

# OpenTheo

## #87 Who was the Apostle Paul and why does he still matter?

October 14, 2021



### Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

Tom Wright talks about the life and legacy of the apostle Paul in front of an audience at Westminster Central Hall, London. The lecture was part of an event by SPCK to mark the publication of Paul: A Biography in 2018.

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## Transcript

[Music] The Ask NT Wright Anything podcast.

[Music] Well hello and welcome along it's Justin Brierley here, Premier's Theology and Apologetics editor. Once again bringing you the show where I get to sit down on a regular basis with renowned New Testament scholar NT Wright, though it's not me sitting down with him this week.

In fact we're going to be hearing some special material from an event organized by SBCK, Tom's UK publisher in 2018 in central London. It was to mark the publication of Tom's best-selling book, Paul A Biography. So today and in the next couple of episodes we're bringing you some of that bonus material.

And as ever the program has brought you in partnership with NT Wright Online and SBCK. You'll be hearing the talk that Tom gave that night on the life and legacy of the Apostle Paul. And in future episodes you'll hear his on stage conversation with Martin Bashir and

the audience Q&A too.

If you know someone who'd enjoy this podcast do make sure to tell them about it and do rate and review the podcast. Especially if you're listening in iTunes it helps other people to discover the show. So the talk you're going to hear today is introduced by Robin Griffith Jones and was recorded in front of a live audience at Westminster Central Hall in London.

And I remember it well as I was in the audience too with my wife Lucy and some members of our church. So enjoy! Well it's a gentleman good evening. My name is Robin Griffith Jones and I teach at King's College London.

I am a grand lique of the reverend and valiant master of the temple at the Temple Church just half a mile away. And I am here really only in order to say hello to all of you. To say what a real delight it is that so many people have come here this evening to enjoy and discuss and relish and learn from Tom's new book.

And of course above all and on behalf of all of us here to thank Tom himself. I suspect almost all of us have been benefiting from Tom's work for decades now. There is the rather serious NT right whom we know well.

There is Tom Wright and the New Testament for everyone and now. A third genre this rollicking read I mean it's a ripping yarn. I hope some of you have already read the book.

It's an absolute page toner. Dan Brown eats your heart out. It really is it's it's completely gripping from beginning to end.

It introduces a new side to Paul's own writing and scholarship. And as a we're a new side for all of us who've enjoyed Paul Tom's writing as we followed it through the years. So Tom in introducing this evening what I think all I need to say is from all of us who have or are enjoying or are going to enjoy the book many thanks.

And for all of us here this evening thank you for what is clearly going to be an absolutely fascinating session. We're extremely grateful to you for being here. Thank you very much.

[Applause] Thank you very much Robin and thank you also for your review in one of the Sunday papers a couple of months ago. Now I hadn't heard about this review but I met somebody through a mutual friend who said oh I just saw a review of your new book and I said oh really was it a good review. He said well I don't think the person actually likes Paul that much but he liked your book.

So I said that's fine by me whether that is a fair representation of the review or of Robin I leave others to judge. And I'm very grateful to those who organize this amazing building for getting this room tonight. I'm especially grateful to SPCK who've done a lot of work

behind the scenes to set it up.

I'm grateful to Robin I'm grateful to Martin Bashir who's going to be helping with asking some questions later on. I'm especially grateful to those of you who intended to come in early March and were prevented like Paul himself was prevented from some of his travel plans. I was booked on a train from Aberdeen where I was doing some lectures to London a straight through one and I got as far as Dundee and the snow came down I couldn't even get to Edinburgh.

And we were texting and emailing and going to and fro and eventually we just had to pull the whole event and so we decided that instead of being disrupted by snowflakes we'd be disrupted by sunshine and heat instead. So I came down on the train yesterday and you know how it is with us Northern as the best building in London is King's Cross station where you get on this train to go back up north but which I shall be doing tomorrow. So just a few things to put some markers down because it won't surprise you to know that just as Paul on occasion could actually preach people to death you know people fell out of windows and so on and on and on.

