

Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel as a Challenge to Contemporary Christianity: A Commentary on Romans 10:6-17

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“As in a murder mystery on the stage, where we do not learn what the key clues were until the end of the play, so it is with God's plan. Not until his Kingdom becomes empirical reality in the transformation of the age will the key clues and their meaning become known to all.”¹

With this statement, Paul Achtemeier provides us with an indispensable key to the movement of Paul's thought in Romans. The logic of Paul's reasoning is rooted in his view of history, namely, that God is guiding His gracious purposes towards a goal, that of restoring the creation to a condition of harmony with its Creator. The “empirical reality” of the coming Kingdom, seen through the eye of faith, provides the common hope of all New Testament writers.

Romans 9-11, in which our passage is found, reveals Paul as a thoroughgoing exponent of the Messianism he had learned from both his Jewish and Christian heritage. His recognition of Jesus as Messiah had intensified his appreciation of God's saving purposes. In addition to the believers now being invited to the messianic salvation, Israel, the nation, as all the prophets foresaw, will play a significant role in the great restoration (Rom. 11:25-32). The theology of Romans is not confined to

¹*Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, Romans*, John Knox Press, 1985, 188.

the doctrine of the individual's justification by faith. Righteousness by faith (*dikaioisune* is rendered in our versions by both “justification” and “righteousness”) is indeed a central concern in Paul's argument. However, the gospel of God's righteousness (1:16, 17) reveals His plan to restore covenant relations with His creation. The “mystery” now made known to the church shows how God is at work in history. This is the overarching theme of Romans. The issues have to do not with static doctrines, but with God's ongoing purpose for the world as He works it out in Christ.

It follows from this introductory premise that Romans 9-11, in which our passage is set, is in no sense peripheral to Paul's main argument. Paul's preoccupation with the “Jewish question” stems logically from his basic insight that God's plan of salvation is to be traced to His original response to the fall of Adam, when the promise of a Savior was made (Gen. 3:15). Since that promise was confirmed to Abraham, as the model of subsequent Christian faith (Rom. 4:1-5), and since for Paul Christ is the human Messiah² descended from Abraham and David (Gal. 3:16; Rom. 1:3), the destiny of Israel is crucial for the whole sweep of history as Paul sees it. It may be that an anti-semitic tendency has sometimes affected the exegesis of Romans 9-11, especially when this section of Paul's treatise is relegated to the status of a parenthesis in his argument. But for Paul Israel's advantage as recipient of the oracles of God is clear (Rom. 3:1, 2; cp. Jesus' own statement that salvation is of the Jews, John 4:22).³ These oracles had constantly predicted a glorious future for Israel in the messianic age. It would be obvious to Paul, though it is far from obvious or even acceptable to modern readers whose tradition has schooled them otherwise, that Israel must return to her God. How and when this is destined to occur is the subject of the “mystery,” i.e., God's purpose now disclosed through the Spirit and treated by Paul in Romans 9-11. Romans 11:26 concludes with the confident assertion that a future collective

²Cp. James Dunn's remark that “it surely cannot still be maintained that ‘a necessary implication of Christ's Lordship is that Paul believed in Christ's preexistence and in the Incarnation,’” citing Cranfield, “Comments,” 274-275, *Word Biblical Commentary, Romans 9-16*, 1988, 608.

³A striking example of Christian anti-semitism is found in Luther's threat: “If I find a Jew to baptize, I shall lead him to the Elbe bridge, hang a stone around his neck and push him into the water, baptizing him in the name of Abraham” (*Tischrede*, No. 1795). Calvin's bias is demonstrated in his commentary by his accusation that the disciples were in gross error when they expected the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel in Acts 1:6 (cp. Luke 24:21).

conversion of “all Israel” is to be expected, coincident with the reappearance of the Messiah.⁴ Until then, with the exception of individual Israelites who become believers in the present age, Israel is suffering “blindness in part” (11:25), but only until the full quota of Gentiles has come to faith in the Messiah. Whereupon “all Israel”—evidently in this context and according to the whole drift of Paul’s argument, all *national* Israel and not the present “spiritual” Israel of the church (cp. Gal. 6:16)—will turn to Jesus for salvation (11:26). This does not mean that there are two ways of salvation involving Christian and Jewish covenants. It is simply that in the divine plan a final repentance of historical Israel collectively is expected in accordance with Hebrew prophecy.

