

How Understanding Paul's Death Metaphors Aids Exegesis

Few would deny that accurate exegesis requires biblical theology and that biblical theology requires accurate exegesis.¹ The two go hand in hand. However, if there is a tendency for one of these disciplines to downplay the other, a guilty plea would most likely fall on the exegesis side of the ledger. Perhaps an essay that explores the relationship between exegesis and biblical theology will be helpful to support such an indictment.

The purpose of this paper is to show how the practice of biblical theology provides necessary and vital aid in the proper exegesis of Paul's letters. To accomplish this goal I will present a biblical-theological study of the death metaphors in Paul related

¹ A sampling of the NT exegesis texts on my shelf affirms this basic truth—they all include sections on the importance of biblical theology for exegesis: Buist M. Fanning, "Theological Analysis: Building Biblical Theology," in *Interpreting the New Testament Text: Introduction to the Art and Science of Exegesis*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Buist M. Fanning (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 277–91; Craig L. Blomberg, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis* with Jennifer Foutz Markley (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 219–37; George H. Guthrie and J. Scott Duvall, *Biblical Greek Exegesis: A Graded Approach to Learning Intermediate and Advanced Greek* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 136–42; Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 3d ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 31–32, 149–50; Richard J. Erickson, *A Beginner's Guide to New Testament Exegesis: Taking the Fear out of Critical Method* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005), 208–12; John D. Grassmick, *Principles and Practice of Greek Exegesis* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1974), 170; Andrew David Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2017), 230–63; Aída Besançon Spencer, *The Exegetical Process: How to Write a New Testament Exegesis Paper Step-by-Step* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2025), 234–36.

On the other hand, biblical theologians recognize the importance of sound exegesis for their work. For example, Andreas Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 26, states that the Biblical Theology of the New Testament series (of which he serves as editor) "endeavors to ground the theological exploration of a given document in a close reading of the respective text(s), whether narrative, discourse, or some other type of literature." Also Brian Rosner, "Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 3, states, "Biblical theology is the fruit of exegesis of the texts of the various biblical corpora."

to the believer. Then, I will apply the knowledge gained from this study to the interpretation of several Pauline passages.

Part One: A Biblical-Theological Study of Pauline Death Metaphors

Exercising his literary acumen, Paul often uses metaphors to explain complex theological concepts. The reader might believe that any time one of these metaphors is used, Paul seeks to elucidate a single truth. But an investigation of Pauline metaphors demonstrates that such is not the case at all. Often Paul uses a particular metaphor to define not only various shades of meaning for a specific concept but also completely different concepts altogether. “Death” for Paul appears to fit into this latter category.

The aim in Part One of this paper will be to investigate the metaphorical uses of “death” when Paul employs it in relation to the believer. This biblical-theological exercise will proceed in three steps. First, I will delineate the parameters of the study. Second, I will outline the three major usages of the believer’s “death” in Paul. And third, I will examine the relation of this “death” language to the discussion of the Pauline indicative and imperative as it relates to our understanding of progressive sanctification.

Parameters of the Study

A comprehensive study of death metaphors in Paul cannot possibly be covered in the space allotted.² This introductory portion will explain the limitations of the subject and the definition of the semantic field of “death.”

Limitations Explained

The various uses of “death” in Paul, both literal and figurative, require some explanation. First, Paul uses “death” literally to speak of physical cessation of life (1 Thess 4:13–15; 1 Cor 15:3–4; Phil 2:7–8). Second and related to this concept are those instances where Paul refers to the threat of physical death (1 Cor 15:31; 2 Cor 4:10–12; 6:9). Third, “death” takes on a more figurative meaning in Romans 6:23 where final separation from God is Paul’s point (also Rom 4:17). Fourth, in Romans 5:12 Paul uses “death” as a metaphor to speak of the imputation of sin upon mankind through the representation of Adam (“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned”)³; the result of this fact is that humanity is “dead” in sin (Eph 2:1, 5; Rom 5:15, 17, 21; 7:9; Col 2:13).

² Ivan Thomas Blazen, “Death to Sin According to Romans 6:1–14 and Related Texts” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1979). This work covers 525 pages (not including the bibliography) and only speaks of this one aspect of death (e.g. death to sin).

³ Paul uses “death” in precisely the same way in 1 Cor 15:21–22.

Finally, there are those metaphorical uses of “death” which relate specifically to the believer.⁴

As already suggested above, Paul’s metaphorical uses of “death” (uses four and five in the previous paragraph) will be the focus of this essay. I will further limit our study in the following ways: (1) only those verses which use “death” with reference to the believer are included; and (2) only “death” language used of the believer from the point of conversion and onward are selected.⁵

Semantic Field Defined

The Greek language expresses the concept of “death” with many different words. Which of these words does Paul choose to express “death” in relation to the believer? There is general consensus regarding the parallel usages of “death” in Paul, who uses six major word groups to describe metaphorical “death” for the believer.⁶

First, the θάνατος word group, along with its compounds, ἀποθνήσκω and συναποσθνήσκω, are used metaphorically of believers.⁷ The instances of these words are found in Romans 6:2, 7, 8; 7:4, 6; 8:13; 2 Corinthians 5:14; Galatians 2:19; Colossians 2:20; 3:3; 2 Timothy 2:11.

⁴ This paragraph is an obviously general assessment of the use of “death” in Paul. For a more thorough treatment see Charles E. Faw, “Death and Resurrection in Paul’s Letters,” *JBR* 27 (1959):291–98 and C. Clifton Black II, “Pauline Perspectives on Death in Romans 5–8,” *JBL* 103 (1984):413–33. Black strives to show that Paul drew upon the current Jewish and Hellenistic death concepts of his day in forming his use of death. Though there are some similarities between Paul and his surroundings, it is better to view Paul as using new and/or reworked concepts of death in his writing. Thus, Black’s statement that there is no such thing as a “Pauline doctrine of death” (413) does not reflect the facts.

⁵ While passages that discuss the imputation of sin to all humanity (use #4) speak of the effect of that imputation as resulting in death (Rom 5:15) so that both believers and unbelievers may be described as being dead in their trespasses (Eph 2:1; Col 2:13), only believers can be described as no longer being dead in their sins when they are “made alive” (συνεζωοποίησεν – Eph 2:5; Col 2:13). Hence, the death metaphor described in use #4 does not apply to the Pauline descriptions of “death” language used exclusively of believers (use #5).

⁶ From this point on, unless otherwise specified, the phrase, “metaphorical usage of ‘death’ with reference to the believer” will be stated with the one word “death.”

⁷ *NIDNTTE*, s.v. “θάνατος,” 2:409–14. and Rudolf Bultmann, *TDNT*, s.v. “θάνατος,” 3:15–21. Both writers show how “death” occurs synonymously between θάνατος, ἀποθνήσκω, and συναποσθνήσκω.

Second, the σταυρός word group and its verbal compound, συσταυρόω, refer to death.⁸ Paul uses “crucifixion” terminology primarily because this was the manner in which Christ died, and the believer’s identification with Christ in His death is a primary function of “death” in Paul.⁹ Examples can be seen in Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:19; 5:24; 6:14.

Third, the νεκρός group, though used only twice in connection with the “death” described in this present study (Romans 6:11; Colossians 3:5), still functions in a similar fashion to the first two word groups.¹⁰

Fourth, the θάπτω word group and its verbal compound, συνθάπτω, speaks of burial. The verb, συνθάπτω means “to bury (together) with.”¹¹ While θάπτω always refers to the actual burying of corpses, συνθάπτω is used only in Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12 in the figurative sense of the believer’s burial (death) with Christ in baptism.¹²

Fifth, καταργέω, whose literal meaning is “to cause something to come to an end or to be no longer in existence” is used in Romans 6:6 to mean “death.” It is employed in

⁸ Johannes Schneider, *TDNT*, s.v. “σταυρός,” 7:582–3, and *NIDNTTE*, s.v. “σταυρός,” 4:357–65. Regarding the function of the σύν compound with ἀποθνήσκω (n. 7) and σταυρόω see Walter Grundmann, *TDNT*, s.v. “σύν ~ μετά with Genitive,” 7:786–93. Also Brendan McGrath, “Syn’ Words in Saint Paul,” *CBQ* 14 (1952): 219–26, shows how Paul uses σύν to express important truth regarding the believer’s relationship with Christ. See Vincent Taylor, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: A Study in New Testament Theology*, 2d ed. (London: Macmillan & Co. Limited, 1952), 117–18.

⁹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 2d ed. NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 396–97.

¹⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, *TDNT*, s.v. “νεκρός,” 4:894. *NIDNTTE*, s.v. “νεκρός,” 3:376; Silva suggests that the hortatory use of νεκρόω in Col 3:5 is parallel to Paul’s usage of θανατόω in Rom 8:13 and σταυρόω in Gal 5:24. Colin Brown, editor of *NIDNTT*, 1:443–6 included νεκρός under the same general heading as θανατός (s.v. “Death, Kill, Sleep”) showing the close association of the two word groups. C. F. D. Moule, “‘The New Life’ in Colossians 3:1–17,” *Review and Expositor* 70 (1973): 486, states that the usage of νεκρόω in Col. 3:5 is “virtually synonymous” to that of θανατόω in Rom. 8:13.

¹¹ *BDAG*, s.v. “συνθάπτω,” 971.

¹² Grundmann, *TDNT*, s.v. “σύν ~ μετά with Genitive,” 7:786–93. Also *EDNT*, s.v. “συνθάπτω,” 3:306. Moo, *Romans*, 415, recognizes the burial of the Christian together with Christ in Rom 6:4 and Col 2:12 as one of nine categories in which Paul uses σύν to describe the relation between Christ and the Christian.

several other New Testament verses to indicate the concept of destroy/abolish (1 Cor. 6:13; 2 Thes. 2:8; 1 Cor. 15:26).¹³

Sixth, Paul uses ὅλεθρος in 1 Corinthians 5:5 in a similar way to his use of καταργέω in Romans 6:6 to speak of the idea of destroying (putting to death) the flesh.¹⁴

By limiting the usages of “death” in Paul to metaphors referring to the believer and by investigating the semantic field of “death” in light of those limits, a shovelful of verses fitting into the parameters of the study have been unearthed. What are the various nuances of “death” in these verses? The next section will seek to answer this important question.

