tim 1:12).
to God. For instance, the idea of ‘staying alert,’ ‘the desire to study the Bible and do what is right,’ preaching the gospel (which was seen as a duty), ‘self-examination and reassessment’ as well as ‘living holy lives’ are all efforts towards faithfulness. By keeping to these proposed activities in their daily Christian lives, they will be gravitating towards the Lord to be counted as loyal and trustworthy. In other words, it is to prove their unwavering faith in Christ in their anticipation of his coming. So that in this eschatological period they will hold on to their faith in the midst of all difficulties and persecutions that they are bound to face on account of their faith.

The development of this value in Ghanaian Christians as a result of their appropriation of the eschatological teaching emphasizes the relevance of faithfulness in African societies. According to Gyekye, in listing moral values in African societies that are paralleled with goodness, it includes faithfulness and truthfulness. This is due to their consequences of ensuring the well-being of people as well as the welfare of the society. Africans cherish good moral values because they are the foundations on which society thrives. It is, therefore, not uncommon in Ghana to see communities praising people who exhibit such values in the society. In every human society, through the imperative of social life, social morality is generated. It is often slanted towards the concern for the well-being of other members of the society. To this effect, members of society are enjoined to seek the good of the entire society. To obtain such state of life within any cultural context requires that the members are faithful.

Consequently, as Ghanaian Christians appropriate the eschatological teaching with its moral imperatives, while anticipating the looming Parousia, this value is developed in them. With the understanding of the need for faithfulness in every social life for the well-

490 Ibid., 63.
being and the transformation of the life of the people, it may instill in them the required attitude for developing such a value in their contexts. In the process of time, some, if not all of the social vices that confront the society as a result of unfaithfulness on the part of the members of the Ghanaian society of which majority profess the Christian faith would be mitigated.

6.5.3 Commitment

From the product of the CBS, the call to action in the category of questions aimed at transformation indicates the development of the Christian value of commitment in the ordinary readers. From the Christian understanding, commitment indicates an effort to demonstrate loyalty, devotion or dedication to a course, someone, relationship or one's faith. Commitment is to develop in people the sense of responsibility for an activity that cannot be shirked or avoided.

From the discussion of the text, the readers demonstrated the development of this value in diverse ways.

First, it was through the use of some important expressions during the reading process. They used expressions such as “visitors and sojourners on earth,” “put Christ first,” “put on the whole amour of God” to indirectly express their commitment to God, Christ, Christianity and the heavenly kingdom. By these expressions, they emphasize the fact that their relationship with Christ must take a centre stage in everything they do and must be their priority. Since Christ’s appearing and their final salvation is the ultimate goal for their lives as Christians, and they must pay attention to it.

Second, they also expressed the commitment to self and others by their desire to be alert and sober in their preparation. With the eschatological teaching as a wake-up call for Christians, the readers saw the requests to be ‘chaste,’ ‘taking a right decision,’ ‘being
mindful of their lives and in all they do, ‘not taking advantage of people to amount to a commitment to self and others. The resolve to stop sinning; abstain from sexual immorality, total surrender to live holy and committed lives to God, reassessment, and self-examination are all efforts to develop the capacity to keep their values in any situation. By this, they can say no to negative values and stand against injustice against the innocent in society. With these efforts, the value of commitment can be developed by the appropriation of the eschatological teaching.

Third, the readers indicated that in their eschatological anticipation there is the need for living a loyal and devoted life to God. Their decision to pray and study the Bible, live in obedience to the teachings of Christ, by living practical Christian lives, living in righteousness, and being examples to others leads to devotion and loyalty to God. Through such activities, the Christian draws closer to God and becomes transformed into the nature of Christ for which reason s/he will always endeavour to honour God in all s/he does.

Finally, they demonstrated a commitment to God and the outside world through active involvement in evangelization. This was seen as an obligation that must not be avoided and so the readers saw the need to intensify their evangelistic activities, give more attention to it and do it effectively. In their own words they indicate they have to “Do more for God in whatever work they do in church,” which also implies giving more time, energy and resources to the course of the kingdom. These are all efforts which underscore their commitment to such a responsibility entrusted to them by the Lord. Therefore, with the understanding of the imminent return of Christ as espoused in this text, Ghanaian Christians develop the need to remain committed in all their activities so as to be ready to be with the Lord at His return.
6.5.4 Accountability

Finally, the value of accountability which embodies the concepts of judgment and punishment implicit in the text is developed through the understanding of the eschatological teaching of the Christian faith. As elements of the eschatological event, the Parousia is linked to the final judgment of God where final justice will be given. Accordingly, the final judgment will not only be a judgment of the believer’s faith in Jesus Christ, but also a judgment of his/her works and deeds. From the experience of most Africans, they anticipate a justice where the offender does not triumph over the victim. This ultimate justice will be delivered by God at his final judgment which will be a day of accountability for all. In view of this, Ghanaian Christians are taught to consider every action as accountable at the eschatological coming of Christ where final justice will be given to all. The eschatological teaching thus places a social responsibility on all Christians. This includes social justice and fairness to people in the society.

