

# ALL SAINTS MARPLE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

## PAUL : GOD'S NEW THING

### Introduction

"The greatest mind in the NT to interpret the person and work of Jesus is the converted Pharisee, Paul." (G E Ladd)

Paul was a man of three worlds; Jewish, Hellenistic (born in Tarsus) and Christian, and trained as a Rabbi in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel.

The seeds of Paul's theology were all sown in his conversion experience, his encounter with the risen Christ:

- Jesus' appearance proved that he really was risen from the dead and that the Christian proclamation was correct;
- Jesus must therefore be the Messiah and the Son of God
- Jesus identifies himself with the Church, who must therefore be truly the people of the Messiah. But if a people who did not observe the Law as did the Pharisees were truly the people of the Messiah, then salvation must be the gift of the Messiah apart from keeping the Law. Thus the scope of salvation must be universal and not confined to Jews alone.
- Furthermore, if the Messiah was here, then the end times had begun and God's Kingdom had dawned ahead of time. Jesus and his people are the first fruits of God's final reign, and the Spirit is given as a foretaste of this.

### The Centre of Pauline theology

The Reformation view - Justification by faith.

More recent scholarship has shown that the Palestinian Judaism of Paul's day was very different in outlook and theology from late mediaeval Catholicism, leading to the 'New Perspective on Paul' as developed by W D Davies, N T Wright and J D G Dunn.

Paul's concern is to show that Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, is the true fulfilment of the hope of Israel, and that in him God has made known a way of fulfilling his own purposes and of putting people right with himself, which allows him to be true to his own just character.

Paul has sometimes been vilified as the one who took the beautiful and simple message of Jesus and turned it into a religious system.

"Paul's thought can be best understood as a redefinition of the framework One God, One People of God, One Future for the world, around the Messiah and the Spirit. Each of these redefinitions is rooted in a re-reading of Israel's Scriptures. This is not merely a matter of typology, but rather an essentially historical and sequential reading of Scripture in which the death and resurrection of the Messiah formed the unexpected but always intended climax of God's lengthy plan." (N T Wright)

### The Problem

Sin - humankind in rebellion against God.

The effects of sin

- Misdirected religion

- Self-indulgence

Link between idolatry and sexual license was well established in Jewish understanding. Independence from God can quickly become commitment or slavery to self indulgence. Two most powerful inner drives are worshipping and sexual; both have capacity to be distorted.

- Sins

In P's lists of various sins (1 Cor 5 & 6, Gal 5) majority of vices listed are social - real impact of sin is seen in breakdown of relationships. many are also petty.

- Death

Romans 5:12-21

Death is not simply natural consequence of created state but of sin.

P seems to be saying that all humanity shares a common subserviency to sin and death; death is the outcome of a breakdown within creation. There is a two-sidedness to this state of affairs, involving both sin as a given of the social fabric of society and sin as an accountable action of individual responsibility. Hard to determine the precise lines of responsibility but overall this state is consequence of humanity's refusal to acknowledge God, of the creature's attempt to dispense with the Creator.

### **God's Solution**

God's solution to problem of sin and death is to call into being a people through Abraham who will be his chosen people, a light to the nations, and be called for the sake of others.

What is it that establishes whether or not someone belongs to the covenant people?

Unfortunately, the people who are called to be the solution, have become part of the problem!

### **The Law**

P uses *nomos* to sum up Israel's covenantal obligations as set out in Mosaic Torah.

#### *The measure of God's requirement and Judgment*

Most obvious function of the law is that of defining and measuring sin and transgression (Rom 3:20, 4:15 etc - no transgression where there is no law etc)

It remains axiomatic for P as a believer in the Messiah Jesus that the Law (as witnessed throughout the OT) functions to define transgression and to make people aware of their sin. Equally it alerts us to the reality of God's judgment.

#### *Israel under the law*

Gal 3:23 - under the law seems to refer to a kind of protective custody; the law is not oppressive here but protective until the coming faith should be revealed.

Positive role of schoolteacher (v24) in instruction and discipline and shaping.

#### *A relationship whose time is past*

a) Gal 3-4 seems to imply that Israel's special relation under the law was only temporary. Guardian angel role was kind of interregnum between giving of promise and its fulfilment.

P has sense that coming of Christ marks a climax and completion in God's overarching purpose and Israel no longer needed the special protection of the law. Clinging to the law thus became a clinging to an underprivileged status. The attraction of law to the gentile believers was the attraction of the detention room (Gal 4:8-10), the equivalent of putting themselves under their old gods (stoicheia).

b) In Romans and Galatians the first criticism of the law is not a criticism of the law as such but of Jews for assuming that their historic status of privilege under the law still held good, even after the coming of the Messiah.

#### *A law for life? - or death?*

Rom 7:10 - law intended for life. Allusion to Gen 2-3 God's intention to regulate Adam's life in the garden. Obedience to the commandment ensured continuous access to the source of life.

Deuteronomy 30 parallel where obedience to the law is tied up with life and prosperity. Law is way of regulating life of those chosen by God. No thought of earning or meriting life not previously experienced. Life is a gift and keeping law is primarily thought of as way of living appropriate to the covenant and its continuance.