Classification of “Death” Usages

Paul uses “death” in three distinct ways. These will be classified as participatory death, emancipatory death, and hortatory death. Although these groupings are distinct in meaning and grammar, they are interrelated. The first two fall into the category of the Pauline indicative, and the third fits into Paul's imperative. The juxtaposition of these terms (indicative and imperative) constitutes the third major section of Part One.

Participatory Death

The preposition, σύν, whether used as the prefix of a verb (Rom. 6:4, 6; Gal. 2:19; Col 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:11) or in a prepositional phrase (σύν Χριστῷ) immediately after a “death” verb (Rom. 6:8; Col. 2:20), indicates the intimate relationship shared between Christ and the Christian.¹⁵ A more difficult usage is found in Romans 7:4 – ὑμεῖς ἐθανατώθητε τῷ νομῷ διὰ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ. But it seems best to understand διὰ as “in association with” because only by association with the body of Christ (i.e., the death of Christ) does one die to the law.¹⁶

¹³ BDAG, s.v. “καταργέω,” 525, includes Rom 6:6 under its third meaning classification, “to cause someth. to come to an end or to be no longer in existence, abolish, wipe out, set aside.”

¹⁴ NIDNTTE, s.v. “ὅλεθρος,” 3:487–8, lists the usage of καταργέω as a parallel concept to the usage of ὅλεθρος in 1 Cor 5:5. In both verses the idea of these two synonyms is one of “destruction,” i.e. “put to death.”

¹⁵ Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 220–21; McGrath, 219; Taylor, 117–18.

¹⁶ The normal rendering for διὰ in this case carries the idea of means; thus, the believer has died to the law “through the body of Christ” (the other main options for διά, given by Murray J. Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012], 69–82, include temporal, cause, attendance

Three other death metaphors that most likely refer to participatory death include unqualified death verbs found in 2 Cor 5:14; Rom 6:7; and Col 3:3.¹⁷ In all these instances as well as the eight references in the previous paragraph Paul views the believer as participating with Christ in His death.

To gain an understanding of the nature of this “death with Christ” four questions must be answered. First, what is meant by the verbal idea of “death?” Second, who is the participant in this “death,” i.e., is the individual in focus or does Paul have a corporate idea in mind? Third, how is this “death” appropriated by the believer, or better, what is the means of “death with Christ?” Finally, what are the results of this participatory death?

The Meaning of Dying

In Galatians 2:20 Paul states, “I have been crucified with Christ.” He uses συναποθνήσκω in 2 Timothy 2:11 the same way. What is the meaning of “death with Christ” in these verbal ideas? There have generally been four suggested answers to this question.¹⁸

circumstances, and purpose, none of which compare with the category of means for Rom 7:4). The best way to view the body of Christ as the means of death to the law is to understand διὰ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ as referring to the death of Christ. Hence, “in association with” is the proper usage here (this concept is paralleled in Rom 6:8 and Col 2:20).

¹⁷ In 2 Cor. 5:14 ἀπέθανον appears without any reference to the type of death experienced by the πάντες. Because of the strong substitutionary aspect of Christ's death for (ὕπερ) believers, it may be assumed that the death spoken of here is a death with Christ (Michael J. Gorman, *Participating in Christ: Explorations in Paul's Theology and Spirituality* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019], 158–59). Similarly, in Rom. 6:7, ὁ ἀποθάνων is unqualified and only a result is mentioned (“freed from sin”); it seems best to see this verse as speaking of participatory death especially because this is the theme of the death verbs used in both 6:6 and 6:8 (Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 319). Few dispute that ἀπεθάνετε in Col 3:3 is speaking of death with Christ; it is “clearly implied” (James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 206) and “repeats 2:20: ‘You have died with Christ’” (G. K. Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019], 267).

¹⁸ These four categories come from Daniel P. Bailey, “The Crucifixion of 'Our Old Man': Romans 6:6 in the Indicative and Imperative of Salvation” (M.A. Thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1990), 4–12, who lists 5 possible meanings of death. The present discussion omits his “ontological” classification since this view is held by so few. More recently, C. E. B. Cranfield, “Romans 6:1–14 Revisited,” *Exp Tim* 106 (1994): 40–43, suggests four senses: 1) juridicial; 2) baptismal; 3) moral; and 4) eschatological.

Ideal Death. Sanday and Headlam introduced the concept of “death with Christ” as an “ideal act” which is to be sought after by the believer,¹⁹ but it is never realized in this life.

Judicial Death. Some see “death” as a forensic/positional term in which God views the believer as in Christ.²⁰ From a judicial standpoint the Christian has died with Christ. Campbell summarizes this judicial death well:

By dying a representative death for sinful humanity, Christ fulfilled the legal requirement for sin. Once this legal requirement had been satisfied by death, the new life of Christ is no longer bound by sin or the juridical consequences it entails. The way in which the benefits of Christ’s representative death are apprehended is by identification with him in his death. . . . Believers spiritually partake in the death and resurrection of Christ, who has represented them in these acts.²¹

Partial Death. In Romans 6:6 Paul speaks of the “old man” as being crucified with Christ. The result is that the “old man” has been dealt a fatal blow but is not yet dead. Bailey considers this to be the traditional Protestant view demonstrated in the writings of the Puritans on mortification.²²

Realm Transfer. A fourth concept for defining what “death” entails explains the believer’s death with Christ as a transfer from the realm/aeon where Satan rules to the

¹⁹ W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), 158. George Baker Stevens, *The Pauline Theology: A Study of the Origin and Correlation of the Doctrinal Teachings of the Apostle Paul* (London: Richard D. Dickinson, 1892), 130–31, uses the term “ethical” to explain the same idea as Sanday and Headlam.

²⁰ Cranfield, “Romans 6:1–14,” 40, calls this the “juridicial” sense of death; Douglas J. Moo, “Exegetical Notes: Romans 6:1–14,” *TrinJ* 3NS (1982): 217. Moo, *Romans*, 389, also refers to a “transfer . . . from the old age to the new” thus indicating that one can hold to both the forensic and transfer views at the same time.

²¹ Campbell, *Union with Christ*, 337.

²² Bailey, “Crucifixion,” 8.

realm/aeon where Christ rules.²³ This transfer is a “once-for-all definitive and irreversible breach” in which the believer takes part.²⁴

Conclusion. The concept of a realm transfer appears to be Paul's *primary* idea when he speaks of death with Christ. But he can also be said to imply secondarily, the forensic sense as well.²⁵ Against the ideal view dying with Christ implies much more than a mere ideal; a *real* union with Christ in His dying is the point.

The forensic view cannot be the primary idea because of the ongoing nature of this death with Christ. The perfect tense of Galatians 2:19 indicates that the results of this death still continue in the present. Also in 2 Corinthians 5:14 the believers have died with Christ in His substitutionary death for them; the result of this death is shown in 5:17 – “the old (aeon) has passed away (consummative aorist)²⁶ and the new (aeon) has come (intensive perfect).²⁷ Therefore, “death with Christ” is more than merely judicial/positional; it has present ramifications.

²³ Robert C. Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ: A Study in Pauline Theology*, BZNW 32 (Berlin, Alfred Töpelmann, 1966), 14–20, 39–43. Cranfield, “Romans 6:1–14,” 41–43, call this the “eschatological” sense, but he dismisses this category probably because he is only thinking of eschatology as the study of future things. But Tannehill is “primarily concerned with the relationship between the dominion of sin and death and the dominion of life, and this distinction of realms is regarded as eschatological in nature” (Campbell, *Union with Christ*, 338).

²⁴ John Murray, “Definitive Sanctification,” *CTJ* 2 (1967): 7. Murray differs slightly with Tannehill in that he applies this concept individually whereas Tannehill sees it in a corporate sense, 29–30.

²⁵ Campbell, *Union with Christ*, 342, helpfully summarizes Tannehill's realm transfer as showing that Paul highlights 1) the two dominions [old age/man and new age/man]; 2) the eschatological nature of realm transfer; and 3) the transcendence of time and space. He also suggests that Tannehill's argument is complemented by Cranfield's juridical argument, and I think he is correct. Note Moo, *Romans*, 389–400, who conjoins both ideas as well.

²⁶ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 559, states, “The aorist is often used to stress the cessation of an act or state. Certain verbs, by their *lexical* nature, virtually require this usage. For example, ‘he died’ is usually not going to be an ingressive idea.”

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 574–5, “The perfect may be used to *emphasize* the results or present state produced by a past action.”

To say that the “old man,” though defeated, still exists in the believer's life is to miss Paul's point about the contrast between the “old” and the “new” (2 Cor 5:17), i.e., between the past existence of the “old” prior to conversion and the present participation in the “new” afterwards. It also misses the corporate sense in which Paul uses the term.²⁸

There are several reasons for seeing “death” as a removal from one realm to another. First, this “death” is real. Second, it continues into the present time of the believer. Finally, it rightly regards the corporate sense of the “old man” and “new man” terminology in Paul as being non-interchangeable.²⁹

The Subjects of Dying

Perhaps by the position taken in the preceding section the reader has been led to believe that a corporate concept will now be taken in regard to the subjects of the “death with Christ.” Such is not the case because the solution to this problem of subject identification does not have to be an “either/or” but can sufficiently be answered by a “both/and.”

Corporate concepts are certainly tied up in Paul's use of “old man” terminology in Romans 6:6.³⁰ Especially when looking at the close conceptual ties to the Adam-Christ

²⁸ Tannehill, 24–25, gives three reasons why “old man” should be seen as a corporate term: 1) Rom 7:4 and Col 2:11 connect death with Christ to $\sigma\delta\mu\alpha$ as it is used in a corporate sense; 2) use of the “old man” concept in other places as in Col 3:9–10 indicate a corporate usage of the term; and 3) Adam and Christ are seen as corporate heads in Rom 5:12–21 and Paul simply continues with this concept of one who “sums up the existence of the many.”

