

Finding Purpose in the Christ Event:  
Re-Contextualizing Paul's Theology for The Triumph of God

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## Introduction

Christianity has long faced a problem that threatens the very heart of its existence. It is an inevitable problem, one that cannot be resolved by means of historical study, interfaith dialogue, or even reflective prayer and meditation. The Christian tradition has found it difficult to understand because it cannot be stopped. It is the problem of time. Some two thousand years have passed since the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth and the establishment of Christian theology. As with any tradition spanning ages such as this, questions of authenticity and historical truth arise. But there is no surprise in them being asked since nearly two billion people profess the Christian faith today, accounting for thirty-three percent of all religious adherents in the world.<sup>1</sup> Their inquiries are necessary for their convictions, as it may become difficult to accept the entirety of this faith without questioning the foundation of its theology. It would be devastating to Christianity if a discovery was made revealing a doctrine based upon fabricated truth. That is, faith cannot afford to be wrong, because it is a question of eternity. Therefore, it has always been and will continue to be imperative for Christians to know the historical truth about their religion, as it offers explanation and guidance for understanding the tradition. In all consideration, the two greatest contributors to this tradition are undeniably Jesus of Nazareth and Paul the Apostle. Thus, discussion of these figures seems necessary in the attempt to identify historical truth within Christianity.

Christian theologians have long talked about the life and times of Jesus of Nazareth. Whether he simply was a man with the divine ability to perform miracles or whether he was a supernatural being disguised as a Galilean carpenter, believers and non-

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<sup>1</sup> Unknown, Major Religions of the World Ranked By Adherents, 6 September 2002, [http://www.adherents.com/Religions\\_By\\_Adherents.html](http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html) (29 February 2004).

believers alike rightfully debate the identity of Jesus. On one side, though exceptional he proved to be, Christians tends to overlook the fact that Jesus was a young Jewish man of his time, whose mortality was revealed through crucifixion. He lived a human life and died a mortal's death. Conversely, arguments can be made proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God. Christian doctrine describes his historical significance, citing action and portraying evidence of a divine existence. Though controversial these arguments may be, no person can deny the fact that Jesus of Nazareth lived as a human being in a certain time and place within history. Therefore, it is of extreme importance to examine Jesus within the context of his time, pulling him out of the mythical eternity Christianity has placed him in, and reinserting him into the historical situation that influenced his message.

The same is true for Paul the Apostle. There is no greater necessity for Christianity than placing Paul within the context of his time. He was not only the most prominent and influential interpreter of the Christ event, but was also a major contributor in the development of the Christian Church. Aside from Jesus himself, he is without a doubt the most recognizable figure in the Christian tradition. Without him Christianity quite possibly might not exist today. His letters account for nearly one fourth of all New Testament scripture and in many ways subsequent Christian theology has repeatedly been the reinterpretation of his gospel. Paul presented a religious model that challenged early Jewish Christianity and offered interpretations of the Christ event, professing that Jesus of Nazareth was the living Son of God, and the promised messiah to Israel whose death and resurrection marked the end of sin and the beginning of a new era within history.

This very theology has caused religious scholars to continue to try to understand the life and works of Paul nearly two thousand years later.

Upon knowing the significance of Jesus of Nazareth and Paul the Apostle in the Christian religion, understanding their theologies in their authentic nature becomes necessary for Christianity. But what if Christianity practiced a theology different from the one established by Paul? Would it still be an authentic faith? This essay will explore the theology of Christianity in light of its historical context, examining whether it has significantly shifted from the doctrine established during the lifetime of Paul the Apostle. Moreover, my thesis seeks to expose the non-authentic beliefs of popular Christianity through a re-contextualization of Paul's theology. Reinserting the apostle into his historical context will expose a problem residing in popular Christianity. It is a crisis that all Christians should be concerned with as they may be practicing a religion diverged from Paul's gospel.

## 1. Historical Context, Eschatology, and Paul's Coherent Center

Jesus of Nazareth lived a brief and tragic life from about 4 B.C.E. to 30 C.E. During this time, Judaism was going through drastic social and political transformation that affected all citizens of Israel in one form or another. No single person could totally remove him or herself from the influence of reform, including Jesus. The time in which he preached, probably from 28 to 30 C.E., followed two hundred years of struggle and revolt. This time period framed one of the most innovative eras in Western religious and intellectual history. It not only reshaped Judaism and launched Christianity, but also formed the notion of eschatology,<sup>2</sup> that is, the idea of an end time. Ultimately, this radical shift of Jewish thought to an eschatological ideal came to dominate Jesus' lifetime by affecting both the content delivered through his gospel and how people heard and interpreted that message.

Just as Jesus' lifetime was dominated by the mood of eschatology, Paul too lived in the era following years of violent revolution in Israel where the idea of the apocalypse<sup>3</sup> entered history. His epistles appeared only twenty years after the death of Jesus. Consequently, the reality of eschatology affecting Jesus also influenced the basis of Paul's thought. His letters evidence this thinking through their underlying language and

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<sup>2</sup> Eschatology is a Greek term meaning "the discourse about last things" or "the exposition of the end times," typically refers to the Judeo Christian doctrine of the coming of the kingdom of God and the transformation or transcendence of history.

<sup>3</sup> Apocalypse refers to the cataclysmic ending of the world when God will ultimately reign over His creation. It originated from Jewish authors during a time when the people of ancient Israel were caught in a struggle that caused them to adopt an eschatological mood. Ultimately this mood shaped their expectation for the end of the world through the coming of a promised deliverance.



coherent theme of writing. As J. Christiaan Beker states, "Understanding Paul, then, means understanding the relationship between tradition and interpretation in his thought."<sup>4</sup> He was an eschatological successor of the prophets whose Jewish heritage rooted itself within his gospel and therefore within the heart of Christianity as well. Therefore, understanding eschatology is crucial in the re-contextualization of Paul's theology.

In explaining the importance of eschatology in relation to Paul, one must first come to understand how it came to be part of Jewish thought. The transformation of Judaism (around the time of Jesus) to an eschatological mood shaped Jewish expectation for the end of the world. As a result of Jewish historical struggle, Israel moved away from the hope of divine intervention within history and began hoping for a catastrophic end to history. That is, Israel adopted eschatology and the imaginative belief in an apocalypse. God would erase Israel's decline in history by destroying the sinful world and creating a new realm wherein the just would find their eternal reward. This thought of the coming apocalypse is what theologians such as Beker consider being the inspiration for Paul's writing. He believes that Paul's theology can be deciphered by its use of language to reveal a coherent apocalyptic theme. Beker claims Paul viewed the Christ event as both the end and beginning of history. More precisely, he states that Paul saw it as the end of sinful existence and the beginning of a new era in time promised to Israel by God. The death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ event as seen by Paul, initiated the final episode of history. Ultimately, the redeeming power of Christ would be actualized through the salvation of humankind. Glory was to be given to God,

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<sup>4</sup> Christiaan Beker, Paul The Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 109.

