

Paul and the Faithfulness of God

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[0 : 00] With that, I will hand it over to you. Thank you, thank you. Yes, as our leader says, yes, today is a book review.

Come right to the heart of it. This is an introduction. And the book, Paul and the Faithfulness of God, and indeed by N.T. Wright.

In the world of Mr. Wright, again, this is called a book. This is a book. He and his publisher need to work on that. 1519 pages in two tomes in an ongoing series by Mr. Wright.

I wasn't going to do this, but I can't resist starting. Do you believe what are written in books, the praise books? Well, I'll just give you one taste. This is from a scholar named Daniel Boyeran, who's a professor of Talmudic, Talmud culture at the University of California, Berkeley.

Someone, we can safely say, well outside of the world of the church, well outside of the world of evangelical Christianity, that's for sure. He writes this, Paul and the Faithfulness of God is the Summa, but surely not the final work of a great mind and indefatigable scholar who has devoted decades to understanding the New Testament and particularly, excuse me for the length of this, as here the letters of Paul in their fullest historical and theological context.

[1 : 43] This book, he continues, will surely be the defining standard, the Bultmann of our age, the text from which everyone will work and argue and revise their and his thinking about Paul for the next decade at least.

That's from a Jewish scholar in California, a professor of Talmud studies, you know the Talmud, the great Jewish work from the early centuries. Mr. Wright is a churchman, very briefly.

Mr. Wright is a churchman for sure. A one-time bishop of Durham. He was, this is just arbitrary from memory, but a lot of you know more about Mr. Wright than I do. He was at one point a resident theologian at Westminster Abbey.

Doesn't that sound impressive? Wow. A scholar of note. He teaches now at St. Andrews in Scotland. He is, and this will shape how we hear him this morning, of course.

Let me say again, he is a New Testament scholar and an historian. That means, and this seems crucial, thinking I don't overstate this, this is important to remember.

[3 : 01] Mr. Wright's first readers, his first hearers, if you will, first readers, first hearers, are these folks, scholars and historians.

Firstly, he writes for them. That's his tribe, New Testament scholars and historians. These tribes, indeed, have their own methods of inquiry, as you know.

And these methods are very much treasured by these folks because they are advertised, certainly very much in our culture, in our modern culture, as a way to open, public, reasonable, discussable truth, or something approaching that mystery, for sure.

So, if you will, this book is not, on its surface, confessional, if I may use that word. Mr. Wright is, apparently, I'm sure it really is the case, a master, say, of Luther's Paul and Calvin's Paul, a Paul as you find him in Augustine, a Paul in our world, Paul in modern evangelicalism.

Paul, again, among modern, usually very secular philosophers. You know, Paul is making a real comeback amongst a lot of philosophers in our time.

[4 : 37] They're taking a real interest in him. That's a very interesting phenomena. If Paul was a diamond, I would think the metaphor appropriate, and so would Mr. Wright, this diamond shines in many ways.

He lives in many communities. There are many trajectories of light here in Paul. He is, isn't it? I was thinking about this this morning for some reason.

I was coming into church. It's always interesting to remember that Holy Writ tells us, this is a word from my confession stance, and I suspect yours.

According to Holy Writ, Paul is hard to understand. Second Peter tells us that. Holy Scripture tells us that another part of Holy Scripture, written by Paul, is hard to understand, which is the ungodly twist, but it stands that Paul is, according to the word of God, hard to understand.

I wonder if Paul, I wonder, excuse me, if Peter ever said that to the tent maker himself. I suspect he did when they were conversing about things, and oh, did they converse about things.

[6 : 01] I wonder if Peter ever said, Paul, you are sometimes very hard to understand. Peter, after all, was not shy. This Paul book is one in a series, it's four so far, this is going to be six all told, I stand corrected on that.

There's at least one to follow this. The first discusses, the first in this series, discusses method issues in some detail. And before we look at Mr. Wright's major work here, it's good to glance, have a brief glance at this.

Critical realism is Mr. Wright's approach. He calls it that. The past is indeed a foreign country. My words, not his.