²⁹ This unchanging aspect of the realm transfer is brought out by Murray, “Definitive Sanctification,” 19, where he compares the once-for-all aspect of Christ's death (Rom 6:10) with the once-for-all nature of the believer's death with Him.

³⁰ See note 28. This is the only usage of “death with Christ” language where people are not the subject of the death (“old man” is here in Romans 6:6). However, Paul uses the “old man” terminology to stand for the corporate position of people in Adam's realm, Tannehill, 24–25. Paul uses the “old man” in a uniform manner throughout his writings. Thus in Col 3:9–10 and Eph 4:22–24, Paul is speaking in this corporate sense of being either in sin's realm (“old man”) or in Christ's realm (“new man”); the believer is no longer part of the “old man.” The apparent contradiction of this interpretation arises in Eph 4:22–24 where one could translate v. 22 as a command (“Put off . . . the old man”). Moo, *Romans*, 398–99, recognizes this as a contradiction and thus takes “old man” as referring to the individual. However, v. 22 should be taken as an indicative (“You put off the old man in the past”) so there is no contradiction. See John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 214–18, and Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker,

representation in Romans 5, the corporate idea of the one-for-all is quite apparent. Furthermore, Paul's usage of "all" dying with Christ when He died for all in 2 Corinthians 5:14 speaks about believers as a group and not about specific individuals.³¹

Not only does Paul view the subjects of this "death with Christ" as a corporate group, but he also indicates an individual focus for participatory death. Moo recognizes three reasons for seeing an individual application: 1) the use of ἡμῶν in the next phrase of verse six indicates personal results of the crucifixion; 2) the reference to "body" in the next phrase; and 3) the "moment" of conversion indicated by the use of baptism in this section of verses has specific reference to individuals.³²

A further indication of individualization lies in Paul's use of the imperatives of 6:11–13. Though they address the group as a whole (through the use of second person plural pronouns), individual application is demanded. Paul is not telling the church as a whole not to let sin reign its "mortal body," nor is he commanding them as a group not to surrender their "members" as tools of unrighteousness. Galatians 2:19 provides the clearest example of the personal aspect of participatory death. Here, Paul declares himself to have been crucified with Christ (συνεσταύρωμαι). When Paul uses the first person plural construction in Romans 6:8; Colossians 2:20; and 2 Timothy 2:11, he unites his personal experience of participatory death with all other believers, i.e., all individual believers have died with Christ.

Therefore, it is with both a corporate and an individual sense that Paul can speak of "death with Christ."

The Means of Dying

How does one come to enter into this participatory death relationship with Christ? Paul answers this question in two passages — Romans 6:3–4 and Colossians 2:12. In Romans 6:3–4 the rhetorical question of verse three assumes that baptism is the means of entering into Christ's death. Lest the reader should miss his point, Paul reiterates this truth in verse four when he writes, "We were buried with Him by baptism (συνετάφημεν οὖν αὐτῷ διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος) into death." In Colossians 2:12 the

2002), 599–602, who gives seven arguments in support of the indicative view.

³¹ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard DeWitt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 207. Throughout his chapter six ("The New Life") Ridderbos more specifically defines this corporate entity as the "church." For an even narrower concept of the corporate concept see Mark W. Karlberg, "Israel's History Personified: Romans 7:7–13 in Relation to Paul's Teaching on the 'Old Man'," *TrinJ* 7NS (1986): 65–74, in which Karlberg identifies the "old man" as elect Israel. The problem with these corporate concepts (especially that of Karlberg) is that they fail to reckon with the individual aspects of some of the verses.

³² Moo, *Romans*, 398.

temporal participle (συνταφέντες) explains when the spiritual circumcision mentioned in verse eleven takes place.³³ And the burial with Christ occurs by means of baptism (ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ).

How, then, is this baptism to be understood in relationship to “death with Christ?” There are two basic positions: the sacramental view and the non-sacramental (faith only) view.³⁴

Sacramental Interpretation. Participatory death occurs by means of water baptism; thus, the act of baptism is itself a way of attaining death with Christ. Günther Bornkamm represents this position well, “As a sacramental presentation of the Christ-event, baptism establishes the basis of Christian existence; in it the condition to which we are called is revealed and on it the certainty with which we await eternity is based.”³⁵

Proponents of this viewpoint vary on their understanding of how faith relates to baptism in the appropriation of participatory death. Ridderbos clearly emphasizes the necessity of faith as a “presupposition of baptism,” while at the same time maintaining the understanding that baptism cannot be separated from faith when speaking of participatory death.³⁶

Roman Catholic theology, however, clearly establishes baptism as a way to “attain salvation”³⁷ so that baptism becomes a means of faith rather than a separate concept working with it.

³³ Clinton E. Arnold, *Colossians*, 2d ed., WBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2025), 495.

³⁴ Using negative language to describe this second position simply shows the obvious opposition of the one viewpoint to the other. Such terminology seems better than using “faith alone” and “anti-faith alone” wording.

³⁵ Günther Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, trans. Paul L. Hammer (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), 76–77. Other representatives of the sacramental view include: Brendan Byrne, “Living out the Righteousness of God: The Contribution of Rom 6:1–8:13 to an Understanding of Paul’s Ethical Presuppositions,” *CBQ* 43 (1981):563; Eduard Schweizer, “Dying and Rising with Christ,” *NTS* 14 (1967–68):4–6; Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 168–69; Ridderbos, 207–214, 400–406.

³⁶ Ridderbos, 411.

³⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Paul and His Theology: A Brief Sketch*, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989), 86–87.

The sacramental view fails to assess accurately the meaning of baptism in its relationship to participatory death. At least five reasons can be cited: 1) Paul's insistence on the "once-for-all" nature of Christ's death and resurrection (v. 10) does not allow for repetition in the act of baptism; 2) giving baptism the significance of being the actual time of the death, burial, and resurrection with Christ does not fit the argument of Romans 6 (baptism is only mentioned in Rom 6:3–4 and nowhere else in the chapter);³⁸ 3) the spiritual circumcision discussed in Colossians 2:12 is never connected with baptism but rather with the work of the Spirit; 4) the σύν verb which accompanies συνταφέντες in 2:12 (συνηγέρθητε) specifies "faith as the means (διὰ τῆς πίστεως, equivalent to the διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος of Rom. 6:4) by which its action was accomplished";³⁹ and 5) the centrality of faith as the means to participatory death, i.e., change of realms from Adam to Christ (or salvation), in Paul (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8–9) does not allow for any other substitute.

Non-Sacramental Interpretation. Rather than viewing baptism as the means to appropriation of participatory death, the non-sacramentalist believes that it (baptism) possesses no saving/grace-giving capability. Proponents of this position take two different approaches in explaining how Paul can use an instrumental idea about baptism⁴⁰ and yet, not imply that baptism is sacramental.

On the one hand are those interpreters who see this baptism as symbolic of the believer's actual participation in the death and resurrection of Christ.⁴¹ The practice of immersion is seen to picture the "death" of the old man and the raising of the new man to walk with Christ.⁴²

³⁸ These first two points are from Moo, *Romans*, 388.

³⁹ Dunn, *Colossians*, 159, provides the third and fourth points given here.

⁴⁰ The instrumental usage of διὰ in Rom 6:4 as its normal function is confirmed by Robert Jewett, *Romans*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 398; Moo, *Romans*, 386; and Andrew David Naselli, *A Concise Guide to the Greatest Letter Ever Written* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 83–84.

Likewise, the usage of ἐν to show instrumentality in Col 2:12 is parallel to the usage of διὰ in Rom 6:4. See Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, PCNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 248, and Dunn, *Colossians*, 159.

⁴¹ August Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1907), 940.

⁴² John B. Polhill, "New Life in Christ: Romans 6-8," *Review and Expositor* 73 (1976): 425-26. Although the mode of immersion certainly pictures the concept of death, burial, and resurrection (see James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* [Philadelphia:

On the other hand stand many non-sacramentalists who consider this baptism as indicative of “conversion-initiation.”⁴³ The action of baptism, as viewed by the first century believers, is sometimes intertwined (seemingly) with the act of faith itself (Acts 2:38). As other passages clearly show, however, faith is antecedent to and necessary apart from baptism.⁴⁴ Thus, Paul could have just as easily used “faith” instead of “baptism” in Romans 6:4, but he chooses baptism because of its immersive allusion to death and burial with Christ⁴⁵ and because of its close ties to the act of faith. Doug Moo provides a good summary of the relation of faith and baptism: “Just as faith is always assumed to lead to baptism, so baptism always assumes faith for its validity.”⁴⁶

Conclusion. The non-sacramental view best assesses Paul's use of baptism in Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12. The means of participatory death comes through baptism (as an illustration of conversion-initiation which presupposes faith).⁴⁷ This position also sheds light on the time when “death with Christ” occurs. It cannot be said to occur historically with Christ in the first century (this would be the time if a sacramental position were taken). Rather, the appropriation of participatory death occurs at

The Westminster Press, 1970], 141), the symbolic interpretation, by itself, fails to account for the “with Christ” language which demands more than mere symbolism. A “both/and” position seems best to account for Paul's usage (both symbolism and conversion-initiation).

⁴³ Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 140-45; Moo, *Romans*, 390; Schreiner, *Romans*, 310.

⁴⁴ James L. Price, “Romans 6:1-14,” *Interpretation* 34 (1980): 66. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 145, states, “Baptism is better seen as the expression of response to the gospel than as that which makes the preaching effective.”

⁴⁵ Paul's choice of βαπτίσματος here shows how important baptism is to Paul as an expression of the faith experience. There was no question in his mind that faith preceded baptism, but he considered baptism to be an extremely important rite for the Christian. Schreiner, *Romans*, 310.

⁴⁶ Moo, *Romans*, 390.

⁴⁷ When evaluating the two different approaches to baptism in the non-sacramental position, the best interpretation applies both the symbolic and the conversion-initiation concepts to explain baptism. However, when referring to baptism in the remainder of this study, the concept of conversion-initiation will be mentioned with the understanding that symbolism is also included in the reference.

conversion;⁴⁸ hence, this must be the time when the believer dies with Christ.

