

Article

“Sleeper Awake, Rise from the Dead”: Future Resurrection and Present Ethics in Ephesians

Eric Covington Bible Department Head, Geneva School of Boerne, Boerne, TX 78015, USA; ecovington@genevaschooltx.org

Abstract: Within Ephesians, resurrection is the defining evidence of God’s divine power. A scholarly consensus contends that the letter is characterized by a realized eschatology in which the two references to individuals’ resurrection in Eph 2:5–6 and Eph 5:14 refer to an already accomplished salvation. This article, however, argues that interpreting the reference to believers’ resurrection in overly realized terms breaks the logic by which the letter roots Christian ethical action in future expectation. It reevaluates both references to resurrection within its epistolary context, demonstrating how the already accomplished resurrection of Christ is the surety of believers’ future resurrection and the basis for life in the present. This analysis challenges the overly realized interpretation of Ephesians’ eschatology and suggests that, rather than an already accomplished event or a spiritualized metaphor, Ephesians’ references to resurrection refer to the future hope that Christian believers will be bodily resurrected—a hope that is patterned on Christ’s resurrection in history. It is this vision of future hope, then, that acts as the foundation for ethical action within the letter. Christ’s resurrection light—the light that will fully be realized in the eschatological resurrection—becomes the evaluative measure of ethical action in the present.

Keywords: Ephesians; resurrection; realized eschatology; ethics



Academic Editor: J. David Stark

Received: 1 November 2024

Revised: 28 January 2025

Accepted: 5 February 2025

Published: 7 February 2025

Citation: Covington, Eric. 2025. “Sleeper Awake, Rise from the Dead”: Future Resurrection and Present Ethics in Ephesians. *Religions* 16: 198. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16020198>

Copyright: © 2025 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

A half-century ago, Andres Lindemann’s study of the relationship between eschatology and history within Ephesians came to a conclusion that was evident in its title: *Die Aufhebung der Zeit*. The theme of Ephesians’ theology, so Lindemann’s study argues, “ist unter dem Gesichtspunkt der Zeit ausschließlich die Gegenwart der Christen” (Lindemann 1975, p. 237). What other early Christian texts, including the undisputed Pauline letters, looked for in the future, Lindemann argues, is a present reality within the letter to the Ephesians.

Lindemann’s interpretation of a *realized* eschatology is dependent on his comparison of Ephesians with the undisputed Pauline letters—the closest literary *comparata* of the letter regardless of the conclusions of authorship. While the future events of Paul’s eschatological expectation feature some variations in their particular epistolary contexts, the overall progression is coherent: Christ will come again, individuals will be resurrected (some to salvation and others to destruction), and Christ will rule as sovereign (Sanders 1977, p. 448). As Matthew Theissen notes, Paul’s broad eschatological framework “seems to be participating in Jewish apocalyptic thinking” (Thiessen 2023, p. 50). These events, which are contingently related yet logically distinct, form the foundation of an early Pauline future eschatological expectation and are summarized together in, for example, 1 Cor 15:22–24: “for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in its own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when

he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power.”

These three future events—the *parousia*, the resurrection of the dead, and the enthronement of Christ—are known and guaranteed through two particular means in the present life of believers. The first—evident in 1 Cor 15:23 above—is Christ’s own resurrection, which Paul regards as an eschatological moment occurring within history that “inaugurated the new age and the dominion of Christ. In the resurrection of Christ, judgment day and the vindication (or justification) that comes with it have already dawned” (Campbell 2020, p. 59). The second means of guaranteeing the expected eschatological future is through the presence of the Holy Spirit. As E. P. Sanders summarizes, one of the most consistent expressions in the Pauline letters is the “conviction that Christians possessed the Spirit as the present guarantee of future salvation” (Sanders 1977, p. 447).

Yet, even granted this Pauline understanding of the eschatological nature of Christ’s resurrection in the midst of history and the guaranteeing presence of the Holy Spirit in the present lives of believers, the eschatological events of Christ’s *parousia*, the resurrection of the dead, and Christ’s enthronement remain future expectations for the undisputed Pauline letters. Sanders takes particular care to note that these acts—including specifically the resurrection of the dead—remain future expectations for Paul even in light of Jesus’s own resurrection in history. He notes, “the resurrection is future. This distinction is maintained by Paul even when the discussion of participation in Christ’s death might seem to lead to the conclusion that Christians have participated in his resurrection” (Sanders 1977, p. 449).

In Lindemann’s reading of Ephesians, the letter presents the resurrection of the dead and the enthronement of Christ as having already been accomplished: “Die Abschnitte 1,20ff. und 2,5ff. machen deutlich, daß das, was der traditionelle christliche Glaube von der Zukunft erwartet und erhofft, nach der Theologie des Epheserbriefes bereites geschehen ist” (Lindemann 1975, p. 237). As Lindemann notes, two key passages inform the realized readings of Ephesians’ eschatology: Eph 1:20—where Christ’s enthronement is described using aorist verbs: “God put this power to work (ἐνέργησεν) in Christ when he raised him (ἐγείρας) from the dead and seated him (καθίσας) at his right hand in the heavenly places”; and Eph 2:5–6—where the resurrection of the dead is similarly discussed using aorist verbs: “even when we were dead through our trespasses, [God] made us alive (συνεζωποίησεν) together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up (συνήγειρεν) with him and seated us (συνεκάθισεν) with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (NRSVue). Lindemann interprets a second reference to the resurrection of the dead in Eph 5:14b—“‘Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you’” (NRSVue)—as a call “der den Christen das Leben nach dem Tode zuspricht—ein Leben der Gegenwart jedoch, nicht der Zukunft” (Lindemann 1975, p. 234 n.167). As Lindemann reads Ephesians, that which the undisputed Paul saw as a future hope of the resurrection of the dead has been accomplished in the present.

This interpretation of a realized eschatology within Ephesians results in an apparent tension between the letter’s ideology and its ethical admonitions. As Ulrich Luz rightly notes, the parenetic sections of Ephesians use eschatological ideas and concepts as the foundation for the ethical imperatives (Luz 1976, p. 374); however, as Luz further notes, the “indicative” sections of the letter seem to negate any truly future eschatological significance (Luz 1976, p. 374). Luz suggests that this may indicate a flawed perspective in the composition of the letter: “Ob die Verbindung zwischen Heilsereignis und Ethik dem Eph nicht nur intentionell, sondern auch theologisch-konzeptuell gelungen ist, mag man sich allerdings fragen” (Luz 1976, p. 374). Indeed, more recent studies of Ephesians have noticed the challenge of articulating the ideological coherence of the letter overall. As Kreitzer summarizes, “recent investigations in the form and style of the letter suggest that it

is more accurately described as a collage of phrases and materials which have been pasted together" (Kreitzer 2007, p. 5). Ultimately, this tension of the letter's coherence between its eschatological perspective of an already accomplished salvation and its ethical admonitions remains a difficulty in the interpretation of Ephesians. Luz notes, "Die Frage, ob es theologisch gelingt, die Paränese in eine Interpretation des Eph wirklich zu integrieren, ist m.E. das Grundproblem einer Interpretation dieses Briefes" (Luz 1976, p. 374).