But this captures Mr. Wright's approach. The past is a foreign country, but with patience, with breadth of inquiry, we may discern its story with reasonable confidence, Mr. Wright believes.

And having said that, let me emphasize that our author believes. He's a Christian. He's confessing, he's a confessing Christian.

[7 : 15] Paul's witness to the resurrection, oh, he believes. And he's probably written the greatest book about the resurrection in our time, perhaps in a long time.

Mr. Wright believes. Method issues frequently are indeed a stumbling block. All positions, and here I'm a bit confessional, if you will, all positions at a final level are indeed confessional.

Hidden absolutes abound in most inquiries. The view from nowhere is indeed nowhere. Now, does that permission mindless confessional assertion?

I don't care what scholars say. I'm a Christian. Here's the truth. No. That is a misuse of confession. No. Come, let us reason together, says Israel's God through Israel's prophet.

So, let us rejoice, as Mr. Wright does, in the gift of reason, and give praise to the giver who allows us to inquire. Note these complexities, we should, as we begin today, but we will not be paralyzed by them.

[8 : 29] End of discourse on method. Paul, again, as diamond, is my metaphor. Mr. Wright ponders Paul, and, of course, there's only one way to look at Paul, and that's through what he wrote.

Paul's, he ponders them and wants to hear them. This is his metaphor. And I find it extremely helpful. Paul, he wants to hear Paul's letters as a symphony.

As you would listen to a symphony at the, at the Orpheum, imagine that orchestra playing in Paul's epistles. This, I find, again, very helpful.

Mr. Wright wants to hear all of Romans going around in his mind. And he wants to hear at the same time, here it comes, Philippians.

And there's Galatians. I'm listening to Galatians. 1 and 2 Corinthians. The Thessalonian correspondence, etc. Interesting to note this.

[9 : 30] Paul's letters are occasional, famously. Some draw large, very large conclusions from that. And that will shape, will shape what people hear in pulpits today in Vancouver about Paul, if Paul's epistles come to their attention.

some draw very large conclusions from that. We should not expect consistency from Paul. Ad hoc rhetorical strategies are in his letters.

Here is, if you will, a missionary pastor exhorting, rebuking, putting out fires, as we might say. Trouble in Galatia, trouble in Philippi, trouble here, there, and everywhere.

I'm a pastor, got to get off a letter to those folks, see if I can straighten out the mess. Not always, of course, even on that view, Galatians and Romans, for instance, show extended theological reasoning.

That is undeniable. There you have it. Nevertheless, occasions prompted these letters and the letters must be read always with that in mind.

[10 : 38] There you have it. recognizing all of that, Mr. Wright, our man here, resolutely disagrees. He totally disagrees with the thrust of that approach to Paul.

On internal, exegetical grounds, our author seeks to show, I think successfully, that Paul is a precise, exact, acting, shrewd thinker.

Every word Mr. Wright believes about Paul, every phrase, every move in his argument and rhetorical strategy is meant by Paul.

He thought it through thoroughly whenever he put words down through that scribe that he would have used. It is out of the abundance of his mind that he speaks to churches.

On occasion, he writes to individuals. Let's not forget Philemon. Not wearing a blindfold did Paul walk through the cities of the Greco-Roman world.

[11:51] Mr. Wright quotes a great German classicist. Paul knew, spoke with, understood Stoics, Mr. Wright believes.

He knew cynics, that philosophical group in the ancient world. He knew Platonists. He knew Epicureans. He knew pagan temple. He knew synagogue.

Boy, did he know the synagogue. And he knew us, the new kid on the block in the ancient world, which came to be called church. Paul knew this world.

He struggled with a culture which indeed had its own narrative of salvation woven right into it.

Caesars were being divinized when Paul walked the roads of the ancient world.

A lord and a savior by name was Caesar, offering peace and security and salvation to people. That was out there in Paul's world.

[12:55] Paul simply amazes. I'm still in the introduction. Paul amazes. This is a big book. Paul amazes Mr. Wright. He amazes me.

He amazes a lot of people. He doesn't amaze a lot of others. For subtlety and depth, our author, Mr. Wright, does not hesitate to compare Paul with Shakespeare and Plato.