Furthermore, the expressions “sudden destruction comes on them” and “they will not escape” (1 Thess. 5:3), following “the thief in the night” metaphor in 1 Thess. 5:2, gives an indication of accountability for people who did not live in accordance with the will of God both in their religious and social lives. For this reason, some readers in the CBS saw the return of Christ as a ‘dangerous’ moment for those who have not prepare for his return. In such an eschatological milieu, the message of “inescapable destruction” connotes the message of judgment which also implies accountability base on which one will be judged to have done what is good or evil. Therefore, these expressions imbibe in Christians a sense of responsibility for their moral and social actions. Though apocalyptic in nature, Paul used them in the exhortation to make this motif of accountability in the eschatological event implied for his readers. These expressions indicate that Christians will
account for their lives on earth base on what they did at the return of Christ: either it qualifies them to be with the Lord or face the wrath of God at the final judgment.

All religions consider punishment as an important facet of religion. The ordinary readers share the belief that the ancestors and God punish people for a variety of reasons and sometimes even in a very harsh way.

As Wyk notes, “The idea of punishment from “higher powers” thus forms part of the religious framework in Africa.” Like most Africans, Ghanaians do not have a problem with associating God with punishment. They believe that God must react to unacceptable human behaviour. Because the ultimate power belongs to Him, and because He is the final guardian of morality and law, He can and must punish people. In Ghana, people in all contexts, both rural and urban communities, admit that discipline and punishment are accepted educational methods. They contribute to the development of accountability as they learn that they are always responsible for their actions which could attract punishment if found contrary or against the rules of the community.

The readers noted in the CBS that when appointing leaders in the church, civil societies and traditional settings, in Ghanaian societies, besides wisdom, integrity is considered another important characteristic. This implies that moral uprightness is required of them, because they are expected to live an exemplary life, be free from greed, and not corrupt, all emphasizing the requirement to be accountable to the community. Hence, the eschatological teaching of the Christian faith teaches members to be responsible for every action they carry out in their present life because they will account for every action in the future when the Lord comes. The knowledge that God will eventually disclose secret immorality, and punish evil, in the end, in all likelihood compels people to be reluctant to carry
out their evil ideas. Some people argue against Christian teaching of a final judgment as causes for immorality, because there is no immediate consequence for sin. But the fact that God punishes at or after death should not be an obstacle to moral responsibility, but rather an encouragement for social responsibility.

In summing up, every individual is accountable to God for the life lived, which includes the decision to serve God and live according to the standards of the faith. It is for this reason that Paul in the letter to the Thessalonians indicated that not everybody will be able to enter the kingdom: the dead in Christ will rise to meet the Lord and the living Christians will join (1 Thess. 4: 16-17). Every action of man will be examined before the Lord. For this reason, Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to live to please God and prayed for them that they will be blameless at his appearing. Although the eschatological perspective is distinctively Christian, more importantly, we acknowledge the sense of human responsibility identified in the wider traditional African cultural context.492

This suggests accountability for all. Therefore, the eschatological teaching raises in Christians this awareness and develops in them this sense of responsibility for their actions so that they can give a good account of themselves at the Parousia.

6.6 Conclusion

The chapter affirms the importance of dialogical engagement of text and context in an endeavour to appropriate a biblical message in a particular context. Considering the perception of Christians on the eschatological teaching of the church, it is relevant that such an engagement be done to bridge the gap between scientific exegesis and the contextual realities in the Ghanaian context.

The chapter underscores some shared faith and values among the recipients of the text. With the understanding of the imminent nature of the Parousia from the text and contextual study, Ghanaian Christians understand that living a life of daily preparation in this eschatological time is a way of anticipating the return of Christ. The preparation must entail a daily living to please God with activities that indicate one's readiness for his return.