the author and perfecter of this salvation, as He readied His people for the coming apocalypse. The fullness of God's eternal plan was to be realized through Christ as he expiated sin and triumphed over the bonds of death.<sup>5</sup>

J. Christiaan Beker, whose ideas were briefly mentioned above, is one of the most influential and prominent authors in the discussion of Paul's eschatology. In his book, Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought, Beker seeks to examine Paul's theology to address two fundamental questions. The author writes,

This study attempts to move toward an understanding of 'the whole Paul' by focusing on two fundamental questions. What is the coherent theme of Paul's thought and what is the texture of his hermeneutic? I posit the triumph of God as the coherent theme of Paul's gospel; that is, the hope in the dawning victory of God and in the imminent redemption of the created order, which he has inaugurated in Christ. Moreover, I claim that Paul's hermeneutic translates the apocalyptic theme of the gospel into the contingent particularities of the human situation.<sup>6</sup>

In light of these expectations, Beker moves forward in his examination of Paul, knowing the apostle's ability to correlate the consistent theme of the gospel to its contingent relevance is what uniquely set him apart in contribution to early Christian thought. In his book, extensive research was conducted, breaking down Paul's language in the context for which he was writing. Beker's study demonstrates the importance of recognizing eschatology in order to understand fully the message of Paul's gospel. He declared that Paul understood the Christ event within the eternal triumph of God.<sup>7</sup> That is, Paul's gospel was written to assist in the recognition and interpretation of the Christ event as a

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 359.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 356.

means of glorifying God through the apocalypse. Contextually speaking, Paul believed that God's triumph was to be realized at the end of time, during the apocalypse, where all glory would be given to him. Beker centralizes this coherent theme of the triumph of God in Paul's gospel by locating it in his apocalyptic worldview. This view is affirmed and modified by the resurrection of Christ.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Beker argues that Paul's thought is anchored in the apocalyptic worldview and that the resurrection of Christ can only be understood in that setting.<sup>9</sup> "The coherent center of Paul's gospel is constituted by the apocalyptic interpretation of the Christ-event."<sup>10</sup>

In regard to the sources shaping Paul's eschatological views, Beker suggests that, "Paul's apocalyptic conviction was not initiated by his conversion to Christ but formed the background of his Pharisaic world view."<sup>11</sup> That is, Beker attributes the apocalyptic theme of Paul's writing to his Jewish background. He finds the theme to be very evident throughout all Pauline letters, from the earliest letter (1 Thessalonians) to the latest (Philippians). Stemming from this understanding, Beker notes, "Apocalyptic is not a peripheral curiosity for Paul but the central climate and focus of his thought, as it was for most early Christian thinkers."<sup>12</sup>

Beker also takes note of transformations in the traditional components of the apocalyptic as Paul modified it in accordance to the Christ event. He cites several

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 144.

modifications in comparison to the traditional writings of Jewish apocalyptic literature found in 4 Ezra, the Apocalypse of Baruch, and the Qumran. One major difference is the lack of traditional apocalyptic terminology in Paul's letters conjoining "this age" with "the age to come." Moreover, Paul does not employ apocalyptic timetables, accounts of demons and angels, or descriptions of the architecture of heaven. The author notes, "The major apocalyptic forces are, for him, those ontological powers that determine the human situation within the context of God's created order and comprise the 'field' of death, sin, the law, and the flesh."<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, for Beker, the reduction of apocalyptic terminology and the absence of apocalyptic speculation indicate that the Christ event has strongly modified the dualistic structure of normal apocalyptic thought.<sup>14</sup> That is, the relationship of the "already" or "this age" and the "not yet" or "the age yet to come."

In speaking of the Christ-event as being modified, Beker notes Paul's interpretation of the crucifixion as being a fulfillment of God's eternal and cosmic plan. That is, Beker realizes Paul's coherent theme in writing and theology is the triumph of God. Unveiling this theme answered one of the two questions Beker posed from the beginning of his research. Beker writes,

Whereas the Pauline gospel come to speech via various hermeneutical moves in the particularity of the human context, its coherent center focuses on the triumph of God. This theme gives Paul's gospel its dynamic explosive character and future horizon. His theology is not contemplative or mystic, for it does not reach its goal until it climaxes in the celebration of God's final glory, that is, in that order of shalom and righteousness that God inaugurated in Christ.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 145.

As Beker sought to address the question of coherency and the triumph of God, he uncovered a problem pertaining to the relationship between God and Jesus as the Christ. Through his study, Beker understood Paul's gospel to be a God centered theology giving triumph to God through the apocalyptic. Moreover, he discovered that history moved away from this apocalyptic understanding of Paul's gospel, conveying non-apocalyptic interpretations of the Christ event. Beker notes, "The process from theology to Christology and from apocalyptic expectation to a form of Christomonism is evident in church history."<sup>15</sup> Ultimately, this digression has severed the relationship once present between God and Christ that gave glory to God through the Christ event. According to Beker, this was supposed be a moment in history intended for the triumph God. "In this construal the Christ-event has effectively displaced the event of God's coming glory and has become the center of Christian theology."<sup>16</sup>

Knowing the importance of God's triumph in Beker's study, posing the question of whether the model of Christianity developed through history views the Christ event as God's triumph seems necessary. In all consideration, Beker does not think it does. Thus, in reference to this question, a very significant portion of his writing comes with his discussion of the resurrection being interpreted during non-apocalyptic eras. He speaks of Christology gaining prevalence during these times, portraying an image that exalts Christ and fails to emphasize the fulfilling of God's purpose for His glory. Christology was exalted as the apocalyptic coordinates of the resurrection and the imminence of the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 358.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 355.

Parousia were reinterpreted non-apocalyptically in the post apostolic era.<sup>17</sup> Six occasions were cited by Beker to point out the effects of non-apocalyptic reinterpretations. The first notes that the resurrection now interprets Jesus' life as a closure event that offered final confirmation of his divine status during incarnate life. "And so the 'life of Jesus' becomes a 'foundation story' that occupies the position of the 'center of history' and loses its firm connection with coming kingdom of God and the final resurrection of the dead."<sup>18</sup> That is, non-apocalyptic interpretations of the resurrection shifted its focus away from God and to Jesus, from theological to Christological.

