

Tuesday Lunchtime Bible Studies

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

Chapters 1 and 2

❖ Quick review of chapter 1

➤ Sanders

- The Jews of Jesus' day weren't striving to keep the Law so that they could "get to heaven" or "be saved." They had already been saved: the Exodus. The "saved" were the people of God. And who were the people of God? Those who kept the Law. The outward and visible markers of the Law, such as the food laws and Sabbath-keeping, were the badge of membership in the people of God. God's people keeping God's law was an expression of gratitude to the God who had saved them.

➤ Four key questions from Schweitzer:

- Where do we put Paul in the history of first century religions?
- How do we understand Paul's theology, its starting point and center?
- How do we read the individual letters, getting out of them what Paul himself put into them. This task is called *exegesis*.
- What is the pay-off, the result, in terms of our own life and work today?

❖ Chapter 2

➤ The agendas of Saul of Tarsus

- Saul, the zealous persecutor – Galatians 1:13-14. Why?
- Which type of Pharisee? (perhaps 6,000 in Judea and Galilee)
 - Shammai – the strict one
 - ◆ Torah demands that the Jews be freed from the Gentile yoke
 - This is what it means to be "zealous" in the New Testament
 - "Zeal" is something you did with a knife
 - "Zeal" is like holy war, even "jihad"
 - ◆ A majority of 1st-century Pharisees were Shammaites and, thus, "zealous for God."
 - Hillel – the lenient one
 - ◆ The "winner" in the internal debate, as set out in the Mishnah (200AD)
 - ◆ Politically followed a "live and let live" approach to Gentile rule
 - ◆ Gamaliel (Acts 5:34-39) was a Hillelite
 - Parallels between Saul and the Yitzhak Rabin's assassin
- The beliefs and hopes of Saul
 - Saul, a Shammaite Pharisee and a strict one
 - But what about Acts 22:3?
 - ◆ Gamaliel would never have countenanced the stoning of Stephen or the persecution of the Christians
 - What would a Shammaite Pharisee believe?
 - ◆ The great promises of the prophets had not been kept
 - Israel still awaited its forgiveness, return from "exile," and restoration.
 - The Day of the Lord was still to come
 - ◆ Three unshakeable Jewish beliefs – a story in search of an ending

- Monotheism – there is one God
- Election – this God had chosen the Jews to be the ones through whom the whole world would come to know God
- Eschatology – God would one day put all things right
- ◆ The Day of the Lord needed to come sooner than later
 - Keeping Torah would hasten its arrival
- Two key “technical” terms
 - ◆ Justification
 - A law-court term, referring to God’s rendering a verdict in favor of his covenant people, declaring them righteous, acquitted of their sin
 - It refers to the redemption and salvation of Israel
 - ◆ Eschatology
 - God will bring things to a cosmic climax, within history.
 - ◆ Put the two together
 - The Jewish eschatological hope was the hope for justification, for God to vindicate his people at last
- Saul’s agenda was simple
 - ◆ To be zealous for Israel’s God and for Torah
 - ◆ Keep Torah zealously so their badge of membership in the people of God shines brightly
 - ◆ Force other Jews to also keep the Law zealously in order to hasten God’s vindication of Israel
 - What does this make the Jesus followers?
 - Renegade Jews who threaten the zealots’ agenda and, thus, must be stopped
- Saul’s conversion and its immediate significance
 - See Acts 9 and Galatians 1:13-17
 - Damascus road: the event and its significance
 - On the way to zealously pursue his agenda in Damascus, Paul meets the risen Christ
 - ◆ Same as the other apostles, only later
 - What did this resurrection of Jesus mean?
 - ◆ That God had done for Jesus in the middle of time what Paul, and ,most Jews, believed God would do for Israel at the end of time
 - ◆ The resurrection of Jesus meant his followers had been right!
 - Jesus was the true Messiah and the bearer of Israel’s God-sent destiny
 - ◆ And, this meant that the Age to Come had arrived already, yet the Age of Sin was still with us.
 - What a puzzle? What could it really mean? How could this? How could we exist in some sort of “between times?”
 - ◆ God’s faithfulness had been revealed in the coming of Jesus. The Day of the Lord had arrived.
 - Paul’s new vocation?
 - ◆ A herald of the king

“Proto-Pelagian”? (p.32)

Pelagius was a British theologian of the early 5th century who denied the doctrine of original sin and taught that person can take the first steps toward salvation on their own initiative. This heresy was condemned the Bishop of Rome in 418.

Today, pelagianism in some form is used to describe the belief that we can save ourselves and have no need of God’s grace.