

Josh Mangelson 00:22

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Carla Long 00:53

Hello everyone, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. My name is Carla Long and I am your host, and it's great to be back with you in our series Percolating on Faith. And what would Percolating on Faith be without our stars—Charmaine and Tony Chvala-Smith. Welcome Charmaine and Tony, thanks for being here.

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:12

You have a low bar.

Carla Long 01:15

Well, I don't want to agree with you, but I might have to.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:19

Hi, Carla. We're twinkling away over here.

Carla Long 01:21

Excellent. Today's podcast is all about Paul. Yes, the apostle Paul, the guy who was a major contributor to that one bestseller—you may have heard of it—the Bible. That's the one. While he may have been a major contributor to the New Testament, there might be some confusion and maybe even some angst out there as to who he was, why he wrote what he wrote, and so on. So let's have a conversation about that. Let's talk about Paul.

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:49

Yeah, we're very, very pleased to talk about Paul. Indeed, lots of angst and lots of confusion.

Carla Long 01:57

Well, go ahead. Let's talk about him. Who was he?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 02:01

That's actually a really great place to start. One of the things I was going to say is that this area of study is one of Tony's very favorite areas of study, so he'll have lots to share and some good insights from the scholarship that's out there. Looking forward to that and also packaging it in sizable, chewable chunks. So that's a warning.

Tony Chvala-Smith 02:37

That's a warning to me.

Carla Long 02:40

Are you telling our listeners to hunker down, grab a cup of tea and get ready to go? Is that what you're saying, Charmaine?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 02:50

That's a nice way to put it. Carla.

Tony Chvala-Smith 02:52

I think she's actually saying, "get a very LARGE cup of tea."

Carla Long 02:55

Ah, cuz you're gonna be here for the rest of winter. It sounds like all right, so let's do this.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 03:02

This is one of Tony's favorite topics, so I'm going to start. I really want...one of the things...and I've probably mentioned this in other of our podcasts...but as I started becoming aware of how much power the Bible had, as a young adult, and aware of some of the texts that people were using against women, Paul featured pretty majorly there. My opinion about Paul was kind of my opinion about the Bible or scripture, and saying, "why should we even take it seriously, if all it does is marginalize people and diminish their worth?" So I had a really bad view of Paul myself. One of the things that I've really appreciated about being able to learn more, is to start to try and imagine who Paul was, and pulling mostly from his own letters, the ones that are undisputed. This would be First Corinthians, Second Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Romans, and Philemon...who did I miss?

Tony Chvala-Smith 04:28

Think you got 'em all...seven?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:30

I think I only got six, but anyhow...

...where he tells us who he is, so let's start there with an image of "Who was this person?" What we can figure out is, he was a good Jewish boy, but he's not from the Jerusalem area. He's from a Gentile area and Greek is his first language. He's very adept in Greek and that's what he wrote in. He's a Hellenized Jew, a Jew who is very comfortable within the Greek culture, but obviously he's also very firm in his faith as a Jew. It's apparent that he studied hard; he likes to study; he knew the Torah; probably loved debating the Torah, since that's what this emerging group within Judaism called the Pharisees loved to do; and he names himself as a Pharisee. If you can imagine, here's someone who loves his religion and is fully, fully, FULLY involved in it, it's very important to him and his relationship with God is very important to him. He sees this upstart movement that seems to be diluting Judaism, and he sees it probably as distorting what Judaism is. I'm sure he was also concerned that it would endanger the Jewish standing among Romans, and then it could cause problems. This is actually a well-founded concern, because that appears to be exactly what happened in the late 40s, when Jews were kicked out of Rome—out of the city of Rome—because of some internal conflicts, and lots of

historians are pretty sure it's a conflict between Jews and Jewish Christians and probably Gentile Christians as well, around the synagogues there.

So this young (young-ish) Paul was really concerned about his faith community. He's really angry at the Christians who are messing up his religion. He later admits to persecuting Christians violently; he's really fired up about this. Then there's a really inconvenient thing happens: he's encountered by the risen Jesus, the risen Christ. Suddenly, things change for him. It doesn't appear that he gives up his Jewishness, but he certainly now has a bigger view of what it is that God is about, who Jesus is, and of course then becomes a follower in the way, which is... "the way" as being an early name for Christians, meaning "in the way of Christ."