A second occasion focuses on the of identity of Jesus as being the eternal Son of God rather than on being the inaugurator of the final resurrection and the kingdom of God.<sup>19</sup> It centralizes the theme of Jesus as having his own unique person rather than reiterating the theme of being part of God's cosmic plan for salvation. This yet is another occasion ultimately contributing to the transference of glory from God to Christ. A third occasion confirms both the divine preexistence of Christ and his incarnation, developing equivalence between the two. It names the post resurrection Jesus to be divine in the flesh, making the incarnate Jesus divine in flesh as well.<sup>20</sup> Beker notes a fourth occasion in that "the resurrection signifies the exaltation of Christ, whose grace is available

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 157.

through the sacraments of the church, 'the kingdom of Christ,' and whose reign can now be located in the hierarchical offices of the church."<sup>21</sup>

Another significant effect of non-apocalyptic interpretation of the Christ event comes with the fifth occasion listed by Beker. He states that, "the resurrection of the dead becomes an individualistic postmortem immortality and an individualistic 'last ' judgment."<sup>22</sup> Here, emphasis has not only shifted away from God to Jesus, but from God and the cosmos to Jesus and the individual. Salvation becomes "personal" and "individualistic" rather than a moment in time intended for all of God's creation. This transformation also shifts the focus of responsibility regarding who "does" the resurrecting. As Jesus became the incarnate and divine Son of God, language of the self-rising of Jesus began to take form. Jesus was no longer raised by God from the dead but instead "rose" himself from the dead. As this progressed, so did the understanding of who was to be the provider of salvation. Again, emphasis shifted away from God to Jesus Christ, from the "theocentric" to the "Christocentric."

The final occasion cited by Beker relates to the timeliness of expectation found in non-apocalyptic interpretations of the Christ event. Whereas apocalyptic interpretations focus on the urgency of the coming Parousia, non-apocalyptic interpretations do not. They sever the imminent relationship existing between the Parousia and salvation. What was once an urgent hope that encompassed Paul's lifetime became a nonexistent and "unexpected" understanding with the development of personal salvation. "The cosmic resurrection of the dead and the future kingdom of God became a far-off proper

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 157.

'conclusion' to the created order."<sup>23</sup> Upon discussion of each of these six occasions of the effect of non-apocalyptic interpretations of the Christ event, Beker writes,

We conclude that the intrusion of Hellenistic categories in the history of doctrine has pushed aside the apocalyptic coordinates of the resurrection of Christ and the final resurrection of the dead, with the result that the triumph of God through Christ has become solely the triumph of Christ over our personal death, and the kingdom of Christ as present in the church has displaced the expectation of the coming triumph of God over his creation.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, a conflict arises between the Christologically centered perspectives of Christianity developed through history and the theologically based gospel of Paul established in the first century. If one were to assume that Christianity ought to be based upon the authentic theology of Paul, as his interpretation of the Christ event has in many ways become subsequent Christian theology, then Christology separates the means and the ends of Christianity. It has done so, as presented by Beker, through a non-apocalyptic reinterpretation of the Christ event that takes away from the intended triumph of God.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 158.



## 2. Defining the Problem: Popular Christianity and the Two Natures of Jesus

As revealed by Beker, placing Paul's gospel in the context to which it was written reveals not only the essence of his theology, but also a problem residing in popular Christianity. It expresses a contradiction of belief, a hypocritical perspective that attempts to walk on two opposing sides of spirituality. One side of this religious dilemma knows how vital Paul was to the foundation of Christianity, understanding his contribution and declaring his gospel the official doctrine of the Church. He is considered by many to be the father of Christian belief, pioneering the origins of faith through his interpretation of the Christ event. Therefore, for many believers, to be Christian is to practice and uphold the theology established by Paul. On the other side of this spiritual disagreement resides popular Christianity, a system of belief unfamiliar with the roots of its foundation as it stems from a two thousand year old tradition. It proclaims belief in a risen Christ yet knows no purpose or meaning within death and resurrection beyond an egocentric view of personal salvation. As a result, a catastrophic problem exists because popular Christianity cannot claim to be "Christian" if it does not accurately centralize its belief within the true theology of Paul.

When speaking of the problem as being present in popular Christianity, clarification as to what is encompassed by the term "popular" becomes necessary. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines "popular" as being "accepted by or prevalent among the people in general" and/or "of, representing, or carried on by the people at large."<sup>25</sup> *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary* defines

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<sup>25</sup> The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000.

“popular” as “suitable to common people; easy to be comprehended; not abstruse; familiar; plain” and/or “of or pertaining to the common people, or to the whole body of the people, as distinguished from a select portion; as, the popular voice; popular elections.”<sup>26</sup> The definition of “popular” in this paper as pertaining to Christianity incorporates each of these definitions in part. That is, “popular Christianity” will be defined as: Christianity accepted by, representing, or prevalent among the people at large that is easy to comprehend, is familiar, and of the common voice in general.

The definition is motivated by the observation that, if asked whether they were Christian or not, members of the “popular” Christian culture would acknowledge themselves to be Christian, but when questioned about their beliefs, would profess something that only vaguely resembles orthodox Christianity.<sup>27</sup> More directly, popular Christians succumb to be non-authentic to the Christian tradition as they part from orthodox Christian beliefs. Varying concepts of Christian doctrine result as popular beliefs diverge from orthodox teachings, developing popular views of God, Jesus, and the Christ event. Sacred accounts and historical interpretations lose their particularity as the masses reinterpret and/or adjust the events in their own accord to assist their comprehension. Thus, this paper will distinguish between a historical and popular understanding of the Christian tradition. It recognizes that the two are not the same. Moreover, it aspires to focus on those differences, revealing the popular and advocating the historical. And as stated earlier, my thesis seeks to expose these non-authentic beliefs of popular Christianity through a re-contextualization of Paul’s theology.

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<sup>26</sup> Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, Micra, Inc., 1996

<sup>27</sup> Orthodox Christianity is determined by a majority consensus of the clergy of the Christian denominations based on centuries of unchanged doctrine and belief.

The problem presented by my thesis is actually one of synthesis. That is, it is a problem between two people whose identities cannot coexist absolutely. I believe that popular Christianity is caught in a struggle between two persons I have come to define as “Jesus the man of Christology” and “Jesus the man of purpose.” Much to God’s demise, the first has come to dominate Christian tradition. “Jesus the man of Christology” centers himself at the heart of believers, shaping their lives into a testament of Jesus’ life on earth. On the contrary, “Jesus the man of purpose” is somewhat forgotten, an ideology lost in the development of Christianity over the ages. He is the purpose inherent to salvation for the glory of God as noted by the authentic message of Paul’s gospel. Further discussion of these two persons becomes necessary as their incongruence leads to a shift of emphasis in salvation.

I believe that “Jesus the man of Christology” is very apparent in popular Christianity. He is the one Christians look to for moral guidance and inspiration in their daily lives. He is the man actualized by the written accounts of the gospels, testifying human goodness through parables, miracles, and stories. “Jesus the man of Christology” is the human manifestation of Christ as related to, understood, and therefore portrayed by humanity in attempt to comprehend the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Personal relationships are formed with “Jesus the man of Christology” where believers claim he actively participates in their daily lives as a friend upholding spiritual accountability. As an omnipresent being many believe to be equivalent to God Himself, he answers prayers and makes decisions in lives for those who know him. He is present amidst “What Would Jesus Do” bracelets, bumper stickers, and blockbuster movies that portray the Christian lifestyle on a moral continuum. On the grander scheme he is the agent of

political action, serving as reason for war, pacifism, or just cause. "Jesus the man of Christology" is the icon of Christian stereotype recognized by believers and non-believers alike as Lord and personal savior whose death and resurrection atoned the sins of the world.