So given world enough and time I'd be quite happy to talk about Paul to you until the bells have stopped ringing whenever that. By the way thanks also to Westminster Abbey for arranging this splendid fusillade of I'm sure that was quite deliberate since I used to work there they probably got it in for me. So I want to just to ask a few basic questions and I've been doing some interviews with various podcasts and other things over the last few days and today particularly.

And these are the questions that people keep coming up with. The first one is why a biography of Paul. I mean anyone who's been to church anyone has started to read the Bible to read the New Testament knows a bit about Paul or thinks they do and his but their nose against him a bit.

But I really want to say in this book I try to say Paul is one of the most important public intellectuals of all time. One of the tragedies of the way we do things in the western world today is that if somebody wants to study Paul they'll probably be sent to a department of religion wrong place. Paul belongs in the world of politics, of culture, of economics, of community life as well as what we call religion and theology and philosophy.

And we diminish Paul if we think of him simply as a quote unquote religious figure. He is out there articulating a new vision of all reality. And he's not only articulating it verbally and in writing he's articulating it through creating and forming and shivying and managing and wrestling with real communities who are experimenting with this remarkable new way of being human.

And as a result there are probably far more people today who wrestle with Paul than

there are with the two great public intellectuals as it were either side of him Cicero and Seneca and others like him. These are great people and Plutarch and Epictetus and those great figures but Paul nevertheless stands out. And he stands at one of the great transition points, the very turning point in world history and he stands there holding together the Jewish world, the Greek world with all its philosophy, the Roman world with all its politics and its new roads and so on.

And he holds them in a new synthesis in a way that nobody had done before because though there were some books like the wisdom of Solomon that were doing a bit of that Paul by being grasped by the gospel of Jesus, Israel's Messiah crucified and risen now the Lord of the world. Paul has a new vantage point from which he holds all these things together so that he's absolutely insistent that what has happened and what he's doing is the fulfillment of Israel's purpose. This is where it was all going even though we never saw it, rather like the two on the road to Emmaus.

Oh we had hoped that he would redeem Israel but now did not our hearts burn within us as he expanded the scriptures. This is how it had to be. Paul has that in spades.

So it's fulfilling Israel's aspirations, albeit in a shocking new way and that gives Paul as it were the theological and scriptural energy which carries him into all the tasks that he does and to face all the sufferings that he does. But then Paul realizes that if Israel's God is the Lord of the world and if Israel's God has revealed once for all the great truths about the way the world really is. This means we must in his words take every thought captive to obey the Messiah.

So Paul can quite cheerfully outflank the Stoics, outflank the Epicureans, outflank the Academy, the Platonists and sometimes he sounds a bit like a Stoic, sometimes he sounds a bit like a Platonist. And then the larger edifice reasserts itself and we see that in his exposition of Jesus as the meaning of the whole creation, we find all these strands of truth, of philosophy, of human exploration and wisdom held together, rushing together. And then if it's Israel's traditions and the thought of the Greek world, it's also the Roman world with its extraordinary empire which was just doing its thing in spades in the middle of the first century.

And Paul comes along and talks about the good news that Jesus is karyos, Lord, and sometimes even that Jesus is so tear, saviour, another thing that some of the Caesars like to say about themselves. And Paul in Visage is, I was going to say a new kind of empire, the word empire is very contested at the moment, and part of the point of what Paul is doing, just as you find in Jesus teaching in say Mark chapter 10, is that empire has been stood on its head. Power itself has been stood on its head.

There is a new power, a new sort of power, let loose in the world. It's the power of suffering love, which is one of the reasons why Paul himself realises that if he is to be the vessel and the instrument of that love, he himself will be called to suffer in all sorts of

ways. So why a biography of Paul? Because somebody who could think all this and try to do all this is far more than just a brain box on legs or even a praying heart on legs, he's all of that, but he's a whole rounded personality intersecting into engaging with whole rounded communities and trying to do something new.

