

Tuesday Lunchtime Bible Studies

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

Chapter 6 - Good News for Israel

- ❖ The righteousness of God
 - The key question here is how to translate and understand the Greek phrase, *dikaiosune theou*
 - Strictly translated, it means the “righteousness of God”
 - But is God then the object or the subject of the phrase?
 - Thinking of this like the phrase the “love of God” will help. Are we speaking of our love for God or God’s love for us? Grammar can’t answer the question, it must be answered in context.
 - Wright suggests (correctly, in my view) that there are two key contexts for understanding the “righteousness of God.”
 - The first context is God’s faithfulness to the covenant. God made big promises and *dikaiosune theou* refers to the fact that is also the big promise keeper. This is the ground of the Jewish eschatological hope that one day God would put all things right.
 - The second context is the Hebrew Law Court, where “righteousness” means one thing with respect to the judge and another with respect to the plaintiff/defendant
 - A righteous judge is one who carries appropriately the duties of a judge
 - A righteous plaintiff/defendant is the one who is declared to be in the right
- ❖ Imputation/impartation and the chart on p. 101!
 - Wright’s point is simply that the righteousness of God is God’s and can’t be given away. It speaks of the judge’s righteousness, which is not the same thing as the defendant being declared innocent/in the right by the judge.
- ❖ Philippians 3:9
 - Here, Paul helps us by writing *dikaiosune ek theou*. He inserts the “from,” so we know, grammatically, that he is speaking of the righteousness of the defendant, declaring the defendant to be in the right.
- ❖ 2 Corinthians 5:20-21
 - This is a tricky verse. Paul uses (no, *ek*/from). How is it that we become the righteousness of God?
 - Could it mean that God’s righteousness is given to us? No . . . for we are not the judge.
 - This is from a passage about Paul’s apostolic ministry, not believers in general. How could the apostolic ministry be the *dikaiosune theou*? Because it is the incarnation of God’s covenantal faithfulness. How can we see God’s promise keeping at work? In the work of the apostles.

- Wright says you can know that his reading is the better one by reading the whole paragraph. Seeing the apostles as the embodiment of God's covenant faithfulness fits perfectly with the thrust of the passage.
- ❖ Romans 3:21-26
 - The faithfulness of Jesus Christ reveals God's righteousness for all to see, that God keeps the promises that God makes.
 - This passage has God's covenant faithfulness in view.
- ❖ Romans 9-10
 - The Jews have tried to substitute a righteousness of their own through the markers of the Law, rather than submitting to God's covenant faithfulness, the goal of which is the restoration of all people, not just those who have kept God's law.
- ❖ Romans 1:17
 - Now, back to the beginning.
 - The fact that God has been faithful to his promises has been revealed - like a package being opened - through the faithfulness of Christ for the benefit of all those who are in turn faithful.
 - Faith to faith to faith - through faith for faith