They also perceive the anticipation as a time of hope resulting from their salvation in Christ. In the light of this hope, they are to anticipate the return of Christ by living in holiness. Sanctification is described as the will of God for His elect and is made possible through the empowerment of God. It is, therefore, to be seen as a demand on the Christian because God’s nature requires that from his children and from those hoping for the final salvation in the Son at the Parousia. As people belonging to the Lord, their holiness is a definite characteristic of their break from their old lives to live in conformity to the will of God. In addition, as a perspective of their anticipation, they are to live demonstrating mutual love in the community of faith. Considering the persecutions and difficulties people go through on account of their faith, they are to demonstrate love to encourage others in the faith.

In addition, the chapter discussed the challenge of the text to some cultural elements in the contexts of the readers. The Christian eschatological teaching challenges the cultural belief of the afterlife which recurred several times in the discussion of the various churches. The chapter engaged the belief in the hereafter within the Ghanaian cultural context in a dialogue with the synthesis of the eschatological teaching from the text. Much as there are some lessons that can be learned from some of these cultural elements, there is the need to avoid over-reliance on them in the matters of faith and critically evaluate them in the light of scripture. These elements should, therefore, lead to a deeper un-
derstanding and appropriation of the eschatological message when evaluated from the perspective of the biblical message.

Despite the wrong assertion that the eschatological message has no relevance for African Christianity, the chapter has underscored the significance of this message for the moral life of the Ghanaian Christian. It has also espoused some Christian values which are developed as a result of appropriating the eschatological message. Values such as perseverance, endurance, faithfulness, commitment, and accountability are discussed. These values if appropriated may help in the individual preparation of the Ghanaian Christian as their lives will be transformed and eventually lead to the transformation of the Ghanaian society.
CHAPTER SEVEN

ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE AND HOLY LIVING:
A CALL TO CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANS

7.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter presents a summary of the findings of the work as it outlines how the intervening chapters respond to the objectives of the research. It then draws conclusions from the study base on the major findings from the work and then finally makes some recommendations for further research on the subject of eschatology, for policy formulation and pastoral recommendations.

7.2 Summary

The research aimed at investigating how Ghanaian Christians appropriate the eschatological teaching in 1 Thess. 4:1–5:11, to explore the relationship between eschatology and moral and ethical behaviour and to outline some Christian values that are developed through the appropriation of the text. The discussions in the intervening chapters as they addressed the objectives are summarized below.

Firstly, concerning the understanding of the text (1 Thess. 4:1—5:11), we observe that through an exegetical analysis of the rhetorical elements, the text is understood as a parenetic letter written to console the readers in their grieving situation. This is affirmed by the parenetic features inherent in the exhortation and the species of rhetoric Paul used. At the same time, it was to encourage the community in the faith and to live in preparation for the imminent return of Christ. To achieve these purposes, several rhetorical devices were used in the pericope. The devices include the vocative case, disclosure formulas, repetitions, parallelisms, euphemism, antithesis, paralipsis, metaphors and key ex-
pressions. The rhetorical functions of these features as discussed contributed to achieving the purpose of the exhortation.

The use of the eschatological motif and the presentation of the Parousia event, interspersed with moral imperatives, helped with the understanding of the text as concerning the coming of Christ. In the light of this, Christians are called upon to good moral behaviours while they anticipate the kingdom on earth. They are enjoined to uphold purity, live sanctified lives, demonstrate love in their communities, care for others, engage in honourable work, have a positive attitude towards work, and be faithful and accountable, in order to please God as they wait for the return of Christ.

Secondly, the interpretation and appropriation of this study are relevant to Ghanaian Christians in diverse ways. The eschatological motif provides Ghanaian Christians with an emotional and logical context to appeal to moral and ethical purity, faithfulness and mutual love as they anticipate the coming of Christ. It exhorts them to hold unwaveringly to their faith and the moral imperatives of their Christian life. Again, the study established that the eschatological teaching is a message of motivation and encouragement to persevere in faith while expecting Christ. It offers a perspective that differs from the fright associated with the subject due to the strong apocalyptic image associated with it in other passages. Which means the Parousia is imminent but not of terror, rather it is to lead to salvation.

Furthermore, it contended that the eschatological hope based on the resurrection of Christ provides the assurance of life after death with Christ. The affirmation of Christ’s resurrection in the text as the model of the believers’ resurrection strengthens the faith of Christians and provides a basis to evaluate the cultural elements of the hereafter. This helps to adhere to cultural practices that are compatible with the Christian faith and en-
gage in activities that are biblically acceptable in relation to death and afterlife in their cultural context.