So Paul is vital as the early interpreter of Jesus. Jesus, the one who announced and more particularly inaugurated God's kingdom, something new has happened. A victory has been won as a result of which the world is a different place.

It's hard for us to hear that because so much in the public world of today says no, nothing actually changed. It just all went on. You just had some new religious ideas and there were plenty of other new religious ideas.

And Paul would have said absolutely not. When Jesus rose again from the dead, something changed in the way the world is, which opens a door. The great rusty door of history has swung open and a voice says now, come into God's new world.

And see what it looks like. So when Paul is holding together, Jewish Jesus believers and Gentiles, Jesus believers and insisting that they belong at the table together. This isn't just about having slightly better table manners.

The fact that now Jew and Greek and slave and free and male and female belong at the same table is the sign as far as he's concerned that the powers that have ruled the world and have kept the world in its different compartments have been defeated. And if you don't believe that, he says to Peter at Antioch, you're denying the truth of the gospel. So why a biography of Paul? That's for starters.

Why a biography at all? Well, without the biography, we meet the letters in a vacuum. One of the things that encouraged me as I was stimulated by my publisher into thinking that maybe I should try my hand at this, as Robin said, a new genre for me, the biographical genre, was Robert Harris' trilogy on Cicero. I don't know if you've seen the play, which is on in the West End at the moment, Imperium.

I'm not sure if I'm going to be able to see it. I'd really like to. Those three books, I now recommend them to my undergraduates because they open up a sense of, "This is what it was actually like to be trying frantically to prepare a speech, realizing he weren't going to have enough time and scribbling something else down." Cicero's wife telling him off because he's being a wimp or whatever.

And then Cicero getting his bodyguards and heading off for the forum, and there's so-and-so's men over there, and then he has to make the speech. So by the time you get to the speech, you are living it with him. Instead of, when I studied Cicero at school, here was Cicero's speech on this or that, so we learned a little bit at the background.

But with those books, I felt I was actually living it with him. And I wanted to try to write a

book in which by the time we get Paul writing Galatians, we are living it with him so that we know ahead of time. Of course, he's got to say this or that.

And by the time he's in his huge depression, which I'll come back to in a moment, we understand why that would be and how maybe he's going to get. So only a biography, I think, can really show the continuities of person and the continuities and the slippages of bits of thought and scriptural exposition and so on. And particularly the personal passion and then the dark sides into which it all fits.

So what's new? What's new in this book? I mean, I've written other books about Paul, as some of you will know, as Robin kindly alluded to. When I was writing this book, there were several things which I found I had to say something about that I'd never really said much about before. And the first one is the quiet decade.

After the initial flurry, the Damascus event, the trip to Arabia, back to Damascus, down to Jerusalem, this man is too hot to handle. Send him back to Tarsus, that's where he came from, we'll see what happens. Then we know nothing for ten years.

However, the fact that we know quite a lot after those ten years, after Barnabas fetches him to Antioch and things go from there, what we know about him from Antioch onwards tells us quite a lot. It's quite a lot about those ten years. Not least, where Romans 9, 1 to 5 comes from.

Some of you will know that's where he says, "I have unceasing sorrow and anguish in my heart because I moved to tears constantly because of my kin's folk, my brothers and sisters according to the flesh." This is not a theoretical group called the Jews. I think this is Mum and Dad, I think this is brother and sister, I think this is even possibly a one-time fiancé. Who knows? That's speculation.

But there is a sense that when he's talking about these people who he longs to see come to accept Jesus as Israel's Messiah, these are real people. He knows their faces, he's got their voices in his head, he remembers their tears and it's moved him to tears. And then at the other end of his life, I'd never written very much about whether Paul went to Spain or not.