If he grew up out in the Greek world... somewhere in the Roman world... he would have had exposure to interaction with Gentiles all the time, far more than if he lived in an area that had a higher concentration of Jewish folks who lived in in their own communities and interacted with each other, like in Jerusalem or maybe Galilee. But he has a real comfort with Gentiles, not only in the marketplace, but also probably in the synagogues where Gentiles came. Though they might not be able to convert all the way, they hung around the synagogues, kind of creating a buffer zone between the Roman authority and their little community, and they were often... these Gentiles were often contributors financially and supporters, believers in God, even though they couldn't fully convert.

It's really natural that then Paul would start with those folks, because he saw very quickly that this whole Jesus thing meant that there was a way to God for his Gentile friends and neighbors who couldn't become Jewish. He very quickly becomes the person who wants to take this message to the Gentiles. There are others of the apostles who weren't so keen on this and didn't know how to do this. He's really equipped to do that, so that's what he does. He then starts going into new areas and developing churches. It's really important to realize there's no structure at this point, no real centralized church, or not a real priesthood structure. This is the good news carrying into new places, and people are having to figure it out as they go—how this is going to look. How do you share the message in a different cultural or different ethnic background area? He's coming in—a newbie himself in lots of ways—yet feeling very called to share this with Gentiles, in a culture... in the Roman culture, backed by Greek thought and language that is very different from his Jewish base understanding of who God is and who Jesus is. You can see where the conflicts are going to start already. The sense of call is what drew him into synagogues, probably in other parts of the Mediterranean area, and starts to talk about who Jesus is.

I think that's a really good way to begin to understand who he is: not somebody with authority given by anybody, except by Christ. Eventually he gets okays from Jerusalem—from James and from Peter—but he's doing this pretty much because Jesus is walking with him.

Tony Chvala-Smith 11:43

I think trying to get to know who Paul is, is compromised for us—in some different ways. This will sound strange, but one of the chief impediments to understanding Paul is the book of Acts. And you're gonna say "What!?"

Carla Long 12:03

Yeah, what!?

Tony Chvala-Smith 11:05

Here's the impediment: if we want to know the historical Paul, where should we go? Should we go to primary sources—his undisputed letters—or should we go to a secondary source: a highly stylized, secondary source from as much as 30 or 40 years after the time of Paul? Where would we go? In the canonical order of books in the New Testament, Acts comes before the letters and so it's not our fault—we go to Acts first. Then what happens is that Luke's very dramatic telling of the Paul story overshadows Paul's own telling of his own story. It's like if you want to understand the real Lincoln—Abraham Lincoln—would you want to go to a dramatic miniseries made for TV or would you want to go to Lincoln's own writings? We would probably be attracted to the miniseries because it's easier and because it's more fun. But we wouldn't necessarily get the real Lincoln from there.

So Acts gives us a picture of Paul, and most Pauline scholars would say that the author of Acts has a reasonably accurate understanding of Paul's journeys—his travels—but the author of Acts really doesn't have an accurate understanding of Paul's actual theology, and doesn't seem to be aware that Paul wrote letters. Pauline scholars see the book of Acts as a secondary source, and so if you want to get to know Paul, you have to go to the letters. And as Charmaine already mentioned, the undisputed ones—the seven...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 13:54

I missed First Thessalonians.

Tony Chvala-Smith 14:00

First Thessalonians, yes...the seven letters that all Pauline scholars are sure came from Paul's own hand, or at least from his own mouth as he dictated them—those are our primary sources. Colossians, Ephesians, Second Thessalonians, First and Second Timothy and Titus—those texts, like Acts, are secondary texts. They do not have the same style as the seven. They are hard to fit into Paul's known career. Theologically, they are significantly different at points from the seven, so we go to the seven letters to find out who Paul really was.

What surprises us when we go there is that Paul actually does not talk about himself very much. I think that's probably our first shock. We want to know who Paul is, we have to read his letters and then he's rather sparse on the autobiographical details. When it comes to this life- and direction-changing experience, he's also somewhat sparse there, too. That's an impediment to knowing Paul.

A second impediment is the way that the letters have been used and misused to create all kinds of really unfortunate ethical problems. I mean, Paul was used to support slavery and Paul's been used to support misogyny, and Paul's been used to bash gay people. This comes down to how people abuse scripture, more than it comes down to what's actually in the text.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 15:48

Right, because when you start really reading Paul's own writings, you'll be surprised to see—at least I was—surprised to see that actually he's following in Jesus' footsteps as far as women are concerned, and you don't have to look real far. In Philippians, he talks about Syntyche and Euodia, who are...he calls them co-workers. Biblical historians figure that probably these are the leaders of two house churches or maybe one house church, who are having some conflict and so Paul is speaking directly to them to have peace with each other, to let Christ be their focus instead of whatever it is that they're arguing over. But he first of all calls them co-workers and obviously recognizes their authority and leadership within that community. Then, in the book...in Romans we find Phoebe mentioned there—named as a deaconess. If you go to the end of Romans to Chapter 16, you'll find a whole list of people that he greets in Rome. I think I did a count one time—I think almost half of them are women, and women's names. And so you've got very much this sense of women being involved. What's the one on Junia?