Since the publication of *Die Aufhebung der Zeit*, there have been nuances to Lindemann's stark articulation of a completely realized eschatology in which time is abolished. Andrew Lincoln, for example, notes that "the apostle's particular emphasis in this letter by no means necessitates a rejection of futurist eschatology. Reference to the future plays a clear role in 1:14; 2:7; 4:30; 5:5, 27; 6:8, 13 and is reflected in the rhetorical flourish of 1:21" (Lincoln 1981, p. 167). Lincoln's description of "particular emphasis in this letter" does refer to elements of Lindemann's realized eschatology, in particular, the already accomplished resurrection and enthronement of Christ; however, he rightly draws attention to future-oriented passages seen throughout the letter.

Several studies have since focused on the way in which Ephesians reflects the undisputed Pauline "guarantees" of the future eschaton: Christ's resurrection and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Recently, for example, Carey Newman has argued that Ephesians is characterized by an apocalyptic eschatology that is discernable in the letter's emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus. Ephesians "does perform an apocalyptic eschatology," he says; "one featuring a dense and calculated use of cosmic, binary, mystical, transformative and spatial language to describe the disruptive and non-iterative power of the death and resurrection of Jesus" (Newman 2018, p. 500 n.33). Another significant line of study has focused on the role of the Spirit as a guarantee, or ἀρραβών, in Eph 1:13. Erwin Penner, for example, notes that "lingering references to a future eschatology (cf. 1:13f, 21; 4:30; 5:5, 16 and 6:13) can perhaps be better integrated into the predominantly present/realized categories by the term 'proleptic eschatology'" (Penner 1983, p. 14). Penner's "proleptic eschatology" is described primarily in spatial categories in which "what is fully accomplished in heaven and will one day be experienced completely on earth is already genuinely, though partially, experienced by believers through the Spirit (1:13f)" (Penner 1983, p. 14). The role of the Spirit as a guarantee is also noted by Lemmer, who maintains that "a complete understanding of Ephesian eschatology can therefore not be arrived at without analyzing it in its interaction with pneumatology and ecclesiology" (Lemmer 1990, p. 114). While such studies argue for future-facing elements of Ephesians, they are to be found in the work of the Spirit and the Church in "growing" or "filling" that which Jesus's resurrection began.

It is significant, though, that these studies have not challenged the fundamental argument of realized interpreters like Lindemann: that Ephesians understands the *parousia*, the resurrection of the dead, and the enthronement of Christ as having already been accomplished. Those who maintain some future expectations have tended to interpret the already accomplished enthronement of Christ as necessitating a transition from "temporal" to "spatial" categories of expectation. So, for example, one particular reason Penner gives for his articulation of the "spatial categories" of future expectation is that they "are more suited to the central concept of an already enthroned Christ who fulfills his ministry to the church and world, than are temporal categories which stress the expectation of the *parousia*" (Penner 1983, p. 15). Penner concurs with the realized interpretation of Christ's enthronement, and so, it is Ephesians' insistence on an already accomplished enthronement of Christ that necessitates abandoning the temporal descriptions of a future, eschatological expectation in favor of spatial categories of growth and fullness. Lemmer, too, notes that the eschatological expectation is not about the *parousia* or resurrection but about a "greater realization, when the present and the anticipated future will occur (1:13–2:10). This

anticipation (reflected, for example, in the concept of ἀπαβών) indicates that much is still extant, such as the full entrance and access into the presence of the Father” (Lemmer 1990, p. 114). Lincoln notes that “the predominance of realized eschatology in Ephesians” “finds its strongest expression in Ephesians 2:6 where believers are said to have been seated with Christ in the heavenlies” (Lincoln 1981, pp. 166–67). Even for Lincoln’s emphasis on future references within the letter, Ephesians’ future hope is neither related to the *parousia* nor the resurrection of the dead; it is, rather reflected in “spatial terminology” like “growing” and “filling”, “which can be seen as equivalents of future eschatology (Lincoln 1981, p. 167). The future language in Ephesians “is to highlight what believers are and have in Christ” (Lincoln 1981, p. 167).

Interpreters who seek to detail a future expectation have tended to interpret the two references to the resurrection of the dead in Eph 2:5–6 and Eph 5:14 as spiritualized metaphors of a salvation already accomplished by Christ. Wessels makes a strong case for a future eschatology in Ephesians, concluding succinctly that there is “insufficient reason to conclude from the letters themselves that futurist eschatology has been abandoned” (Wessels 1987, p. 200). However, a key warrant for this conclusion is the interpretation of the references to the Ephesian believers “being made alive” as a spiritualized metaphor that “means nothing more than what is described in terms of justification in the undisputed letters” (Wessels 1987, p. 189). Muddiman, too, interprets Ephesians’ discussion of the believers’ pre-Christian life with their present experience in Christ as a metaphor invoking sleep and death: “if this is correct, it should be noted that the implied understanding of baptism would involve a more realized eschatology, the ‘resurrection of the believer,’ then is found in most other New Testament texts; but Col. 3.1 and Eph. 1.20 show that it is possible. Death, in the second line [of Eph 5:14], is used metaphorically of the domain of sin from which believers have been delivered by dying, and being buried, with Christ in baptism” (Muddiman 2001, p. 243). Frederick Tappenden perhaps articulates this position most clearly when he notes, “both the Epistle to the Colossians and the text we know as Ephesians build upon Pauline ideas of dying with Christ while casting notions of resurrection within an explicitly realised framework (see Col 2:11–15; 3:1–17; Eph 2:1–10). These texts are usually located within a trajectory of thought that is traced back to Paul, and indeed related themes are pregnant in Paul’s writings (comp. Rom 6:1–14). But with equal weight, one cannot miss the apostle’s very clear expectation of resurrection as a future event” (Tappenden 2017, pp. 181–82). For many scholars, then, the resurrection of the dead, which the undisputed Pauline letters expected as a future, eschatological event, is a metaphor for already accomplished salvation in Ephesians.

For all the nuance that has sought to emphasize future-oriented passages in the letter, it is still widely held that Ephesians conveys what the undisputed Pauline letters saw as future events—the *parousia*, the resurrection of the dead, and the enthronement of Christ—as having already been accomplished, either as an historical act or as a spiritualized metaphor. Not least, such advances have not satisfyingly responded to the foundational interpretive problem in Ephesians: the coherence of the letter’s ethical exhortations with a realized eschatology. This article reexamines “das Grundproblem” of Ephesians by reevaluating the place of future, bodily resurrection in Ephesians. It ultimately argues that interpreting the reference to believers’ resurrection in overly realized terms breaks the logic by which the letter roots Christian ethical action in future expectation. Rather than an overly realized or overly spiritualized metaphorical interpretation of resurrection, Ephesians points to the future hope of a bodily resurrection that is patterned on Christ’s own resurrection within history, and which is broadly coherent with the undisputed Pauline emphasis on the future resurrection of the dead. It is this vision of the future hope, then, that acts as the foundation for ethical action within the letter.

