

**'Learning from Paul Together:
How New Insights into Paul's Teaching can Help Move us Forward in Mission'**

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Introduction

Thank you for your invitation and welcome. I have spent a good deal of time over the years trying to help build bridges between different Christian groups and churches and I remain convinced that one of the best ways forward is to read the Bible together and – perhaps paradoxically! – not least the letters of St Paul. I say 'paradoxically' because Paul has often been a figure of controversy, both in his own day of course and ever since the sixteenth-century Reformation, when he was more or less claimed as a patron saint by the Protestant Reformers even though they often disagreed amongst themselves as to how exactly he should be interpreted.

Before we get properly into Paul himself, however, let me say a word or two about the theme upon which I have been asked to speak this evening; about three words in particular, 'Mission', 'Teaching' and 'Together'. These are all important for Paul himself and for us today, but they all need sharpening up. (I should say at the outset that I'm taking for granted throughout this presentation a good deal that I have argued at more length in various published works.)

First, 'Mission'. The mission of the church – or, more properly, the mission of God through the church, the ongoing tasks for which the living God 'sends' and equips the church – can only be properly understood in the light of a fully biblical eschatology. This means firmly embracing the biblical vision of new creation, of new heavens and new earth, inaugurated when Jesus announced God's kingdom and rose from the dead after defeating the powers of darkness, and to be consummated when he returns in glory to make all things new. The mission of the church *derives from* that inauguration, energised by the same Spirit by whose power Jesus was raised, and *points forward to* that consummation, anticipating it, demonstrating its life-transforming reality even in the present time, calling men, women and children to share in the new life, communal and personal, which is already a reality and which will be fully revealed at the last.

I anticipate that this holistic new-creation vision and all that follows from it may be startling to many western protestants, for whom 'eschatology' often focuses on 'going to heaven when you die' on the one hand and a 'second coming' on the other hand in which Jesus will snatch his people away from the wreck of the present world and take them to 'heaven' at last. This western vision, deeply rooted (albeit with variations) in the Middle Ages, gives rise to a sense of 'mission' simply in terms of 'saving souls for heaven', despite the fact that the Bible nowhere speaks of the future in those terms. I suspect in fact that a certain amount of resistance to what I and others have done that goes under the loose title of 'new perspectives' on Paul – there is no single 'new perspective', but a variety – has come not so much from problems connected with the traditional doctrine of justification, though that of course matters as well, as from what to many appears as a radical redrawing of the ultimate future. And I suspect that many Orthodox theologians will recognise the biblical picture I am sketching as far more consonant with their own traditional emphases than with those of western theology. As in some other matters I am perhaps standing like a typical Anglican half way between different groups.

This already highlights the need for the second word: 'Teaching'. We are a group of theological educators, and as such our vocation is to continue a noble tradition unbroken since the days of the