I used to think that's a bridge too far. The more I looked at it, and particularly at the letter of Clement, who was bishop in Rome towards the end of the first century, he says Paul got to the limits of East and West. Well, he was there pretty soon afterwards.

I think it's more likely that Clement got it right than that I am getting it right by being a bit skeptical about that. So it's possible that Paul did get through Spain. One of the other things, quite different sort of thing, which I hadn't really put together before was Paul's prayer life.

We see Paul's prayer life bubbling up at certain points in the letters. And when he says to

people, "Pray constantly," it would be very odd if he was giving that advice to everybody, but he wasn't actually doing it himself. And so when I then started to explore what it looked like for Paul to be a man of prayer, starting to explore the Jewish prayer traditions and to see the way in which his invocation of Jesus and the Spirit fits somehow within those Jewish narratives and prayers.

Then I started to see all sorts of things in three dimensions. But in particular, and I think we may be talking about this later on when Martin is asking me some questions, I found myself seeing the famous doctrine of justification by faith itself within that larger context of who Paul was as a whole. So that you don't actually lose anything that the 16th century was so keen on about we are justified by faith not works, but you see it in many dimensions, and we'll maybe say more about those dimensions later on.

But one of the things which I found most compelling at the middle of all of this was the dark period to which Paul alludes at the start of 2 Corinthians. And I describe in the book the happy early days in Ephesus where he's going around and healings are happening and people are bringing handkerchiefs to touch him so that then sick people will be healed. Imagine what that does, I mean how did Paul sustain and not having an over inflated ego, well maybe he didn't, who knows.

But in the middle of that he made a painful visit to Corinth and suddenly it all went wrong and stuff he thought he couldn't do anymore and they were rude to him and they told him go away and if you want to come back we'd like to have fresh letters of recommendation. Well any pastors among you will know what that would be like from the people with whom you've worked and who you've loved and prayed for and so on. But I think then things are going on in Ephesus as well, bad things which go horribly wrong after the great riot in the theatre, I think it's after that's slightly tricky to be quite sure.

But as I tried to describe it now I find myself looking at what Paul says there where he says I was so crushed that I despaired of life itself. Now I as a pastor know that if somebody came into the room and said that to me I would be thinking this is above my pay grade, I need to call in a professional counselor to help with this because that is serious depression and you don't get out of that just by saying we'll go home and say your prayers and don't drink so much coffee or whatever it is. No this is a very serious thing and I think that we see something going on when he says this was to make me rely on the God who raises the dead.

If you know anything about depression you can't come through it simply by saying you know perfectly well you ought to rely on the God who raises. That's not how it happens. I think what happens what we see then when we put the whole picture together is that if I can just read you a few lines here.

I think that like a plant in harsh winter Paul in prison was forced to put his roots down

even deeper than he had yet gone into the biblical tradition and deeper again still within that tradition into the meaning of Jesus and his death and the roots slowly found moisture and from the depth of that dark soil way below previous consciousness he drew hope and new possibilities and the fruit of that labor remains to this day near the heart of Christian belief because as I've suggested in the book if he is writing Philippians Colossians Ephesians and Philemon from that prison in Ephesus then what we see in each of those letters except for Philemon which is the shorter one of course is a sense of Jewish prayer reshaped around Jesus turned into poetry. I think actually the poetry of Ephesians 1 Philippians 2 Colossians 1 I think that poetry precedes the theology. I don't think somebody had hammered out the theology and then Paul said let's write a poem about it.

I think he comes out of the darkness and like some other people one can think of R.S. Thomas or Gerard Manley Hopkins emerging from the darkness with things that can only be said poetically which then the church realizes this is a very important thing. This is the heart of what we then call theology. What's difficult for us about this? Well we still tend to reach for this category religion.