For the sheer breadth and subtlety of his understanding of the human condition, we're in the presence of a great genius when we read Paul. That's Mr.

Wright's conclusion, his deepest conviction. Paul lives in narrative. Everything he thinks and writes is embedded in the story of Israel.

Torah, prophets, Psalter, all of the wisdom literature lives in Paul, lives in him, breathes in him.

[13:57] So today, I'm drawing to a close at the introduction, I will unfold in real shorthand, obviously, mere soundings, this book.

And I will speak to you today as Paul. Today, I'm going to speak to you today as Paul. It's about time Learner's Exchange had an apostolic visitation.

And today, therefore, on the last, our last meeting for the season, it's about time we got straightened out here, a visit from Paul.

And Paul would immediately issue a warning. It's time we heard directly from Paul. If Paul heard me talking like this, he'd say, he'd nudge me. He'd say, let me get a word in edgewise here.

And Paul would say most solemnly to us, you know these words. Here is Paul the rhetorician. Oh, he's, we take Paul's gifts as a rhetorician for granted.

[15:01] He's the greatest letter writer in antiquity, Mr. Wright tells us over and over again. Let no one boast of men, says Paul to the Corinthian church.

They were high on men in Corinth. Let no one boast of men, for all things are yours, he says.

Imagine Paul preaching to us today. All things are yours.

Imagine Paul saying that. Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours and you are Christ's and Christ is God's.

A classic statement. Learn a little touch of high flown, fancy, New Testament scholarship and theology talk today.

There's a classic statement of inaugurated eschatology. Now, in the ruins of this world, in your ordinary life struggles, wherever you are today along life's way, today, Paul says, he just said it to you, right now, the future is yours.

[16:12] Because Jesus Christ is the world's future. You belong to him, the future is yours. end of introduction. Paul was here, he'd say, please pray, as someone tries to imitate me.

So, let us pray. Lord, we thank you for the gospel. We thank you for the apostles who unfolded it for us. May we, in attending to this material, know more of the glory of Jesus Christ.

And we pray in his name. Amen. In the gospel events, in the gospel events, Mr. Wright writes, in the gospel events, it's a crucial statement, in the gospel events, the inner character, the being, and the identity of the one God of Jewish monotheism has been made known in person.

that might very well be a summarizing statement of my Paul's new life in the Messiah, after my conversion on the Damascus Road.

Please always remember, I was a Jew on the Damascus Road. More controversially, let me remind you, the presence which confronted me there was a Jewish divine presence.

[17:40] the word Christ, you hear it all the time, you've already heard it from my writings to the Corinthians. In your English Bibles, that might be a bit of a suspicious word.

The word Christ might be helpfully erased from the English Bible. Jesus is not Mr. Christ.

It's not a proper name, Christ. Christ means, and Paul thinks this as he writes the word, it means Israel's Messiah.

Christ means Israel's Messiah. All human beings have a worldview. Let me take a step back here, a window through which they see the world. You have me today on an apostolic visitation.

You say, Paul, what do you really believe? Here follows my worldview. In the mystery of God's providence, I was born a Jew, as you know. Jew, never forget, means praise.

[18:48] A privilege it was to be born a Jew. I wrote to the Romans, I said, he is a Jew who is one inwardly. His praise is not from man, but from God.

That was a pun, you often miss it. Jew praise. Jews praise. That's what we are called to do. A privilege it is to be of Israel. In Torah, we learned, we Jews learned, and have since shared with the world that humans are a visible presence of the invisible God.

Read Genesis 1. We are in the one God's creation and are called to rule here on the one God's behalf.

Moving right along. Humanity, so Torah reveals, as you know, has declined to obey this calling and now lives in disorder, if you will, in exile from the garden.

Israel, the people entrusted with the oracles of God, you'll recall from my writings, Israel, they are called to be the solution to the world's problem.

[20:00] You got that? That's what all Jews believe. God called our forefather Abraham and promised him through you, I will bless the nations.

Let me emphasize again, Israel is the solution to the world's problem. A famous Jew, the most famous Jew of them all, said salvation is of the Jews.