2. Resurrection in Ephesians

Discussions of a future, bodily resurrection in Ephesians occur within a complex web of passages and themes. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a central component in understanding the role of resurrection within the letter, as are two clear references to individual believers rising from the dead in Eph 2:5–6 and Eph 5:14. We will begin the study by examining each of these focal passages.

2.1. *The Resurrection of the Christ in Eph 1:20–22*

As the author of Ephesians expounds on the revelation of God's will that all things be "gathered up" in Christ (as the NRSVue translates ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι in Eph 1:10), he prays that the Ephesian believers may have "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him" (Eph 1:17). There is a three-fold description of the prayed-for knowledge of God: that the believers may know (1) the hope of his calling (Eph 1:18b); (2) the riches of the glory of his inheritance among the saints (Eph 1:18c); and finally (3) the exceeding greatness of his power for those who believe according to the outworking of the power of his strength (Eph 1:19). This final focus on God's exceedingly powerful strength is further developed in Eph 1:20–23, where the outworking of this divine cosmic power is manifested in the resurrection and enthronement of the Christ at God's right hand in the heavenlies—a position above every ruler, authority, power, and dominion in this age and in the age to come. As the younger Barth has noted, "since the unique power of God is at work in the resurrection, the resurrection is an event without parallel" (Barth 1974, p. 166).

The resurrection and exalted enthronement of Christ are associated with two further actions. With reference to the textual tradition of Ps 8:7, the author of Ephesians emphasizes that God has subjected all things under the resurrected and enthroned Christ's feet (Eph 1:22a). Further, in Eph 1:22b, the author indicates that God has established him as the head over all things to the church. This specification of the Christ's relationship with the church highlights the close, even intimate, relationship that exists between Christ and the believers. Christ is described as the head of the church, describing the way in which the believers share the body of Christ.

The resurrection of the Christ stands as the defining event in which God's divine cosmic power has been made manifest within Ephesians using both political/military and intimate relational imagery. It explains the structure and order of the cosmos as well as the life that the Ephesian believers are living. Indeed, "the resurrection and enthronement of Christ are explained as deeds of God that affect not only individual men and their faith, but also principalities and powers, all things, and the church as a whole" (Barth 1974, p. 168). The combination of these two foci ensures that while the resurrection of the Christ can be seen as a cosmic political action, as Gombis (2010) highlights, it also remains an individual, existential experience with implications for each individual.

As the elder Barth notes, the author of Ephesians points to the resurrection of the Christ as the defining point in history that is the "basis of their Christian existence" (Barth 2017, p. 133). For Ephesians, the Christ's resurrection is an event that acts as a type of anchor or focal point for all of existence: past, present, and future. Much as gravity warps space and time in the theory of general relativity, the Christ's resurrection is an event of such gravity that all of history and existence are impacted by it.

References to the past, present, and future significance of the Christ's resurrection and enthronement are weaved around and within the prayer of Eph 1:15–23. There is a dense collection of some of the clearest references to future expectations within the entire letter (for a helpful list of some of the more significant passages concerning the future expectations of Ephesians, see (Talbert 2007, p. 75). Perhaps the clearest expression of this future expectation occurs in Eph 1:21, where the cosmic results of the enthroned Christ's subjugation of all

things includes both things “in this age” (ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ) and “in the age to come” (ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι). Cohick notes that the language of “the age to come” corresponds with an apocalyptic conception of a “two ages” eschatology, evidencing the hope of a future eschatological event (Cohick 2020, pp. 126–27). Though there have been recent works that challenge an oversimplified, direct application of an apocalyptic two-age eschatology within Ephesians and the Pauline letters more broadly (see particularly Davies 2021, 2022; Jervis 2023), the verb μέλλω clearly suggests the conception of a temporal age that remains subsequent to the author’s present experience (cf. BDAG 2000, s.v.).

Two other features of the broader prayer in Eph 1:15–23 suggest a temporally future significance of the Christ’s resurrection. The first component of the prayer for the Ephesians is that they may know the “hope of his calling” (Eph 1:18b). In speaking of a “hope”, the author of Ephesians understands there to be an expectation of something not yet attained within the call of God. The second component of the prayer for the Ephesians builds on this conception of something not yet fully attained when it prays that the Ephesians may know “the riches of the glory of his inheritance” (Eph 1:18c). The description of the Ephesians as heirs awaiting an inheritance must be read in light of the initial reference to an “inheritance” four verses earlier in Eph 1:14. There, the gift of the Holy Spirit is described as a pledge or guarantee (ἀρραβὼν) of “our inheritance”. As Eph 1:14b clarifies, the Spirit’s role as a pledge or guarantee is toward the full redemption of the possession that has been promised (εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῆς περιποιήσεως). Thus, the significance of the inheritance referenced in Eph 1:14 and again in Eph 1:18 is to portray the Ephesian believers as being in a state of waiting. They have the promise of redemption, but they do not yet have its full possession. In this way, Christ’s resurrection functions as the historical demonstration of God’s divine power to be able to bring about the expected promise that remains, as of yet, incomplete. The resurrection of the Christ, then, along with the presence of the Holy Spirit, is the foundation for the Ephesian believers’ future hopes and expectations.

The present significance of Jesus’s resurrection is also closely associated with this passage. In Eph 2:2, it emerges that the enthroned Christ empowers a life that stands in tension with the life associated “with the age of this world” (τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου), which also corresponds with an opponent to Christ’s enthronement: the “ruler of the power of the air” (τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος). The letter’s first imperative appears in Eph 2:11 as the letter urges the readers to remember (μνημονεύετε) that they live according to a different reality than the trespasses, sin, and disobedience that characterize this age and this ruler. This description of life in the present, as being lived in tension between two competing ages and two competing rulers, is echoed not least in the proclamation that the present life of the Ephesian believers is depicted as a struggle with the forces associated with “this present darkness” (as the NRSVue translates τοῦ σκότους τούτου) in Eph 6:12. The resurrected and enthroned Christ stands as the surety by which the Ephesian believers are to orient their life in the present.

The resurrected and enthroned Christ also informs the letter’s understanding of the Ephesian believers’ past. Because the resurrected Christ is the determination of life, it is clear that the Ephesian believers’ past lives, before they were in Christ, were characterized by the opposite of life. Indeed, Eph 2:1 describes the Ephesians as being “dead in your trespasses and sins” (ὅμᾳς ὄντας νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ὑμῶν). The resurrection of Christ, then, acts as a pronouncement that their former way of life was the way of death. As the younger Barth rightly notes, “only in the light of the reality of God’s resuscitating power can the reality of man’s former death be recognized” (Barth 1974, p. 233). As Eph 1:20–23 makes clear, this divine “resuscitating power” is preeminently manifested in the resurrection of Christ. The author of Ephesians, then, regards Jesus’s resurrection “as the point in history that assured his readers of the extent of the hope

granted to them through God's call and the nature of their Christian existence" (Barth 2017, pp. 135–36). It is within this context that the letter's first reference to the resurrection of individual believers occurs.