The word religion didn't mean in Paul's day what it means in our day and what Paul is doing doesn't fit religion in the ancient world or religion in the modern world. As I said before it's really quite different it's a much bigger community experiment based in worship, worship of the God made known in Jesus flowing out into every aspect of life and watch out for this category religion because our world tries to put us and Paul and Jesus into that. For Paul what matters is he insists to his dying day that he is utterly loyal to the one God of Israel.

That's a contested statement in the first century who is a loyal Israelite is a big question in the first century. There are many groups claiming it and Paul is right there in the middle among them but today it's controversial as well. It's one of the reasons I was so thrilled when Rabbi Lord Sax very generously put a commendation on the back of this book.

I said to him because I said to him I really don't want any Jewish interlocutor to pick up this book and say well this person doesn't understand Judaism so I thought let's send it to the chief Rabbi and see what he thinks and bless him. He was kind enough to write a commendation. So summing it all up what was Paul trying to do? What was his aim? It would be easy to say and fifty years ago I would have said Paul was telling people about Jesus so that when they died they would go to heaven.

And I really want to say that's the wrong place to start. Now as some of you know if you read my book "Surprised by Hope" and other bits and pieces the New Testament doesn't say that the name of the game is how to get to heaven when you die. If you go to the first century AD looking for somebody who talks about that the primary person I would



go to is Plutarch who is a first century middle Platonist who has a whole treatise on how our souls are exiled from their true home in heaven and we hope one day that they'll get back there.

That's not what Paul says Paul is looking forward to the day when God will renew heaven and earth and will raise his people from the dead to a new bodily life within that new integrated reality. Now how this plays out is full of all sorts of other questions but I want then to say so what was Paul doing? Well he was founding and maintaining communities and I have a riff which I've been developing out of this book and so on. What sort of communities? Well they're worship based educational, egalitarian, philanthropic, fictive kinship groups.

I'll say it again, they're worship based educational, egalitarian, philanthropic, fictive kinship groups. Our shorthand for that is churches. But if we say churches then that will conjure up various images in our minds from which at least one or two of those words will probably be missing.

Worship based because they exist in order to invoke Jesus as Lord to celebrate his presence and his healing power and his reconciling work in them and through them into the world because they're also educational. What were people teaching in Paul's churches? One of the things I think they were teaching was how to read. A lot of people were functionally illiterate in the ancient world but Paul wanted them to be able to search the scriptures for themselves.

That's part of Christian maturity. So the church was in the vanguard of teaching people to read and to read scripture particularly. And they were egalitarian, neither Jew nor Greek slave nor free male nor female.

We struggle still to implement that. For Paul that was an extraordinary unheard of experiment. A very dangerous one.

People would look on and see all these people, very different people all going into a house on a Sunday morning. Who are they? What are they doing? And they talk about family and so on. And they are philanthropic.

Paul says, "While we have time, do good to all people and specially to those of the household of faith." The churches were doing what the Jewish communities had done. That is to say looking after people in their own community who needed help, who needed money, who needed healing, medicine or whatever. But now they were doing it as far as they could forever.

This is one of the main reasons why Christianity spread. Nobody had ever tried this experiment. Let's have egalitarian philanthropic communities who even if they are not doing all the stuff on the street, worshipping the idols going on the processions, etc.

Even if they are not doing any of that so people think this is bad news, they will get us into trouble. Maybe there will be an earthquake or a lightning strike or something. We will know who to blame.

So these are people who regard as good neighbors. Paul says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep." The people on your street who are having a party, you go and be the life and soul of that party. The people who are having a funeral, you go and genuinely share their sorrow.

These are people who other people will enjoy having them around. And there will be a reason for that because they are reflecting the generous love of Jesus into that community. And they are living as in the anthropologist's fictive kinship groups.

That is to say, living as family, even though it's blindingly obvious that they're not. And the ancient world family means the people who are down the street from you who help you out. One of the nicest moments I had when I was Bishop of Durham was one night I was doing a confirmation in a very much below the tracks parish in Gateshead.