The Results of Dying

Participatory death in Paul has three results, all of which are interrelated. First, the believer's death with Christ produces a “death” to sin. This concept is most clearly seen in Romans 6:6 where the crucifixion of the “old man” results in the destruction of the “body of sin,” i.e., the person’s sin-dominated capacities to interact with the world.⁴⁹ To this reference Romans 7:4 (νομῷ [law]) and Colossians 2:20 (στοιχείων [elemental forces of the world])⁵⁰ may be added. Although “body of sin,” “law,” and “elemental forces of the world,” are not strictly parallel, they all refer to the negative aspects of sin as it affects man prior to salvation. Finally, Romans 6:6–7 provide a positive focus on this same principle: death with Christ results in freedom from sin: (δουλεύειν ἡμᾶς τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ – 6:6) and (δεδικαίωται ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας – 6:7).⁵¹ The use of the aorist tense in all four verses indicates that these aspects of sin are a past experience for the believer.

Second, the believer experiences life in association with Christ. Galatians 2:20 indicates that Christ is presently living (present tense—ζῇ) in the believer as a result of

⁴⁸ The use of ἀπέθανον in 2 Cor. 5:14 does not contradict this point. Paul sees the substitutionary death of Christ inferentially, i.e., when Christ took the believers' place on Calvary, they died with Him. As the concepts of realm transfer in death and conversion-initiation in baptism show in Romans 6, this death does not become the believer's experience until conversion. Moo, *Romans*, 389, differs slightly with this by suggesting that the believers' death with Christ transcends time in that the transfer from the old to the new realm, “while applied to individuals at their conversion, has been accomplished through the redemptive work of Christ on Good Friday and Easter.”

⁴⁹ Moo, *Romans*, 400.

⁵⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 123–24.

⁵¹ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 222. Moo, *Romans*, 401, differs slightly seeing this as a general maxim not applied specifically to the believer. However, Murray's arguments supporting an individualistic interpretation are stronger.

Two less possible views are 1) Karl Georg Kuhn, “Rm 6.7: ὁ γὰρ ἀποθάνων δεδικαίωται ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας,” *ZNW* 30 (1931):305-310, who argues that this death actually pays for one's sins; and 2) Conleth Kearns, “The Interpretation of Romans 6,7,” in *Studiorum Paulinorum Congressus Internationalis Catholicus*, vol. 1 (Romae: E. Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1963), 301-307, and Robin Scroggs, “Romans VI.7 Ο ΓΑΡ ΑΠΟΘΑΝΩΝ ΔΕΔΙΚΑΙΩΤΑΙ ΑΠΟ ΤΗΣ ΑΜΑΡΤΙΑΣ,” *NTS* 10 (1963-1964):104-108, who interpret the verse as referring to Christ's death.

death with Christ. Both Romans 6:8 and 2 Timothy 2:11 use the future tense (συζήσομεν) to describe the future certainty of life in the presence of Christ.⁵²

Finally, Romans 6:4; 7:4; and 2 Corinthians 5:14-17 indicate that all who die with Christ will live obediently.⁵³ In Romans 6:4 they “walk in newness of life” (ἡμεῖς ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς περιπατήσωμεν); in Romans 7:4 they “bear fruit for God” (ἵνα καρποφορήσωμεν τῷ θεῷ); in 2 Corinthians 5:15 they “live for the One who lived and died for them” (ἵνα οἱ ζῶντες . . . ζῶσιν . . . τῷ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἀποθανόντι καὶ ἐγερθέντι); in 2 Corinthians 5:16 they no longer see the world around them κατὰ σάρκα. Hence, death with Christ results in a new lifestyle and perspective.

Thus, as a participant in Christ's death, the believer experiences a whole new life, one that enjoys a vital relationship with Christ to be enjoyed perfectly in the future and one that realizes the benefits of being dead to sin.

Emancipatory Death

Paul uses the idea of participatory death to describe the nature of one's death at conversion: it is a death “with Christ.” Continuing in the same indicative vein are those references in Paul of a death “to sin.” These occurrences show, not the nature, but the result of one's death at conversion—an emancipatory death.

There are at least nine verses in Paul's writings⁵⁴ where he uses “death” terminology with the dative of disadvantage or with various constructions parallel to this idea.⁵⁵ Besides the dative of disadvantage used in Rom 6:2 (ἀπεθάνομεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ), 11 (νεκροὺς . . . τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ); 7:4 (ἐθανατώθητε τῷ νόμῳ); Gal 2:19 (νόμῳ ἀπέθανον); 6:14 (ἐσταύρωται κάγῳ κόσμῳ), Paul also uses other constructions with death language to

⁵² Moo, *Romans*, 402, writes that the future life of resurrection with Christ “casts its shadow into the believer's present experience,” causing the Christian to see the present implications of this future certainty (Col. 3:1). Also Schreiner, *Romans*, 320.

⁵³ Jonathan R. Pratt, *My Sheep Follow Me: A Study of Perseverance and the Threat of Antinomianism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2026), 43–44, discusses Rom 6:4 and 7:4 and how Paul's grammatical construction demands an indicative understanding of persevering obedience in the life of the believer.

⁵⁴ These include Rom. 6:2, 6, 11; 7:4, 6; Gal. 2:19; 5:24; 6:14; Col 2:20. Blazen, 85, notes several of these parallels.

⁵⁵ F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and rev. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), §188. I could also add Rom 6:10 to this list where Paul uses a death verb with the dative of disadvantage (ὁ γὰρ ἀπέθανεν, τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ἀπέθανεν ἐφ' ὅπαξ), but this occurrence is speaking of Christ's cross work: “Death no longer rules over Jesus, because he died to the power of sin” (Schreiner, *Romans*, 320).

make the same point: 1) Rom 6:6 – καταργηθῇ το σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας (the sinful body is the subject of the passive verb); 2) Rom 7:6 – ἀποθανόντες ἐν ᾧ κατειχόμεθα (the relative clause describes the law as that to which believers have died); 3) Gal 5:24 – τὴν σάρκα ἐσταύρωσαν (the flesh is the direct object of the verb); and 4) Col 2:20 – ἀπεθάνετε . . . ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων (the prepositional phrase indicates “deliverance from the control of στοιχεῖα, severing bondage to their malevolent and enslaving influence.”⁵⁶ In the sense that the believer's death is to the disadvantage of sin, the concept of freedom from that sin arises; hence, the term, “emancipatory death,” will be used to describe “death to sin.”

Several questions must be answered while the investigation of emancipatory death takes place. First, what is the relationship between participatory and emancipatory death? Second, what is the meaning of “death to sin?” Third, other terms besides “sin” are used in the dative construction (e.g., “flesh,” “world,” and “law”); are these terms related and how do they help explain the meaning of emancipatory death? Fourth, what are the results of emancipatory death?

Relationship Between Emancipatory and Participatory Death

The distinction between emancipatory and participatory death is made obvious by the grammatical constructions of each occurrence. However, the two are intertwined in Paul's thought, the one (emancipatory death) resulting/arising from the other (participatory death). Paul uses both concepts in this way in Romans 6:6 (“our old man was crucified with Him *in order that* the body of sin might be destroyed”); he does so again in 7:4 (“you died to the law in association with the body of Christ”).⁵⁷

Another angle on Romans 6:1-6 shows how these two ideas are related. Paul states that the believer's death to sin occurs when he is baptized (6:2–4).⁵⁸ Verses four and five give clear indication that baptism is also the time when death with Christ takes place.⁵⁹ Thus, there is a temporal equality between emancipatory and participatory death; both transpire at baptism (conversion-initiation). Logically, “death with Christ” precedes “death to sin,” but temporally, they both occur at baptism.

⁵⁶ Murray J. Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 61.

⁵⁷ See n. 16.

⁵⁸ See the argument above on pp. 13–14 showing the relationship between baptism and faith.

⁵⁹ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1962), 140.

Meaning of Emancipatory Death

A hint about the meaning of emancipatory death can be seen in the preceding discussion regarding its relationship to participatory death. Just as “death to sin” and “death with Christ” occur simultaneously at baptism (conversion-initiation), so also the meaning of “death” as a transfer from one realm to another transpires “with Christ” and “to sin.” Hence, “death to sin” carries the same idea as “death with Christ” in regard to the transfer from the realm of Satan (Adam) to the realm of Christ.⁶⁰

Tannehill notes three reasons for viewing death as a transfer from the “old” realm to the “new” realm.⁶¹ First, the dative of disadvantage used in these constructions (especially in Rom 6:2, 10, 11) can be taken as datives of ownership⁶² so that Paul's concept is one of dying to an old master (“sin” or “law” or “flesh” etc.).

A second support given in favor of a realm transfer regards the prepositional phrase, ἐν αὐτῇ, at the end of 6:2. Living “in sin” is in direct opposition to Paul's common terminology of being “in Christ” as a believer. When Christians die to sin, they change dominions, i.e., they are out of sin's dominion and in Christ's.

Third, emancipatory death is demonstrated by “walking in newness of life” (Rom 6:4) and “bearing fruit for God” (Rom 7:4). Paul could not conceive of a believer, who had “died to sin,” still living (walking) in it. This comparison between “oldness” and “newness” of life further illustrates the concept of the two dominions.

Terminology Used with Emancipatory Death

“Sin” is one of five words used following “death” verbal constructions (Rom. 6:2, 6, 11). Also included are “law” (Rom. 7:4, 6; Gal. 2:19), “flesh” (Gal. 5:24), “world” (Gal. 6:14), and “elemental principles” (Col 2:20). Are these terms related? Do these concepts add further understanding to the meaning of emancipatory death as already presented?

Regarding the former question, an affirmative answer is made obvious by the usage of each term in its context. The terms are related in that they are all elements of the

⁶⁰ Note the argumentation for realm transfer on pp. 8–9. While participatory death and emancipatory death refer to realm transfer, there a difference in emphases between these two kinds of death. Emancipatory death majors not so much on the believer's new position in Christ but rather on the freedom from the debilitating entities related to the old realm that come about as a result of participatory death.

⁶¹ Tannehill, *Dying and Rising*, 18–20.