Within this important framework, which has been obscured by the anti-eschatological bias of much commentary,⁵ we approach Romans 10:6-17. Paul has just repeated his earnest desire for the salvation of his Israelite brethren (10:1; cp. 9:1-3). He complains that Israel is not lacking in religious zeal, but it is a zeal which tragically ignores the claims of Jesus. They have not, therefore, submitted themselves to the “righteousness of God,” which is God’s outreach to provide salvation from sin and death on the sole basis of faith in Messiah Jesus. Israel is still under the delusion that the Torah, apart from Christ to whom paradoxically that very Torah was meant to point (3:21), can save them.

In Romans 10:6-17 Paul embarks on an illuminating discussion of the process of salvation, for Jew or Gentile, providing additional essential keys to his whole discussion in chapters 1-8. He concludes by giving us an important summary statement of how faith “works.” Faith has its origin in “hearing” or the “report” (*ex akoues*), and that “hearing” in turn is traced to the saving effect of the message of Messiah (*dia rhematos christou*). Paul then continues his argument (10:18 - 11:32) by pointing to the tragedy of Israel’s present failure to heed the saving message. Yet he sees a time coming when that blindness will be removed (11:26).

⁴By “all Israel” we need not necessarily understand “every Israelite.” A typical passage predicting the restoration of Israel is found in Micah 2:12, where an equation is made between “all Israel” and the eschatological “remnant of Israel.”

⁵Three views of the meaning of “all Israel” in Romans 11:26 have been proposed:

(a) Spiritual Israel now (Augustine, Luther, Calvin).

(b) Elect Jews in the Church now (Bengel, Olshausen).

(c) The future conversion of national Israelites, following the conversion of Gentiles, at the end-time. (De Wette, Hodge, Sanday and Headlam in ICC, etc.). *The Thornapple Commentary on Romans*, by W.G.T. Shedd, reprinted by Baker Book-house, 1980, 348, states simply, “The last is the correct view.”

Chapter 12:1ff. continues with a detailed exhortation to Christian conduct, “I beseech you, therefore, brothers and sisters. . . .”

We propose the following translation from the Greek of Romans 10:6-17:

But the righteousness which arises from faith speaks thus: Do not say in your heart, who will go up to heaven, that is, to bring Messiah down? Or who will go down the abyss, that is, to bring Christ up from the dead? The message is near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the message of faith which we are proclaiming publicly; that if you confess the Lord Jesus with your mouth and if you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made leading to salvation. For Scripture says, “Everyone who is a believer in him will not be disgraced”; for there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. For the same Lord is rich to all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on one in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe him whom they have not heard [preaching]? And how can they hear unless someone heralds [the message]? And how can they herald [the message] unless they are divinely commissioned? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of the ones announcing the Good News about the good things [coming].” But not all have responded to the Good News. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who believed our report?” Faith, then, is produced by hearing, and hearing is mediated by Messiah’s message.

Our approach both in the translation and exegesis of this passage attempts to take note of a fundamentally important principle enunciated by James Dunn:⁶

The first task of exegesis is to penetrate as far as possible inside the historical context(s) of the author and of those for whom he wrote. So much of this involves the taken-for-granted of both author and addressees. Where a modern reader is unaware of (or unsympathetic to) these shared assumptions and concerns it will be impossible to hear the text as the author intended it to be heard (and assumed it would be heard). In this case [Romans] a major part of the context is the self-understanding of Jews and Judaism in the first century and of the Gentiles sympathetic to Judaism. Since most of Christian history and scholarship, regrettably, has been unsympathetic to that self-understanding, if not downright hostile to it, a proper appreciation of Paul in his interaction with that self-understanding has been virtually impossible.

⁶*Word Biblical Commentary, Romans 9-16*, xv.