Apostles. When Paul and others speak of ‘teachers’ in the church, what were they teaching? One obvious answer is that they were teaching people to read; many non-Jews of Paul’s day would be functionally illiterate, and the church was eager from the beginning to get Christians to read the scriptures and to understand the great story into which they had, to their own surprise, been adopted. Few would disagree with this, but the new insights which I and others have been exploring in Paul have often come as we have tried to tune in to the way he and other second-temple Jews were reading their scriptures, in particular to the great scriptural story in which they believed that they were now caught up. A great many of the traditional puzzles and problems which people have encountered in reading Paul have arisen because it has been assumed that he was addressing the questions which much later generations wanted to address – particularly, in modern western thought, those I mentioned a moment ago, of ‘how can my soul get to heaven?’, or, in Luther’s question, ‘how can I find a gracious God?’ But the trouble is that Paul and his contemporaries were not asking exactly those questions. Ultimate salvation on the one hand, and assurance of divine grace and mercy on the other, are and were of course vital. But the way these questions have normally been asked ignores the central element of teaching which we see in, for instance, some of the great speeches in Acts, and also by strong implication in Paul’s letters themselves: that what had happened in Jesus of Nazareth meant what it meant within the context of the long story of Israel, the single narrative stretching from Abraham to the Messiah and now, through the Spirit, out into the wider world. For Paul, it is this narrative that makes sense of and undergirds the church’s mission: one of his favourite texts was Isaiah 49, where the ‘servant’ is commissioned to bring God’s light to the nations. Saul the Pharisee thought in terms of the ‘present age’ and the ‘age to come’; for Paul the Apostle, the ‘age to come’ had broken in to the present age in Jesus, so that now the powers of the age to come had been released upon the world, commissioning and equipping the apostolic mission. As far as I’m concerned, the most important new insight into Paul’s teaching to arise in recent generations has been the discovery of the way in which Paul’s apocalyptic eschatology makes sense as the sudden and shocking fulfilment of the age-old scriptural promises, generating a new moment, a new time, in which new things would happen, chief among them (as far as Paul was concerned) being the creation of a new covenant family, the Jew-plus-Gentile single community which, indwelt by the Spirit, was to be the model, the advance sign, and in part the means, of God’s eschatological purposes for all creation. Perhaps I should just say that this vision emerges most clearly in the letter to the Ephesians, and that I regard the western scholarly prejudice against Ephesians as arising exactly from the long-running and deep-seated western distortions of biblical theology of which I have already spoken. The Mission and the Teaching thus go together.

‘Together’, indeed, is my third key category. One would not know, from many Pauline interpreters, that the unity of the church was one of Paul’s overriding passions. The famous doctrine of justification, used in the sixteenth century and later as a means of dividing the church, was itself actually designed to affirm the unity of all believers across lines of ethnic and other divisions. That is clear particularly from its first exposition in Galatians 2, where Paul confronts Peter because Peter has given in to pressure from hard-line Jewish Christians and has separated himself from table-fellowship with Gentile Christians. Paul’s response, in a brief articulation of justification, is that *all who share Messiah-faith belong at the same table*. All alike have died with the Messiah and have come through to new life in him, and that new shared life is the one and only source and marker of their identity: ‘I through the Law died to the Law that I might live to God; I am crucified with the Messiah, nevertheless I live, yet not I but the Messiah lives in me’. Plenty of detailed questions remain, of course, but the thrust of the passage is clear: what matters is that we belong *together*, we eat together, we pray together, we believe together. Again, it often goes unnoticed that whereas even the vital doctrine of justification is stated only in three of the letters, and there quite briefly, every letter, including Philemon, insists on the unity of the church and is working hard to achieve it through what Paul names ‘the ministry of reconciliation’. Whether it’s Jewish and Gentile in Galatians and Romans, rich and poor in Corinth, competing factions in Philippians, different ethnic groups in Colossians, a master and a slave in Philemon – at every point we find Paul standing in the middle and saying ‘But we must do this *together*.’ So here we are: mission, teaching and togetherness.

There is of course one other major concern for Paul, and that is holiness. The community that has come through the death and resurrection of the Messiah, that is indwelt by the Spirit, that is in its very existence a sign and foretaste of the coming time when the creator will flood the whole creation with his glory – this community has the responsibility to model the life of new creation, of creation restored. The eschatology I spoke of above funds this vision of holiness, which cannot be reduced – as it has so often been reduced in western thought – to detached ethical principles or rules on the one hand or to the mere cult of ‘authenticity’ or ‘spontaneity’ on the other hand. Right from the start Paul’s communities were challenged to live differently from the world around them. This meant in one sense living Jewishly – particularly in their rejection of idolatry and sexual immorality – though granted the crucified and risen Messiah the Jewishness had been radically redrawn so that ethnic-specific customs had become irrelevant. (This is a particularly important point today when sexual morality, upon which Paul insisted, is often put in the same level as food-laws and circumcision, which Paul declared to be ‘matters indifferent’.) Of course, holiness is fairly easy if you don’t care about unity; you just split over every disagreement. Similarly, unity is fairly easy if you don’t care about holiness; anything goes and we shrug our shoulders and ignore it. One of the biggest challenges for me about the new insights into Paul’s teaching, and one of the most vital to grasp if we are to move forward together in mission, is that combination of unity and holiness. The world will take no notice of a divided church. The world will take no notice of an unholy church. Paul’s theology is directed again and again at equipping and exhorting the church to be united and holy so that the world may see that Jesus is Lord, that in raising him from the dead God has launched his new creation, and that there is in consequence a different way to be human. All mission flows from that, as the church announces Jesus as Lord and explains what that means not least by reference to the new way of life which has been unveiled and which the church itself is supposed to be modelling.