Tony Chvala-Smith 17:42

That's in Romans 16. In Romans 16, Paul mentions Andronicus and Junia. Junia he refers to as noteworthy among the apostles, and the simple sense of the Greek is that she's an apostle, she's a noteworthy apostle, ...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 18:01

an emissary, a messenger of Jesus.

Tony Chvala-Smith 18:05

That's really important for understanding that Paul has a large...works with a large team of people. The scholar Luke Johnson estimates that Paul's...we'll call it "missionary team"...(I don't like the language because it's modern-ish language)...but the group of people Paul worked with has about 40 names in it, and a large chunk of them are women. If we understand the end of Romans right, this Phoebe—the deacon from the church at Cencreae, which is near Corinth—she would have been the person probably carrying his "letter to the Romans" to them and would have been its reader and interpreter. What we have in Romans 16 is what scholars of the ancient letter form refer to as a letter of recommendation. Paul names her and this is basically his saying, "Phoebe has got my seal of approval; she's the one who can interpret this letter." Think about that for a second—that one of the most weighty theological texts, not only in the Bible, but in the history of Christian thought, was first read and interpreted to the Roman Christians by a deacon named Phoebe. Pretty amazing, isn't it?

Carla Long 19:30

It is pretty amazing. When we think about all of that stuff that you've just talked about, Charmaine and Tony, about who Paul was: how he is a good Jewish boy; how he had this amazing turnaround with a vision of Christ; where he has come from and who he's trying to become. He didn't have the Internet to help them figure out all of these things that are actually happening around him, right? He has him. He has his—as you said Tony, even though you didn't like it—his missionary team to try and figure out what was actually happening in this new, developing world of Christianity. What made Paul start writing these letters anyway? What was his first letter? Why did he start? Why did he feel like he was the one to answer some of these questions?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 20:29

Wow, great questions. His earliest letter that that we have—or that's part of the New Testament—is First Thessalonians. It was probably written around 50, maybe a little bit earlier than that. He's writing to a church that he helped found in Thessalonica. He's heard from people who have been there or perhaps through a letter to him, that they have some serious questions about this faith that he's introduced them to. His conviction was that Christ was going to be returning any time, and one of their worries is: we were expecting (and probably Paul was expecting this as well) that Christ was going to be returning—it was gonna be an imminent return. They're saying: but there's people in our community...little Christian house church here...who are dying—what does that mean? Will they not partake in Christ's return? Pretty heavy-duty questions, and Paul is wanting to address them. Here's a little group of Christians who are taking on this whole new way of living and thinking in the midst of a Roman culture, and they're trying to figure it out. He's simply trying to help them understand that all is not lost, that their faith is well founded, and hang in there.

Tony Chvala-Smith 22:20

The question of “Why is he the one to write them?” There's several ways to answer that, in addition to what Charmaine said. First of all, in Roman culture someone who creates something else is its *patronus*—its father. He uses father language in his letters, because in Greco-Roman culture, the father was the head of the family.

(Oh, by the way, don't try this at home!)

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 22:58

This is an old, old archaic practice...

Tony Chvala-Smith 23:01

Just because it's in the Bible doesn't mean you should do it!

In Roman culture, to be the patron of something else puts you automatically in a role of authority. Paul is the patron—he has helped...I'm going to switch metaphors here...he has helped birth these people into a new religious movement, a new way of life. He has an automatic authority over them because of that, in that culture.

Secondly, he is *apóstolos*. The Greek word means “to be sent” or means “an emissary.” He has an authority that comes to him from the risen Christ, and that authority is visible in the very fact that he is able to talk about Christ in ways that are compelling to these people. He's in charge, but he's in charge in a way that...we have to kind of step out of modern hierarchical notions of “Who is in charge of the church?” First of all, the word “church” here in Paul's letters, *ekklēsia*, doesn't mean a building, and doesn't even really mean a structure. It means a group of people who have responded to a particular summons, they have been “called out,” and they are now a community. Paul's authority over this community is simply because he has fathered them, and secondly because he has a connection with the risen Christ that is compelling to them. Does that make sense, Carla?

