



into the Melting Pot

the question is more important than the answer

Sunday 14 February 2016

Women and Hats – the Three Pauls

- Jesus and Paul were both Jews with a passion for the God of Israel.
- Paul expanded what was later to become 'Christianity' to non-Jews.
- These writings influenced Augustine, Martin Luther and John Wesley (among others) leading to a strong 'Protestant' tradition.
- These writings have been used to justify oppression concerning slavery, anti-Semitism, women and homosexuality.

Letters attributed to Paul

Of the 27 books in the New Testament, 13 are attributed to Paul. Scholarship suggests that seven books are genuine, three questionable, and three unlikely to be by Paul; modern scholars are moving to a seven six split.

Radical Paul – 1 Thessalonians (<54CE), 1 Corinthians (54CE), 2 Corinthians(55/56CE), Galatians (56 or 54CE), Romans (56/57CE), Philippians (55-62CE), Philemon (61-63 or 58-60 or 56-57CE).

Reactionary (Pseudo) Paul – Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, Colossians written in the years following his death (at the hands of Nero in 67CE).

Conservative (Anti) Paul – 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus written in the first half of the second century, perhaps fifty or more years after Paul's death.

There is a fourth '**Narrative Paul**' found in Acts, written by Luke some thirty years after Paul's death, but it does not always harmonise with the Radical Paul.

Other letters attributed to Paul, also not written by him and not in the canon, are: Laodiceans, 3 Corinthians, Paul and Seneca.

Context

These writings were to small communities of the early Jesus movement in specific circumstances; they were not yet 'Christians' in the sense we use the word today, but *followers of Jesus within Judaism*.

Paul was a Jew, in fact a Pharisee (see note below).

They were living under imperial Roman rule and Roman theology with the Emperor as Son of God, Lord, Saviour of the World, bringer of peace (pax romana) through military conquest.

'Jesus is Lord' – the first creed – is high treason.

Slavery

Radical: The letter to Philemon (P272), where his slave Onesimus (a slave name meaning 'useful' – see the play on words used in v11) has run away to Paul. The request (duty) is that he returns a free man (v16, 19-20).

Reactionary: Ephesians 6:5-9 (P244) and Colossians 3:22-41 (P253) slaves obey masters; masters treat fairly.

Conservative: Titus 2:9 (P270) slaves be submissive with no comment about masters.

Patriarchy & Women

Radical: 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 (P210) sexual activity & abstinence – note husband/wife and wife/husband symmetry.

Reactionary: Colossians 3:18-19 (P253) and Ephesians 5:22-24 (P244) wives subject to husbands; husbands love and not treat harshly.

Conservative: 1 Timothy 2:11-15 (P262) women learn in silence, not allowed to teach, and to have no authority over men.

Women and Hats

1 Corinthians 11:2-16 (P214) details the requirement for men to remove headwear (v4), women to cover their heads (v6) and comments on long hair (v14-15).

It's all about cultural context (v16)!!!

Paul's Message

Paul is a Jewish Christ mystic – Damascus Road experience: Jesus 'appeared' as in a vision.

He preaches 'Christ crucified and raised'.

- Crucifixion was reserved for those who challenged imperial rule or for defiant slaves (because they both reject the Roman domination system).
- Crucifixion was an imperial 'no' to Jesus; Jesus raised was God's 'yes'.
- Galations 2:19-20 (P235) - I have been crucified with Christ . . . and it is Christ who lives in me. This is metaphorical language, like 'died and reborn'; it represents a new way of life, living for God's justice, reconciled with God, and not the 'way of the world'.
- The risen Christ is an experienced reality. 1 Corinthians 15: 42-44 (P220) as a seed dies . . . an understanding of resurrection that is nothing to do with a re-animated corpse; it is a spiritual re-birth.
- Crucified and risen – we undergo an internal death and receive a spirit transplant; Jesus is Lord, not Caesar; we participate in bringing that new life to the world.

Romans – written to a community Paul had not met so most fully expounds his thinking. It is dense reading. It was taken by the deaconess Phoebe – who would have read and expounded the letter (see Patriarchy above).

Do not read it post reformation! – but as a Jesus following Jew within conventional Judaism under and criticising Roman imperialism.

The major theme within Romans is about Unification – how to unify differences within the early Jesus followers. The book can be divided into three parts
Romans 1:16 – 8:39 (P188 on) Gentiles (non-Jews) and Jews
Romans 9:1 – 11:36 (P196 on) Jews and Jesus followers
Romans 12:1 – 15:11 (P200 on) Jesus followers and non-Jews (Gentiles)

How We Are Put Right With God

Romans 3:21-31 (P190)

- Grace is a gift
- Dying 'for' does not have to mean 'as a substitute' – this was not the meaning within Jewish practice - sacrifice means 'making sacred', a gift to God (followed by a shared meal).
- Atonement is a means of reconciliation
- Redemption (nothing to do with sin) but redeemed from bondage; being liberated.
- The death of Jesus is a parable of God's grace, a revelation of God's character as love.

Within Protestantism, 'justification by grace through faith' became 'justification by faith' with faith meaning believing a correct set of doctrines – joy had been translated to joyless.

Background Notes

Pharisee

Followed the Torah strictly but allowed teaching, a development of the Torah for changing situations not directly covered by the original (603) Laws. Thus there were 39 specific additional Sabbath prohibitions to avoid accident or ignorance leading to a breaking of the Law. This 'Oral Law' was held to have 'come from Moses' in the sense that it could have come from Moses had he added the detail.

There was a strong ethical emphasis eg strict tithing was seen as representing loyalty to God so Pharisees would only buy food and eat with other Pharisees in case it had not been tithed.

Sadducee

This group also developed during the Hasmonaean period, all priests of wealthy backgrounds and still in control of the Sanhedrin under the Herods and the Romans. They were conservative and only accepted the validity of the written Law, rejecting later developments (eg the after-life, reward and retribution, angels and demons, fate).

Anselm

The Bishop of Canterbury in 1097 wrote his *Cur Deus Homo* (Why did God become human?) often referred to as 'the most unfortunately successful piece of theology ever written'. His argument is summed up as:

- Forgiveness requires compensation
- Our debt to God is infinite so no man can pay it
- Jesus, as God incarnate, can.
- His death is a substitutionary sacrifice for sin, so now we can be forgiven.

Most of this material has come from The First Paul – Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan (SPCK 978-0-281-06158-7) 2009, with additional reference to the Good News Study Bible and the Oxford Bible Dictionary.