

1-1-1999

## What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?, N. T. Wright

Ronald L. Tyler  
ron.tyler@pepperdine.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Tyler, Ronald L. (1999) "What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?, N. T. Wright," *Leaven*: Vol. 7: Iss. 3, Article 12.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol7/iss3/12>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Religion at Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Leaven by an authorized editor of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [bailey.berry@pepperdine.edu](mailto:bailey.berry@pepperdine.edu).

## Book Reviews

Markus McDowell,  
Eleanor Daniel, Editors



Kenneth O. Gangel and James C. Wilhoit, eds., *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Adult Education* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 1993). Reviewed by Charles Gresham.

Kenneth O. Gangel, distinguished Christian educator, and James C. Wilhoit, professor at Wheaton College, have left us in their debt by editing this fine book. Contributors are outstanding Christian educators such as Edward L. Hays, Malcolm S. Knowles, Warren S. Benson, Wesley, Willis, Harold J. Westing, Robert Pazmiño, and some eighteen others. Essays relating to adult Christian education move from biblical and theological foundations to adult learning, curriculum, how to teach various adult groups, family life education, and adult education programming. Written by leaders who are genuinely "expert" in their fields, these essays offer a responsible presentation of "evangelical" Christian education for adults.

After surveying the biblical

message (which was written by adults and applied specifically to the life situations of adults), Gangel emphasizes needs faced by present-day adults to which the Bible can be applied. Edward L. Hayes surveys the theological scene of the late twentieth century and then sets out "an adequate theology" that "must stand the test of rapid social change," equip adults "for the crises of life," and face "the tough questions on our human Destiny" (p. 35). Such matters as the "centrality of the Bible," the "Christological imperative," the "human factor," and the "corporate mission and ministry of the church," all in light of a biblical theology, are significant (pp. 36–44).

Building upon the first two chapters, such items as "spiritual formation" (chapter 3) and "teaching strategies" (chapters 9–15) for various adult groups—single, young adults, middle adults, older adults—are discussed in terms of cultural demands and adequate learning theory. Other chapters discuss programming needs of

current adult life in contemporary church situations.

This volume is, as the title suggests, a handbook. It surveys the current issues in Christian education and thus would be helpful to anyone engaged in adult education. But it would also serve admirably as a text in an entry-level adult Christian education class, offering guidance from veteran practitioners who have kept up with the latest trends in adult education.

CHARLES GRESHAM, retired professor of theology and Christian education, taught at Kentucky Christian College in Grayson, Kentucky.

N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). Reviewed by Ronald L. Tyler.

Wright is Dean of Lichfield Cathedral in Staffordshire, England, and is the author of various impor-



tant books: *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1986), *The New Testament and the People of God* (1992), and a volume, in process, on Paul.

These are exhaustive tomes that I highly recommend to the advanced student. Two other popular, widely read books are *The Original Jesus* and *Who Was Jesus?*

Wright views this present 192-page book as an interim report on his forthcoming Paul volume. This is an exciting and timely book that makes one anxious for the larger work. Wright correctly affirms that Paul has been abused and misunderstood; he has had scholars impose their categories on him, had the wrong questions asked of him, and been criticized for giving unclear answers. Further, Paul has had his material used to fit schemes with which he would not have approved. Wright confesses feeling like one who has climbed only halfway up the mountain in understanding Paul (a feeling that all true Pauline scholars ought to confess).

Wright's critical stance often accepts Acts as valuable historical material regarding Paul. He uses the seven generally accepted letters of Paul as source material (Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, and 1 Thessalonians). He regards Colossians as written by Paul and Ephesians as likely from Paul. He, correctly, sees Paul as deeply rooted in the Hebraic tradition (which was thoroughly Hellenized). Wright has a helpful summary/conclusion at the end of most chapters.