Carla Long 24:38

Yeah, it does. Although I will tell you I was a little bit confused by the word *patronus*—I thought it was only in Harry Potter—it's not, I see now. Thank you for that clarification. Continue.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 24:51

Actually, that's all really very helpful for understanding something about the tone of many of Paul's letters. He, as I said, is a Greek thinker—he thinks in Greek, he writes in Greek. But this additional thing that Tony was talking about—his authority—then allows him to speak in a certain way to the congregations. He's their teacher. He's the one who taught them who Jesus is, who probably served them the bread and wine, who may have baptized some of them (we find in First Corinthians, he's done some baptisms). And so he's the one they look to for instruction. He's been in “the way”—he's been living this longer than they have—and he comes from a Jewish background, which is where Jesus came from as well. They're wanting to hear instructions on “How do we live this out in our time, in this place?” So that's part of his voice, part of the reason why much of what he says is very instructional, because that's what was needed, and that was the role that he was playing.

I mention this because it's one of the places where we find so much misunderstanding of Paul today. When we read the New Testament today and read his letters—it sounds arrogant, it sounds boastful, it sounds like he's puffing himself up. But especially in places like Galatians where he's arguing with opponents who would totally undermine the message of Jesus, he is very straightforward. He's very much using his authority—his established relationship with them as their patron, their “birther”—to say, “Listen to me. Take seriously what I've said.” But when we read it out of context today, we can say, “Oh, look at Paul, he's saying ‘Look at me, I'm a perfect...I was a perfect Jew and now I'm a perfect Christian’” or however people tend to read that. If you don't understand the context of why he is doing that, we tend to then project on him our own hearing of his voice.

Partly, our reaction to that is justified because there are people who use Paul's authoritarian voice today, and use it usually to sideline people, to correct them, to judge them. Which is, in my mind, ironic, since in doing that they've missed Paul's message. Paul's message is clearest in Galatians, where it's your belief in Christ that makes you right with God, that's called grace. God's grace comes in your belief through Christ, and it doesn't come by your actions. So people who use Paul's writings to restrict or enforce certain actions really have missed who Paul is. Especially when they've done that in ways that are violent to people's faith and spirituality.

Tony Chvala-Smith 28:51

Charmaine's gotten something really important there. This is another difficulty for reading Paul's letters. We tend to overlay on these letters, our almost narcissistic sense of individuality. We read these letters, and we encounter a person speaking in the first person, and we think—actually we don't think, we just assume that this “I” is just like us. This is actually inaccurate, in the sense that letters like these were highly rhetorical compositions. Paul takes on personae in each of the letters. We can't always go from how he's coming across in the letter, to what he was like as a person. He chooses a persona in terms of what he wants to convey. For example, in Galatians he uses a form of rhetoric called *apologetic rhetoric*. This is the rhetoric of defending oneself in the law court, and that's part of the hostility of the letter. In Second Corinthians, which is, I think, one of the most complicated of the letters, probably

because it's a composite—it's probably from pieces of different letters of his—but the rhetorical form in there is really complex. The overall feeling of that letter is what the orators in the ancient world would have called *pathos*—Paul is trying to convey to the Corinthians how much suffering they have cost him. You have to pay attention rhetorically to each letter, and recognize that he's using certain forms to convey certain things to the readers. We don't always instinctively relate to those forms quite the same way first century people would have.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 31:02

This might be a good place to toss in another piece of information that—without going into lots of detail—I think is really, really important. That is that when Paul is writing these letters, he has no idea that these are going to become scripture. These are his “seat of the pants” writing, trying to fix situations in congregations, trying to help people learn what it means to have faith in Christ and to be a community and live in a new way. There's no...he has no idea that these writings are going to, 300 years later, be considered scripture to Christians. I always say it's obvious that he doesn't know that because he probably would have cleaned up his language in Galatians a little bit if he had—he gets pretty graphic there, and he's very angry. I think that's really crucial: Paul is a first century person. He's a first century Jew, having grown up in a culture of his time, with the views...many of them that would have been passed on by his Jewish culture, and some from the Roman culture. He is doing his best with the tools that he has, to help these little congregations survive and to teach them a whole new thing. The idea that this would somehow eventually be of the same import as the Torah or the Prophets, would never have crossed his mind. He isn't speaking to us—he's speaking to those churches in his time. We have the benefit of hearing his letters, and the benefit of finding some very helpful elements in them in our own relationship with God and in our own spiritual growth. But we can't hold him to 21st-century ways of thinking or acting.