As the second person in the Christian relationship, "Jesus the man of purpose" is the basis for Paul's theology. He is the event in time that marked a transformation of the ages. A world once enslaved by the bondages of sin became free as "Jesus the man of Purpose" served God through death upon a cross. He was formed the day God created time and became destined within God's eternal plan of the cosmos. Upon God's decision to begin a new ending within time in preparation for an apocalypse, "Jesus the man of Purpose" entered this world and became flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Living a sinless life in the divine body of Jesus of Nazareth, "Jesus the Man of Purpose" became the earthly teacher of goodness, love, and compassion. In accordance the eternal plan of God, "Jesus the Man of Purpose" came to fulfill the promises made to Israel. Through a mortal's death of crucifixion, God took the sinless life of Jesus of Nazareth and completed the purpose of "the word being made flesh" in "Jesus the Man of Purpose." His death marked the end of an old history and the beginning of a new era within time where God's people could receive salvation through the gift of "purpose" in His eternal plan. God then resurrected the body of Jesus of Nazareth, bringing back to Him "Jesus the Man of Purpose" through victory over death. Thus, the gift of salvation, destined for humankind from the beginning by God, became complete as "Jesus the Man of Purpose" fulfilled His purpose as designed by God when he created time.

In regard to society and popular Christianity, "Jesus the Man of Purpose" has no face to be recognized or surname to be called, only a purpose to be understood by those who believe in God's gift of salvation. He is the redeeming power of God's eternal plan that will be actualized during the catastrophic end to history through the apocalypse. His purpose will be fully realized at this time, and no person will fail to understand His cosmic role designed by God. More importantly, He has become the person commonly forgotten by popular Christianity as "Jesus the Man of Christology" comes to dominate the Christian tradition.

The lack of synthesis between the two natures of Jesus has centralized itself through two problems present in the relationship. The first is that "Jesus the Man of Christology" is exclusionary and does not incorporate "Jesus the Man of Purpose" whereas "Jesus the Man of Purpose" does and can include "Jesus the Man of Christology." Second, "Jesus the Man of Christology" has led to the formation of individualistic Christology, as He has become the incarnate Son of God who resurrected Himself from the dead.

In discussion of the first problem, "Jesus the Man of Purpose" incorporates into His person the man of Jesus, that is the Jesus of Nazareth, as he was an actual person during Jewish times. Knowing this man brings into "Jesus the purpose" all the historical teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, but does not let His person come to dominate His purpose. On the other hand, "Jesus the Man of Christology" tells a different story. He does not incorporate "Jesus the Man of Purpose" into His person. He is exclusive in nature, in that Christology does not leave room for God. A Christ-centered theology equalizes Christ to the ranks of God, undermining the omnipotence of God present in a

God-centered theology. Christology can even extend that rank to one above that of God, unfortunately mistaking the order of who created whom and forgetting the historical significance of their relationship.

The second problem found in the synthesis of the two natures of Jesus relates to the incarnation of Jesus as the eternal Son of God claiming importance over His resurrection. That is, the deification of Jesus Christ personified by the name "Son of God" and exemplified by "Jesus the Man of Christology" marks a shift of meaning within the resurrection. What was once a God-centered theocentric gospel transforms to a Christ-centered Christocentric gospel as incarnation shifts focus away from resurrection. As suggested by Beker:

In this context the resurrection of Christ is overshadowed by his incarnation; the resurrection now becomes a closure event that seals the end of the itinerary of the incarnate Son of God. This shift of emphasis from resurrection to incarnation involves a shift away from theocentric to the Christocentric dimension of the gospel.<sup>28</sup>

As an event of closure, this theological understanding of the resurrection being a means to incarnation rather than an act of God for the glory of God points Christianity to a risky direction. The purpose encompassed by "Jesus the Man of Purpose" is lost and "Jesus the Man of Christology" is born. What was once a destined purpose found in Christ and defined by God in service to the cosmic plan of salvation becomes a purpose found through Christ alone as He is named the provider of that salvation. The role of the servant becomes misunderstood within the instructions of the master. As mentioned by Beker:

The church now becomes dangerously identified with the kingdom of Christ (Augustine) as the place where through the sacraments souls are

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<sup>28</sup> Beker, Paul the Apostle, 357.

won for Christ, or it identifies its spheres as separate from the world (the doctrine of two kingdoms), or it begins to compete with the world for imperial glory.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, as Jesus Christ is deified, responsibility within the resurrection itself begins to change. The understanding of who raised whom becomes blurred and the divine nature of God's eternal plan becomes undermined by Christ's own person possessing the ability to do all things, the ability to resurrect Himself. Again, stated by Beker:

Whereas the subject of the resurrection is always God who raised Jesus from the dead as his proleptic agent of redemption, the incarnation focuses attention on the Son of God himself as God's full revelation of himself. This shift of focus parallels the idea already present in the New Testament of the 'self-rising' of Jesus.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, the problem of the two natures of Jesus is fully appropriated by not only the lack of synthesis found in "Jesus the Man of Christology" excluding and therefore losing "Jesus the Man of Purpose," but also by the incarnation of Christ which leads to Him being responsible for His own resurrection and therefore the ownership of salvation. These are two issues that need to be addressed as the problematic shift of emphasis in popular Christian belief from a God-centered theology to a Christ-centered Christology is examined through the apocalyptic nature of Paul eschatology.

The divergence of the two natures of Jesus has led to the formation of individualistic Christology, a hybrid Christianity that worships Christ alone from an egocentric perspective, forgetting about God's role within salvation. It has come to define the death and resurrection of Christ as the end-all and be-all of the Christian faith,

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 356.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 357.

forsaking the purpose the Christ event served in marking the end of an old history for time and the beginning of a new ending within time. That is, individualistic Christology knows no purpose in Christ beyond personal salvation. It is not familiar with the apocalyptic purpose set to be fulfilled through God's plan of salvation. More importantly, it has no understanding of the meaning of that salvation aside from the hope it provides for a life after death in Heaven.

As briefly mentioned above, the greatest fault of individualistic Christology has been its transference of the "whom" in salvation. More directly, it has shifted the target of who is to be saved. As it has digressed from Paul's authentic theology, one whose coherent center focuses on the triumph of God,<sup>31</sup> individualistic Christology has moved away from the salvation of God's chosen people as a whole, restricting it to saving the person evidenced by its very name, the individual. What was once a salvation intended for humanity has become selective and exclusive to those who "personally" know Christ, forgetting God's intentions as a whole. "Personal salvation" has become a phrase so common to individualistic Christology that it is inseparable from popular Christianity. "In this construal the Christ-event has effectively displaced the event of God's coming glory and has become the center of Christian theology."<sup>32</sup>

Ultimately, individualistic Christology serves as direct evidence citing the conversion of theology to Christology and its severance from Christ's true purpose intended by God through salvation. Beker states:

It is interesting to observe how often the transformation of theology into Christology runs parallel to a deapocalypticizing of Paul's eschatology.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 355.