The same caveat is offered to exegetes by F.V. Filson:

The primary kinship of the New Testament is not with this Gentile environment, but rather with the Jewish heritage and environment. . . . We are often led by our traditional creeds and theology to think in terms dictated by Gentile and especially Greek concepts. The New Testament's kinship is primarily and overwhelmingly with Judaism and the Old Testament. . . . The New Testament speaks always with disapproval and usually with blunt denunciation of Gentile cults and philosophies. It agrees essentially with the Jewish indictment of the pagan world.⁷

I. THE MESSAGE OF FAITH

In Romans 10:6 we take up Paul's argument at a point where he begins to elaborate again on the central theme of his entire treatise in Romans, "the righteousness of faith." With the word "righteousness," we should not forget a typical Old Testament context. We are reminded of Isaiah 45:8, where mention is made of righteousness as a description of the eschatological salvation of Israel in the new age. When the skies "pour down righteousness," the earth will experience "salvation." It should not immediately be thought, with much traditional exegesis, that Paul has abandoned the "concrete" meaning of salvation in the prophets. While certainly for Paul the repeated use of "righteousness" in Romans designates God's giving and sustaining a renewed covenant relationship with Him, the process is fully accomplished only in the eschatological future. Then immortality will be conferred on believers and they will be saved from the coming wrath (Rom. 5:9). Then the physical creation will rejoice at the manifestation of the sons of God (Rom. 8:19).

Since the arrival of the new possibility of salvation in Christ, righteousness is no longer to be confined within national and ritual limits. This does not, however, mean that it is to be divorced from its worldwide territorial context as given by the prophets. We may not instinctively relate to the "millennial" hopes of the prophets. There is nothing, however, to indicate that Paul has abandoned them. They are part of the "furniture" of the belief-system of Apostolic Christianity which cannot be set aside without altering the quality of the message itself.

Significantly, Paul's quotation of Deuteronomy 30:12-14 in Romans 10:6-8 omits the last three words of verse 14. Paul intends to shift the

⁷*The New Testament Against Its Environment*, SCM Press, 1950, 26.

emphasis from works to faith: "The word is very near to you, in your mouth, and in your heart *to do it*." Moreover, it is not, as in Deuteronomy, the commandment which is neither too far off nor too difficult, but Christ and the word of the gospel, "the message of faith which we are proclaiming publicly."⁸

We should not, however, draw the contrast between law and faith too sharply. Paul has frequently alluded to the Old Testament in his explanation of the "law of faith" (3:21; 4:1ff; 7:1ff). We may say, therefore, that the law of faith, properly understood in its relation to Christ, is the law of righteousness. The commandment of the Old Testament is not at fault, but it is misunderstood when conceived as a "law of works" apart from faith in Messiah. The original word of God has not failed (9:6); it has found its true meaning in the obedience of faith. (Does this not correspond to Jesus' own statement in Matthew 5:17 that he came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it?) From the heart man is to respond to the commandment given in Christ. That commandment is the message of faith delivered in the apostolic proclamation.

Studies in Judaism show that the commandment of Deuteronomy 30:11 had been compared to divine wisdom (Bar. 3:29, 30). Philo refers to it as "the good." The suggestion that the commandment was "in heaven" or "beyond the sea" pointed to a cosmic dimension appropriately fulfilled in the gospel of Christ. The exaltation of Christ alluded to in the reference to bringing him down from heaven and his resurrection—bringing him up from the abyss—neatly coincided with the Deuteronomy text and facilitated the comparison. The commandment in Deuteronomy, now understood in the light of the gospel, calls for a feasible obedience from the heart based on faith in God's plan of restoration.

Confession of Jesus' lordship and belief in his resurrection (v. 9) lie at the heart of belief in what God has done and what He is doing, and, it should be added, what He will yet do to complete the salvation process. That Jesus is Lord (1 Cor. 8:6; Phil. 2:11) does not mean that he is God, but rather God's agent, the Lord Messiah of Psalm 110:1 so often quoted in the New Testament. It is important to establish what status is intended for Jesus when he is confessed as "Lord." Ziesler is right to remind us that:

Paul ascribes divine functions to Jesus. He nowhere says that he *is* God without qualification. . . . Certainly Paul can transfer to Christ some Old

⁸An interchange between the "commandment" and "word" of Jesus is found also in John's Gospel (John 14:15, 21, 23, 24).