So much by way of long introduction. I now want to move into my two main sections, expanding what I have said into the areas of eschatology and mission on the one hand and justification and mission on the other. In both I am again drawing on the Pauline insights which I and others have developed in recent years.

Eschatology and Mission

When you buy a new commentary on a favourite book of the Bible, if you’re anything like me you turn at once to certain particular passages to see what the writers will do with them. With commentaries on Paul’s letter to the Romans, one obvious point is 10:4: what does Paul mean in saying that the Messiah is the end of the law . . . or is it the goal of the law? Does the Messiah abolish the law or fulfil it, or what; and how does Paul’s subsequent use of Deuteronomy explain what he means? For me, an equally important point is the place of Abraham in the argument of Romans 4 and Galatians 3. Many exegetes assume that Abraham is simply an ‘example’, or a ‘proof from scripture’, an ancient instance of someone who was ‘justified by faith’, offered without any sense of a larger narrative which has Abraham as its starting-point and the Messiah, and the believing community, as the newest elements. Some have tried to resist the idea of a grand biblical narrative, supposing that it reduces grace to the mere outworking of historical progress; but this is a pernicious distortion, combining elements of reformational protests against ‘works’ (and hence against ‘history’ – that strange connection would take too long to unpack just now) with elements of early twentieth-century protests against immanent Hegelian progress-schemes. When we grasp the thought-world and particularly the narrative world of second-temple Jews such as Paul, and then see how, for him, the good news of Jesus the Messiah, crucified and risen, made the sense it did within that world, Abraham cannot simply be a random example. The two key points are that for second-temple readers of Genesis Abraham was the divine answer to Adam, or rather the start of the divine answer to Adam, requiring the full answer in the later achievement of the Messiah. The nexus between Abraham and the house of David is clear in many texts; I think of Psalm 2, so vital for Paul and other early Christians, in which the Abrahamic promises of inheritance are globalized so that David will now inherit the whole world. This fits exactly with Paul’s sense that Isaiah 40–55 has now come true and is coming true: the work

of the Servant has accomplished the divine purpose to end Israel's long exile and restore creation itself. That is why mission is now the name of the game.

The trouble for us here is that most western exegetes until recently have ignored the four themes which were so obvious in the first century but so opaque to later ones. I start with three interlocking ones and then return to the fourth.

First, the principle I just mentioned: God's purpose through Abraham was to rescue the human race. Second, the point of rescuing the human race, was that God always purposed to work within creation *through his image-bearers*, so that saving people from sin and death was not simply for their own benefit but so that through renewed humans God would rescue creation itself. That is the underlying logic of Romans 8, which by anyone's account must be seen as central to Paul. Third, Paul invokes again and again the biblical prophecies which speak of God's frustrated judgment on the people of Israel, resulting in exile – not just the exile in Babylon itself but the much longer exile, spoken of in Daniel 9, in which most Jews of Paul's day believed they were still living. The exiles, still enslaved under foreign overlords, longed for the much-promised New Exodus, and not only Paul but most of the New Testament writers insist that this is what has happened in the events concerning Jesus. (The reason they can all be so sure of this is of course because Jesus himself chose Passover as the moment to do what had to be done.) The different stories all fit together: the exile of Israel is the long outworking of the exile of Adam and Eve from the Garden, and the New Exodus is therefore the rescue of Israel – in the person of the Messiah as he defeats the powers of darkness and is raised from the dead – and with that the rescue of the human race as a whole.