This hermeneutic has caused a severe misinterpretation of Paul. When futurist, cosmic eschatology is minimized or neutralized, the final triumph of God in the Christ-event that the theocentric apocalyptic focus of Paul is absorbed into the Christocentric triumph of Christ....Whenever the final victory of the reign of God becomes secondary to the present reign of Christ, the result is an ecclesiology that is no longer geared to the cosmic future triumph of God over his creation.<sup>33</sup>

Only by means of revealing "Jesus the Man of Purpose" within popular Christianity can the gap existing between theology and Christology be connected and individualistic Christianity absolved. Without it, not only will the coherent center of Paul's apocalyptic theology continue to be misinterpreted, the authentic truth behind that intended understanding of salvation for all of God's people will be forgotten.

In light of this understanding, the concluding section of my thesis seeks to present a solution to the problem. It offers an explanation how and why Paul's theology can and should be rediscovered and reincorporated into Christianity, both in its tradition and in the church. In the end, I will present a challenge to Christianity as a whole, offering what I believe is a crucial element of the second coming of Christ as all believers, past, present, and future await the arrival of our Lord. But first, in order to comprehend the solution to the problem, I will attempt to reveal "Jesus the Man of Purpose" through a discussion of the Parousia and the events of the apocalypse as described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 5.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 356.

### 3. Understanding "Jesus the Man of Purpose" Through the Parousia

Imperative to the conclusion of this paper is the revealing of "Jesus the Man of Purpose" within Christianity. As mentioned in the preceding pages, I believe that popular Christianity is caught in a struggle between two persons I have come to define as "Jesus the Man of Christology" and "Jesus the Man of purpose." The problem between the two persons manifests itself in a synthesis, as their identities cannot coexist absolutely. "Jesus the Man of Purpose" is the purpose inherent to salvation that gives glory to God. It is the authentic message of Paul's gospel actualizing Israel's fate through the apocalypse. Unfortunate to the Christian tradition, however, this understanding of "Jesus the Man of purpose" has been forgotten; its objectivity lost as Christianity shifted the meaning of salvation. What was once humanity's salvation culminating in the apocalypse and doctrine of the end times became an individualistic and personal salvation earned upon a mortal's death. As a result, "Jesus the Man of Christology" was born and came to center himself at the heart of believers, shaping their lives to a testament of Jesus' life on earth. The thoughts, words, and deeds of Jesus were to be mimicked by all those Christians who accepted "his"<sup>34</sup> sacrifice of the cross and gift of salvation. In popular Christianity, he is the icon of Christian stereotype recognized by believers and non-believers alike as Lord and personal savior who paid the price of death upon the cross for sins. "Jesus the Man of Christology" came to lay total claim over God as being responsible for salvation.

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<sup>34</sup> The possessive language of "his" inferred Christ as being responsible for his own resurrection and incarnation as the Son of God. In this context the resurrection of Christ is overshadowed by his incarnation; the resurrection now becomes a closure event that seals the end of the itinerary of the incarnate Son of God. This shift of emphasis from resurrection to incarnation involves a shift away from theocentric to the Christocentric dimension of the gospel.

Again, as discussed earlier, the divergence of the two persons has led to the formation of individualistic Christology, the alternative theological emphasis that worships Christ alone from an egocentric perspective. This Christology comes to forget God's role within salvation as it transfers the meaning of the "whom" in salvation. What was once a salvation intended for all of humanity became individualistic and restrictive as Christology digressed from Paul's authentic theology. By relocating "Jesus the Man of Purpose" within Christianity, the gap existing between theology and Christology can be reconnected as the individualistic tendencies of Christianity are removed. If no attempt is made to find this true person of the Christ event, the coherent center of Paul's apocalyptic theology will continue to be misinterpreted, as the authentic truth behind the intended understanding of salvation for all of God's people is forgotten.

The reinvention of "Jesus the Man of Purpose" is contingent upon one crucial aspect of Paul's theology, understanding the Parousia. More importantly, he can only be reincorporated into Christian theology when the Parousia is seen not only in the light of first-century Christianity, but also in a timeless fashion spanning the millennia. That is, the Parousia cannot be limited to a historical linguistic device or idea used for contextually understanding Paul and his theology. It has to be something more than just a sign of the times in Greco-Roman antiquity. It should be contemplated and discussed by popular Christianity in a more recurrent and particular fashion. The Parousia needs to be recognized as divine promise kept yet today for life after the first century. It must not be seen as a promise left unfulfilled, but rather a timeless<sup>35</sup> assurance still in waiting.

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<sup>35</sup> Timeless means "spanning the ages" in that it has not yet occurred since the death and resurrection of Christ but still remains as promise that has the possibility to be fulfilled today. Timeless does not refer to an eternity where the promise will never be

Therefore, the urgency that defined the theology of Paul's lifetime needs to define Christian theology yet today. Christianity must firmly believe that Christ will indeed return some day and with the Parousia embark on a time unveiling the purpose of humanity's salvation through the apocalypse. The notion of this understanding seems to be a daunting task as believers are so far removed from this idea, virtually having no knowledge of the end times beyond the heaven and hell defined in popular Christianity.

The following section offers a discussion of the Parousia, revealing that Paul did not believe that Christ's second coming was limited to his lifetime alone. Rather, he writes of how it was an event that could have occurred during his time or life thereafter. There are two important ideas to be drawn from this section. The first, stemming from the affirmations made above, is the most crucial. It asserts that the Parousia is an authentic and viable event that will happen some day because Paul did not limit his expectation of the Parousia to his generation alone. The second, resulting from this understanding, asserts that the proximity of Parousia is reason enough for Christians today to live with the same sense of urgency and anticipation as they did during Paul's lifetime. It must be noted that Christians do not possess the ability to bring about the Parousia. This decision remains one to be made by God and God alone in accordance to His eternal plan. It is through this understanding of the Parousia's timeless nature that all Christians might live in readiness for the moment when Christ shall come again.

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filled, rather it pertains to being timeless through all ages before today, and each day thereafter until the Parousia occurs. Thus, the language of the "timelessness" of the Parousia can include references to the "some day." This meaning is applicable to all references of "timeless" throughout the paper.

#### 4. Paul and the Parousia

“Jesus the Man of Purpose” was the cornerstone for Paul’s theology as he offered an interpretation of the Christ-event. For Paul, everything began with the cross. It was the place where his Jewish heritage finally understood the promises made to Israel by God. Moreover, it was the event in time that marked the closure of a sinful history, offering a new beginning to history from that moment forward. Paul understood that “Jesus the Man of Purpose” had found His way to the cross as God destined Him to be the means of salvation. Humankind could now obtain salvation as given by God and become prepared to receive a life eternal following the end of time God promised through the apocalypse. That is, Paul unmistakably knew “Jesus the Man of Purpose” and was unclouded by the person of “Jesus the Man of Christology.” He offered a theology based solely upon the earlier and lived during a time where the latter was not yet born. “Jesus the Man of Christology” was secondary to “Jesus the Man of Purpose” during Paul’s lifetime because he was the one that offered the interpretation of the purpose in the first place. Being one of the original interpreters of the Christ-event in such a manner leads to authenticity in theology in regards to Paul’s own understanding of “Jesus the Man of Purpose.” Therefore, as the synthesis between the two natures of Jesus seeks to be reconciled, it is imperative to examine Paul and his letters because he is the one that offers a gospel whose coherent center has been unaffected by the alterations of time.