2.2. *The Individual Resurrection of Believers in Eph 2:5–6*

Ephesians maintains that this divine resurrecting power preeminently demonstrated in Christ is also evident in the resurrection of believers. The author of Ephesians summarizes the ways in which God's power, motivated by divine love, have been made manifest in individuals in Eph 2:4–7 by contrasting the Ephesians' past life of death: "but God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (συνεζωοποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ)—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him (καὶ συνήγειρεν) and seated us with him (καὶ συνεκάθισεν) in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (NRSVue). A distinctive feature of this passage, the συν-prefixed main verbs highlight the concomitant relationship between Christ and those individuals who are in Christ. What is true of Jesus—living, raising, and seating—is true for individuals through the same divine loving power.

It is another feature of these verbs, though, that has played a key role in scholarly discussions on this passage: they are in the aorist tense. The discussion of traditionally futuristic, eschatological hopes like resurrection and ascension in the aorist tense presents an interpretive difficulty for readers of the letter. There have been two primary ways that interpreters have attempted to deal with the tension caused by these aorist verbs. The first, represented by Lindemann, is to emphasize that the aorist tense verbs convey a perspective that these actions (living, raising, and seating) have already become a reality for believers in Christ. As noted above, this passage played a key role in Lindemann's interpretation of the letter's eschatology: "Die Abschnitte 1,20ff. und 2,5ff. machen deutlich, daß das, was der traditionelle christliche Glaube von der Zukunft erwartet und erhofft, nach der Theologie des Epheserbriefes bereites geschehen ist" (Lindemann 1975, p. 237). For Lindemann, the aorist tense verbs are clear evidence that Ephesians operates with a completely realized eschatology.

While Lindemann's position provides a potential explanation of the aorist verbs, it does create tension with other forward-looking elements of the letter (not least, the reference to the "ages to come" that occurs in Eph 2:7 immediately following this summary). So, a second major interpretive position arose, seeking to account for the use of the aorist verbs and alleviate the tension of a completely realized eschatological interpretation by reading this passage as a metaphor for a new, spiritual life. Andrew Lincoln, for example, maintains firmly that "in Ephesians 2 there is no mention of the future aspect of resurrection-life for believers (though there is a more general future reference in 2:7). Ephesians then has a more exclusive realized-eschatological focus on salvation as having been raised with Christ. Salvation also involves having been seated with Christ in the heavenly realms, and such a notion is the most developed formulation of realized eschatology in the Pauline corpus" (Lincoln 1983, p. 621). Hoehner makes the metaphorical interpretation of the aorist verbs even clearer in saying:

The aorist is constative, viewing the entire action without reference to its beginning, its progress, or its end. Normally, resurrection is considered as something yet future. But in both Col 2:13 and 3:1 and here, it talks about a resurrection in conjunction with Christ's resurrection, and since Christ's resurrection is in the past, it is not talking about a future resurrection. Thus, the believers' spiritual resurrection is in conjunction with Christ's physical resurrection. As he died

physically, we were dead spiritually; so also as he was raised physically (1:20), we were raised spiritually. This talks about the believers' positional resurrection and not their future physical resurrection. (Hoehner 2002, p. 330)

In Hoehner's interpretation of Eph 2:5–6, the aorist verbs preclude any reference to a future physical resurrection, and, so, he argues this passage must be read as a spiritualized metaphor referring to an already accomplished "spiritual resurrection". He summarizes his point clearly: "As God raised and seated Christ in the heavenlies physically (1:20), so has God raised and seated us together with Christ in the heavenlies spiritually" (Hoehner 2002, p. 334).

However, a few interpreters have voiced reasons, both linguistic and conceptual, that suggest a reconsideration of these common readings of the passage may be warranted. Linguistically, studies in verbal aspect have challenged the easy assumptions made by some interpreters that the aorist verbs in Eph 2:5–6 must necessarily reference a temporally past action. In his discussion of verbal aspect, Constantine Campbell refers to a study that suggests aorist verbs refer to past events 85 percent of the time that they are used (Campbell 2024, p. 36). While highly associated with past events, the fact that not all aorist verbs refer to past events raises questions concerning the extent to which temporality can be assumed in aorist verbs. In another work, Campbell points to an example in the undisputed Pauline corpus of Romans 8:30, in which a string of aorist indicatives are used where there is some challenge to understanding a past temporality: "And those whom he predestined (προώρισεν) he also called (ἐκάλεσεν), and those whom he called (ἐκάλεσεν) he also justified (ἐδικαίωσεν), and those whom he justified (ἐδικαίωσεν) he also glorified (ἐδόξασεν)" (Campbell 2015, pp. 116–17). Campbell argues that the final of these aorists, ἐδόξασεν, contains a particular challenge to the temporally past reading of the aorist indicative as most commentators consider glorification to be a future, eschatological expectation. Rather than an inherent temporality, Campbell suggests that the aorist verbs are used "to present these truths in summary form" before also suggesting that the perfective aspect of the aorist tense could be paired with a gnomic *Aktionsart* to express "a universal and timeless action" (Campbell 2015, p. 117).

In her commentary, Cohick refers to the significance of verbal aspect when interpreting Ephesians' aorist verbs, noting "aspectual theory contends that the aorist does not refer to past time, but to the totality of the event or action" (Cohick 2020, p. 53). Concerning the use of the aorist verbs in Eph 2:5–6, Cohick suggests that:

the aorist tense is best understood here as constative, because it paints the action as a whole, standing from the outside, presenting God's action without concern for when the action began or ended. Paul shows that believers in Christ have victory over death and the spiritual powers that promote evil and disobedience. Believers were spiritually dead, now are regenerated to a holy life that honors God and blesses others, and will continue in the new heavens and new earth as they enjoy resurrected bodies, all based on God's grace exercised in Christ. (Cohick 2020, p. 152)

Thus, Cohick argues that verbal aspect demonstrates that it may be linguistically possible to read the descriptions of believers being made alive, raised, and seated with Christ without reference to a specific temporal occurrence. Rather, the perfective aspect of the aorist indicative could be read as a summary of a general and timeless truth, which incorporates the past, present, and future significance of Christ's resurrection.