Here is a point of paramount importance in many current debates, not least as they affect the mission of the church. People have often supposed that Paul had discovered what he took to be a new or superior form of religion, that he rejected something we call 'Judaism' because it now seemed to him an inferior form of 'religion', and that Christian 'mission' would then consist in propagating this new kind of 'religion'. That perception carries all the marks of nineteenth-century philosophy and none of first-century history (a mistake which is reinforced when educational institutions, and indeed broadcasting institutions, treat anything to do with 'Christianity' as a branch of 'religion', with 'religion' defined in an eighteenth-century way rather than a first-century way). What mattered for Paul was not *comparative religion* but what we may call *messianic eschatology*. Any Jew of the period, faced with the claim that this or that person was Israel's Messiah (there were many such claims, culminating with the Bar-Kochba rebellion of AD 132–135), would know at once that it constituted an eschatological and theological claim – and indeed a global claim, because Israel's Messiah was to be the Lord of the whole world. One could not say 'This man is Messiah; so follow him if you feel like it'. To say 'this man is Messiah' necessarily means 'This is where the One God is acting for the salvation of Israel and thereby of the world, and this constitutes a worldwide summons to faithful allegiance'.

This does not, then, mean that something called 'Judaism' (again, beware of nineteenth-century constructs!) is deemed to be somehow 'inferior' as a system or pattern of religion; on the contrary, the claim only makes sense as the *validation* of everything that first-century Jews like Paul had held dear (the ancient purposes and promises, the long covenantal narrative). The symbols of Jewish identity themselves – circumcision, Sabbath, food laws – were set aside, not because they were irrelevant or 'legalistic' but because they were forward-looking signposts to the reality which had now been unveiled. To cling to the signposts is to imply that you have not yet arrived at the reality; but the point of Paul's gospel was that the reality had dawned in the events concerning Jesus. In him, the promises to Abraham had been fulfilled; Adam and Eve had been rescued, and with that new creation had been launched; Israel's exile was over and 'Israel' itself had been transformed, as so many scriptures had promised, into a new worldwide family. This story, with this fulfilment, is the necessary substructure for Paul's mission; and, I would submit, for ours as well. Fresh teaching in all these areas is urgently needed if we are to understand our shared mission as *both* the announcement of Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord, demanding the personal response of obedient faith, *and* the inauguration of new creation, with signs of healing and hope pointing forward to the eventual renewal of the whole cosmos.

I mentioned a fourth element, which could be a course of lectures in itself but which I will state very briefly. For Jews of Paul's day, the Temple was the central symbol of history, covenant, hope and above all divine presence. Recent research has shown again and again how from Genesis and Exodus onwards the Tabernacle and the Temple were seen in terms of *new creation*: the wilderness Tent, and then Solomon's Temple, were understood as the *microcosmos*, the 'little world', not an escape from creation into a separate 'religious' space but the place where heaven and earth came dangerously together, thereby functioning as the sign and foretaste of the promised new creation. (Within a larger biblical theology, this is of course why there is no temple in the new creation in Revelation 21 and 22: the new creation *is* the new temple, with the New Jerusalem as the Holy of Holies within it.) All this (and much more detail), as many scholars have now argued, was easily present to many Jewish minds in the first century, and makes a great deal of sense both of Jesus' focus on the Temple and of Paul's fresh use of Temple-imagery. This theme joins up with the narrative I sketched a moment ago, because part of the point of the long-awaited 'return from exile' was that Israel's God himself had promised to return to his people in power and glory (notably in Isaiah 40–55 but in many other books as well, including so-called 'post-exilic' writings like Zechariah and Malachi) but had not done so yet. I have argued at length in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (chapter 9) that this theme of the return of YHWH to Zion is central to Paul's Christology and Pneumatology, offering a window on early Trinitarian theology which I would hope might prove exciting for Orthodox and Evangelical alike. But my point here is that this also provides the eschatological context for understanding Paul's fresh use of Temple-imagery (e.g. in 1 Corinthians 3 and 6) in relation to the church and the individual Christian, with Unity the theme of chapter 3 and Holiness the theme of chapter 6. Once again, what we are looking at is not simply a miscellaneous metaphor, a mere verbal allusion, but a deep-rooted theological theme: that the living God has come to dwell in our midst in and as Jesus, Israel's Messiah, and now comes again to dwell in the hearts and lives of his faithful community. *The very existence of this community therefore constitutes the mission of God in the world*, though of course we must quickly add that since the Spirit is the same Spirit that blows through all creation we must not and cannot limit the Spirit's work simply to 'what is going on in the church'. There is also the danger that some might suppose this would limit 'mission' to 'ecclesiology', but this would simply be to miss the point: ecclesiology – the biblical understanding of the church – simply is the *outreach* of new creation in the midst of the old. (That is why suffering is also, for Paul, a constant feature of apostolic life, as the old world, called to account by the new, strikes back in unpleasant ways.) The church, seen as the Temple where the Spirit dwells (as in Ephesians 2 and elsewhere – and actually this theme is present in much of Romans as well, though normally unnoticed), is the sign and means of new creation, and if for a moment the church forgets this vocation it is turning itself into something else (a 'religion', perhaps?).