Tony Chvala-Smith 33:23

Charmaine mentioned Paul's “seat of the pants” writing. I can give you an example of this. If you look at the NRSV translation of Galatians, you will find in a few places “long dashes.” That's where the translators and editors have...are trying to indicate that Paul hasn't finished a thought. You can tell from that, especially in the Greek, that he's probably dictating this letter to a scribe and he started a thought and he didn't finish it and then he goes on to another thought. We have a technical term for this—it's called an *anacoluthon*, which in Greek means “it doesn't follow.” The translators can see at points where he's very hot, and he's dictating in the heat of argument. Probably the only letter I would say is not “seat of the pants” really is Romans, which is a much more systematic and methodical piece. Yet even that letter, at the end you have a greeting from the scribe who took the dictation. At the very end of the letter, 15:22 [ed. 16:22] I think, we read “I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord.” Tertius—a good Latin name—Tertius is Paul's scribe for that letter. Here we have to understand that writing in the ancient world on papyrus was not an easy task. You let the experts, the professionals, do it. Once in a while you...if you wanted to send a little letter to a family member in the Roman world, the standard way to do it was to go to the marketplace, find a scribe, hire them, the scribe would take dictation or you could tell the scribe “This is what I want to say—you say it.” Maybe you might, if you could write, you might write your signature on the end of this letter. The scribe would typically make two copies, one for you and then the one that was sent. And when I say sent, I mean it was carried by

somebody who was going in that direction—that's how letters were conveyed. Typically, you needed somebody with the skill and training to write for you on papyrus.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 35:59

So we've wandered all over the place here, Carla.

Carla Long 36:04

It happens more often than not with you two.

Tony Chvala-Smith 36:08

It's Lent...we're supposed to be wandering in the wilderness.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 36:13

Bring us back to some of the questions and some of the other details that you would like to know about.

Carla Long 36:22

I was just thinking, while you guys were talking, that we're reading one side of a bunch of emails basically in some ways. We don't even really know the questions that the people in Corinth were asking, or in Thessalonica. We don't even know exactly what they were asking, we only know Paul's reaction to what they were asking. We are really just stepping into a conversation that we really have no part stepping into. I really appreciate you both lifting that up: just because we think that we know exactly what's happening, and we just don't—we're just jumping into a middle of a conversation and only hearing one side of it. I think that's important to remember. Thanks for bringing that up.

Tony Chvala-Smith 37:12

Really true.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 37:13

I think one of the places that scholars have spent a lot of time, is in First Corinthians. In First Corinthians scholars can kind of read between the lines, and they can start to pick up what were some of the issues that Paul is addressing. But you're right—in some of the letters, like in Philippians, we know (because Paul mentions it probably four or five times subtly in the letter) that there's division in the little house church or house churches in Philippi. He wants to help bring some peace and help people to refocus on what's important. Once we see that theme of several mentions of “having unity,” and “making peace with each other,” then conversations like the one about Euodia and Syntyche can help us say, “Okay, there's some controversy...there's some conflict happening.” Very close readings can give us some sense of it, but we don't know what the personalities are like—who are these people? Are they like people in our congregations who are always causing problems, or...

Carla Long 38:38

Who argue about the color of the carpet...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 38:41

Right—or who are self-righteous, or who think, “Oh, my spiritual gift or my calling is better than other people's calling.” You can get a sense of that—First Corinthians is full of those kinds of things. But that's one of the reasons his letters got passed on from one little church group to another to another, is that there are some things that he's addressing in his letters that are timeless.

Tony Chvala-Smith 39:11

In Pauline scholarship—actually this is true of all biblical scholarship—a big part of the work of critically understanding a particular book is trying to figure out, **from** the book, “the story behind the book.” Almost every writing—Old and New Testament—has a story behind it, and the more we can reconstruct pieces of that story, the better we understand what's going on in the book. This is especially true for the letters. With some of Paul's letters, it's easier to reconstruct the story behind the letter; with others it's harder. Yes, it's guesswork, but let's call it...it's educated, disciplined guesswork when scholars do it. We use our knowledge of the Greco-Roman world—its religion, culture and politics; we use our knowledge of ancient Judaism, or Judaisms if you will; what we know about the various Christian traditions that are represented in the New Testament; and then we work with what Paul says and try to reconstruct from there. It's both art and science. For example, when we're trying to figure out “Why does Paul tell women in Corinth to do certain things and not do certain things?” knowing how women deported themselves in the Roman world will be very helpful for understanding why he might say something. That reminds us, by the way, that if you want to read some good scholarship on Paul, we can make some suggestions on that too.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 40:59

Is there one in particular that gives good background to the letters—at least what scholars have best able to discern?

