

Tuesday Lunchtime Bible Studies

What St. Paul Really Said, by N. T. Wright

Chapter 4 – Paul and Jesus

- ❖ Jewish monotheism
 - No analysis of God’s inner being
 - Three claims
 - There was only one God who created everything (monotheism)
 - This God had chosen the Jews as the ones through whom God would work (election)
 - The day would come when God would step in and put all things right (eschatology)
 - The Jews believed that God was near and active among them
 - They used five “language sets”
 - Wisdom (see Proverbs 1:20-33) – the personification of God
 - Torah – God’s Law and Teaching
 - Spirit
 - Word
 - Shekinah – the true presence of God “tabernacling” with his people
 - ◆ See Ecclesiasticus/Sirach 24 for some of these combined in a single passage
 - They knew God to be always present, always active with them.
 - God is both transcendent and immanent.
- ❖ How did Paul, a good Jewish monotheist, come to speak of Jesus as he had spoken of God? (i.e., what is Paul’s Christology?)
 - 1 Corinthians 8:1-6
 - Anyone who loves God is known by God (echoes of the *Shema*, Deuteronomy 6:4).
 - There is only one God – there are no other gods at all.
 - “. . . there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord. Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”
 - Paul has discovered what has been the true content of “God” all along.
 - Philippians 2:5-11
 - See Isaiah 45:23
 - Jesus offered the true interpretation of what it means to be equal with God
 - Jesus has done what only the one true God can do.
 - The cross is not something that God does unwillingly or only because he can’t think of a better way. The true God consists of self-giving love.
 - The word “God” contains not only Jesus, but the crucified Jesus. It is the cross that reveals fully just who this God really is!
 - Colossians 1:15-20 – YHWH now recognized in the human face of Jesus

- ❖ Key Jewish words that take on meaning for Paul
 - Son of God
 - Though it typically refers to Israel or its God, now Paul brings Father and Son (Jesus) closely together.
 - Lord (*kyrios*)
 - In the Septuagint, *kyrios* regularly is used as the name of God. Now Paul uses *kyrios* to refer to Jesus.
 - See Romans 10:9-13
- ❖ What about the Spirit?
 - Galatians 4:1-11
 - The Son and the Spirit of the Son
 - 1 Corinthians 12:4-6
 - God's unity subsists in threefold form: Spirit, Lord, and God
 - Paul works at the border of language! So do we.
 - Romans 8:1-11
 - God sent his Son and Spirit to do what Torah could not do. The Spirit now dwells in (tabernacles in) those who are in Christ.

Christians sometimes long for a single place in the NT that unequivocally and simply sets forth the doctrine of the triune God. Indeed, just such a statement was inserted in 1 John 5:7 early in the Renaissance. However, such a phrase need not be added. If we read Paul closely, we can see how it is the early Christians came to formulate the doctrine of a Trinitarian God. We see this in Paul's elevation of Jesus and his repeated acknowledgement of the work of the Spirit.