Paul often simply takes this missionary focus of the church's life for granted. He himself is involved in the apostolic task, but (perhaps surprisingly to us) he seldom speaks of others sharing in this work. Philippians is the obvious exception, where he envisages Christians 'speaking the word with boldness', and 'holding forth the word of life' (both passages have difficulties but the overall thrust is I think clear). But part of the missionary point is that the church is to 'do good to all', to be generous, to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep, to 'remember the poor', to show the example of a public life worthy of the gospel, in other words, to live as a sign of contradiction to the ways of the old world and a sign of hope that there is a new way to be human, a way of outgoing love and refreshing holiness. The history of the second and third centuries – when the Romans were doing their best to stamp out this new and subversive movement – indicates that the project succeeded beyond, perhaps, the wildest dreams of Paul and his colleagues. The church really was the missionary body of the Messiah.

Justice and Justification

I turn now to my second main topic, which dovetails at many points with what I have already said. Once we understand the second-temple world of Bible reading, with its great sprawling narrative from Abraham to the Messiah, with exile and return as a major feature and the Temple, and the return of

God to the Temple, as providing the theological depth, we can focus on the question of justification in a new way. Justification has been, of course, at the heart of some of the puzzles about the so-called ‘new perspective’ on Paul, and though this isn’t the time and place to expound that whole theme in any detail I hope I can not only shed some light on the controversy but also show how such reflection might help focus and fuel our shared missionary calling.

The word ‘justification’ has suffered from becoming first a technical term and then a contested technical term in ways that have not allowed its original range of meaning to shine through. (Like everything else in this paper this is of course a long and complex story which I here drastically abbreviate.) Once again my sense is that the western tradition has done us no favours here – ironically, since the doctrine of justification was one of the key focal points of the Reformation. As Karl Barth himself observed in the *Church Dogmatics* (long before anyone was talking about ‘new perspectives’ and all that!), Luther allowed his view of what was wrong with Rome to skew his exegesis of Galatians by reading it as though Paul’s Jewish opponents were more or less like late mediaeval Roman Catholics; and many of Luther’s successors to this day have continued with various forms of the same mistake. The problem can be focused by suggesting that for Luther and the other reformers what mattered above all was the *forensic* sense of ‘justification’: as in Romans 3, all humans are in the dock, God is the judge, all are found guilty – but then, astonishingly, the verdict is reversed on the basis of the death of Jesus on the one hand and ‘faith’ on the other. There are several exegetical problems with this account of Romans; and it is noticeable in particular that it is *only* in Romans where the ‘forensic’ meaning stands out (and only in Romans 1–3, not in Romans 4 or the ‘justification’ passage in 9–10). We cannot transport the ‘lawcourt’ meaning into Galatians 2 and 3, or into Philippians 3, both of which are about ‘justification’ but without hinting at a lawcourt setting. In addition, in each of the key passages, Paul combines talk of ‘justification’ with talk of ‘being in the Messiah’: Romans 3 speaks of being justified ‘through the redemption which is in Messiah Jesus’, Galatians 2 speaks of being ‘justified in the Messiah’, and Philippians 3 aspires to be ‘found in him’ (that is, in the Messiah), ‘not having my own righteousness but that which is through Messiah-faith’. Many reformational accounts of ‘justification’ (with Calvin a notable exception) have managed to split off ‘justification by faith’ from ‘being in the Messiah’. For Paul, they belong together.