So we await the fulfillment of heaven's promise. What a fulfillment it is. Resurrected spiritual bodies ruling a new heavens and a new earth, the creator's original purpose fulfilled and more.

There is my worldview today as your apostle, Paul. Worldviews answer five questions. You pick them up as I told you my worldview.

All worldviews answer five questions. Who am I? Where am I? What's the problem with the world? What's the solution to the problem?

[21:13] And the last question of all that all worldviews answer, what time is it? All of us walk around as worldviews, answering those five questions.

This was my worldview as a Pharisee. Pharisees, we were zealous for the law as God called people to be zealous for the law in the oracles of God.

Phineas, Elijah. It is my worldview as a Christian. It is my worldview in the Messiah. Torah, the law, the oracles of God.

What a joy it was, it is to know God and to know his word. Sweet to the taste it was for me to live in God's word.

Blessed is the man who lives here in God's word, like a tree planted by streams of water. What a gift of salvation is the law.

[22:13] Today at 7:30, we had a beautiful unfolding of Psalm 25. David, deep recognition of his sinfulness, deep recognition of his need for God's loving kindness and forgiveness.

Paul, as a Pharisee, had that same recognition. He lived wanting to know God's love and forgiveness. Torah involved, of course, obedience, as you know.

Commanded by Israel's God, we observed Sabbath, we practiced food laws, we knew circumcision, a sign of intimacy with God. Holiness demanded separation from the world, it still does.

And so we stood apart, as we were commanded to do by Israel's God. Our faith further was a faith of waiting. We rehearsed always the drama of our salvation.

When Israel came out of Egypt and the house of Jacob from among a strange people, how we love to sing that, you do too. We remember desert wanderings, we remembered Moses and the gift of law, of Torah, of the way of obedience.

[23:22] The land, of course, was ours. We began to see, you see, what our God was doing.

Those of us in Israel who thought it through. Adam and Eve in a garden with a law, now Israel in a

new garden with the law of Moses.

The command to Adam and Eve was, be fruitful and multiply. the promise to Abraham was, your children shall be as the stars, as the sand of the sea.

Yes, the Adam and Eve story was now modulating into the Israel story. God doesn't forget his purposes for the creation. Oh, no. There it is.

What a story to be in this story. What a privilege to know this story, this narrative. What a privilege to be in this story. Now the plot takes the strangest turn imaginable.

I might even call it unimaginable. Waiting is difficult. It was difficult for Israel to live in waiting. Israel, when I was growing to maturity, was oppressed by Rome, as you know.

[24 : 33] We were in our promised land, but we considered ourselves, in fact, to be still in exile. The temple seemed a very compromised place.

I wouldn't be surprised if one amongst us could even say it was a den of thieves. Our leaders were compromised frequently by a pagan culture.

So it might happen that a too eager group might imagine prematurely a messianic arrival. It happened apparently at Qumran, for instance.

And in my time, one group announced that a crucified man in Israel was the Messiah. Aha. Yeah. The basis of this assertion, they claimed that he had been raised up out of death. Imagine. So as you know, and this returns us finally to the Damascus road, there on the Damascus road, I was overwhelmed by a divine presence.

[25 : 39] No argument, no persuasion, a complete transition from unbelief to belief happened to me. There are no words to describe what this meant.

I was suddenly placed inside a new, transformed world. Mr. Wright uses this analogy. Imagine being in a gallery surrounded by traditional glories.

you fill in the blanks here. I don't know, mine would be Rembrandt, Turner, from across many centuries, Vermeer, etc. Now all of us are together in this gallery and we're surrounded by those glories and we're blindfolded and we're taken into a new room in the gallery, a huge, massive room, and we're told, open your eyes now, and here we are and we're now circled by Picassos.

Get the feeling? A new world, a new glory. In my writings I even called it a new creation.

That's what happened to me on the Damascus road. The man Jesus of Israel, the man Jesus of Nazareth, excuse me, the man Jesus of Nazareth was Israel's God returned to his temple.

[26 : 59] people. When I wrote to churches about him, I used, therefore, the language of divinity. This, I'm told, has caused a couple centuries of controversy and 450 libraries and books about it.