⁶² Ibid., 18. While BDF (§188) do classify the datives in Rom 6:10, 11; 7:4 as datives of disadvantage, they do qualify their classification of these verses with the added idea of possession/ownership: “In the following examples the dat. expresses more the possessor (cf. §189 [dative of possession]).”

old dominion to which the believer has died with Christ.⁶³ Space is not available to go into the specific nuances of each term. What is important, however, is that the death resulting from participatory death releases the believer from the power/influence which these entities represent.⁶⁴

The answer to the second question is negative. Changing from the realm of sin in Adam to the realm of life in Christ brings freedom, i.e., death to sin/flesh/law/world/elemental principles. All of the verbs used regarding emancipatory death are aorists except for Galatians 6:14, which is perfect.⁶⁵ This death is a past event for the believer occurring at his baptism (conversion-initiation). Freedom from the powers exerted by the “old man,” which include sin, flesh, law, world, and elemental principles was effected back then.

The Results of Emancipatory Death

The believer has experienced a change of realms in emancipatory death. When Paul uses “death to sin” language, he is saying that the believer is no longer in the realm/dominion of sin. While some of Paul’s emancipatory death statements do not provide any reference to results (Rom 6:2; Gal 5:24; 6:14; Col 2:20), several verses do. From these texts we learn of three results. First, the believer enjoys freedom from the

⁶³ Incidentally, the phrase, “death to self,” often used in preaching and teaching about sanctification is not a biblical phrase. In its popular evangelical use it normally refers to the surrender of one’s life to Christ and is synonymous with holiness language such as “let go and let God,” “dedicate your life to Christ,” surrender your all on the altar,” etc., that is used to call hearers to a higher life. See Andrew David Naselli, *No Quick Fix: Where Higher Life Theology Came From, What It Is, and Why It’s Harmful* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017, for further discussion about the theological and practical issues that arise from such teaching. Most preachers are likely unaware that Paul never uses the phrase, nor do any other NT writers.

The closest any verse may come to the *idea* are those texts where Christ calls his hearers to deny themselves, take up their crosses, and follow Him (Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23). But even in this saying (it is likely these are parallel passages speaking of one occurrence where Jesus says this following Peter’s confession and Jesus’s passion prediction), it is difficult to assert that Jesus is calling on followers to surrender their lives to Him in a second work of grace following justification.

⁶⁴ Blazen, “Death to Sin,” 86, states, “. . . for one to die to something means to cease to have any kind of connection with it whereby it could henceforth exercise power or influence, claim or control, discipline or dominion over him.”

⁶⁵ This is likely an extensive perfect, emphasizing “the completed action of a past action or process from which a present state emerges” (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 577).

control or dominion of the evil powers associated with the “old man.” Romans 6:6 declares that when the “body of sin has been destroyed” (i.e., when the believer died to sin),⁶⁶ the Christian no longer serves sin (τοῦ μηκέτι δουλεύειν ἡμᾶς τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ). Paul makes the same point in Romans 7:6 regarding death to the law (“we have been released from the law” – κατηργήωμεν ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου).

Second, those who have died to these evil powers bear fruit (Rom 7:4 – ἵνα καρποφορήσωμεν τῷ θεῷ) and serve in the new way of the Spirit rather than the old way of the written code (Rom 7:6 – ὥστε δουλεύειν ἡμᾶς ἐν καινότητι πνεύματος καὶ οὐ παλαιότητι γράμματος). Third, in contrast to being enslaved to sin (Rom 6:20) believers who have died to sin and its associated evil powers are now alive to God (Rom 6:11 – ζῶντας δὲ τῷ θεῷ; and Gal 2:19 – ἵνα θεῷ ζήσω).

Conclusion

Before proceeding to the third type of death (hortatory), a short summary of participatory and emancipatory death must be given. These usages of death are indicatives; Paul views these as facts related to conversion, occurring at the beginning point of salvation.

In both cases “death” refers to a change of realms from the dominion of Satan (Adam) to the dominion of Christ. This “death” occurs in baptism (conversion-initiation), and is true on both the corporate and individual levels (though primarily individual, especially in Romans 6).

The two concepts are different in that participatory death deals with the nature of the death (with Christ) and provides the reason why emancipatory death is possible: only in and through Christ, who conquered death, can true freedom from sin be effected (Rom. 6:10). Emancipatory death, then, emphasizes the *results* of “death with Christ”; the believer has changed realms from death to life, from the “old” to the “new” and can now live in freedom from the elements of the “old,” which, in particular, include sin, law, flesh, world, and elemental principles.

These two focuses upon “death” for the believer result in a new life (fellowship with Christ – Gal. 2:20), a new aptitude (freedom from sin and ability to obey – Rom. 6:6, 14), a new master (God [and righteousness] – Rom 6:18, 22), and a new hope (future resurrection – Rom. 6:8; 2 Tim. 2:11).⁶⁷

Hortatory Death

The vast majority of Pauline “death” metaphors have now been considered. Yet, the interpreter must assess the meaning of at least three verses which use the concept of

⁶⁶ See p. 16.

⁶⁷ Don N. Howell, Jr., “Pauline Eschatological Dualism and its Resulting Tensions,” *Trinity Journal* 14NS (1993):15–16.

“death” as an imperative (Rom 8:13; 1 Cor 5:5; and Col 3:5). A careful reader of these three verses will notice that neither Romans 8:13 nor 1 Corinthians 5:5 have imperative verbs as does Colossians 3:5 (νεκρώσατε). So an explanation is necessary.

First, regarding Romans 8:13, θανατοῦτε is a present tense verb in a conditional clause. This fact has caused some to deny its function here as an imperative.⁶⁸ However, there are three indications that Paul intends an imperatival idea here: 1) the parallel concept of putting something (τὰς πράξεις τοῦ σώματος [“deeds of the body”] in Rom 8:13 and τὰ μέλη [“members”] in Col 3:5) to death occurs in Col 3:5⁶⁹; 2) the use of the present tense indicates the type of ongoing action required in the imperative of putting to death (one would expect the aorist tense if emancipatory death were in view); and 3) the obligation concept of 8:12 begins with the negative in v. 12 (“obligated not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh” [ὀφειλέται ἐσμέν οὐ τῇ σαρκὶ τοῦ κατὰ σάρκα ζῆν]), but is not concluded until the positive of v. 13 (“we are obligated . . . to put to death the practices of the body”).

Second, in 1 Corinthians 5:5 Paul calls on the Corinthians to deliver the sinning individual to Satan “for the destruction of the flesh” (εἰς ὄλεθρον τῆς σαρκός). There is a minefield of exegetical and theological questions in this verse which cannot be answered here,⁷⁰ but here are a few reasons for suggesting that this verse demonstrates the concept of hortatory death: 1) the preposition, εἰς, is used following παραδουναί to show the purpose why the Corinthians should excommunicate this individual—to put his flesh (in this case his fleshly sin of fornication and unrepentance) to death (i.e. to kill his flesh)⁷¹;

⁶⁸ Meinert H. Grumm, “The Gospel Call: Imperatives in Romans,” *Expository Times* 93 (1982): 241. But see William D. Dennison, “Indicative and Imperative: The Basic Structure of Pauline Ethics,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 14 (1979): 69, and J.-M. Cambier, “La Liberté du Spirituel dans Rom. 8.12–17,” in *Paul and Paulinism: Essays in Honour of C. K. Barrett*, ed. M. D. Hooker and S. G. Wilson (London: SPCK, 1982), 205–208, who argue for an imperatival idea here.

⁶⁹ Moule, “The New Life,” 486.

⁷⁰ The two most significant include (1) the meaning of “deliver this man to Satan” (which refers to excommunication from the church) and (2) the meaning of “flesh” and “spirit.” (which views these concepts ethically). In support of these conclusions regarding these two issues see Jonathan Pratt, “Church Discipline in 1 Corinthians 5:1–5” (Th.M. Thesis, Central Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990), 42–71; Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 207–12; and Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 392–400.

⁷¹ See Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 369; also Harris, *Prepositions and Theology*, 88–89.

2) just as “the deeds of the body” in Romans 8:13 and the “members” in Colossians 3:5 were to be put to death, so also here the “flesh” is to be put to death (“destroyed”); and 3) the noun ὀλεθρος (“destruction”) shares the same meaning as καταργέω (abolish/destroy) indicating that this phrase in 1 Corinthians 5:5 fits under the umbrella of death metaphors.⁷²

These three imperatival verses appear to be in contradiction to the indicatives of participatory and emancipatory death.⁷³ Why is the Christian called to put to death what has already died? An investigation of these three references of hortatory death is necessary to answer this concern. What is the meaning of the command, “Put to death?” And what is the focus of this effort, i.e., what is to be killed?

Meaning of Hortatory Death

All interpreters agree that Paul is using “death” in a figurative rather than literal sense in these verses. Yet, they differ on the precise meaning of hortatory death. Some support the passive interpretation which views hortatory death as a command to “reckon as dead.”⁷⁴ This is meant to be an attitudinal concept similar to Paul’s command of Romans 6:11 requiring the believer to accept God’s accomplished work and to allow it to be “implemented in us.”⁷⁵ Against this passive idea is the absence of λογίζεσθε in Romans 8:13; 1 Corinthians 5:5; or Colossians 3:5. Paul uses this verb when he wants to stress the passive idea (Rom. 6:11).

A second viewpoint interprets the commands actively. Hortatory death is more than a mindset, it is an activity to be executed. To show the active participation of the

The idea of killing the flesh as a responsibility of the believer applies to the disciplined man in this passage. In the same way believers are called to put the practices of the body to death (Rom 8:13) and to kill one’s earthly members (Paul’s description of fleshly behaviors such as fornication, uncleanness, passions, evil desires, etc. in Col 3:5), so here the excommunicated individual must seek to destroy (put to death) the fleshly behavior he has been committing.

⁷² See n. 14.

⁷³ Technically speaking, 1 Cor 5:5 is not calling on the unrepentant man to put his sin to death, i.e., it is not making an imperatival claim on the reader. Rather, the verse is describing a situation in which hortatory death should be taking place as a result of the church’s action. In effect through its excommunication of the sinning individual, the church was saying, “You need to put your fleshly behavior to death!”