Reexamining this coherent center can bring out the authentic nature of Paul’s theology and expose the true person of “Jesus the Man of Purpose” in his intended context. Thus, a discussion of Paul’s background and writing ensues in order to understand his eschatology and reveal the importance of this person of Jesus. Ultimately,

after the apocalyptic nature of Paul's gospel has been established, the transformation of theology to Christology that has occurred within Christianity can be revisited and a solution to the problem proposed.

In dealing with Paul's eschatology, historical criticism often questions his expectation of the Parousia.<sup>36</sup> Many theologians argue about the urgency of his beliefs, that is, whether or not he expected the Parousia to happen within his lifetime. There are arguments on both sides of the issue, each with its own collection of scriptural evidence supporting their claims. The arguments examine specific language used by Paul as he discussed the time when Christ would come again. In the following section, I will look at each set of views in its own merit, presenting the strengths and weaknesses of its claims. Ultimately, I will provide evidence supporting the claim that Paul did not have an expectation that restricted the Parousia to occurring only in the time when he was alive. That is, though he preached a gospel of urgency and preparation, it was a gospel intended not just for his generation, but one for all generations to practice and understand until the time of the Parousia. More importantly, it was a gospel of instruction, timeless words directed towards Christians of any age, so that they might fulfill God's expectations and remain ready in preparation for the time when Christ would come again.

"1 Corinthians 15: 50-57 is frequently cited as evidence that Paul expected to be alive at the Parousia, chiefly on the basis of the distinction in v. 52 between 'the dead' who 'will be raised imperishable' and 'we' who 'will be changed'."<sup>37</sup> This notion lays heavy claim on the tense and person used in the language of the apostle's writing. Paul

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<sup>36</sup> The second coming or return of the Lord Jesus Christ

<sup>37</sup> A.C. Perriman "Paul and the Parousia" New Testament Studies 35 (1989): 512.

expects that at the Parousia he himself will not be among the dead, of whom he speaks in the third person, but among the living, of whom he speaks in the first person.<sup>38</sup> "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."<sup>39</sup> Thus, the tense and person of "we will" informs readers of Paul's letters that he expected to be alive for the Parousia.

This stance (of Paul being alive for the Parousia) faces significant criticism when the resurrection is incorporated into the discussion. Any expectation of Christ coming again in his lifetime seemingly presents a contradiction between the purpose and timing of the resurrection. That is, why would the Parousia (and therefore the resurrection) take place when only a limited number of people (the immediate followers of Christ) would be resurrected? If Christ returned during Paul's lifetime, then the majority of believers would have had to forego resurrection.<sup>40</sup> That is, they would not be able to participate fully in the resurrection of the body because they would not yet have been spiritually prepared in their faith to benefit from Parousia. The followers of Christ were a small number of people during the first century, many of whom did not have a full understanding of the Christ event and what it meant for their salvation. Without salvation, the resurrection coming with the Parousia would have excluded many believers. Thus, as the primary author and interpreter of the Christ event, how could

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<sup>38</sup> C.K. Barrett, A Commentary on the First Epistle of the Corinthians (London: A & C Black, 1968) 381.

<sup>39</sup> The Holy Bible. New International Version, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1 Cor. 15: 51-52.

<sup>40</sup> Perriman, "Paul and the Parousia," 512.

Paul's expectation of the Parousia be timed to limit those who could participate in the resurrection? Knowing its purpose, he would seemingly have created an inclusive gospel timed with the possibility to incorporate more members into the body of Christ aside from those in his immediate religious circle.

Evidence supporting Paul's belief that the Parousia was not limited to his lifetime can again be found within the language of scripture. Looking again to Corinthians 15, Paul describes a hope in Christ after death.

First, the statement in v. 19 that 'If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied' abbreviates a syllogistic argument (if the dead are not raised, then Christ is not raised, if Christ is not raised, then your faith is futile) into which it is very difficult to insert the idea of Christians being alive at the Parousia.<sup>41</sup>

Paul is speaking about the expectation of being alive for the Parousia. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul addresses many issues circulating within the church. Of these issues, one of the most significant related to their understanding of the resurrection. Church members had sent Paul letters inquiring about what was to come of those who had died after the Christ. Many became skeptical of their belief, questioning the resurrection of the dead. "But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"<sup>42</sup> So in his response to the Corinthian inquiry, Paul writes,

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 512.

<sup>42</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:12



your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.<sup>43</sup>

The main focus of this passage comes at the very end when it speaks of having hope in Christ only for this life. The use of such language tells of Paul's understanding of the Parousia apart from his lifetime alone in that he believed it would happen someday. Paul hoped that perhaps it would take place during his time on earth, if not it would definitely occur thereafter. This is what he tried to explain to the Churches of Corinth and Thessolonia in his letters. If he expected Christ's return only while he was alive, why would he claim that, "if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men"<sup>44</sup> in his response to the Corinthian inquiry? Does not this insinuate a hope relevant to Paul's lifetime and that beyond his mortal life? Can the language not be applicable to both? "Hope in Christ" directly refers to the Parousia, the belief that Christ would come again. "Only for this life" references the current life to which Paul was living as well as those around him. It represents human mortality and the totality of life on earth. Thus, one might interpret this verse in such a way that it would lead to a perspective accrediting the statement that Paul did not expect to be alive for the Parousia. Special note should be given to the word "expect" as it is used in light of Paul's thoughts about the Parousia. It is important to point out that expectation involves exclusivity in that when one has a fixed anticipation of what ought to be, anything falling short of what was preconceived then fails to meet that expectation. Stated in another manner, with expectation comes limitation. When dealing with the imminence of the Parousia, having an expectation automatically limits the timelessness of the event. That is, if Paul

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<sup>43</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:13-19

<sup>44</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:19

“expected” Christ to come again in his lifetime, he did not think it would take place outside of his earthly existence. His thoughts would then be limited by that expectation. But as revealed earlier, Paul indeed did not “expect” the Parousia to happen in his lifetime. This is not to say that he didn’t think or want it to happen in his lifetime because he indeed hoped and readied himself as if it would. Without the limitation of expectation, Paul viewed the Parousia as an event that could happen at any time. He saw it as an imminent possibility that he believed would take place in his lifetime, but would not have been surprised or disheartened if it occurred in the ages thereafter. Thus, Paul intended that his gospel to be timeless in nature, in such ways that the urgency of salvation lived out during his lifetime would also be lived out in the lives of believers thereafter. In this manner, no generation could separate itself from the necessity of readiness and preparation needed for resurrection in the second coming. What was important for Paul then, was to live in this readiness for the Parousia, whenever that time may come. Though the importance of readiness is not clearly stated by Paul in 1 Corinthians, he does address the matter in his letter to the Romans. He tells them first about the commandments of God ultimately summed up by the commandment to love one’s neighbor as oneself in chapter 13 saying,