Testament statements about Yahweh (e.g., Phil. 2:10), but equally he seems to draw back from equating Jesus with God purely and simply.⁹

That God raised Jesus anchors faith in the historical event without which there is no story to tell (1 Cor. 15:17). Belief in the resurrection is, of course, central to all New Testament teaching. Paul's point here is that the conviction that God raised Jesus must move first from the mouth of the preacher to the convert and then from the latter's heart to his mouth. So the Good News is propagated.

It is not hard to recognize that Paul's creative use of the Old Testament to speak of the gospel aims both at confirming the believers and involving his fellow countrymen, who have largely rejected their Messiah. Romans 10:11 introduces the same quotation which Paul had used in 9:33. It is a quotation of Isaiah 28:16 which commends faith in the Lord (Yahweh), now to be read as faith in Yahweh's unique agent, Christ. The insertion of "all" enables Paul to remind us that the Law had always envisaged the nations becoming part of Israel's covenant. No one is excluded from the invitation to faith. The resurrection and exaltation of Christ made that possibility a reality. The Law had always encouraged faith in the one who gave it. But faith is now to be directed toward Christ and his message, as the one appointed as Lord of God's saving program.

Paul makes the same point positively. In calling on the Lord the believer now finds salvation in the Lord Jesus, who represents God. Once again there is room for both Jew and Gentile, for "all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved" (v. 13). Careful note should be taken of the future (*sothesetai*), which makes salvation, as nearly always in Paul's writings, the end of a process beginning now (cp. Rom. 13:11). Paul appropriately has the Joel (2:32, LXX) text in mind with its promise that "in Mount Zion and Jerusalem there shall be one who is rescued (*anasozomenos*)" and "they who receive Good News (*evangelizomenoi*), whom the Lord has summoned (*prokekletai*)." This Old Testament language provides the stock vocabulary for Paul's description of salvation: "calling," "being evangelized," "being saved." Paul has not abandoned the Old Testament framework of messianic salvation. He still expects the Day of the Lord and rescue from wrath at that time. He also expects the Kingdom which the prophets saw as the sequel to the Day of the Lord. All this is indeed part of the "taken-for-granted" which Paul had

⁹Paul's Letter to the Romans, SCM Press, 1989, 239, 262.

earlier conveyed to his converts when, as Luke so persistently says, Paul preached the Good News about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31; cp. Acts 8:12).

II. THE PROCESS OF SALVATION

In verse 14 Paul moves to the heart of the issue. How is the process of salvation to be initiated? How can one call on someone in whom one has not believed? The rhetorical question implies that such a thing is impossible. A second question confirms the point. "How can they believe in him whom they have not heard [preaching]?"

With this question Paul attests to the continuity of his saving message with the proclamation originally made by Jesus himself. It is proper to translate *akouein* with the following genitive as "to hear someone (preaching)" and not "to hear of (someone)," since *akouein* is normally followed by a direct objective in the genitive case.¹⁰ Christ's own proclamation must be heard. The *rhema Christou* is the indispensable stimulus for faith, and it takes us back not only to Messiah's own message, but back to the prophets' announcement of salvation (Isa. 61:1; Joel 2:1; Zeph. 3:14, 15; Zech. 9:9; Isa. 52:7). The message of Jesus is relayed by apostles and evangelists who are his own commissioned agents. The content of their common proclamation is the Kingdom of God. In view of his constant reliance on the Hebrew Scriptures for the framework of his theology, Paul then appeals (v. 15) to Isaiah 52:7: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring Good Tidings, who publish peace, who bring Good Tidings of good, who publish salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'"

It is clear from the Jewish Targum that the latter phrase is to be understood as a promise of the manifestation of the Kingdom of God. Despite the present invasion of the evil age by the Spirit of God, Paul still expects the great messianic salvation of the age to come and strains towards it in hope. This is only to say that Paul has not parted company with Jesus' and John the Baptist's original call to repentance based on the imminent Day of the Lord which would usher in the Kingdom (Matt. 3:2, 7; Mark 1:14, 15).