Apparently, some claim, I saw it the other day on PBS, I could go into detail about that, meaning the conversation we will, apparently some claim Jews could never believe in a divine man.

This is beside the point and quite wrong. When our God returned in glory to dwell with us, which was the expectation of Israel in our waiting faith, we had no way to anticipate what this might look like.

So I will repeat where I started, in the gospel events, the inner character being an identity of the one God of Jewish monotheism has been made known in person.

The person, that person, yes, as of one untimely born, I met him on that road, that person.

[28 : 19] I met him, Jesus of Nazareth. He was of Israel. He was born of a woman, I reminded the Galatian church, born under the law, but vindicated by the one he called his father.

This son reveals his father. And this, always remember, on this day in particular, it seems so appropriate, the spirit of this son is given to dwell in each one who believes.

Why? Is that an arbitrary kind of move by Paul? Why? Because Messiah Jesus, who is Yahweh returned to his temple, takes up residence therein as spirit.

As I said to the Corinthians, you are the temple of the living God. An aside, on Trinity Sunday, we can remember, according to Mr. Wright, and against the prevailing view for the last 200 years, that Trinitarian theology is rooted right in the heart of Israel's faith.

Yahweh returned to his temple and fills his temple with his spirit. Father, son, spirit. A lot of people have thought that Paul wrote a kind of early version of the Westminster Catechism.

[29 : 44] And we use his writings to sort of prove the Westminster Catechism. Big mistake, says Mr. Wright. If anything, Paul is writing an early form of the Nicene Creed, which when unfolded completely, becomes the Creed of Saint Athanasius in all of its logic.

Mr. Wright is sometimes not popular at meetings of New Testament scholars. The spirit of the son lives in his temple because Israel was expecting Yahweh to return to his temple. Paul didn't get divinized language about Paul from the Greco-Roman world, from the divinization of Caesar, maybe from Eastern mystery religions. Nope, it came right out of his faith in the God of Israel.

Mr. Wright is not a popular man in New Testament scholar circles. Torah obedience, Torah obedience, that's what Israel lived by.

Torah obedience is now the confession that Jesus is Lord, the risen Lord, and that life in the spirit, and that we live in the life of the spirit of this son.

[31 : 05] Again, God's spirit is in his temple. Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Always, always God saves by forming communities.

Salvation is not merely private. Therefore, membership criteria must be addressed. In Israel, this was so well known, their identity markers, circumcision it was for us, Sabbath regulation, food laws. Now, in the new Israel, the Israel of God, it is faith in the faithful Messiah, Jesus. That is what justification by faith means.

Covenant membership is by faith. There you have it. The faith of the Messiah is the one we believe in.

We believe in his faith. the Messiah is the justifier of God. The gospel is about, indeed, the faithfulness of God.

[32 : 16] Paul and the faithfulness of God. That's right, being very edgy and controversial. Justification by faith precisely is about covenant membership.

But that encounter meant more, of course, that encounter on the Damascus road. how was I to think through what this meant? Paul's letters are so complex on this matter.

What about the promise to Abraham? Remember my worldview? What about the promise to Abraham? What about Israel as the solution to the world's problem?

what was the God of Israel doing? For a while, this is total news to me.

I step outside of my Paul role. This is really new and right for me. For a while, I, Paul, I felt like Elijah.

[33 : 19] I felt like even Job. Is God faithful? faithful? Has God been faithful to his people in all of this? Is God faithful?

Could I be sure that God is faithful? Even in the gathering of God's people, as you know, again, that's what the word church means for Paul.

People gathered. There were astonishing responses possible to understanding how it all stood in relation to God's promises to Israel. For instance, as you famously know, you've read my epistles, in Galatia, some thought circumcision was a good thing still.

Let's go back to circumcision as a sign of covenant membership. Not a sign of when I die, I'm going to go to heaven, by the way. No, as a sign of what community do I belong to?

And some said we still need circumcision as a sign of covenant membership. Faith in Jesus, not enough. In Christ, I had to write to them, as you know, I said a stern no to Galatia.

