

369 A real eyeopener – thanks, Tom!

I'm a 'words man' – I love following the meanings of words: Where are they used and why? Well, the *mot du jour* is 'covenant'. And you've probably picked up that I'm a fan of Tom Wright's translation, the *New Testament for Everyone*. So I typed 'covenant' into Bible Gateway, selected NTFE, and got a list of its 78 uses. But, hang on, 'covenant' only appears in the NIV New Testament 36 times – interesting!

You know, too, that I say repeatedly that what we call 'the Word of God' (in whichever translation) only represents the best attempts of scholars to tell us what *they* think is the best set of (English) words to convey the writers' intended meaning, based on *their* understanding of what God is trying to tell us in the Bible as a whole.

Now, Tom's excessive(?) use of 'covenant', relates to my feeling that 'righteousness', as mainly used to translate *dikaíosynē*, often conjures up in our minds ideas that were not what the writers intended.^[341] And that was what triggered my eyeopener...

In NTFE, Tom renders *dikaíosynē* as 'covenant membership' (13), 'covenant justice' (11), or 'covenant faithfulness' (2). These are mostly in Romans, especially 9-10, and reading those two chapters was what caused my lightbulb moment.

As we know, 'righteousness' comes by faith (and faith alone!), not by works. But what exactly is it that Paul says comes by faith? Tom says it's 'covenant membership' – that is, *membership of God's covenant family*. Read it and see what you think, but I'm beginning to think that this is actually the whole point of the whole Bible: not, 'how I get saved', but how we (re)join God's family.

A further hint is the book titles: *The Old Covenant* and *The New Covenant*. (A 'testament' is an agreement, a 'covenant'.) *The Old Covenant* is the story of how the people of God went in and out of God's covenant like yoyos! *The New Covenant* is the story of how Jesus came to fulfil all the predictions cleverly planted by God into *The Old Covenant*, and how Jesus' death and resurrection fulfilled God's plan: all of the nations of the world are to be blessed through God's covenant people – first Israel, now all who have been brought into covenant membership by putting their trust in Jesus. One big long-term plan!

God brings us into his covenant community, we welcome others into that community, and we live to serve other people (whether they actually want to be part of that community or not). What a glorious vision of 'Thy kingdom come on earth'!

So then, while we have the chance, let's do good to everyone, and particularly to the household of the faith. Gal 6:10

Yes, of course, our faith is still about how we can be freed from sin, through Christ's death on the cross, but the Good News is not about **me**; it's about **God's plan** for the world. Remember, the Lord's prayer only uses 'we', not 'I'.