In verse 16 we find Paul lamenting the obvious failure of Israel to respond to the message by which God invites them back into covenant relationship. In the last verse of our passage (Rom. 10:17) we reach a basic

¹⁰Sanday and Headlam, *ICC on Romans*, T & T Clark, 1905, 296.

statement about the provenance of genuine saving faith. “So, then, faith comes from hearing and hearing is mediated by the Message of Messiah.” This brings Paul to the conclusion of his logical train of thought. We learn that faith, to be effective, must be rooted in an intelligent hearing of the gospel as Christ preached it and continues to preach it through his commissioned agents. Thus the whole Christian venture may be summarized as a response to “the Message of faith which we are proclaiming” (verse 8).

III. A CHALLENGE TO CONTEMPORARY EVANGELISM

This passage in Romans is of particular interest as a challenge to modern versions of the “gospel.” Paul holds, in common with all the New Testament writers, a conviction that the transaction between preacher and hearer must be guarded against all attempts to alter its terms. Any perversion of the saving message will produce a defective convert who has not properly appropriated God’s invitation to salvation. No wonder, then, that in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 we find Paul thanking God in terms reminiscent of our passage: “When you received the word of the report [*logos akoes*] from us, you received it not as a message from man, but as what it truly is—God’s message, which is indeed effectively at work in you, the believers.”

It is fatally easy for modern Gentiles to reduce the message of salvation to terms dictated by an anti-eschatological bias mediated to us by the intrusion of post-biblical ideas. The conceptual shift into Greek categories of thought which the church underwent as early as the second century eventually led to a loss of the apocalyptic framework within which the whole New Testament works. This had a direct bearing on the content of the Christian message as Paul (and Jesus before him) understood it. Modern readers do not always adequately “read between the lines” of Paul’s letters to discern what is presupposed by him, but not necessarily by us. This is because our traditions have not taught us to think apocalyptically, that is, with a sense of the ultimate goal and point of salvation at the end-time. Indeed, the biblical term “end-time” is often misrepresented by commentators as “the end of time.” However, Paul does not expect time to end at the end of the age. What follows is the new age of the manifested Kingdom of God on earth. Such a hope is none other than the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham that he will inherit the land forever (Gen. 13:15; 17:8; cp. Heb. 11:8-10). To this Paul refers in passing

in Romans 4:13 as the promise to Abraham that he will “inherit the world.” It would have been obvious that the inheritance of the land would imply the greater inheritance of the world as the Kingdom of God extended its power over the whole earth. Henry Alford’s comment is helpful:

The inheritance of the world is not the possession of Canaan merely . . . but that ultimate Lordship over the whole world which Abraham, as the father of the faithful in all peoples, and Christ, as the seed of the promise shall possess.¹¹

The same expectation that the promise to Abraham still awaits fulfillment is taken for granted by Jesus when he commends the meek who will “inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5).

Our passage weighs heavily in favor of Paul’s strongly messianic and apocalyptic understanding of salvation. The point may be made at the most fundamental level by stating that Paul’s gospel message is the same as Jesus’ message of the Kingdom of God. (The same presupposition that the gospel message began with Jesus’ own preaching in Galilee is found in Heb. 2:1-3. Cp. Acts 10:34-36; 1 Tim. 6:3; 2 John 9.) Evidence for this common proclamation is provided by Luke in his record of the content of Paul’s (and others’) preaching. Just as Jesus always preached the Kingdom of God (Luke 4:43; 8:1, etc.; Acts 1:3), so did Paul (Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). In Romans he has been developing that message by showing us how we are to respond to God’s gracious outreach. Because the term “Kingdom” does not appear so frequently, there is no reason to believe that Paul has created a new gospel. Kingdom language appears less frequently in Paul than in the Synoptics. Yet he takes it for granted that entrance into the Kingdom of God is the goal of salvation (1 Cor. 6:10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5). He believes also that one can be proleptically transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of the Son even now (Col. 1:13). Thus the Spirit which Christians receive is a downpayment of a much greater participation in the Spirit to be received not at death, but at the *parousia*. The Spirit is, in fact, “the Spirit of the promise [made to Abraham]” (Eph. 1:13, 14. Cp. Rom. 4:13).