### *Is the law sin?*

Jews who boast in their possession of the law fail to realise the more fundamental role of the law in defining sin and judging it.

More sombre note sounded in Rom 5:20 where law is described as being introduced to increase the trespass.

Law as increasing trespass may only refer to law giving sin occasion to strike home and attack or may imply that the law is a stalking horse designed to bring sin into the open and reveal its true character. 7;7-8:4 actually constitutes a defence of the law. Law has a complex role in relation to sin.

Defence of law deepened in 7:14-25 by reference to sinful flesh "I". Power of sin exploiting weakness of the flesh which is the real culprit here.

The weakness of the flesh means that the law on its own is unable to counteract the power of sin.

### **The end of the law - Christ Crucified**

- Sacrifice for sin

- Christ our representative (and substitute)

- Bearing the Curse of the Law

The covenant breaking Israelite becomes like the uncovenanted gentile and is excluded from the promises. The cursed Christ has thus been put out of the covenant in order that both Jew and Gentile can be admitted to the New Covenant.

- Justification by faith alone  
(The example of Abraham)

- Not of works

Gal 3:6-9 - in continuing to rely on works of the law and to insist on Israel's privilege and separation from other nations people were resisting the manifest will of God in the gospel. Thus their understanding and practice of the law was deficient and they were under the curse pronounced by Dt 27:26.

P evidently did not associate good works with works of the law and can be seen to commend the obedience of faith, good works prepared by God for us to walk in etc.

- The blessings of Justification

Acceptance by God; forgiveness; the putting to death of sinful flesh; the granting of the privilege of belonging to the covenant people of God. Justification also means Gentiles being granted a share in Israel's inheritance.

### **§19 Israel & the Church (Romans 9-11)**

*Has God's word failed? (9:1-5)*

Paul's theology of justification emerged not as an attempt by P the individual to find peace with God but as his attempt to understand how it was that Gentiles as Gentiles could be accepted by the God of Israel. What was at stake here was God's own faithfulness and integrity. Was his covenant with Israel thus called into question?

Romans is an exposition of God's righteousness and his righteousness denotes the fulfilment of his obligation to the people chosen by him to be his covenant partner.

### *Who is Israel?*

The identity of Israel becomes the focus of P's exposition.

In earlier chapters P has referred to Jews and Greeks; now he introduces the term 'Israel'. Jew is term used when distinguishing Jews from people who come from other regions or countries; primarily an ethnic term, and used to give perspective from the outside. Israel on the other hand denotes an insider perspective, a self-understanding, a covenant understanding. It is the self-understanding of a people who identify themselves as chosen by God, descendants of the patriarch. Jew defines someone by relation to land and by differentiation from other people, whereas Israel defines primarily by relation to God.

Theme of these chapters is not 'the church and Israel' but 'Israel' and how it is to be understood. For P 'Israel' is and remains the vehicle of God's saving purpose, so the task is to understand who is 'israel' and how 'Israel' is to be defined. Once that issue has been sorted then secondary issues of Jews and Gentiles can be clarified.

#### *The character of Israel's election (9:7-29)*

Israel is not defined by physical descent (from Abraham) but through God's promise. Nor does achievement (works/proven fidelity to the covenant) determine who is of Israel (as in story of Jacob and Esau). God's purpose of election is determined solely by his call (9:11-12).

9:24-29 - Israel of God's promise includes both Jews and gentiles. Scripture refs point to inclusion of gentiles (not my people) and the remnant of Israel.

#### *Israel's misunderstanding of its call (9:30-10:21)*

When Israel is defined by God's call, the Israel which continues to define itself in the traditional terms of the law, that which separates them from other nations, is thereby failing to appreciate the role of the law (which is to be understood in terms of faith and in relation to Christ).

9:30-10:4 - To continue to pursue works of the law is to misunderstand grounds on which Jacob was chosen and not Esau. Gentiles have stumbled upon truth that Gospel has brought them to the goal which the law was supposed to promote.

10:5-13 - Often misunderstood because often seen as a direct conflict between the law and faith. P was not wholly antagonistic to the law; his critique was directed against the law in its role as guardian of Israel's distinctiveness and as the law abused by sin. 9:31 seems to refer approvingly to the pursuit of the law of righteousness - it is a proper goal which is missed because Israel pursued it in the wrong way. Implication is that there is a proper way to pursue this goal i.e. by faith.

#### *Israel not abandoned (11:1-24)*

God has not repudiated his people whom he foreknew. God's grace has ensured that there is still a remnant of Israel.

Ps 69 quotation in vv 9-10 is a prayer of David against the enemies of Israel. Israel's failure to respond to messiah is not simply an act of disobedience it also God's response to David's prayer against the enemies of Israel.

v11 - Stumble is not terminal, they are not excluded forever. Israel had to be put out of the race (at least temporarily) in order that Gentiles might be able to compete successfully. Purpose in view was that success of Gospel amongst gentiles would provoke Israel to jealousy.

Ian Parkinson, March 2010

<http://www.marpleparish.co.uk/Resources/theology2.htm>