Thirdly, the understanding of the text revealed different perspectives from which some contemporary Ghanaian Christians are anticipating the Parousia. To some, the anticipation of Christ is a call to a life of daily preparation. They made such inference from the context of the text, the socio-economic, religious and political matrix of the original recipients. And again, from the exhortations of Paul in view of the imminent Parousia, as well as the metaphors used in the text. By these, they perceive the need for a sustained effort of consistent daily living in accordance with the imperatives of the Christian faith. They attested to the need for holy living, abstinence from sin and immorality, paying attention to the word of God among others. These efforts, they indicated, must be a daily practice since the day and time for the Parousia is unknown.

Others perceive the anticipation as a time of living in hope. Hope is emerged as an important element in the eschatological life in the Ghanaian Context. It is anchored on their faith in Christ, the faithfulness of God, the resurrection of Christ, and the promise of Christ’s return. For the perceived glory they anticipate in the events of the Parousia, some Ghanaian Christians are motivated by the eschatological teaching to persevere in faith for the hope of Christ. They are, therefore, to live every day in anticipation of this blessed hope. This hope also encourages them not to mourn like those who do not know Christ but in hope that when someone dies in Christ, s/he will resurrect. For by this hope they are assured further that the purpose of God cannot be terminated by death since Christ is the victor over death and in Christ this eschatological hope is founded.

Another perspective that informs the anticipation of Christ is the call to live in holiness as God’s nature requires, as they anticipate the final salvation at the return of the Son.
This is significant to them because considering the relationship between faith and morality, the indicative of God’s salvation presumes that those in Christ have been endowed with grace to live a sanctified life. They must share this nature of God by ensuring that whatever they do while they await the Parousia be characterized by holiness.

Additionally, life in their eschatological anticipation is seen to be a life of mutual love. The participants observed from the study the need to demonstrate love and offer assistance to others in order to strengthen each other to endure the difficulties of this time. As a value enshrined in the moral codes of their contexts, they expressed different ways of sharing love beyond the giving of material assistance. They emphasized that such a way of living enforces the communal bond in the community and unite in faith to persevere in their eschatological existence. Hence, the anticipation of Christ should be a life lived in shared love.

Fourthly, the eschatological teaching contributes to the development of significant Christian values. First, there is the development of perseverance and endurance which are all translated from the Greek term ὑπομονή. With the perception of the delay in the Parousia, such values are required and development for the Christian’s steadfast faith in the eschatological hope. The persistence in faith in view of the Christians’ knowledge of his/her identity in Christ and what awaits them in the future, despite all the difficulties that confront them contributes to the development of this value in their eschatological existence. By endeavouring to be “awake and sober” and “live as children of light and children of the day (1 Thess 5:5),” such values are developed.

The second value that is developed is faithfulness. Though not explicitly stated in the text, it is implicitly related to perseverance and endurance. In this life, Christians are taught to be loyal and trustworthy to God, Christ, the Christian faith and fellow
Christians. As Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to be faithful to his teachings and practice them, Christians today demonstrate such faithfulness in diverse ways. They demonstrate faithfulness to God through the preaching of the gospel, self-examination, reassessment, and living holy lives. And through honesty, transparency, the decision not to cheat people and wronging them even in sexual matters, they demonstrate faithfulness to their fellow Christians. As a cherished value in African societies, the eschatological teaching enhances the development of this value among Ghanaian Christians.

Thirdly, there is the development of commitment among Christians. The eschatological teaching inspires Christians to be committed to God, his kingdom, and fellow Christians by living transformed lives in the society. They are motivated to live as children of “the light and day” (the kingdom) by manifesting values such as love, honesty, faithfulness, correctness, care for others and being examples to others which are practical Christian lives because of their hope of meeting Christ.

Finally, the value of accountability is perpetuated by the eschatological teaching of the church. Through the knowledge that people are responsible for their actions, and that they are liable to judgment and punishment as part of the events of the Parousia, they become mindful of their day-to-day activities as they await Christ’s return. The eschatological teaching thus places a social responsibility on all Christians and compels them to be accountable.

The study further established that the eschatological teaching of the church challenges some cultural concepts in the Ghanaian context for transformation. Through a dialogical engagement of the findings from the text and context, we observed that concepts such as death and afterlife, reincarnation, ancestors, and absence of the idea of resurrection pose some difficulties to the appropriation of the eschatological teaching. The study argued
against over-reliance on these cultural elements in the matters of faith and called for a critical evaluation of these elements in light of the biblical teaching on afterlife. So that instead of distorting the understanding of the subject, they should rather deepen and contributes to its appropriation. The moral lessons embedded in these cultural elements should be conjoining with the moral imperatives of scripture to create a standard moral life approved by the Christian faith and the Ghanaian culture.