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not covet,’ and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Romans 13: 8-10

Upon establishing the significance of the commandments, Paul then moves on to tell the Romans how they must understand, interpret, and incorporate them into the present time of their lives saying,

And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over: the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies or drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.<sup>46</sup>

Paul says that salvation is now closer than it was from the time when believers first came to believe after the Christ event. He presents a both a moral and spiritual challenge to the Romans requesting they might step away from a sinful nature as “the day is almost here” where their salvation would be realized and the point of existing in readiness by “clothing themselves with the Lord Jesus Christ” would be justified. His language supposes an urgent call to preparation as the time of the Parousia neared. Though salvation is a gift freely given by God, imperative to Paul’s theology is the acceptance of “Jesus the Man of Purpose” as God’s means of atoning life eternally upon the destruction of His creation. This acknowledgement of purpose within the Christ event as the fulfillment of God’s eternal plan becomes a necessary “rite of passage” to salvation. One must understand the meaning of the gift of salvation in order to participate in that salvation. Without it, no person will be “prepared” to ensue the wrath of the apocalypse. Thus, preparation involves urgency, as it becomes a crucial aspect of the Parousia in regards to obtaining salvation.

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<sup>46</sup> Romans 13:11-14

Paul discussed the timing of the second coming in his letter to the Thessalonians. More specifically, he addressed the mindfulness of their expectation of the Parousia as needing to be an imminent reality. He tells them that they do not need to know the time or date when Christ would come again, only that He shall come upon them quickly.

Now, brothers, about the times and dates we do not need to write to you for you know very well that that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.<sup>47</sup>

Trying to ease any confusion that might be coupled with the anticipation of the Parousia, Paul goes on to tell the Thessalonians that they need not be fearful of the arrival of the Lord because they are prepared. Being "sons of the light" and "sons of the day" sets them apart from belonging "to the night" and "to the darkness" as they are prepared for the moment when He comes again. Through this preparation, the acknowledgment and acceptance of the plan of their salvation set before them by God through their Lord Jesus Christ, the Thessalonians would be ready "so this day might not surprise you like a thief."

Setting apart the differences of the two persons Paul writes,

But you brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.<sup>48</sup>

Paul is presenting a challenge to the Thessalonians. As they remain in waiting, he calls them to a state of readiness where they might be "alert and self-controlled" until the time of the Parousia. The Thessalonians were to live out the tension between their time on earth and the urgency of the time when Christ would come again. Thus, this passage

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<sup>47</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-3

<sup>48</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5: 4-6

describes a mentality that all persons were intended to have until the Parousia. It tells of the sense of urgency that should encompass and define life even in its most common reality. That is, life was to be lived out every day in the anticipation of the arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ. If God is to provide salvation for His people before the time when He shall reign over all His creation, then preparation for that moment when salvation will be realized needs to be the defining reality of Christian life on earth.

In continuing discussion of the passage above, it also speaks of deciphering between good and bad, light and darkness, as the Thessalonians are commanded to “not be like others” in the endeavors of their time of earth before “the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” The language continues as Paul moves on in his letter, telling the Thessalonians that those who are a part of the darkness remain in that darkness as they live out their lives. Moreover, those who “belong to the day” are the ones who “put on the breastplate of faith and love” and wear “the hope of salvation as a helmet.” They are the people who understand the purpose of their salvation as intended by God.

For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another to build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps the most significant part of this passage comes with the language of “the hope of salvation” and the sentence “for God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” These remarks depict an understanding of the end times and make a statement clarifying the role of salvation in its intended purpose.

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<sup>49</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5: 7-11

Salvation often encompasses a common misconception as it is viewed by popular Christianity as the means of “getting to heaven” or receiving eternal life upon death. These beliefs stem from an even greater misconception of salvation, at least according to this passage, that it is gift received during the present time of life. The words written by Paul suggest that salvation is something one is to hope for in the future, that it is not yet realized in the now, and should be a motivating factor for life in the present as it is a determinant of the life yet to come. The language of “the hope of salvation” implies these notions as it credits an understanding of being a heavenly gift given to humanity by God. It is something to be hoped for that cannot be earned or actualized by earthly means. Rather, it is a divine aspect of God’s eternal plan that serves to save humanity from the wrath ensued by the ending of the world. Salvation will appear at the moment of the apocalypse, realizing its cosmic role intentioned by God as the means of saving His people as He triumphs over His creation of the earth. That is, salvation embodies the eternal plan of how God aimed to save His people and destroy the world. It is the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel of how the just were to be saved as God destroyed the sinful world and created a new realm where they would find their eternal reward.

The thoughts mentioned above are suggested by the sentence “for God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” from Thessalonians. It speaks of a cosmic generosity through destined salvation as God created purpose through the Christ event. This all ties together the importance of “Jesus the Man of Purpose” as he becomes a critical person in the role of salvation. Furthermore, “Jesus the Man of Christology” has no place in a cosmic conversation of

salvation. The reason of salvation, actualized through the Christ event and embodied by “Jesus the Man of Purpose,” finds its meaning as “God did not appoint us to suffer wrath” during the apocalypse.

Thus, “Jesus the Man of Purpose,” the key to understanding salvation, resurrection, and the apocalyptic center of Paul’s theology for the triumph of God, has been revealed. It is the nature of Jesus unfamiliar to popular Christianity as it has digressed from orthodox teachings in the formation of Christology. Now that this nature of Jesus has been revealed, it can be used to resolve the separation that has occurred between theology and Christology, reincorporating the triumph of God into interpretations of the Christ event.

### **Conclusion: Finding Resolution within the Church**

As the concluding section of this paper is presented, a summary of the arguments of the thesis becomes necessary. In the introduction of the paper, the problem of time and authenticity was discussed in relation to the two thousand year old tradition of Christianity. It was concluded that Christians should know the historical truth of their religion as it offers explanation and guidance for understanding their tradition. In light of this conclusion, it was suggested that the model of Christianity be examined through the historical context of Paul the Apostle as his interpretation of the Christ event has in many ways become subsequent Christianity. If the model greatly differed from the theology of Paul established in the first century, it would indicate a shift in theology that took place during the course of Christianity throughout history.