[34 : 27] In Christ, in Israel's Messiah, there is a universal community now. That's what the church is, a universal community. It has no ethnic membership requirements, as does the synagogue.

Always remember that. The synagogue has a membership requirement rooted in ethnicity. I said, no Jew or Gentile anymore. I also said, rather shockingly, no male or female.

And that's when, that takes a little work. Boy, no slaves are free. No covenant membership rules, except faith in the faithful Jesus.

That's what justification by faith means. You're in the community because you have faith in the faithful Jesus. Wow. Now, the plot thickens again.

This is why my letters cause trouble, why they're hard to understand according to that fisherman Peter. Never trust the fishermen, go with tent makers. In the church at Rome, the opposite evil was a possibility, as you recall.

[35 : 43] A contempt for Israel was at work in that community that I love so much. Contempt for those Jews who were saying prevailingly, not absolutely, but prevailingly saying no to Messiah Jesus.

To this, the only response was again a no to an opposite problem. They didn't want to go back to circumcision. They wanted to have contempt for the circumcised.

No, I had to say to them, do not boast. Remember my famous words to the church at Rome? Do not boast over those branches which have been cut off. God can put them back in.

I had to tell the Gentiles this many times. They are the natural olive tree. When I wrote words like seeking a righteousness of their own, that was a caricature of the truth that they are the natural olive tree.

some in some traditions, I can forgive them, came to believe that that meant building up a moral righteousness so that I'd impress God and go to heaven when I die.

[36 : 56] That's the Lutheran caricature of me. They got it half right but not totally. There is a Paul of Lutheranism, a Paul of evangelicalism, a Paul of Calvinism.

Let's make sure we're reading Paul and not the tradition. Let's love Holy Scripture and not our own traditions. Mr. Wright wants to say to us there quite bluntly, what confusion you see was possible in all of this.

Oh my goodness. Some going back to an old covenant membership obedience as in Galatia, others despising or attempted to despise Israel.

Both big errors, both opposite problems I have to address in my letters to these churches. And yet the confusions are understandable.

After all, I come back to what I said earlier. Israel had crucified her Messiah. This was at the center of Paul's thinking.

[38 : 04] was I really able to accept this? I, Paul, asked myself, was this heaven's plan that Israel should crucify her Messiah?

Through you, I had said, God had said to Abraham, through you, I will bless the nations. did the God of Israel mean by this, I have chosen you, Israel, to bear the sins of the world in your Messiah.

That's exactly what Paul came to believe. Why did unbelief prevail in Israel?

we can ask a tentative question. Why is the cross a stumbling block, according to Paul? Me.

Because Israel is only Israel when she is crucified and risen.

Get that. Israel is Israel when she is crucified and risen. And Israel prevailingly said, no.

[39 : 27] We want salvation as a privilege, but not a responsibility. And therefore, prevailingly, Israel said no to Messiah Jesus.

We don't want to be Israel crucified and risen. We want salvation rather as our privilege. That is what is meant by seeking a righteousness of her own.

we are the privileged people of God. Yes, you are, Paul says, you're the true olive tree. But your election is to bear responsibility, not as mere privilege.

There's the heart of the problem of the gospel. Wow. always Israel was a remnant. I must move right along here.

Always Israel was a remnant. This is rooted in her scriptures. Had she become a remnant of one? Israel, yes, we have to say, in the Messiah, Israel became a remnant of one.

[40 : 39] Israel in her Messiah became sin. he became sin who knew no sin, I said to the Corinthians. Got that?

Israel had become sin so that the Gentiles might be forgiven. Oh, the mystery of God's plan, the depth of his riches of wisdom as I finished my letter to the Romans almost.

Oh, the depth of his plan. You think you got it figured out? Think again. Oh, this God. He is beyond finding out.

What was Israel's sin? Was it not presumption again? Assuming her election meant privilege, but again, not awesome responsibility.

The responsibility of nothing less of bearing the world's sin. Her trespass, see my letter to the Romans, has meant riches for the world.