⁷⁴ Bruce, *Colossians*, 140.

⁷⁵ Grumm, “The Gospel Call,” 241.

believer in this battle Ernst Käsemann compares the hortatory death action of Romans 8:13 to Paul's fighting terminology in 1 Corinthians 9:27.⁷⁶

The contexts of the three verses indicate that the active concept fits Paul's usage.⁷⁷ In Romans 8:12–13 the language of obligation does not logically allow an attitudinal concept (“obligated to think of the deeds of your body as dead”??). The context of Colossians 3:5 includes a usage in 3:8 (“lay aside”) which is synonymous to νεκρώσατε.⁷⁸ In 1 Corinthians 5:5 the goal of the flesh's destruction is the spirit's salvation, and killing fornication (which is the fleshly sin in question) must be more than a thought experiment.

Objects of Hortatory Death

The “practices of the body” (Rom. 8:13), the “flesh” (1 Cor 5:5), and the “members upon the earth” (Col. 3:5) are the objects of hortatory death. What do these phrases mean? As noted earlier, “sin,” “flesh,” “law,” “world,” and “elemental principles” have already been conquered in emancipatory death, and the Christian now lives in the freedom of a new realm.

Nowhere in Paul does he mention the defeat and death of sin/flesh/law/world.⁷⁹ The believer, under a new Lord, now has the freedom to avoid these influences and to defeat them. But the Christian still is affected by these “old” aspects because of his “mortal body.”⁸⁰

In all three verses the objects of hortatory death appear to have parallel meaning. In Romans 8:13, “τὰς πράξεις τοῦ σώματος,” is best translated as “deeds of the body under the influence of the flesh.”⁸¹ First Corinthians 5:5 indicates that the σάρξ must be put to

⁷⁶ Käsemann, *Romans*, 226.

⁷⁷ Moo, *Romans*, 518, while acknowledging the active responsibility of the believer to put sin to death, Moo mentions the place of the Spirit in this equation (Rom 8:13); his point is well taken (Phil 2:12–13).

⁷⁸ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Colossians and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1964), 144.

⁷⁹ Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, 80.

⁸⁰ J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 287–89, states, “‘The mortal body’ is an ‘interim’ reality. We are no longer ‘the body of sin’ and not yet ‘the spiritual body’; we are a body that is subject both to the rule of the Spirit and to the rule of death.” He bases this analysis on Paul's use of θνητῷ σώματι in Rom. 6:12.

⁸¹ Moo, *Romans*, 518, differs with C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Vol 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 395, who equates σάρξ and σῶμα. Paul prefers to

death.⁸² Bruce summarizes Paul's usage of "members upon the earth" in Colossians 3:5 when he calls them the "practices and attitudes to which his readers' bodily activity and strength had been devoted in the old life."⁸³ Thus, Paul commands believers to rid themselves of those actions characteristic of their "old" life; this is what he means in all three verses.⁸⁴

Conclusion

As the imperative usage of death metaphors related to the believer indicates, Paul commands the Christian to actively strive to remove/destroy those fleshly practices and attitudes which were characteristic of life under the dominion of the "old man." This effort is made possible because of the presence of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9, 13) and because of the freedom from sin afforded by the transfer of realms from Adam to Christ which occurred in emancipatory and participatory death.

"Death" in Relation to the Indicative and Imperative

The three types of death discussed in this study have revealed both the indicative and the imperative in Pauline writings. How are these to be reconciled? There are three basic positions taken in answer to this question.⁸⁵

keep a neutral or positive meaning for *σῶμα* (Beker, *Paul*, 288) and often subscribes a negative, ethical concept to *σάρξ*. The interpretation offered demonstrates this Pauline trait.

⁸² Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 229–35.

⁸³ Bruce, *Colossians*, 141; Moule, "The New Life," 487. John R. Levison, "2 Apoc. Bar. 48:42–52:7 and the Apocalyptic Dimension of Colossians 3:1–6," *JBL* 108 (1989):106–108, sees these "members" as "vehicles of vice" which the believer must figuratively kill in order to avoid God's wrath at the final judgment. He takes this approach because it parallels a similar eschatological perspective found in apocalyptic literature. However, it seems that Paul is not borrowing his concept of present sin in the believer's life from apocalyptic texts. Col 3:6–7 indicate that God's judgment and wrath will apply to the "children of disobedience" among whose ranks the Colossians used to live (v. 7). The actions to be put to death are characteristic of their past lifestyle, but the doing of them does not bring about the same consequences.

⁸⁴ Incidentally, Ridderbos, *Paul*, 117 and 124, sees a connection between Paul's usage of "deeds of the body" in Rom 8:13 and "members on the earth" in Col 3:5.

⁸⁵ Michael Parsons, "Being Precedes Act: Indicative and Imperative in Paul's Writing," *Evangelical Quarterly* 88 (1988):100–113, presents a good survey of the three

The Relationship Explained

First, the position of C. H. Dodd recognizes a virtual disjuncture between the two. He sees Paul as always giving doctrinal truth and then, leaving the indicative behind, going forward to stress the imperative.⁸⁶

A second viewpoint sees a fusion of the indicative and imperative so that the indicative is only realized in the believer's life as he (the believer) obeys the imperative.⁸⁷

A third answer to this question of the relation of indicative and imperative seeks a mediating position between that represented by Dodd and Bultmann. It acknowledges a close relationship between the two while maintaining a distinction.⁸⁸ Most interpreters believe that the imperative finds its basis in the indicative.⁸⁹

This third idea which bases the imperative on the indicative best follows the position taken in this paper with regard to participatory/emancipatory death and hortatory death. Because believers have changed realms with Christ and with regard to sin, they now have the ability to carry out the commands given to them. Besides their realm transfer, Christians also receive the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit who helps to effect obedience and serves as the divine "link" between the indicative and imperative.⁹⁰

viewpoints. For an even more detailed approach to this problem see Richard E. Howard, "Some Modern Interpretations of the Pauline Indicative and Imperative," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 11 (1976): 39–43, who lists at least 7 major positions. For a good historical survey of this issue see Anthony A. Hoekema, "The Struggle Between Old and New Natures in the Converted Man," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 5 (1962): 42–46.

⁸⁶ C. H. Dodd, *Gospel and Law* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), 10, states, "This order of approach, first the proclamation, then the beginning of instruction in morals, first *kerygma*, then *didaché*, seems to have been thoroughly characteristic of the Christian mission; it is precisely this order, first *kerygma*, then *didaché*, which we have seen to be general in the New Testament writings."

⁸⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 203–204.

⁸⁸ Parsons, "Being Precedes Act," 109–113.

⁸⁹ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 254; Dennison, "Indicative and Imperative," 68–70; Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, 81–82; J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Enquiry*, SNTSMS 20 (Cambridge: University Press, 1972), 202. These are but a few of the writers who take this position.

⁹⁰ Dennison, "Indicative and Imperative," 70–71.

The Relationship Applied

Paul's imperatives are based on the fact of his indicatives. This principle is illustrated by his use of participatory/emancipatory death and hortatory death in Colossians 3:3–5. Although “death” terminology is not used in the immediate context, certainly indicative language (Rom 8:2, 9) appears prior to Paul's hortatory death imperative in Romans 8:13.

Other indicative-imperative parallels, though not using “death” language, can be found in Paul demonstrating similar meaning. These include the following: Romans 6:2–6 and 6:12–13; Romans 12:1a and 12:1b–2; Galatians 5:25a and 5:25b; 1 Corinthians 6:15, 19 and 6:16–18, 20; Ephesians 4:22–24 and 4:25ff; Philippians 2:12 and 2:13; Colossians 3:9–10 and 3:12ff.⁹¹

Therefore, Paul can demand obedience to the truth because believers have been given the ability to obey since they exist in the “new” realm of the Spirit. Though sin still remains as an enemy for the believer to overcome, for now the Christian would be wise to consider T. Francis Glasson's poignant comment regarding obedience: “It is not good taste to walk around after one's funeral.”⁹²

Summary

Part One of this study has strived to demonstrate that Paul uses death metaphors (when speaking of believers) in three ways: participatory, emancipatory, and hortatory. These first two concepts are intrinsically related, and when used, they form the indicative of Pauline soteriology. In order to experience participatory/emancipatory death one must believe/have faith. This participatory/emancipatory death involves a transfer from the realm of sin and death to the realm of new life in the Spirit. In this new realm the ability to defeat sin and live righteously is made possible. Because of this fact, hortatory death terminology is employed by Paul to encourage believers in the struggle against sin which still dogs them in their mortal bodies.

Part Two: How Biblical Theology Aids Exegesis

⁹¹ This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, though it attempts to point out the major passages demonstrating this principle. Parsons, “Being Precedes Act,” 114–26, has done a masterful job of demonstrating the indicative-imperative relationships in Rom 12, Gal 5, 1 Cor 6, and Phil 2.

⁹² T. Francis Glasson, “Dying and Rising with Christ,” *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* 186 (1961): 289.

Having completed our biblical-theological study of Paul's death metaphors, we proceed to application. In particular how does an understanding of Paul's theology serve as a foundation and buttress in practicing accurate exegesis? Before the reader interrupts with the objection that I have things inverted and that good exegesis actually forms the basis for good biblical theology, let me explain.⁹³

We ought to conceive of the task of good interpretation in the form of a spiral. This is certainly not a new concept,⁹⁴ but it is a helpful way to explain how exegesis and biblical theology work together. Unlike the other building blocks needed to do exegesis (e.g., textual criticism, grammar and syntax, diagramming, word study, historical/cultural background), biblical theology relates to exegesis differently. Specifically, while these other building blocks are vital elements needed for doing exegesis, the exegete does not normally use the fruits of his interpretation to better understand Greek grammar or diagramming or the historical/cultural background. But the same cannot be said for biblical theology.