In attempt to test this hypothesis, my thesis sought to expose the non-authentic beliefs of popular Christianity through a re-contextualization of Paul's theology. To do this, the context of first century Israel was examined in consideration of Paul and Jesus of Nazareth to reveal an eschatological mood that shaped their lives. The arguments of J. Christiaan Beker were then discussed to explain the importance of this eschatology. He claimed the completeness of Paul's theology was based on a coherent apocalyptic theme ultimately intended for the triumph to God. Six occasions cited by Beker were then revealed explaining the effects of non-apocalyptic interpretations of the Christ event. They demonstrated a shift occurring throughout the history of Christianity, testing the hypothesis to be correct as emphasis shifted from a God-centered theology to a Christ-centered Christology.



Hoping to narrow down the transformation to isolated parts that could offer resolution, two natures of Jesus were introduced along with the culture of popular Christianity. The rationale was that if the problem tested by the hypothesis could be reduced to a specific claim, then that claim as a whole would solve the problem. The biggest challenge was pinpointing such a claim, as it was difficult to reconnect means and ends separated throughout the history of Christianity. Respectively, the claim was the problem of synthesis between the two natures of Jesus, the means was revealing “Jesus the Man of Purpose” through the Parousia, and the ends is now what is left to be introduced during the conclusion of this paper.

The language of the Parousia was discussed to reveal that Paul did not limit the timing of the Parousia to his generation alone. Furthermore, it has been declared that Christians need to live with a sense of urgency as they ready for the time when Christ will come again. This was all stated to reveal “Jesus the Man of Purpose” and solve the problem of synthesis existing between the two natures of Jesus. The lack of synthesis was shown to be the primary source of non-apocalyptic interpretations of the Christ event in popular Christianity. Ultimately, this problem served to transfer salvation’s purpose from humanity to the individual, responsibility within the resurrection from God to Christ, and religious emphasis from a theology to a Christology.

I believe that popular Christianity upholds an incomplete theology as it practices a tradition unfamiliar with the doctrine of the end times. This is very problematic as I witness the coherent center of Paul’s theology authentic to first-century Christianity dissipate in modern church practice, virtually being ignored in religious teaching. How can Christians profess to practice Pauline Christianity if they miss out on such a major

part of his theology? Many Christians today have no understanding of the end times. They may conclude that the world will be destroyed in the future and know the word apocalypse, but the knowledge of this occurrence is just that: it is knowledge. I see this as a great problem. How can the apocalyptic nature of Paul's gospel, as intricate and critical as it is to his theology, be left to personal knowledge of select educated individuals? Should not all members of the Christian body have complete understanding of this gospel?

The goal of this paper was to isolate a claim whose means and ends would connect to bring resolution to the problem of theology becoming Christology. As mentioned earlier in this conclusion, the claim was identified to be the problem of synthesis between the two natures of Jesus and the means was shown to be "Jesus the Man of Purpose" through the Parousia. The ends of the claim was left undisclosed as it was intended to be the purpose of this conclusion. Therefore, in completion of the purpose of this conclusion, the ends is the challenge of reincorporating "Jesus the Man of Purpose" into Christology so that it might revert back to a theologically based system of belief intended for the triumph of God. I pose this challenge to all parties of the Christian religion, the Church and the popular Christian culture, as they are each members of the model of Christology that dominates Christianity today.

It seems as though an awareness of Paul's eschatology is completely irrelevant to popular Christianity. Why is this not grounds for a major revolution within the Church? A significant part of the theology of the single most recognizable figure in Christianity aside from Jesus himself is being ignored and no action is being taken. It is imperative that the apocalyptic nature of Paul's theology be revealed to popular Christianity. The

current understanding of Jesus being the end-all and be-all of the Christian faith needs to be removed and his purpose of salvation instilled. Christology needs to be disassembled and theology reassembled, giving glory to God, as He will triumph over His creation.

Five things need to happen in order for this theology to be re-appropriated into Christianity. First and foremost, the coherent apocalyptic theme of Paul's gospel needs to be taught within the Church emphasizing the triumph of God. The apocalyptic language of his writing is sometimes hard to decipher. Therefore, it should become a central task of the church to create an understanding of that language so that all Christians can learn of its importance. Second, upon understanding the purpose of salvation through Paul's apocalyptic language, the Church needs to officially declare Jesus to be a purpose intended for the triumph of God. That is, it must announce that the death and resurrection of Jesus was an event in time meant to service God's plan of salvation promised to Israel and all of humanity. Third, knowing Christ's role in salvation, the Church must proclaim that the individualistic Christology established over the ages is not authentic to its tradition. It must distance itself from giving glory to Christ alone through this realization and gain an understanding of salvation beyond its own. Fourth, the Church must realize that the Parousia was not limited to Paul's lifetime alone. It must believe that the second coming was a divine promise not left unfilled, but rather still in waiting until the time is right. Lastly, the Church must adopt the same sense of urgency that shaped the life and time of Paul's generation. It was with this authentic belief that Christ would soon return that Christians were able to live out lives of purpose and true devotion as they constantly were readying themselves for a life in eternity.

If "Jesus the Man of Purpose" is not reincorporated into Christianity through the understanding of the Parousia, salvation, and the resurrection, then the problem of synthesis between the two natures of Jesus will continue. Moreover, if the problem of synthesis is not resolved then Christology will continue to dominate theology and the purpose behind Paul's gospel will continue to be lost and misinterpreted. As Christology continues this path of dominance, shifting the emphasis away from theology to a Christ-centered system of belief, Christians fail to see a major setback in Jesus of Nazareth being the end-all and be-all of Christianity. They fail to notice that "Jesus the Man of Christology" is irrelevant to the cosmic plan of salvation. Furthermore, he is irrelevant to the so-called "personal salvation" that individualistic Christianity creates in popular view. Why is this so? The life of Jesus of Nazareth before the time his crucifixion could all be stripped away and it would not change the purpose God intended for the salvation of His creation. For Paul, everything began at the cross. He understood that the Christ event was the moment in time that marked a new beginning within history. It was the event where God actualized His cosmic plan for triumphing over His creation, offering a means to salvation for the moment when that time would come. Paul did not know the man or life of Jesus of Nazareth, and in all respect, to him it did not matter. What mattered to Paul was that Jesus served the purpose intended by God for his triumph in the cosmic scheme of salvation.

I do not mean to disrespect the life and times of Jesus of Nazareth. He did indeed live the sinless life, perfect in all parts of human existence. I acknowledge, accept, and believe that he did possess the divine ability to perform miracles as the accounts of the gospels reveal. Furthermore, I believe that he was the ultimate teacher, evoking within

his disciples and those who knew him an understanding of kindness, love, and compassion. With all this being said, even though he lived the model for Christian life, his crucifixion marked the true purpose of his life, as he more importantly became the model for Christian belief. Thus, in all do respect, Christians need to realize that the life of Jesus of Nazareth before the time his crucifixion could all be stripped away and it would not change the purpose God intended for the salvation of His creation.

As suggested by Beker and revealed through the nature of "Jesus the Man of Purpose," ultimately important to the basis of authentic God-centered theology is the apocalyptic interpretation of the Christ event for the triumph of God. Moreover, Christianity needs to live in the urgent readiness of expectation for the moment in time when this triumph shall come.

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