[41 : 39] here's where Mr. Wright's symphony metaphor comes in brilliantly for me. So, Paul says to the church at Rome, through her trespass, you have entered into the riches of God's forgiving love in Christ, in Israel's Messiah.

Remember when I wrote to the Corinthians, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be made rich.

I'm always thinking like this, Mr. Wright tells us about Paul, the poverty of Israel, her trespass has made the Gentiles rich.

Oh, the depths of God's plan for the world. This theme I repeated everywhere. If you put this in the simplest of formulas, you want to have a good time for conversation.

today. If you put this into the simplest of formulas, it would go something like this. The Adam and Eve story always subverted the Israel story, but the second Adam, Israel's Messiah, fulfilled the Israel story and also fulfilled the Adam story.

[42 : 56] That's why you Gentiles are now part of salvation story. Oh, the ways of God. How deep is his plan for the world? Israel. Was the law a good thing or a bad thing?

In Israel, was it a good thing or a bad thing? How Paul struggles with this? Was it a good thing or a bad thing? Well, it was both. The law is holy and just and good and yet it concentrated apparently sin in Israel.

part of the difficulty of reading Paul, as Mr. Wright says, is out of the abundance of his mind, he can affirm and critique at the same time.

And that's why Paul's hard to understand. His mind is so abounding in things, he can critique law and affirm it at the same time. The Lutheran tradition has tended to say, gospel gets all rid of law. not quite Paul would say, no, no, it's more complicated than that. The Adam and Eve story, you see, had a law and sin became concentrated in the world because of that law.

[44 : 06] So God gave Israel a law so that sin, again, could be concentrated somewhere so that he could deal with it. Mr. Wright eloquently says, God lured sin to Israel.

There he dealt with it. Oh, God is strange. God is unpredictable. God is mysterious. So everything now is, Mr.

Wright's phrase, he uses it all the time, everything now is rethought and reimagined. Monotheism, one God, election, the choice of Abraham, eschatology, those things of the future, the one God who chose Abraham and the one who will make humanity his faithful, obedient servants again.

That's why he created the world. In the new heavens and the new earth, he will do that for them. It is all now again rethought in the light of a crucified and risen Messiah.

Mr. Wright is at his most eloquent and convincing and mysterious in his own way. And I was just shocked when he said this simple thing. You can put it like this, I'm not quoting you, but do you love scripture today?

[45 : 27] I know you Protestant evangelicals are nuts about scripture. You have it on your refrigerators. You're like the Pharisees, they wore it on their foreheads. You memorize it.

You got it in your bloodstream. I'm happy about that. Do you love scripture? The Hebrew scriptures have been crucified and risen in their Messiah.

That's how to read the Old Testament. The Hebrew scriptures have been crucified and raised in Messiah Jesus. That's how to read it.

That's why you find Jesus everywhere back there, you Christians. You Messiah ones. Think of Hebrew scripture that way. 100 years after Paul died in Rome, there was a guy named Marcion, a heretic, who said, let's get rid of the Old Testament to waste time.

Bad God. I don't like that God. It's still being said today in liberal churches, that God didn't like homosexuals. He's a bad God. He was too violent. He was a nasty God.

[46 : 34] A lot of people still have God of the Old Testament bad, God of the New Testament good. Paul anticipated that problem coming. It was already at work in the Church of Rome. Don't despise Israel, he told them.

It's still at work. The Old Testament is crucified and risen in the Messiah. It's part of the mystery of salvation. Don't turn your backs on Israel and her Holy Scripture, the oracles of God.

They're still part of salvation's mystery. The one God of Jewish monotheism, yes, he has been revealed in person, this person, Jesus.

Jesus, yes. And I must rush to a conclusion, so of lots of time, you need to, when you have an apostle in your presence, you want to grill him. I hope this is being recorded from other church. This person, this person, may I remind you, he took the form of a servant, didn't he? The suffering servant of Isaiah. He bore the sins of many.

[47 : 36] He fulfills, that is to say, the mystery of temporal. That's what you did in the temple, you got rid of your sins. He bore the sins of many. In the temple, in the temple, there was regular sacrifice and incense.