And the vicar asked one of the confirmation candidates, a woman in her 30s. He said, "What's it like since you've been coming to this church?" And she blurted it out. She said, "It's like having a great big second family." And then she turned to me and said, "Was I supposed to say that?" And I said, "Yes, that means this is a real church." She lived in a community where family meant precisely the people around the corner who would look out for you when bad things were happening, or would celebrate with you when good.

And she had found the church to be that sort of community. Thank God that it never gets into the press, of course. But there are many, many communities like that who are doing precisely what Paul said they should.

As a result, Paul is bringing into being through his announcement of the gospel, through his prayer, his pastoral work, and particularly his letters. He's bringing into being a new cultural and social reality, breaking with existing patterns and forms, and yet demonstrating an attractive and compelling new way of being human. It is, as some people have described it, Judaism for the masses.

Nietzsche sneered at Christianity and said that Christianity was Platonism for the masses. Well, maybe some 19th century Christianity was, that's what he was mocking. But really, it is this Jewish vision of one God, one people, and it's for everybody.

And to that end, what Paul was doing, through his preaching, teaching, pastoral work, was aiming at renewed human lives. He says, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may figure out and put into practice what God's will is, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Renewed humans, he says in Colossians 3, "Renewed in knowledge according to the image of the Creator." Paul has this vision of humans made

in God's image and humans now renewed in God's image. And humans therefore renewed in thought.

Paul says, "When it comes to evil, just stay as ignorant little babies." But when it comes to thinking, be grown-ups. The gospel for Paul is all about people discovering what it means to be genuine humans, not least by learning how to think. For Paul, you see, somebody asked me this in a radio interview earlier today.

Why doesn't Paul refer more to Jesus' teaching? That's an interesting question, but one of the answers, not the only answer, but one of the answers is. If, in order to answer a question, what you have to do is to look up something on a shelf, "Oh yes, that's it," and then put the book back, you don't grow. That may see you around the next corner, but what Paul does instead is not just to teach them what to think, but to teach them how to think.

That's why he says in Philippians 2, "You've got to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." That doesn't mean do good works to impress God. It means you've got to figure out what this means. Here are the tools.

Now you go to the job. And actually that's so for scripture as a whole, but it's certainly part of Paul's ministry, that it's never a look it up and put the book back on the shelf kind of thing. It's all about every generation has to engage with this stuff in an increasing maturity of thought and reflection, because only if we're doing that will we be the kind of communities and the kind of individuals that God wants us to be.

And if it's a renewed human community, a renewed thinking human community, it's a renewed thinking and loving human community, a community which is founded on the basis of the world. Paul says that the love of the Messiah drives us on, or is his saying, says in Galatians, "The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me." And that love then has to reflect out into the world, because that's what does the trick. That's what makes people think nothing else in my life looks like this.

This is where genuine life is to be found. So what was Paul himself like? Towards the end of the book, I wrote a few pages on this, and I shall quote a few little bits from that. The first thing coming at us through the story is his sheer energy.

We feel it pulsing through the letters. We watch as he responds to violence in one city by going straight on to the next one and saying and doing the same things. He's working all hours, his hands hardened with tent making, his back stiff from bending at the workbench, but he's ready every moment for the visitor with a question, for the distraught youngster whose parents have thrown him out, for the local official, worried what's going to happen, if people discover he's following Jesus, and so on and so on and so on.

But the second thing, it is blunt upfront habit of telling it like he sees it. He'll say, "Boo to every goose within earshot and to all the swans as well." There is a reason why Saul of Tarsus is the one getting into trouble, just as there is a reason why the Jerusalem apostles decided to pack him off to Tarsus. He confronts Peter in Antioch and so on.

He's the kind of man you want on your side in a debate, even if he may alienate some more sensitive souls. He still does that today. He confronts the magistrates at Philippi.

He's itching to speak to the vast crowded Ephesus. He tries to explain himself to the Jerusalem mob that's been trying to lynch him. He rebukes the high priest.

