

What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?
by N.T. Wright. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997. Pp. 192. *

This book is must reading for every seminary student, pastor, and interested Bible student who wants to stay abreast of the latest research in Pauline studies. I first heard some of this material at a seminar Wright gave at the Canadian Theological Seminary in Regina, Saskatchewan, several years ago and was profoundly impacted by it.

Wright helpfully begins by introducing the reader to the major players in Pauline research in this century: Schweitzer, Bultmann, Davies, Käsemann, and E.P. Sanders. Wright characterizes Pauline scholarship in this century as a pendulum swing between two suggested alternative centers of Pauline theology: justification by faith and union (participation) with Christ. But according to Wright, this is a false dichotomy, for both themes are found in Paul's writings side by side (e.g., Gal. 3:26-28).

The remainder of the book is given to the development of Wright's own creative synthesis. Two crucial pillars in Wright's argument are his understanding of the nature of Paul's gospel and of the Pauline concept of "the righteousness of God." Wright views Paul's gospel as the announcement of a royal victory (an idea further developed in Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God*), not merely a suggestion for others to consider the claims of Christ. For Paul, the cross marked Christ's decisive victory over the "principalities and powers," the victory which constituted Christ as Lord and King. This gospel of the victory of Christ provided Paul with his impetus for mission, challenging both Jewish and Gentiles audiences with the universal headship of Christ.

The Pauline phrase "the righteousness of God" (see the chart on p. 101) is understood by Wright to refer to God's own righteousness (possessive or subjective genitive) rather than as a "righteousness" given to human beings (genitive of origin or objective genitive). In the Hebrew law court, Wright argues, there were only three parties: the judge (in the present of God, who is perfectly righteous); the plaintiff (bringing the accusation); and the defendant (the accused; in the present case us, who are sinners). Now all that Paul means by "righteousness of God," according to Wright, is that sinners are acquitted from all guilt by a righteous God on the basis of Christ's work. This solution differs from Luther's, who focused on God's distributive justice (Latin *justitia*). Wright rather views Paul as casting the righteousness of God as God's covenant faithfulness to his promises, even his love, which in turn leads to corresponding actions.

It is not possible here to trace in detail Wright's exegetical argument (principally from Romans and Galatians) and reading this review cannot, and must not, be a substitute for working through his important arguments. It is still too early to see whether Wright's perspective will carry the day. While Wright essentially follows Dunn and Sanders, he is very much his own person and cannot be easily subsumed under any other scholar's thought. This well-written, comparatively brief, and highly suggestive work is one of the best introductions to recent research on Paul that I know. Anyone seeking to understand Pauline scholarship will ignore it at his own peril.

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