In his commentary on Ephesians, the elder Barth also offers a theological reading of Eph 2:5–6 that eschews either the overly realized or overly metaphorical reading of individual believers' resurrection. He emphasizes that the foundational role of Christ's resurrection in understanding individual believers' resurrection (highlighted by the συν-

prefixed verbs) reminds the readers of the letter that “as believers they are engaged not with mere human matters but with God, not with time but with eternity” (Barth 2017, p. 139). Thus, Barth argues, “speaking about the mystery of Christ means speaking the mystery of human life” (Barth 2017, p. 139). This mystery, or “paradox of our existence,” as he also calls it, is the fundamental shift from death to life with God, and in this mystery:

Its effects (v. 7) are in the future, temporally speaking; its origin and grounding (vv. 8–10) are in God. However, the relation of our life to this hidden renewal *really does exist*. In Christ, almighty God, the giver of life and source of all blessings, becomes the basis of our existence in the *past* as well as the *future*. In the power of his resurrection, Jesus is the midpoint, which separates time, making the past truly the *past* and the future truly the *future*. (Barth 2017, pp. 139–40, emphasis original)

This reading suggests that Ephesians conceives of the believers’ resurrection and ascension as truly future events that have an actual significance on the present life of the letter’s readers, which is clearly demarcated from their previous, past life before they were in Christ.

2.3. The Individual Resurrection of Believers in Eph 5:14

The second reference to individual believers’ resurrection in the letter occurs in Eph 5:14:

πάν γὰρ τὸ φανερούμενον φῶς ἐστίν. διὸ λέγει·
ἔγειρε, ὁ καθεύδων,
καὶ ἀνάστα ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν,
καὶ ἐπιφύσει σοι ὁ Χριστός.

A distinctive feature of this passage is the introductory quotation formula διὸ λέγει. This introductory formula indicates that the next three lines are a quotation from a known source. A similar construction appears earlier in Eph 4:8 to introduce a quotation from Ps 68:19. The problem in Eph 5:14, though, is that the quoted material does not have an obviously identifiable origin.

Some scholars have suggested that even though “the text is not found in anything approaching this form in the OT,” this quotation formula suggests a reference to the Hebrew Scriptures (Moritz 1996, p. 96). While there have been a number of different suggestions for the source text, the most common suggestion is that this is a composite quotation from Isa 26:19 and Isa 60:1. Recent studies have validated the use and significance of composite citations in antiquity (notably Adams and Ehorn 2016; Adams and Ehorn 2018), and the identification of Eph 5:14 as a composite citation of the two Isaianic passages has been followed by Moritz (1996), Williamson (2009), Fowl (2012), and Campbell (2023).

Another suggestion for explaining the introductory quotation formula is that the author of Ephesians is referring to a song or hymn that would have been known to the original readers. So, for example, Schnackenburg suggests that the quotation is “a fragment of a song of unknown origin” (Schnackenburg 1990, p. 228), while Cohick avers, slightly more specifically, that it is “likely an early Christian poem or hymn celebrating a believer’s rising up from the dead, with Christ shining as a light on them” (Cohick 2020, p. 320). Moritz (1996, p. 104) and Merkle (2016, p. 167) combine both proposals and suggest that the quotation is from an early Christian hymn that was deeply influenced by Isa 26:19 and Isa 60:1.

While there is little to suggest any more definitive answer to the specification of source text with our current evidence, it is important to note that any interpretation of the verse is, as Fowl rightly notes, “obligated to understand these clauses in the context of Ephesians and not in some prior, speculatively reconstructed context” (Fowl 2012, p. 172). Whatever

the source of the quotation, the author has incorporated the passage within the epistle as support of the claims being made in the broader context of the passage. The quotation thus reflects the words that the author has chosen to communicate. As Moritz notes, even if the original source of the words was definitively known, “the author of Ephesians could well have used the hymn to make an entirely different point” (Moritz 1996, p. 107). So, the interpretation of this verse must focus on the understanding of these words within the letter itself.

In the context of Ephesians 5, this reference to resurrection from the dead occurs within an extended discussion that returns to the comparison of the Ephesian believers’ lives before Christ with their present lives. Beginning in Eph 5:8, the Ephesians’ previous lives are characterized as “darkness” (σκότος), but they are now “light in the Lord” (νῦν δὲ φῶς ἐν κυρίῳ). As in Eph 2, it is the Ephesians’ incorporation in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ that acts as the temporally distinguishing marker between past and present for the Ephesians. This comparison initiates an extended admonition for the Ephesian believers to avoid the “unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph 5:11) and to “live as children of light” (Eph 5:8). The reference to resurrection appears as evidentiary support for the claim that “everything exposed by the light becomes visible for everything that becomes visible is light” (Eph 5:13–14a). However, as Lincoln has noted, “the force of these assertions in support of the writer’s exhortation is not immediately obvious, and they have given rise to a number of different interpretations” (Lincoln 1990, p. 331).

The most common interpretation of these verses is that they are a continuation of the metaphorical description of the contrast between believers’ past and present lives. As we saw in the introduction, Lindemann sees in this reference a call “der den Christen das Leben nach dem Tode zuspricht—ein Leben der Gegenwart jedoch, nicht der Zukunft” (Lindemann 1975, p. 234 n.167). Most recent commentators have largely echoed a similar interpretation, seeing this passage as adding additional components to the already established spiritualized metaphor of conversion begun in Eph 5:8. A number of interpreters, influenced by the speculative identification of the quotation as a type of baptismal confession, read a strong baptismal significance in this passage in reference to the believers’ initial act of conversion. Kirby’s study of the role of baptism in Ephesians in the late 1960s concludes that this passage “makes use of the double symbolism of sleep and death to describe the situation of men apart from Christ; our author probably quotes it because both symbols are allied with his third symbol, darkness” (Kirby 1968, p. 160). The significance of baptism is reflected in subsequent commentaries, including Lincoln’s suggestion that this passage refers to the Ephesians’ conversion, in which their baptism “had involved their waking out of the sleep of the old life, their rising from the death of sin, as the light of Christ shone on them. They should be assured that the light that had transformed their darkness had lost none of its power” (Lincoln 1990, p. 334). Muddiman, too, suggests “death, in the second line, is used metaphorically of the domain of sin from which believers have been delivered by dying, and being buried, with Christ in baptism” (Muddiman 2001, p. 243).

Even when interpreters do not follow the baptismal situation of Eph 5:14, they do not fundamentally differ in their interpretation of the verse as a spiritualized metaphor for the change of life already accomplished by Christ. So, for example, Schnackenburg concludes that “the ‘rising from the dead’ is not to be referred to those who are still spiritually dead but refers to the metaphor of the sleeper who rises to new life” (Schnackenburg 1990, p. 229). Moritz similarly indicates that “it may be conceded that the first line of the hymn may refer to a pre-conversion ‘sleep’, the second line to the fundamental turn-around at conversion and the third line to the ongoing ‘walk’ under the influence of Christ, the light” (Moritz 1996, pp. 108–9). Hoehner indicates that this passage is an unusual metaphorical departure from the typical focus on an eschatological resurrection: “normally

the resurrection from the dead refers to those who are physically dead, but in the present context it has reference to a spiritual deadening demonstrated by their unfruitful works of darkness” (Hoehner 2002, pp. 687–88). Williamson’s commentary concludes that the author “recalls his readers’ experience of the transformation Christ accomplished in their lives” (Williamson 2009, p. 147). Fowl indicates that the combination of the imagery of sleep, death, and darkness is a “way of speaking about believers’ conversion from darkness into light” (Fowl 2012, p. 172). Cohick suggests that, “in a final metaphor, Paul likens believers to those who were once asleep and have risen from the dead now that the light of Christ shines on them” (Cohick 2020, p. 325). Campbell echoes the metaphorical interpretation indicating that “believers’ light-giving vocation is preceded by their waking up from sleep—their spiritual resurrection with Christ from death to life” (Campbell 2023, ch. X).