The problem here is deep rooted. As I have argued in *The Day the Revolution Began*, the essentially Platonic eschatology of ‘going to heaven’ has been coupled with an essentially moralizing anthropology in which keeping (or not keeping) the moral law is the clue to ‘going to heaven’ – so that those who don’t keep it need some other way, namely to be ‘justified in the Messiah’ and/or ‘by faith’. But this does no justice to Paul’s arguments. For Paul, as for all serious Jews of the period, the primary human failure was not ‘sin’ but idolatry, and the primary result was not simply not ‘going to heaven’ but the failure of the whole human project, including the divine mandate to look after creation. ‘Sin’ still matters, of course; it is what happens when humans worship idols, thence distorting their own humanity and that of others with them. Ultimate ‘eternal life’ still matters, of course; only it will be resurrection life in God’s new creation, with responsibilities (‘the royal priesthood’) not simply disembodied bliss. This double distortion has then produced distorted views of what the cross achieved, a problem I have addressed in the book I just mentioned. But my point for our present purposes is that by focusing on the moralistic problem, and then shrinking ‘justification’ to the lawcourt in which that problem is addressed, the tradition has failed to notice the two other focal points of Paul’s ‘justification’ language.

First, this language is (in general terms) ‘relational’, which (in specific terms) takes us into the sphere of covenantal theology: the question is, who is really a member of the family of Abraham, the family promised in the foundation covenant of Genesis 15 which Paul expounds in Romans 4 and Galatians 3? (We remind ourselves that the point of the covenant was that Abraham’s family was God’s answer to the problem of Adam – in other words, that to be within the covenant family was to be declared to be ‘in the right’, with sins forgiven; this is not, in other words, something to be played off against ‘sin and forgiveness’.) The main thrust of Paul’s ‘justification’ argument in Romans 3–4 and 9–10, and also in Galatians 2 and 3, was not ‘this is how you get to heaven’ but that *believing Gentiles are every bit as much members of the Abrahamic covenant family as believing Jews*. The unity of the covenant family was threatened in Galatia (and was anticipated in the warnings of Philippians 3). That unity

needed to be nailed down firmly in Romans if the later exhortations in the letter were to have full value.

But if 'justification' language is not only forensic but also covenantal (indeed, forensic *because* it is covenantal), it is also *cosmic*. In the largest sense, the creator God intends to put all things right in the end: this is the promise of the Psalms (e.g. 96, 98), a promise built in to creation itself and never rescinded in favour of any cosmic dualism such as that embraced by Gnosticism. To understand how this works we need once again to invoke eschatology: God *will* put all things right at the last; God *has*, as a past event, launched this project in raising Jesus from the dead; and, in the present, *God puts humans right so that they can then be part of his putting-right project for the world*. This is what is missed in many traditional doctrines, but is a point central to Paul, not least to Romans (this is what is happening in Romans 8, as redeemed humans share Jesus' sonship and the 'glory' spoken of in Psalm 8, namely, the glorious rule of the 'son of man' over the creation). The larger point of a Hebraic vision of 'justice' – not so much a punitive 'judgment', though that is implied for the recalcitrant, as the 'judgment' for which creation longs as in the Psalms – is the long outreach of what Paul means by the *dikaiosyne theou*, the 'righteousness of God': God's covenant faithfulness *through which creation is to be restored by means of the restoration of the human race*.