Taking 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 (“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body”) as an example, the interpretation of these verses requires biblical-theological knowledge of “body,” “temple,” “Holy Spirit,” redemption (“bought with a price”), and glorifying God. And this basic knowledge helps to make a proper assessment of the meaning of this text. Once this exegesis has been conducted, the student will likely revisit each of these five themes with the enhanced knowledge that 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 can provide for each of those themes across the canon of Scripture.⁹⁵

⁹³ See n. 1 for a listing of eight exegesis texts, all of which argue that such things as textual criticism, grammar and syntax, diagramming, word study, historical/cultural background study, and biblical-theological study ought to be used in the pursuit of accurate interpretation. But at the same time, how does an interpreter produce biblical-theological observations without good exegesis? Certainly, one cannot do good biblical theology without a knowledge of textual criticism, grammar and syntax, word meanings, and historical/cultural background information. As an example of the importance of exegesis for biblical theology, see the Zondervan Biblical Theology of the New Testament series. Each of the volumes includes an interpretation of its corpus in commentary form in the first half of the volume as a basis for the biblical-theological material in the second half.

⁹⁴ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 6, uses the spiral imagery to speak of the relation of meaning and significance in the hermeneutical task, but the concept certainly applies to this current discussion.

⁹⁵ Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament*, 243–50, provides a helpful discussion of the biblical-theological theme of “temple.” His conclusion is helpful: “If you are an expositional preacher or teacher, you can do this when you encounter significant whole-Bible themes in the text: zoom out, trace the entire trajectory, and then zoom back in on your passage.”

I would like, now, to apply what we have learned in our study of Paul's death metaphors to the interpretation of several verses in Romans 6–8, 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 5; Galatians 2, 5, 6; Colossians 2–3; and 2 Timothy 2. Given what we have learned about the three types of metaphorical death found in Paul's writings (participatory, emancipatory, and hortatory), how does this information affect the various ways scholars have interpreted the passages in which these death metaphors are found?

This portion of the paper will answer this question in the following way: 1) first I will provide a simple listing of each of the three types of death metaphors with their passages so that the reader has an easy reference point for the exegetical observations in the next section; and 2) second, I will survey each of the passages (where disagreement exists) and give one or two examples of interpretations which have failed to consider the meaning of Paul's death metaphors as revealed in Part One of this study.

Listing of Paul's Death Metaphors

Participatory Death

Paul speaks of the believer's death with Christ in a number of passages. When believers die with Christ in their baptism they are transferred from the realm of Adam into the realm of Christ. This is Paul's primary idea. But this concept secondarily includes the forensic sense as well, which means that believers spiritually partake in the death and resurrection of Christ who has represented them in His death and resurrection.⁹⁶

In what follows each of the eleven verses in the Pauline corpus that includes reference to participatory death is listed.

Romans 6:4 – We were **buried** therefore **with him** (συνετάφημεν αὐτῷ) by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:6 – We know that our old self was **crucified with him** (συνεσταυρώθη) in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

Romans 6:7 – For one who **has died** (ὁ ἀποθανὼν) has been set free from sin.

Romans 6:8 – Now if we **have died with Christ** (ἀπεθάνομεν σὺν Χριστῷ), we believe that we will also live with him.

Romans 7:4 – Likewise, my brothers, **you** also **have died** to the law **through the body of Christ** (ὁμεῖς ἐθανατώθητε . . . διὰ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ) so that you may belong

⁹⁶ See pp 6–7 above for further explanation.

to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

2 Corinthians 5:14 – For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore **all have died** (οἱ πάντες ἀπέθανον).

Galatians 2:19 – For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. **I have been crucified with Christ** (Χριστῷ συνεσταύρωμαι).

Colossians 2:12 – **Having been buried with him** (συνταφέντες αὐτῷ) in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Colossians 2:20 – If **with Christ you died** (ἀπεθάνετε σὺν Χριστῷ) to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations.

Colossians 3:3 – For **you have died** (ἀπεθάνετε), and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

2 Timothy 2:11 – If **we have died with him** (συναπεθάνομεν), we will also live with him.

The reader should refer to the earlier portion of the paper for a defense of including the three unqualified verbal uses here (Rom 6:7; 2 Cor 5:14; Col 3:3).

Emancipatory Death

When Paul uses emancipatory death language, “death” refers to a change of realms from the dominion of Satan (Adam) to the dominion of Christ. This “death” occurs in baptism (conversion-initiation), and is true on both the corporate and individual levels. Emancipatory death emphasizes the *results* of participatory death; because the believer has changed realms, he can now live in freedom from the elements of the “old,” which, in particular, include sin, law, flesh, world, and elemental principles.

In what follows each of the nine verses in the Pauline corpus that includes reference to emancipatory death is listed.⁹⁷

Romans 6:2 – By no means! How can **we who died to sin** (ἀπεθάνομεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ) still live in it?

⁹⁷ The first three texts in Rom 6 speak of dying to sin; the second group of three texts in Rom 7 and Gal 2 speak of dying to the law; and each of the three remaining texts speak of dying to the flesh (Gal 5), the world (Gal 6), and elemental principles (Col 2).

Romans 6:6 – We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that **the body of sin might be brought to nothing** (καταργηθῇ το σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας), so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

Romans 6:11 – So you also must consider yourselves **dead to sin** (νεκροὺς . . . τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ) and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 7:4 – Likewise, my brothers, **you also have died to the law** (ὁμεῖς ἐθανατώθητε τῷ νόμῳ) through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

Romans 7:6 – But now we are released from the law, **having died to that which held us captive** (ἀποθανόντες ἐν ᾧ κατειχόμεθα), so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

Galatians 2:19 – For through the law **I died to the law** (νόμῳ ἀπέθανον), so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ.

Galatians 5:24 – And those who belong to Christ Jesus **have crucified the flesh** (τὴν σάρκα ἐσταύρωσαν) with its passions and desires.

Galatians 6:14 – But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world **has been crucified to me, and I to the world** (ἐσταύρωται κάγῳ κόσμῳ).

Colossians 2:20 – If with Christ **you died to the elemental spirits of the world** (ἀπεθάνετε . . . ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων), why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations.

Hortatory Death

The hortatory usage of death metaphors related to the believer demands that the Christian actively strive to remove/destroy those fleshly practices and attitudes which were characteristic of life under the dominion of the “old man.” This effort is made possible because of the presence of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9, 13) and because of the freedom from sin afforded by the transfer of realms from Adam to Christ which occurred in emancipatory and participatory death. Paul writes about hortatory death on only three occasions.

Romans 8:13 – For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit **you put to death the deeds of the body** (τὰς πράξεις τοῦ σώματος θανατοῦτε), you will live.

1 Corinthians 5:5 – You are to deliver this man to Satan **for the destruction of the flesh** (εἰς ὄλεθρον τῆς σαρκός), so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

Colossians 3:5 – **Put to death** therefore **what is earthly in you** (νεκρώσατε . . . τὰ μέλη τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς): sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

A Cornucopia of Incorrect Interpretations

Armed with the data gained in our study of Paul's death metaphors, we have learned that Paul speaks of participatory death (11 times), emancipatory death (9 times), and hortatory death (3 times). How can this knowledge aid accurate exegesis? In this portion of the paper I will survey each of the passages and give one or two examples of interpretations which have failed to consider the meaning of Paul's death metaphors. In taking this approach I realize that commendation of accurate interpretations will not be possible, nor will I have space to mention all erroneous culprits. So this section must be cursory in citation on the one hand and representative of a larger number of interpreters on the other hand.

Romans

In the previous section (based on the findings of Part One) we learned that Romans 6:4, 6, 7, 8; 7:4 all demonstrated participatory death. Emancipatory death was found in Romans 6:2, 6, 11; 7:4, 6 and hortatory death in Romans 8:13. How have writers misinterpreted these verses because they failed to understand Paul's death metaphors accurately?

Romans 6:2, 6, 11

Nineteen years after his Romans commentary was published in 1975, C. E. B. Cranfield wrote to give clarification on the four senses of the Christian's dying with Christ.⁹⁸ Unfortunately, in his treatment of the "moral" sense he took Paul's declarations of the believer's emancipatory death in Romans 6:2, 6, 11 as implying hortatory death: 1) "The response called for by the question . . . in v. 2 is a recognition that, instead of continuing to live in sin, we must try to die to it"; 2) "The thought that we have to strive constantly to die to sin is surely implicit in the last part of v. 6"; and 3) "When in v. 11 Paul exhorts the Roman Christians to reckon with the fact that they have already died to sin in God's sight, . . . he surely intends them to draw the conclusion that they must now try to die to sin in their actual living."⁹⁹

In the next paragraph of his essay Cranfield recognizes Romans 8:13 and Col 3:5 as expressing Paul's moral sense, i.e., hortatory death, but he has erroneously transferred

⁹⁸ Cranfield, "Romans 6:1–14 Revisited," 40–43. The four senses are 1) juridicial; 2) baptismal; 3) moral; and 4) eschatological.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 42

that understanding to these three references in Romans 6, each of which clearly refer to emancipatory death to sin.¹⁰⁰ Arguing that indicative statements imply imperatives presents the interpreter with a massive exegetical minefield to be avoided. Just because one can find an imperatival idea similar to the indicative (as in this case) does not give warrant to do so, and Cranfield has certainly tripped on this particular landmine.

Romans 6:4

Romans' commentators are in virtually unanimous agreement that the baptism described in Romans 6:3–4 refers to water baptism. One exception is D. M. Lloyd-Jones, who argues that the Christian's burial with Christ is effected by Spirit baptism rather than by water baptism.¹⁰¹ He explains that when someone believes they "have been baptized into His burial."¹⁰² Sadly, Lloyd-Jones has reinterpreted Paul's description of the believer's burial with Christ in Romans 6:4 (his participatory death resulting in a transfer from the old man into the new man) to the believer's incorporation into Christ in Spirit baptism. Though often argued in popular Christian writing and conversation, the Spirit baptism position does not mesh with Paul's participatory death language used in Romans 6:4.

Romans 6:6, 7

Higher life teachers typically consider the participatory death language in these verses (and in Gal 2:19) as an action related to sanctification. When the old man is crucified with Christ in Romans 6:6 (the unqualified *ὁ ἀποθανὼν* of 6:7 is interpreted in the same way), this event occurs because the believer performs this crucifixion in order "to realize in him[self] the life of the Risen One."¹⁰³ However, this exegesis cannot be sustained in light of the participatory death described by Paul that occurs at the time of salvation. Furthermore, the notion of squeezing the text to make a command from these indicative statements in both Romans 6:6, 7, strains credulity.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6 The New Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 30–37.