Interpreters are not only influenced by the potential of seeing metaphorical parallels between the polarities of light/dark, sleep/awake, and dead/alive in reference to the conversion of the Ephesian believers, they are also influenced by the dominant interpretation of resurrection in Eph 2:5–6 as an already accomplished, past event. Best perhaps most clearly evidences this when he rhetorically asks in his comments on Eph 5:14, “Can those who are Christians and have therefore risen with Christ (2.6) be envisaged as still dead?” (Best 2003, p. 261). Best’s rhetorical question assumes a connection between the two references to individual resurrection in Eph 2:5–6 and Eph 5:14, and the interpretation of an already accomplished resurrection in Eph 2 clearly informs his reading of this passage. If Ephesians 2 speaks of resurrection as a past event, it is not possible, according to Best, to view Eph 5:14 as anything other than a metaphorical reference to an already accomplished conversion. Yet, this creates a tension for the interpretation of a metaphorical reference to conversion. Best gives voice to this tension, noting that “though believers are light, some of them seem still to be darkness and Christ needs to shine on them” (Best 2003, p. 260). The significance of the verse—that believers must awake and rise from the dead so that Christ will shine—is logically disjointed from the primary interpretation that resurrection refers to the already accomplished task of conversion.

Though Cohick ultimately concludes that Eph 5:14 functions as a spiritual metaphor for conversion, her comments on the broader context seek to address the logical tension by indicating that there is a “future-facing orientation” evident within Eph 5:1–21 that functions “not only to encourage the Ephesians to obey God daily, but also to expose the evil of the present age” (Cohick 2020, p. 305). Cohick particularly identifies these “future-facing” references as the mention of inheriting the kingdom in Eph 5:5 and the reference to God’s wrath coming on those who are disobedient in Eph 5:6. To these should be added Eph 5:14 as a reference to the future resurrection of believers.

As there are reasons for reevaluating the extent to which resurrection can be assumed to be an already accomplished, past event in Eph 2:5–6, so also are there reasons to reevaluate this reference to resurrection in Eph 5:14. The function of the resurrection of the dead as a metaphor for conversion needs to be reconsidered in light of the proposed re-reading of Eph 2:5–6. Best assumes that Eph 5:14 *must* be a metaphor because Eph 2:5–6 must refer to an already accomplished, past salvation. But if, as we have suggested above, there are grammatical and ideological reasons to question the prevailing interpretation of Eph 2, this removes one of the key pieces of evidence that constrains the interpretation of this passage. Without the assumption that resurrection is already an accomplished event from Eph 2:5–6, it would be difficult to imagine that Eph 5:14 alone depicts resurrection from the dead as a purely *figurative* description. Rather, it would seem to indicate the explicit content of the Ephesian believers’ hope: that they would share in the same resurrection life as the resurrected Christ. The primary reason to consider resurrection as a metaphor for conversion in this passage is the assumption that resurrection has already occurred

in the perspective of the author of Ephesians. But if this reason is removed, a clear and natural reading of resurrection in Eph 5:14 is that it does reference a future, eschatological resurrection of individual believers who are in Christ.

Grammatically, the form of this verse does not clearly convey the conception of a past event. In fact, the construction of the two imperatives *ἐγείρε* and *ἀνάστα* followed by the future tense *ἐπιφύσκει* conveys the sense of a conditional state that remains, as of yet, incomplete. The conditional function of imperatives indicates either “a simple command followed by a promise” or “that the promise is conditioned upon the doing of the thing commanded” (Boyer 1987, p. 38). For the author of Ephesians, the promise in this construction is not in jeopardy or in doubt.

The imperatival force of the proclamation in Eph 5:14 must be understood in light of the future promise of Christ’s illumination of the Ephesian believers. As Moritz rightly notes: “*ἐπιφύσκειν* usually implies some element of a dominating, sustaining, transforming, or even threatening power” (Moritz 1996, p. 110). Ephesians 1:20–23 establishes that the resurrection of Jesus is the paradigmatic definition of divine, cosmic power. Thus, the full light of Christ’s transforming power (as Moritz calls it) is associated with the resurrection of Jesus. That full light, which illumines all actions and will completely distinguish the life of selfish disobedience and sin (the works of “darkness”) from that of the way of “light” in Christ, will ultimately be manifested at the eschatological resurrection of individual believers.

Because everything exposed by the light becomes visible (Eph 5:13) and because everything visible is light (Eph 5:14a), Christ must shine on the Ephesian believers for them to be light. And while glimpses of the resurrection light are present within the Ephesian believers *now* (*νῦν*) as noted in Eph 5:8, the Ephesians still must be exhorted to avoid the “works of darkness” (Eph 5:11) that characterize the “sons of disobedience” (Eph 5:6) and to live as “children of light” (Eph 5:8). This suggests that there is still an, as of yet, incomplete illumination of the Ephesian believers that must be continually manifested in their present way of life. This fact, which is logically disjunctive with the realized interpretation of this passage as a spiritualized metaphor of conversion, corresponds with the idea of a future eschatological resurrection that remains in the future for the Ephesian believers, even while its accomplishment is sure because of the already accomplished resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Within the context of Eph 5, the imperative *ἀνάστα ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν* indicates that there is still a component of resurrection that has not yet been accomplished. The light of Christ which shines, using the future verb, helps to demonstrate that the full revelation of Christ’s transforming power, which will vindicate the prescribed way of life in Ephesians, will be made a reality on the eschatological day of resurrection. The light of Christ’s resurrection that was already experienced in the past is the ultimate demonstration of the surety of the believers’ future resurrection.

3. Future Resurrection and Present Ethics in Ephesians

The understanding of resurrection and, more broadly, eschatology in Ephesians has a direct impact on the understanding of the letter’s overall coherence, particularly as it concerns the basis for its ethical imperatives. As we saw in the introduction, Luz has called resolving the apparent tension between the realized eschatology of the letter and its ethical imperatives “das Grundproblem” of Ephesians interpretation. Lincoln echoes the noted difficulty, stating that “by viewing salvation as already accomplished” Ephesians seems to remove “the emphasis of human response” (Lincoln 1983, pp. 629–30). Interpreters have struggled to articulate the ethical logic by which Ephesians could exhort its believers to live as children of the light (Eph 5:8) when they are considered to already be resurrected and ascended as “light in the Lord”.