It ought to be clear from this that a 'mission' which is simply aimed at bringing people to faith in Jesus and so assuring them of eternal salvation has only done half the job. Yes, coming to explicit faith matters. Yes, this faith functions as the badge which assures the believer, and his or her fellow believers, that this person is a true member of Abraham's covenant family, and 'those he justified, them he also glorified'. But justification is a middle term in a much larger story than normally envisaged. And that larger story is, once again, the story of creator and cosmos, of God and the world. 'Justification' forms part of the missiological mandate of the church, not because that mandate is simply to get more people into 'heaven' but because the mandate is to bring signs of new creation to birth even in the present age, signs that point forward towards, and indeed truly partake in, the reality of the new creation which will be complete upon Jesus' return to put all things right and to transform his people so that their bodies are 'like his glorious body' (Philippians 3.20–21, again echoing Psalm 8). Those who themselves have been 'put right', as the Spirit works through the gospel to bring them to faith and to the transformation of identity signalled in baptism, are called by that very same event to be part of the mission of God to and for the world.

Conclusion

It is time to sum up after this very brief account of some ways in which recent insights into Paul and his teaching can help move us forward together in mission. My argument, obviously, has been that as we learn more about the actual historical context of Paul's work, and particularly about the Jewish narrational world which makes sense of so much of his writing, we can see in these two ways (and no doubt several others) that the mission of the church is given fresh grounding and shaping. And I hope we can see that, contextualised as all this is within Paul's concern for the unity of the church, this ought to be almost by definition something which the different parts of today's church can and must agree on and work on together. There has not been time to provide all the nuancing and shading required by recent scholarly debates; for that I must refer to other work.

I hope I have said enough to start some fresh trains of thought and particularly, granted our overall theme, to suggest some ways in which that word 'together' might become more of a reality. One of the joys of my episcopate in Durham was to see how shared Bible study could be one of the great ecumenical instruments: we still have difficulties about meeting at the one table (and Paul would be as horrified by that as he was with Peter in Antioch), but there should be no theological difficulties about shared reading of scripture. It can be done very simply; the thing is to start, at the local level, not just with church leaders. And, as we read together, there is again no reason why we should not do mission together: why we should not, together, engage in projects of generous and healing love and hope in the wider communities where we find ourselves? No church restrictions prevent us getting together to do prison visiting, hospice care, work among migrants of whatever sort, running youth employment

schemes, campaigning for local or global justice, providing safe spaces for women and children at risk . . . and so on, and so on. Once we grasp the great story which, by its climax in Jesus and in the energy of the Spirit, is now the story not of Israel only but of a worldwide family; once we grasp the truth that our own justification by faith is part of God's larger project to put the whole world right – then there should be nothing to stop us. As together we learn from Paul, we ought to find that his teaching should both encourage and inspire us to move forward, again together, in our mission in the world.

Of course, all this assumes that we will be worshipping and praying Christians. For Paul, the constant invoking of the One God as Father and Son in the power of the Spirit was basic and essential. That was not my assigned topic, but I am anxious that because I hadn't mentioned it you might imagine that I considered it unimportant. Clearly Paul was keen that all Christians from whatever backgrounds would be able to worship together, with one heart and voice; that, after all, is the final rhetorical climax of Romans (15.7–13). All that we do in our teaching and our mission ought to have that as the ultimate aim, though it may take some further sudden moves on the part of the Spirit before we can see our way to such unity on the ground. But let us at least do together all that we can. Let us constantly thank God for the unsearchable riches of the Messiah, for the good news that the power of evil has been radically defeated and the new creation decisively launched. These are the great truths of the faith. Our different traditions have sometimes expressed them differently, but the more we learn of Paul and the other early Christians the more I believe and hope that we can come together, work together, pray together, and thereby demonstrate in mission to the world that Jesus is Lord.