Romans 10:6-17 can guard us against the mistake of reducing the content of the apostolic gospel to belief in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul’s summary statements, which have been used as “proof-texts” to exclude the future dimension in the gospel (e.g., 1 Cor.

¹¹*Greek New Testament, Vol. II*, London: Rivingtons, 1861, 351.

15:1-4), do not cover all the ground as a description of what he preached. Bultmann is right to point out that when Paul summarizes the faith,

Now the one statement, now the other can be made, or the saving event may be described in other terms, or in more detail; but it is always the whole which is meant. "So we preach and so you believed," says Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:11 with reference to the gospel, to which it appertains *as of first importance* [*en protois*, v. 3] that Christ died for our sins, was buried and was raised on the third day and declared himself to be the risen one.¹²

In Romans 10:13 Paul states that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." He did not, however, mean to contradict the Lord's statement that "*Not* everyone who calls me 'Lord, Lord,' will be saved" (Matt. 7:21). Nor did he imply that baptism was unnecessary as part of the saving process. Moreover, he would have insisted on repentance and belief in the Kingdom of God as a *sine qua non* of faith (i.e., following the tradition of Jesus who initiated his ministry in Galilee with the same message, Mark 1:14, 15).

IV. PAUL'S APOCALYPTIC GOSPEL

In our passage a number of facts point strongly to the Kingdom orientation of Paul's understanding of the gospel. Firstly, Christ is associated with the gospel. This seems obvious, but the point should not be missed that there is no need to bring Christ down from heaven because his message, the message he had proclaimed, lives on in the ministry of the apostles as the "message of faith which we are proclaiming." How, indeed, can one believe in one whom he has not heard preaching? For Paul, exposure to Christ's own gospel message provides the essential link with the saving information which mediates the power of the Spirit. Again, "hearing comes by contact with the message of Messiah." So Fitzmeyer renders *rhema christou* in Romans 10:17.¹³ The genitive should not be limited to the objective sense, "the message about Christ." It is also a subjective genitive, "the message which Christ himself proclaimed." There must be no loss of Christ's own gospel if preaching is to be true to the apostolic witness.

¹²"Faith," in *Bible Key Words from G. Kittel's Theologisches Worterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Bultmann and Weiser, A & C Black, London, 1961, 71.

¹³Cited by Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 629.

Secondly, when Paul thinks of the gospel he works out of Isaiah 52:7. As Dunn says,

The message is one of assurance to Jerusalem of the Lord's mercy, of God's deliverance of his people for all the world to see. And probably at this time the passage was understood eschatologically, as a reference to the age to come, when God would reverse Israel's inferior and oppressed state. This eschatological note may also be seen in the word "timely" [rendered in our versions as "beautiful"] with its overtones of the harvest season.¹⁴

The New Testament has not lost sight of that hope (Acts 1:6; Luke 24:21). Disparagement of such "Jewish" aspirations comes from later commentary, not from Jesus or the apostles, who continue to look for the restoration promised by the prophets as the sequel to the return of Christ (Luke 22:28-30; Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21).

To say that Paul's good news is the good news of God's eschatological act in Christ is true, but too often eschatology becomes "over-realized" and thus completely truncated, with nothing left for the Christian's future but to disappear to heaven as a disembodied soul. When this collapsed eschatological scheme is then read into Paul, serious misunderstandings of his intention occur. Paul's gospel, as we see elsewhere in Romans, looks for a new world in which the sons of God will be manifested (8:19-21). The message of the prophets everywhere looks forward to the dénouement of the messianic drama *on earth*, not to a far-off "heavenly home." Such is the eschatological hope contained in the "message of faith which we are proclaiming." It corresponds precisely with what the writer to the Hebrews calls "the inhabited world to come about which we speak" (Heb. 2:5), and to Jesus' own promise of inheritance in the future Kingdom of God which is equated with inheriting the earth (Matt. 5:3, 5). A passing reference to future rulership in the Kingdom is found in Romans 5:17, "shall reign in life." As Ziesler says, "The future tense indicates that such life properly belongs to the future."¹⁵

An essential element of the original Christian gospel is lost when no definition is given of the apocalyptic messianic goal which Paul expected. J.C. Beker points out that:

The abiding center of Paul's gospel is the conviction that the death and resurrection of Christ have opened up a new future for the world. This

¹⁴Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 629.