The reevaluation of the resurrection texts in Eph 2 and Eph 5, though, challenges the fundamental assumption of an already accomplished salvation shared by Luz and Lincoln. The challenge of this fundamental assumption thus also encourages a reexamination of the ethical logic of the letter. While the resurrection of Jesus remains essential for the ethics of the letter, Ephesians still maintains that “what God has done, now, *in Christ* prefigures and (pre)formatively structures the end—what God will do *with all*” (Newman 2018, p. 507; emphasis original). What has happened in Christ is the foundation for the Ephesians’ hope of their own future resurrection. While it is guaranteed by and prefigured in Christ’s own resurrection, the Ephesian believers’ own resurrection remains a future expectation, and it is the tension between these two points—one historical, one future—that informs the ethical logic of Ephesians. The once/now language that Ephesians uses to describe the change that has happened within the Ephesian believers’ lives, as for example in Eph 2:13 and Eph 5:8, is what Carey Newman, following Gerd Theissen, calls “physiomorphic”: “As opposed to sociomorphic root metaphors—language exclusively used to mark the initial change in a relationship (e.g., enemy to friend, slave to free, guilty to justified, estranged to reconciled)—Ephesians deploys a panoply of physiomorphic symbols to describe the ongoing life of the believer” (Newman 2018, p. 499). While Ephesians does dramatically point to a definitive change in the Ephesian believers’ lives because of Jesus’s resurrection, the language it uses to refer to this change emphasizes the continuing and ongoing implications of these events.

The reference to resurrection in Eph 5:14 becomes particularly important in understanding the way in which resurrection informs the ethical logic throughout the letter because of its rhetorical location in an extended paraenetic section. The call for believers to rise from the dead in Eph 5:14 is part of the evidentiary support that establishes the veracity and importance of the ethical admonitions in Eph 5:3–14 to avoid the unfruitful works of darkness and to live as children of light. The postpositive conjunction γάρ that begins Eph 5:14 indicates that the verse explains what precedes it by adding support (Runge 2010, p. 52). This verse further functions as the foundation upon which the further admonitions of Eph 5:15–21 are established. The postpositive conjunction οὖν in Eph 5:15 signifies that this entire section is a continued development that stands in “close continuity with what precedes” it (Runge 2010, p. 43). Ephesians 5:14 with its reference to the resurrection of individual believers and the shining light of the resurrected Christ is, then, conceptually and grammatically the logical basis for the ethical exhortations in Eph 5:3–21.

In his comments on this passage, Moritz notes that Eph 5:14 emphasizes “the distinctive nature of ethical exposure which derives its motivation from Christ’s transforming power” (Moritz 1996, p. 114). This comment highlights the ultimate ethical logic of the extended passage, but its ultimate significance is not fully drawn out in Moritz’s further treatment because he fails to highlight the necessary connection with the logic of resurrection throughout the entire letter. As Eph 1:20–23 establishes, Christ’s transforming power is evident precisely in his own resurrection from the dead and enthronement in the heavenlies. As Eph 2:5–6 indicates, the Ephesian believers who are in Christ will share the same experience by being made “alive together with Christ,” “raised with Christ,” and “seated together with Christ”. The power that has conquered death in the resurrection of Christ is the same power that will resurrect those who are in Christ, and it is, then, this resurrecting power that is the ultimate motivating force for the ethical admonitions in Ephesians 5.

The key term describing the ethical way of life in Eph 5:3–14 and in Eph 5:15–21 is the imperative περιπατεῖτε. In Eph 5:8, the Ephesian believers are exhorted to live (περιπατεῖτε) as the “children of light,” and in Eph 5:15, the Ephesians are exhorted to live (περιπατεῖτε) as the “wise”. Schnackenburg rightly notes that “in Paul and in the

epistles influenced by him (apart from the Pastorals) περιπατεῖν is usual in the sense of an ethical way of life" (Schnackenburg 1990, p. 91n.11). The figurative use of "walking" as a depiction of a way of life indicates intentional movement from a place of departure towards a particular destination. It suggests life as an incomplete journey. The destination is established but progress is still required before the individual arrives.

A similar understanding of the ethical life as progress towards a destination is suggested in the description of the differences between actions characterized by darkness and actions characterized by light, using the figurative language of being "fruitful" (καρπός). While the works of darkness are "unfruitful" (ἄκαρποις) in Eph 5:11, the "fruit of the light" (ὁ καρπὸς τοῦ φωτός) is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth in Eph 5:8. Being "fruitful" is a common figurative description to refer to the ability of an action to produce an intended result or outcome (BDAG 2000, καρπός 1b). While the actions of light produce outcomes and results ("fruit"), the actions of darkness are unfruitful—they do not bring about the intended outcome.

Since Eph 5:14 is the rhetorical and conceptual basis for these ethical admonitions, it appears that the destination implied in the walking metaphor and the result or outcome implied in the fruit metaphor are best understood as an (as of yet unattained) resurrection life. The acts of darkness that were characteristic of the Ephesians' life before Christ should be put away because the future resurrection life will dispel those actions of sin, disobedience, and darkness. Similarly, acts characterized by light should be adopted because the future resurrection life will validate them as good, righteous, true, and, ultimately, light. The way of life that is consistent with and which will be vindicated by the light of the resurrected Christ shining on resurrected believers should be the standard by which the Ephesian believers evaluate their way of life in the present.

4. Conclusions

If resurrection is an already accomplished event for the Ephesian believers, then it remains challenging to articulate the logic undergirding the letter's ethical admonitions. While modern interpreters have sought to explain the aorist verbs of Christ's saving activity in Eph 2:5–6 as an already accomplished event (whether actual or metaphorical), the result has been the loss of the letter's overall coherence. But, if resurrection remains a future expectation towards which the Ephesian believers' lives are oriented (and there are reasons to understand it as such), the ethical logic of the letter is coherent. The author of the letter would be encouraging its readers to live consistently with the ultimate expectation of resurrection. This future hope would be firmly rooted in the divine power that has already resurrected Jesus from the dead. Jesus's resurrection, which informs the Ephesian believers' conception of their past, present, and future existence, is a light that illumines the true condition of the Ephesians' way of life before Christ, the ways in which they should be living in the present, and the ultimate destination towards which their lives are aiming.

Interestingly, at least one early reader of the letter understood its ethical logic in similar terms. In *Protrepticus*, or *Exhortation to the Greeks*, Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215 CE) quotes Eph 5:14 in his description of God who offers salvation in and through the resurrected Christ:

The Lord does not weary of admonishing, of terrifying, of exhorting, of arousing, of warning; no indeed, He awakes men from sleep, and those that have gone astray He causes to rise from out the darkness itself. 'Awake, thou that sleepest,' He cries, 'and arise from the dead, and there shall shine upon thee Christ the Lord,' the sun of the resurrection (ὁ τῆς ἀναστάσεως ἥλιος), He that is begotten 'before the morning star,' He that dispenses life by His own rays (ὁ ζωὴν χαρισάμενος ἀκτῖσιν ἰδίαις). (Clement of Alexandria 1919, Prot IX: p. 187)

Clement identifies the light of Christ that shines on believers in Eph 5:14 to be the life-giving rays that emanate from Christ: “the sun of the resurrection”. The resurrected Christ emits light and life, calling believers to experience the same resurrection out of death and darkness in Christ. For Clement, this resurrection light has an undeniable ethical impetus as well. A few lines earlier, Clement quotes the admonition from Eph 4:17–19 that believers no longer “walk in the vanity of their mind, being darkened in their understanding and alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them” (Clement of Alexandria 1919, *Prot IX*: p. 187). The resurrection of Christ illuminates believers in order to orient their lives, actions, and behaviors in ways that are consistent with the resurrection of Christ, which is the pattern and foundation of their own resurrection hope.