His annotated bibliography (pp. 185–92) is valuable for its clear

insights into various scholarly works. For example, Wright asserts that David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (1995) is the “fullest, best and most recent study of the relationship between Jesus and Paul” and that Martin Hengel is “probably the most learned New Testament scholar in the world today.”

Chapter 1, “Puzzling Over Paul,” examines five scholars Wright believes essential for modern Pauline study: A. Schweitzer, R. Bultmann, W. D. Davies, E. Kasemann, and J. P. Sanders. Wright then summarizes, precisely and accurately, certain current topics: history, theology, exegesis, and application. This is a usable introduction to some modern Pauline issues.

Chapter 2, “Saul the Persecutor, Paul the Convert,” places Paul firmly in his Jewish setting as a Shammaite Pharisee and stresses the influence of his conversion on his life and theology. It is not clear that we can be as certain as Wright regarding Paul's pre-Christian training. Nonetheless, the reader will learn much about ancient Judaism.

Chapter 3, “Herald of the King,” explains that by *the gospel* Paul did not mean “how one gets saved” but rather the cross, the resurrection, which initiated the new age, Jesus as God's Messiah and Israel's representative King, and Jesus as Lord of the whole world. The chapter is a strong and accurate statement of Paul's gospel. A central value of this chapter is its study of the word *gospel*.

Chapter 4, “Paul and Jesus,” affirms that Jesus was divine for Paul, who held firmly to Jewish monotheism. Wright engages in some very stimulating exegesis to show how Jesus revealed God. This is one of the better chapters in the book, whatever one thinks of his conclusions. The question of the humanity and/or divinity of Jesus was one of the heated issues in early Christian theology.

Chapter 5, “Good News for Pagans,” shows how Paul's pre-Christian zeal against Christianity became replaced by his zeal for taking the gospel to the pagan world. This is a vivid statement of what Paul believed before and after his conversion.

Chapter 6, “Good News for Israel,” affirms that Jesus brought a new vision of God along with his sense of the love of God. Wright establishes a connection between the death of Jesus and that vision—a connection, carefully related to Romans 9–11, that will allow the reader some new insights into Paul's view of Israel.

Chapter 7, “Justification and the Church,” addresses what justification is and is not. Wright has a profound grasp of the history of the answers in Christian thought. He believes that most discussions of justification have been off the mark. Within an outstanding statement of the Jewish setting of Paul, Wright gives his own three-point summary of justification with respect to the concepts of covenant, law court, and eschatology. This is an important contribution to the study of Paul's view of justification.



Chapter 8, “God’s Renewed Humanity,” discusses Paul’s vision of God’s renewed humanity along the lines of worship, resurrection, holiness, love, and mission. The study of holiness is one of the best aspects of the chapter.

Chapter 9, “Paul’s Gospel Then and Now,” affirms that Paul’s gospel was, and remains, a valid source for the renewal of the church. Its use will demand that people be willing to be “wise fools, strong weaklings, failures in human terms.”

Chapter 10, “Paul, Jesus, and Christian Origins,” takes strong issue with the recent work of A. N. Wilson, *Paul: The Mind of the Apostle* (1997). The old issue of whether it was Jesus or Paul who founded Christianity resurfaces. Wright affirms that while Wilson contains interesting historical and cultural material along with suggestive ideas, the work is theologically deficient and ignorant of the centrality of the resurrection of Jesus for Paul. (Wilson believes that Paul’s view of the resurrection was derived from the cult of Mithras.) Although Wright acknowledges strong points in Wilson, his critique of the work is thorough, devastating, and appropriate.

An index would have greatly improved the value of this important volume; nevertheless, I highly recommend the book to readers of *Leaven*.

**RONALD L. TYLER** is a professor of religion at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California.

Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 265 pages. Reviewed by Morris Yates.

Fee and Stuart, in *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, offer significant and highly useful help to the believer who wants to apply the Bible to contemporary issues, concerns, and struggles. They build an inviting and readily usable bridge connecting the “‘then and there’ of the original text to the ‘here and now’ of our own life settings” (p. 10). With a minimum of technical jargon and in an easily understood style, they also build a bridge to span the gap between the exegetical scholar and the contemporary church.