¹⁵*Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 150.

future climaxes in the reign of God as that event that will bring the created order to its glorious destiny according to God's promises.¹⁶

The promises made to Abraham are renewed and confirmed in Christ (Rom. 4:13; 15:8). Speaking of the promise of the inheritance of the world given to Abraham (Rom. 4:13), Matthew Black reminds us that "the words have messianic overtones; the promise was that through one of these descendants [of Abraham] the whole earth would be blessed, and through him Abraham's seed would enjoy world-wide dominion."¹⁷ (Cp. 1 Cor. 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26; 3:21; 20:4-6.) The promises, in other words, pertain to the yet future public manifestation of the Kingdom of God. This hope provides the essential driving force of Paul's proclamation.

In much contemporary preaching, however, the expectation of a future apocalypse is omitted. Often the neo-apocalypticism of the Hal Lindsay type is used by others as an excuse to discredit the whole of biblical Messianism. But the spiritualizing of the eschatological promise leaves the structures of history untouched. It is only too obvious that the Kingdom of God is not manifested world wide, that the nations have not beaten their swords into plowshares. In fact, the churches which claim to follow Jesus persist, with notable exceptions, in countenancing the participation of their members in international warfare. The result is that believers threaten the lives of their fellow believers. This is inevitable as long as Christians do not distance themselves from the machinery of violence. It is a hollow pretense to maintain that the Kingdom of God is demonstrated by believers in advance of its full manifestation, as long as Christians continue to behave in the same way as the world. But how few have given up the "right" to kill.

Faith, in Romans, frequently takes on the character of hope—hope for "the freedom of the glory of the children of God," which is the same as the coming "manifestation of the sons of God." This event should not be "reinterpreted" as the individual's triumph at death. It is to be the cosmic defeat of all hostile forces at the *parousia*. For this great Day of deliverance the believer is to wait, endure, and struggle. This is Paul's constant theme. And it is only a logical outworking of his appropriation of Jesus' own announcement of messianic salvation (Mark 1:14, 15; Luke 4:43, etc.).

¹⁶*Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel*, Fortress Press, 1982, 29.

¹⁷*Romans*, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1973, 78.

The critical importance of Romans for us today lies in its power to reform our own mini-theologies and bring them into line with the gospel as Jesus and the apostles proclaimed it. We have lost a great portion of the grand scope and sweep of apostolic faith. William Wrede's comments from 1904 deserve to be taken to heart:

The whole Pauline conception of salvation is characterized by suspense which strains forward toward the final release. . . . In this connection we should keep before our minds with special clearness a fact which, indeed, when we are dealing with Paul ought never to be forgotten. He believed with all his might in the speedy coming of Christ and the approaching end of the world. In consequence, the redemptive act of Christ, which lay in the past, and the dawn of the future glory, lay in his view, close together. . . . It has been popularly held that Paul departed from the view of salvation of the early Church by shifting the stress from the future to the past, looking upon the blessedness of the Christian as already attained, and emphasizing faith instead of hope. It is easy to see that this is but a half truth. All references to the redemption as a completed transaction swing around at once into utterances about the future. . . . *There are deep differences between the Pauline doctrine of redemption and the thoughts of modern belief.*¹⁸

Confession of Jesus' resurrection (Rom. 10:9) is itself a confession of apocalyptic salvation, since Christ's resurrection anticipates the resurrection of the faithful at the *parousia*. Even the apocalyptic program involving the appearance of the Man of sin forms an integral part of the gospel as told by Paul (2 Thes. 2:5). The rich colors of the Pauline gospel have been turned into vague tones of grey in much contemporary preaching. We must decisively reject the notion that Paul's apocalyptic gospel is a time-conditioned optional extra. It is in fact the substance of Messiah's own message of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:19), and the "message of faith which we are proclaiming" (Rom. 10:8). Contact with that message is essential for the generation of saving faith (Rom. 10:17).

¹⁸*Paul*, Eng. Trans., Edward Lummis, London: Philip Green, 1987, 105-6, 111, emphasis added.