7.3 Conclusion

The study makes contributions on three levels. These are a methodological contribution, shaping Ghanaian Christianity and impact on society.

Methodological Contribution

The integration of different methods following the proposed framework contributes to the field of biblical studies on the study of eschatology. The approach fills the growing gap between the academia and the pastoral use of the Bible. Both the exegesis and perspectives of the ordinary readers contribute to the understanding of the subject of eschatology. Research on eschatology is often approached from literary and theological perspectives.

However, it can be observed that this exegetical and contextual approach to the subject not only addresses eschatology from an informed textual background but also gives a contemporary contextual perspective to the subject. It presents an eschatology firmly grounded on hope drawn from the interface of the indicative of salvation and the imperative within the context of Ghanaian Christianity. The perspectives of the readers bring to bear more practical views among some Christians in Ghana as they wait daily for the Parousia event. It challenges the abstract imagery of eschatology with all the scary apoc-
alyptic images to a more expressive and motivating approach to understanding the events of the Parousia.

**Contribution to Shaping Ghanaian Christianity**

The study also contributes to ‘shaping’ Ghanaian Christianity through the dialogue between the biblical text and cultural values to bring individual and societal transformation. It upholds that African Cultural elements and concepts such as death, funerals, afterlife, and ancestors, should not be discarded as unscriptural, but rather be engaged, re-evaluated and adopted as means of appealing to Ghanaians in their anticipation of the coming of Christ. These eschatological elements embedded in the concept of an afterlife in the Ghanaian culture are rich potential mediums of conveying the message of Christ’s Parousia.

They can be adopted and analysed with a scriptural basis to enhance the satisfaction of the inner desire and the mitigation of fear in the Ghanaian on the subject of eschatology. By that, they can authentically worship God and await the *eschaton* in their own context without hindrances. Concepts that are not common to Africans should not be adopted wholesale into the culture without being engaged with the culture. A proper contextualization is essential for their understanding and appropriation for individual and communal transformation.

Moreover, Ghanaian Christians do not cease in any absolute sense to belong to the cultures in which they were brought up. The Parousia will occur while Christians live as cultural beings living as members of their own societies. An approach to resolve the challenge between their faith and culture can be found in the fact that culture is never static but constantly subject to change under the impact of uncountable factors including religion. For religion considerably contribute to shaping culture, thus religious change
necessarily involves cultural change. Hence, Ferdinando’s assertion “if the church is mission, it is by its very nature an agent of cultural change.”

Consequently, Christianity is progressively reshaping the cultural universe in Ghana. It is impacting significantly the way in which people conform to its values, norms, and patterns. Nonetheless, even though conversion to Christ entails a radical break; it does not erase cultural identity. It leads to a transformation in the Christian’s relationship to his/her culture as it dialogues with scripture.

The perception of eschatology among African Christians to some extent is influenced by the distorting effect of elements emanating from their cultural worldview. Culture, as Kevin J. Vanhoozer asserts is a “performance” of one’s ultimate beliefs and values, a concrete way of “staging” one’s religion and that individuals are the actors, but they are culturally and historically costumed, and thrown into plots that are culturally and historically conditioned. This perception can be transformed or improved by a conscious engagement of these cultural elements with the unchanging gospel. By so doing, African Christians begin to live in a manner that is sensitive and of significance to the culture, leading to an authentic African Christianity that takes the Ghanaian (African) context as the subject of biblical interpretation.

It addresses all these challenges in light of the Christian faith to produce a unique and authentic Christianity resulting from the understanding of the worldview as they are confronted with the biblical teachings on eschatology. For the above reasons, there is the need to contextualize the eschatological teaching of the church by engaging the text in

dialogue with these cultural and religious elements to speak to the people, from that which is based on what they already know and believe.

We, therefore, conclude on this fact that just as through tradition, custom, practices as well as social and family codes, moral standards are prescribed for the people living in a particular cultural context, these codes are reinforced by the biblical text giving it a divine backing to demand obedience. Through it, the moral lives of the people are guided as they prepare for the Parousia of Christ.