The authors contend that the believing scholar must be concerned for both what a text meant and what a text means. Whereas the scholar may be more concerned with what a text meant, and the believer, with what it means, reliable application requires that both make the journey from then to now. The operative premise is that the texts of the living Word “mean what they meant” (p. 11). The Bible reader is thus led to a twofold task that requires determining as nearly as possible what the original text meant (exegesis) and then “learning to hear that same meaning in a variety of new or different contexts of our own day” (p. 11).

Fee and Stuart hold that God has used a wide variety of literary genres in the Bible. In chapters 3–13, they set forth the main conventions of ten of those genres. Litera-

ture must be read in terms of its genre before its meaning—original or present-day—can be understood. Fee and Stuart explain the differences among the genres and then demonstrate how understanding what the literature said originally can help in understanding what it has to say today. For example, to be more reliably understood, the psalms need to be heard as poetry that was spoken to God. Looking for a plot in Proverbs, Isaiah, or Jeremiah is as frustrating as it is futile, for their genres do not have plots. The authors offer easily comprehensible and systematic guidance for getting more out of the various types of literature found in the Bible.

The authors are sympathetic to the fear of some believers that approaches used by Bible scholars wind up taking the reading of the Bible out of their hands. Fee and Stuart advocate devotional reading with a view to putting into effect God’s will in the life of the reader. They insist that every reader is in reality an exegete “of sorts. The only real question is whether you will be a good one” (p. 20). They present easily understood and readily applicable information to help the believer understand how to distinguish between a poor and a better interpretation. In the first chapter, entitled “Introduction: The Need to Interpret,” they kindly and gently—but cogently—set forth numerous examples, illustrations, and arguments aimed at disarming the limiting and naive assumption that reading does not involve interpretation. They provide a systematic means for getting a

better grip on the possible range of meaning in biblical texts.

Scripture is described as having a dual nature, being both the word of God and the word of man. This concept is set forth in terms of the analogy of the dual nature of Jesus Christ as both divine and human. Thus the Bible has “eternal significance . . . and historical particularity” (p. 17). Exegesis, “the careful, systematic study of the Scripture to discover the original, intended meaning” (p. 19), is seen as the first step of the interpreter. It is viewed as a largely historical endeavor. While exegesis is often thought of as the province of the experts, the authors suggest that the ordinary believer can learn to do good exegesis. They advocate learning to read the text in its historical and literary contexts and to ask better questions of the text. They show how to use the work of experts to achieve this without sacrificing independent thought. While they

want the reader to learn how to think exegetically, they view that as only the first step. The ultimate goal is to move from then to now, from what it meant to what it means in the life of the believer. The realm of what it means is, in this work, the province of hermeneutics. They insist that proper “‘hermeneutics’ begins with solid ‘exegesis’” (p. 25). They are able to convey all of this with an inviting attitude, in a way that avoids intimidation. Their confidence is quietly contagious and tends to generate a can-do response.

Chapter 2, entitled “The Basic Tool: A Good Translation,” discusses how and why translations differ. Textual criticism and various theories of translation and their significance for the reader are briefly discussed. Various translations are placed on a continuum ranging from word-for-word through dynamic equivalent to freer

translations. The authors show why using several versions can be more beneficial than using any single version.

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the genre of epistles, with a view to learning how to think in terms of their historical and literary context and then what they might be saying today. Following this general pattern, chapter 5 deals with Old Testament narratives, and chapter 6 extends this information to Acts. Chapter 7 focuses on the gospels and the problem associated with their literary relationship. Psalms, parables, law, wisdom literature, the prophets, and apocalyptic writing are discussed in separate chapters. An appendix on commentary selection and two indexes conclude this valuable work.

**MORRIS YATES** worships with the Church of Christ in Tulare, California.