The expectation of a future resurrection of believers is the basis and standard for evaluating the ethical way of life in Ephesians 5. The resurrection joins several other goal-oriented, forward-looking themes throughout the letter, including mentions of a promise, hope, and inheritance, that inform the letter’s ethical admonitions (Covington 2018, p. 209). These forward-looking expectations are ultimately predicated on the ultimate hope of the letter, articulated in Eph 1:10, that “in the fullness of time” God will “gather up” all things together in Christ. The “gathering up” for believers who are in Christ is experienced by believers in the resurrection, in which they will be made alive together with Christ, raise with Christ, and be seated with Christ in the heavenlies, and it is this expectation that informs and evaluates the ethical way of life for believers according to Ephesians.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

- Adams, Sean A., and Seth M. Ehorn. 2016. *Composite Citations in Antiquity: Volume 1: Jewish, Graeco-Roman, and Early Christian Uses*. Library of New Testament Studies 525. London: T&T Clark.
- Adams, Sean A., and Seth M. Ehorn. 2018. *Composite Citations in Antiquity: Volume 2: New Testament Uses*. Library of New Testament Studies 593. London: T&T Clark.
- Barth, Karl. 2017. *The Epistle to the Ephesians*. Edited by R. David Nelson. Translated by Ross Wright. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Barth, Markus. 1974. *Ephesians*. The Anchor Bible 34. Garden City: Doubleday.
- BDAG. 2000. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Best, Ernest. 2003. *Ephesians: A Shorter Commentary*. London: T&T Clark.
- Boyer, James L. 1987. A Classification of Imperatives: A Statistical Study. *Grace Theological Journal* 8: 35–54.
- Campbell, Constantine R. 2015. *Advances in the Study of Greek: New Insights for Reading the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Campbell, Constantine R. 2020. *Paul and the Hope of Glory: An Exegetical and Theological Study*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Campbell, Constantine R. 2023. *The Letter to the Ephesians*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Campbell, Constantine R. 2024. *Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic.
- Clement of Alexandria. 1919. *The Exhortation to the Greeks*. Translated and Edited by G. W. Butterworth. Loeb Classical Library 92. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Cohick, Lynn H. 2020. *The Letter to the Ephesians*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Covington, Eric. 2018. *Functional Teleology and the Coherence of Ephesians: A Comparative and Reception-Historical Approach*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 470. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Davies, Jamie. 2021. Why Paul Doesn’t Mention the “Age to Come”. *Scottish Journal of Theology* 74: 199–208. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Davies, Jamie. 2022. *The Apocalyptic Paul*. Cascade Library of Pauline Studies. Eugene: Cascade Books.
- Fowl, Stephen E. 2012. *Ephesians: A Commentary*. New Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox.

- Gombis, Timothy. 2010. *The Drama of Ephesians: Participating in the Triumph of God*. Downer's Grove: IVP Academic.
- Hoehner, Harold W. 2002. *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Jervis, L. Ann. 2023. *Paul and Time: Life in the Temporality of Christ*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Kirby, John C. 1968. *Ephesians Baptism and Pentecost: An Inquiry into the Structure and Purpose of the Epistle to the Ephesians*. London: SPCK.
- Kreitzer, Larry J. 2007. Hierapolis in the Heavens: A New Proposal for Reading the Letter to the Ephesians. In *Hierapolis in the Heavens: Studies in the Letter to the Ephesians*. Library of New Testament Studies 368. London: T & T Clark, pp. 1–28.
- Lemmer, H. Richard. 1990. A Multifarious Understanding of Eschatology in Ephesians: A Possible Solution to a Vexing Issue. *HTS Theological Studies* 46: 102–119. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Lincoln, Andrew T. 1981. *Paradise Now and Not Yet: Studies in the Role of the Heavenly Dimension in Paul's Thought with Special Reference to His Eschatology*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 43; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lincoln, Andrew T. 1983. Ephesians 2:8–10: A Summary of Paul's Gospel? *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45: 617–30.
- Lincoln, Andrew T. 1990. *Ephesians*. Word Biblical Commentary 42. Dallas: Word Books.
- Lindemann, Andreas. 1975. *Die Aufhebung der Zeit: Geschichtsverständnis und Eschatologie im Epheserbrief*. Studien zum Neuen Testament Bd. 12. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn.
- Luz, Ulrich. 1976. Rechtfertigung bei den Paulusschülern. In *Rechtfertigung: Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann um 70. Geburtstag*. Edited by Johannes Friedrich, Wolfgang Pöhlmann and Peter Stuhlmacher. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, pp. 365–83.
- Merkle, Benjamin L. 2016. *Ephesians*. Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament. Nashville: B & H Academic.
- Moritz, Thorsten. 1996. *A Profound Mystery: The Use of the Old Testament in Ephesians*. Supplements to Novum Testamentum 85. Leiden: Brill.
- Muddiman, John. 2001. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*. Black's New Testament Commentaries. London: Continuum.
- Newman, Carey. 2018. Narrative Cross, Apocalyptic Resurrection: Ephesians and Reading Paul. In *One God, One People, One Future: Essays in Honor of N. T. Wright*. Edited by John Anthony Dunne and Eric Lewellen. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, pp. 493–512.
- Penner, Erwin. 1983. The Enthronement of Christ in Ephesians. *Direction* 12: 12–19.
- Runge, Steven E. 2010. *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis*. Lexham Bible Reference Series; Peabody: Hendrickson.
- Sanders, E. P. 1977. *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Schnackenburg, Rudolf. 1990. *Ephesians: A Commentary*. Translated by Helen Heron. Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar Zum Neuen Testament, 10. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Talbert, Charles H. 2007. *Ephesians and Colossians*. Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Tappenden, Frederick S. 2017. Coming Back to Life in and through Death: Early Christian Creativity in Paul, Ignatius, and Valentinus. In *Coming Back to Life: The Permeability of Past and Present, Mortality and Immortality, Death and Life in the Ancient Mediterranean*. Edited by Frederick S. Tappenden and Carly Daniel-Hughes. Montreal: McGill University Library, pp. 181–214.
- Thiessen, Matthew. 2023. *A Jewish Paul: The Messiah's Herald to the Gentiles*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Wessels, G. F. 1987. The Eschatology of Colossians and Ephesians. *Neotestamentica* 21: 183–202.
- Williamson, Peter. 2009. *Ephesians*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.