He knows how to turn the factions in the Sanhedrin against one another. He lectures the Roman governor himself about justice, if you please. He tells the ship owner where he shouldn't spend the winter.

And when he goes horribly wrong, he says, "I told you so." He spots the sailors trying to bolt and tells the centurion to stop them doing it. As a companion, he must have been exhilarating when things were going well and exasperating when they weren't. As an opponent, he could cause some people to contemplate murder as their only recourse.

It's very interesting. I've done various odd jobs in my time. People write doctoral dissertations about how successful companies are not for profit organizations begin.

In 99 cases out of 100, there's someone like Paul hammering away, getting things off the ground, confronting local authorities, raising money, persuading coworkers what needs to be done, never losing the vision, taking the bull by the horns. Someone will go on insisting the whole time. We've got to do this stuff.

But there's also something disarming about his vulnerable side, which means that despite his relentless, his people loved him and wanted to work with him and wept when he left. When he says that his heart is open wide, we believe him. It rings true.

His honesty shines out with Paul. What you see is what you get, even if it isn't always what you wanted. You know where you are.

You know he will do anything for you because he would say, "God has done everything for us in the Messiah Jesus." And so it goes on. That's what he was like. So what? Where does this leave us? I found as I was working on this book, the letters were coming to life in a new way.

I've been studying Paul on and off all my life, but they came up in three dimensions again and again as part of a fully rounded history, a Watson all history, a multicultural, swirling, and a multi-ethnic mix. And for us, now as then, we struggle with the things he's struggled with. When I was writing my previous big book on Paul, Paul and the Faithfulness of God, I was looking for what are the things that Paul wants to see which

tells the world what sort of a community this is.

And the two things again and again are unity and holiness. Now, any of you in church work, you know as well as I do, unity is easy if you don't care about holiness. Holiness is easy if you don't care about unity.

Trust me, I'm a bishop, I know. The trick, the really difficult thing, is to have them both together. That is really... And that's what Paul is working at.

That's why the pastoral side of him is wrestling in first Corinthians with what it means, all this stuff about food offered to idols. What does it mean to be a holy and a pagan city? To be monotheistic in a pagan city. What does it mean to be united when in the church, there are some people who think it's fine to eat any meat that's sold in the market because God made it all and he loves us so that's okay.

And other people are still crushed with the burden of their pagan past and don't want to touch that meat in case it reminds them of the way they used to live. Paul the pastor brings unity and holiness together, confronting a confused and dangerous world with the challenge and the comfort of the unstoppable love of the Creator God. That's why I love him.

That's why I want to go on studying and that's what this book's about. Thank you very much. Thanks for listening today.

The bonus episode to continue next week as we hear part two of this special evening with NT Wright organised by SBCK to mark the publication of Paul Biography and he'll be sitting down with broadcaster Martin Bashir to talk through the issues next time. And don't forget that SBCK Tom's UK publisher have some special deals on Tom's book for podcast listeners. The links are in the show notes and if you don't already have it, why not get hold of Paul Biography? You really won't regret it.

You can also find a link to the video of the event with today's podcast. And you can find out more about the show as ever at [askntwright.com](http://askntwright.com). If you signed up, you'll be entered into our prize giveaways, you'll get updates and bonus stuff too. And if you haven't already heard, we've launched a new online apologetics course from Premier Unbelievable.

It's for individual learning in your own time, over four hours of video teaching from some brilliant Christian thinkers like William Lane Craig, Amy O'Ewing, Gary Habermas and John Lennox. I'm on there too as we together guide you through key aspects of evidence for the Christian faith. It's called Confident Christianity and you can actually get it for 30% off until the end of this month, October.

So go to [premier.org.uk/getconfident](http://premier.org.uk/getconfident) to get hold of that offer. There's a link with today's show too. For now, thanks for being with us and see you next time.

[music] [ Silence ]