**Contribution to Impact on Society**

In addition to the above, the research impacts society in several ways by underscoring moral and ethical implications for the contemporary reader. Through the moral imperatives embedded in the eschatological teaching and the ethical requirements from the cultural context, Christians are called upon to live a life of high moral and ethical standards in their eschatological anticipation. The call to holiness which must characterize the daily life of the Christian is an invitation to moral purity that confronts all individual and social evils that people engage in resulting in transformed lives and society. The values that are developed through this teaching brings about good relationship in the society as people live responsible lives and pay attention to the need of others. It enjoins Christians to confront the problem of corruption with the development of a commitment to God, self, and society as well as the values of faithfulness and accountability.

Again, it invites Christians to consider ethics as holistic. Paul in addition to good moral conduct emphasized on work ethics as pleasing to God. He indicates the need to take work seriously and engage in honourable work. By this understanding, Christians must transform their attitude to work such as punctuality, commitment, dedication, diligence,

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495 Nel, “Morality and Religion,” 44.
and hard work in order to increase productivity. The eschatological teaching implies that ethics must not be restricted to a person’s individual or private moral life, but must be holistic, including the approach to work and life in the community.

The study contributes to the correction of some false religious assumptions that have a negative effect on the society. First is the modality of grieving over the dead and how they express such grieve. The false assumption in Thessalonica that those who died before the Parousia have been disadvantaged resulted in the grief in the community which was affecting their lives and faith. Paul, therefore, used the eschatological teaching to correct this false assumption. In a similar way, the lack of understanding of the fate of the dead in Christ among Ghanaians in their cultural context can result in burial rites and funeral practices that may have negative effect on the society. For instance, the period of grieving can be time-consuming as some cultures spend weeks and months mourning the dead. During such period most activities are suspended which affects productivity and thereby having negative economic implications on society. In addition, the cost of funeral rites has economic effects on individuals and families due to the expenditures incurred. The study, therefore, offers insight into the issue of the afterlife to transform the activities of Christians regarding the dead.

Second, it corrects the passive attitude of some Christians to work. Due to the assumption of the imminent Parousia, some of the Christians in Thessalonica abandoned work and were depending on others for their living. Paul used this exhortation to correct their attitude. The eschatological teaching calls on the church’s leadership to correct all forms of assumptions and perceptions of the faith that have the tendency of breeding laziness and negative attitude to work among Christians in order to increase productivity. This will contribute to the reduction of poverty and overdependence by some Christians on the church and their fellow Christians. The study invites the Christian community to re-
flect on and correct the wrong assumptions to correct their faith. Faith is rational and not only emotional; there is, therefore, the need to reflect on moving from emotional faith to that which is rational.

The thesis concludes that if the eschatological message is effectively taught and appropriated by Ghanaian Christians, it can contribute to transforming the life of Christians and the Ghanaian socio-cultural context. Ghanaian cultural concepts such as death, afterlife, and ancestors should not be discarded as unscriptural by Christians. They should be engaged, revaluated, and those compatible with the Christianity should be adopted to enhance the understanding of the eschatological message of the church.

7.4 Recommendations

The following are some recommendations for consideration for further study on the subject of eschatology.

Firstly, considering the influence of cultural elements on the understanding of the biblical message, the thesis recommends an in-depth study of the cultural understanding of death and afterlife in different Ghanaian cultures as a foundation of the contextualization process practically for a further study on eschatology and its relationship with salvation.

Secondly, the research has shown the importance of language in the interpretative process considering the terms that are used in describing the Parousia. For this reason, an investigation on symbols and metaphors employed by different cultures to express the eschatological events would be very important to the understanding of the subject.

The study also recommends a comparative analysis of the eschatological passages and contemporary prophetic preaching in Ghana to investigate whether they contribute to the anticipation of Christ or otherwise.
As a recommendation for policy formulation, institutions that train people in biblical interpretation should incorporate some courses in linguistics in their curriculum. This could offer students additional skills to adequately address linguistic issues in the interpretation of scripture besides the grammatical level considering the importance of language to faith. Such a skill can complement others in producing great insights from biblical passages through the understanding of the word forms and structure.

Churches must offer biblical and doctrinal formation for their ministers. This can equip them to effectively teach the subject in the churches. This is because the understanding and appropriation of the eschatological teaching are important for individual and societal transformation.

Finally, the thesis recommends to Christians to see ethics as holistic and to transform attitudes to work such as punctuality, commitment, diligence and dedication. Christian leaders should address all forms of assumptions and perceptions that contribute to laziness and negative attitude to work.
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