

356 The mind of Christ, more widely applied

I was struck by Tom Wright's reply to my asking for 'a book about his "how to think"^[353]', which was: 'Philippians'. As I read it, I noted Paul's insistence (Tom's translation):^[2:2-4] 'Bring your thinking into line with one another' and 'Regard everybody else as superior' and 'look after each other's best interests, not your own'. So I then tried to apply that to the issue of gay marriage^[354,5] – a very pressing (and difficult) issue, so I think we must try.

I then continued to read on in chapter 2, but not before I was interrupted for a couple of days by thoughts of Matt 5's beatitudes, and Gal 5's fruits of the Spirit, both of which I try to drum into myself regularly, as they feel crucial. For example, 5/6 years ago, the fruit 'patience' kept coming up – Sue even made me a bookmark, embroidered with that single word. Given her diagnosis of Alzheimer's, two years ago, how prophetic was that! My (and her) having patience can transform things for us.

Anyway, after that glorious picture of what the Messiah was like,^[2:5-11] I balked at Tom's translation 'work at bringing about your own salvation' and then saw 'taking this with utter seriousness'. So while this is clearly something really, really important, I know that some readers (and the Paul Bev of 12+ years ago) would have reacted badly to that translation. In the past, we've tried to play down the phrase 'work out your own salvation', knowing that salvation is by faith alone, not by works, and Tom seems to be making it worse: 'work at bringing about your own salvation'!

While the Reformation rightly challenged works as the *means* of salvation, I feel that we now have a view of salvation that's a thin shadow of Paul's view – hardly more than an on-off switch that we flick by 'praying a prayer of salvation'. (My homegroup is currently imbibing James, who certainly challenges this narrow view.)

Trying not to be too negative about my former view of faith, I do now see 'shine among them like lights in the world'^[v15] very differently. For me, what should 'shine out' is our quality of life (Mt 5 + Gal 5) and not our insistence that (caricature) 'we have the Bible, so we know what's right, and our job is to tell the world where it's going wrong, morally.'

Then add, 'There must be no grumbling and disputing in anything you do',^[v14] and I blanch slightly, thinking of the church politics I've been part of over the years...

I wrote the above a few days ago, but it didn't seem 'finished'; then I become aware of the implications of Justin Welby's resignation, and his own views about gay marriage. Now, however you feel about the Church of England, please would you pray for a Phil 2 + Mt 5 + Gal 5 outcome? Thanks!

Paul Bev. 15.11.24