¹⁰² Ibid., 54

¹⁰³ Frederick L. Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, rev. and ed. Talbot W. Chambers, trans. A. Cusin (Funk & Wagnall, 1883; repr. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), 244; shortly after this statement he writes: "The believer knows certainly that he is called to die, but to die in order to live again." Commenting on verse 7, Godet states, "Such is the believer's position after the crucifixion of his own will (of his *old man*) has reduced his *body of sin* (ver. 6) to powerlessness" (italics in original) (246).

Romans 7:4, 6

Addressing the emancipatory death described in both Romans 7:4 and 7:6 (dying to the law), Godet argues that this death to the law is *not* something that occurs when someone believes. Rather, “the believer who appropriates this death appropriates also the glorious liberty which in the case of Christ was its consequence.”¹⁰⁴ Consistent with higher life teaching, Godet argues that death to the law will only occur when believers appropriate it by an act of surrender or dedication. Thus, Godet errs by failing to embrace Paul’s teaching on emancipatory death as taking place when someone believes in Christ for salvation.

2 Corinthians

There is only one passage (2 Cor 5:14) that relates to Paul’s death metaphors in 2 Corinthians, and I believe that it belongs under Paul’s participatory death category. Since this usage is unqualified, one might also classify it under emancipatory death, though the context is quite unclear regarding which element of the old life the “all” have died to. Furthermore and *not* incidentally, the death of the “all” must be metaphorical since it would be nonsensical for Paul to suggest that physical death of “all” (however πάντες is construed) is the result of Christ’s death on the cross. Given the fact that Paul is using death metaphorically and that believers must be included in the “all,”¹⁰⁵ we have learned that Paul uses death only three ways with regard to believers: participatory, emancipatory, and hortatory.

Since only participatory and emancipatory death occur in indicative statements, have students of 2 Corinthians 5 failed to rightly consider these options in their interpretations? The answer to this question is “Yes!” and sadly, the majority have misunderstood Paul’s words. We do not have space to comprehensively list all the erroneous conclusions. So I will limit this study to John Evans’s top five 2 Corinthians commentaries and select any who fail to observe Paul’s death metaphors accurately.¹⁰⁶

First, Paul Barnett suggests that this death is a potential death to the penalty of sin (similar to the concept of emancipatory death) since Christ’s death for all provided the potential salvation for anyone who may believe.¹⁰⁷ While coming close to Paul’s

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 266. Godet, 269, expresses a similar viewpoint regarding death to the law in Rom 7:6.

¹⁰⁵ Paul certainly is not suggesting that believers are *not* part of the group for whom Christ died!

¹⁰⁶ John F. Evans, *A Guide to Biblical Commentaries and Reference Works*, 11th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2025), 414–15, lists Barnett, Garland, Guthrie, Hafemann, and Harris as his top five suggestions that students should purchase.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 289–90.

emancipatory death, this view still fails to see the actuality of emancipatory death for the believer. If Paul does use death in a potential way, this would be the only occurrence.

Second, George Guthrie states, “All humanity died that day [when Christ died] in Christ’s substitutionary experience of the condemnation that had passed from Adam to all humanity (Rom. 5:18).”¹⁰⁸ However, this death is only appropriated for all when they repent and believe the gospel. Similar to Barnett’s view, this death is only potential, but this, again, flies in the face of the actuality of Paul’s death metaphors.

Third, Murray Harris believes that this death is actual rather than potential and that it is universal in scope. However, his clarifying explanation of this universal death is anything but clarifying (e.g., 1) the death they deserve because of sin; 2) “ethical” death that must be appropriated by faith; or 3) a collective participation in the event of Christ’s death).¹⁰⁹ By suggesting that the πάντες is universal, Harris has failed to reckon with the reality that Paul’s death metaphors, when including Christians, must either refer to participatory or emancipatory death.

Galatians

Our study pinpointed three texts in Galatians where Paul used death metaphors. Galatians 2:19 contained both participatory (“crucified with Christ”) and emancipatory (“died to the law”) death references. Galatians 5:24 (“crucified the flesh”) and 6:14 (“crucifixion to the world”) provided two more references to emancipatory death. The three instances of emancipatory death are not in dispute, and so will not receive comment here. However, the one instance of participatory death in Galatians 2:19 has yielded some incorrect interpretations.

Galatians 2:19

We have seen that participatory death occurs at conversion and results in a transfer from the realm of Adam into the realm of Christ. Victorious life teachers fail to acknowledge both the timing and meaning of participatory death, and as a result provide erroneous teaching regarding the believer’s crucifixion with Christ. For example, F. B. Meyer views Paul addressing sanctification in Galatians 2:19 when he calls believers to be crucified with Christ. He does not see this as a reference to participatory death but rather to an imperative that believers must obey as they substitute the self-life for the Christ-life.¹¹⁰ However, our study of participatory death shows that believers die with

¹⁰⁸ George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 305–6.

¹⁰⁹ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 421–22.

¹¹⁰ F. B. Meyer, *The Christ Life for Your Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 44. He states, “God demands that every man and woman should unite with the cross, and (so to speak) kill the self-life, the egotism, the personal element which has been so strong

Christ at the point of their salvation when they are transferred from the old realm in Adam into the new realm in Christ. And this is precisely what Paul is speaking of in Galatians 2:19. Thus, this is not a call to the believer to surrender so that he can be crucified with Christ; that event happened when the person was saved.

Colossians

All three types of death metaphors are found in Colossians. We discovered examples of participatory death in Colossians 2:12, 20; 3:3; emancipatory death in Colossians 2:20; and hortatory death in Colossians 3:5. While considering each of these usages, I learned that interpreters are generally agreed on these usages of death in the book.

2 Timothy

Most all interpreters of the pastoral epistles agree that 2 Timothy 2:11 describes the believer's participatory death with Christ. And Gordon Fee concurs as he compares Paul's statement in this verse with Romans 6:8 and Colossians 2:20.¹¹¹ However, Fee makes room for a secondary interpretation that suggests the verb, συναπεθάνομεν, also refers to the loss of physical life in martyrdom.¹¹² Since the verse shares all the characteristics of Paul's participatory death, it is highly unlikely that Paul intended any reference to a physical interpretation such as martyrdom.

Conclusion

I have sought to show how the practice of biblical theology provides necessary and vital aid in the proper exegesis of Paul's letters. In order to accomplish this purpose I investigated Paul's death metaphors that relate specifically to the believer with the goal of formulating a foundational biblical-theological framework for understanding this important concept. Our enquiry unearthed three ways Paul uses death metaphors when speaking about Christians.

First, we learned about **participatory death** when Paul uses phrases such as "died with," "crucified with," and "buried with." Furthermore, our study showed that the *meaning* of this language related to the believer's transfer of realms from that ruled by Satan to that ruled by Christ; the *subjects* of death have both corporate and individual

in each one. . . . You must put [yourself] to the cross, and believe that from this moment it shall be crucified to you and you to it."

¹¹¹ Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*. NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 249.

¹¹² Ibid., 249–50. Fee writes, "In the present context . . . the language of dying and living in Christ is perhaps also to be heard with the broader implications of Christian martyrdom. What was true figuratively at one's baptism would also be true of a 'baptism' of another kind."

application; the *means* of this death comes through baptism (as an illustration of conversion-initiation which presupposes faith); and the *results* of this death include dying to sin, rising with Christ, and persevering obedience.

Second, Paul refers to **emancipatory death** with phrases like “dying to sin,” “crucifying the flesh,” “dying to the law,” “being crucified to the world,” and “dying to elemental principles.” Like participatory death, emancipatory death refers to a realm transfer but majors not so much on the believer’s new position in Christ but rather on the freedom from the debilitating entities related to the old realm that come about as a result of participatory death. The results of emancipatory death include: 1) freedom from the enslavement of sin, law, flesh, world, and elemental principles; 2) obedient fruit-bearing; and 3) being alive in Christ, i.e. under the lordship of Christ.

Third, while the previous metaphors related to the Pauline indicative, **hortatory death** refer to those times when Paul commands believers to put sin to death (the Pauline imperative). Paul makes this command in Romans 8:13 (put the deeds of the body to death) and Colossians 3:5 (kill the earthly members). He also describes the situation of the excommunicated individual in 1 Corinthians 5:5 who needs to put his fleshly actions to death. All these fleshly practices and attitudes which were characteristic of life under the dominion of the “old man” need to be mortified. This effort is made possible because of the presence of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9, 13) and because of the freedom from sin afforded by the transfer of realms from Adam to Christ which occurred in emancipatory and participatory death.

Following the description of the three types of death metaphors Paul uses, we examined the ways that Paul’s indicative statements (like participatory and emancipatory death) relate to his imperatives (like hortatory death). There is not a disjuncture between the two nor a fusion but rather a close relationship between the two while maintaining a distinction.

Armed with the knowledge gained in Part One of this essay, we looked at several of the 23 passages to see how this biblical-theological wisdom gained from studying Paul’s death metaphors could help interpreters avoid errant conclusions in their exegesis. Perhaps the material that showed the failings of the Victorious Life interpretations, the Spirit baptism interpretation of Romans 6:4, and the clarifications for understanding 2 Corinthians 5:14 was most revealing in how biblical theology can inform solid exegesis.

One final observation relates to the oft-used phrase “death to self.” We have learned that no NT writer ever uses this phrase, and I suggest we remove it from our vocabulary due to the many erroneous notions often attached to it, particularly, those connected with higher life theology. I prefer more biblical language such as dying to sin or flesh or law, and I commend the words of Christ, who called for His followers to deny themselves.

As citizens in a new realm, Christians ought to rejoice in their freedom from sin’s grasp. With this new ability comes a great challenge: either live righteously or allow sin to creep back into prominence. With the aid of the Spirit, every believer can accomplish righteous behavior and bring glory to the One Who, alone, is truly righteous.

May God help us to apply the biblical-theological truth of His Word to our exegetical efforts so that we approach our life in the new realm with faithful zeal.