The prayer of hope, usually the prayers of Jews, was a prayer of hope, of expectation, offered amid the ruins of the present. History is always rather ruinous, isn't it?

prayer. So pray constantly, I said to all of my churches. I tell Gentiles that always. Prayer is essentially a celebration and an intercession.

Jew, again, means praise. So praise always, and let the incense of prayer go up from you, because you are now the temple. So do the temple's work.

Forgiveness of sin, incense as prayer, a constant celebration that the God that you know is saving the world. You are the temple.

[48 : 45] The true Jew is one inwardly. I hope you are one today. I hope you are. Well, why, why finally should we do all of this?

Because the God of Israel revealed in person, revealed in and as, Mr. Wright, careful phrase he likes to use, revealed in and as Jesus of Nazareth is revealed as love.

My final word to you this morning. The Christian life, life in the Messiah, must be this kind of life.

The Messiah, I'll remind you, is Yahweh, the God of Israel.

Return to his temple. You are now that temple. His character is now revealed in all of its astonishing glory. What a story.

This is the last session I'm told of your program called Learner's Exchange, as noted, for this winter, spring term. Was there anything like Learner's Exchange in the earliest, earliest church?

[49 : 54] Well, yes. Why be child? As Paul heads towards the end of his magisterial glorious letter to the Romans, he says to them, he loves them, he talks to them in such affectionate terms, and he says to them, do you recall, he says to them, you are able, he says, to instruct one another.

High praise for the church at Rome. I have confidence in you, he said to them. you are able to instruct one another. Paul could not have said that to the church at Corinth.

He doesn't. Some churches probably can't instruct one another. Some churches, the guy in the pulpit can't instruct you very well about the gospel, but we wouldn't name names.

Because I'm not really an apostle. he would. Yes, able to instruct one another.

What is the heart of our instruction as we move to the close? What motivates the church? What motivates a ministry like Learner's Exchange? Paul would answer for us very clearly, the love of God revealed in Israel's Messiah, Jesus.

[51 : 14] That should be your motivation. That should be your goal. Make love your aim, he says. What a thing to say.

Make love your aim, Paul says. Love one another more and more, he says to the Thessalonians. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Israel's Messiah, our Lord.

Nothing. The love of Israel's Messiah compels us. He used to saying the love of Christ compels us. The love of Israel's Messiah.

In all of his mystery, he compels us. The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me, Paul says.

The mystery of the one God of Jewish monotheism revealed in person, as it explodes into the fullness of its meaning, if you had to sum it up in one word, it would be love.

[52 : 15] love, love, love, love. This God loves. Jew and Gentile, he's got a big plan, he's working it out.

Love one another. The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me indeed. Even without the word, the idea thunders in Paul. I knew nothing among you, he says to the Corinthians, except Jesus, Israel's Messiah, crucified.

Yes, he gave himself. Why do you give yourself in death for another? Because of love. Love. Paul's chief message is love.

Because he's seen Israel's Messiah and all that that means. That's where I began and therefore that's where I'll end. On the Damascus road, there was Israel's Messiah.

He is the faithful one. He is the faithful God, Jesus. Return to his temple, Yahweh. Jesus he is.

[53 : 22] Giving his spirit, Father, Son, Spirit. Work it out, church. Maybe you could go with the word like Trinity. There it is.

Church has been faithful. God is Trinity. That's where I began. That's what happened to me on the Damascus road.

God was in Israel's Messiah, reconciling the world to himself. Mr. Wright, trying to give us a picture of Paul.

Perhaps, if you read him positively, like an old, old, beautiful masterpiece, that a master, cleaner, restorer, moves away some of the distortions that come down to over Paul, inevitably, over the centuries, endless controversies between Catholic and Protestant, Luther and the Reformed, and he's been smudged and used, appropriately, inappropriately, distorted here and there, and Mr.

Wright wants to say, as best he can, let's see if we can do endless exegesis and make sure we're looking at Paul, not at ourselves, our traditions.

[54 : 44] Let's look at Paul, not our own traditions about Paul. God was in Israel's Messiah. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.

Thanks be to God. I want to say a word of prayer and then get some good time for discussion.

■■■■f. told you