Tony Chvala-Smith 41:08

I think there are...for seven undisputed letters, this is a field of study that's been plowed thousands of times. But I think working with some good basic, critical introductions to the New Testament is an excellent starting point. For example, Raymond Brown's *Introduction to the New Testament*, which we use with our seminary students, is a very readable way to get at the background of the Pauline letters. Other introductions to the New Testament, like Bart Ehrman, and like Harris's introduction—these give you lots of decent background. A very simple text for getting at background stuff is the one we use with our undergrads called *An Introduction to the Bible*. It's by Clyde Fant (F-a-n-t) and other authors, a very nice, simple way to get at the background. A text that's a little dated now, but still I think very helpful, is Marion Soards (S-o-a-r-d-s)...Marion Soards' *Paul The Apostle*, a very fine introduction to Paul. We also like a book by Gary Wills. Gary Wills is not a biblical scholar, but he's a classicist—he's trained in Latin and Greek—and he's very good at sifting through tons of scholarship and getting to what he sees is essential. Gary Wills book, *What Paul Meant*, is good, with some qualifications, just recognizing he's not a Pauline scholar. He's very good at understanding the Greco-Roman world, and he cuts through a lot of scholarship to give you a quick take on where current scholarship on Paul really is.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 43:00

A thing I like about Wills is that if you already know some things about Paul and are either familiar with some of the uses and misuses of Paul, or have done some reading in Paul's letters yourself, this book will make lots of sense because he really likes to engage some of the misconceptions in our time about Paul and who he was and what he had to say. But it's probably not as good a book for people who are just starting to read Paul themselves for the first time, or aren't really aware of some of the controversy around him. That's Gary Wills, *What Paul Meant*.

Tony Chvala-Smith 43:42

Once again, we've circled way around the barn, Carla, so bring us back.

Carla Long 43:50

No, you're doing a great job. I really appreciate this huge background. We've talked for about 40 minutes about who Paul was and all about his background, so I really appreciate that. But I want to move forward to: what can we tell from his own writings? What was Paul's message? What was his M.O.? How did he move around and start churches? There's so many things about what he did and what his message was, that people might be confused about as well. So tell us more about that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:25

I'll start with...I'll say something about Paul's message. One of the things I would want to say is that there is a consistent message in the seven letters, and yet you have to be aware that he's constantly interpreting that consistent message for his different situations. Nowhere, not even in Romans, does Paul say "All right everybody—here's my basic beliefs." He doesn't have a website that gives basic beliefs like church websites do. What we can tell—and here I would rely on one of the great 20th-century Paul scholars, Johan Christiaan Beker, who wrote a book called *Paul The Apostle*, published around 1980-81. Becker argues in this book that Paul has a consistent core of a message and then what he calls contingent or local interpretations of it. The consistent core of Paul's message, Becker argues, is the coming triumph of God over the powers of evil in the world, and that this has been inaugurated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; in other words, the kingdom of God has dawned in the death and resurrection of the Messiah. This dawning of this brand new creation—it's just entering—is what empowers Paul to go around the Roman Empire, creating little communities that embody this whole new way of living. God's triumph over sin and evil that hold people in their power, in and through the death and resurrection of Jesus and the starting of a whole new way of life in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male and female, and so on (Galatians 3)—that's sort of at the core of his message. Entry into this message...entry into this new way of life for Paul is a sheer gift. That's what grace is, for Paul—it's this unfathomable gift that draws us into this whole new way of living. We can't claim that...for Paul we can't claim to have become Christian because we're so wise, or so smart, or so righteous, or so moral, or that we're fifth generation or tenth generation. None of that counts at all for Paul—it's a sheer gift and he's seems to be constantly amazed, and having his breath taken away by the gift of what God has done and is doing in Christ in creating this new world. That's the core of his message.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 47:31

Tony, you reference Galatians 3, and I'd say probably this captures his message best of all. It's 3:26 through 29, says,

"...for in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise."

He's always tying together the Jewish background, but then this brand new thing that God has done through Christ, that has brought reconciliation between humanity and God. On God's actions, not ours.

Tony Chvala-Smith 48:32

Paul is also dumbstruck by the fact that the old—the centuries old—division between Jew and Gentile has now been bridged. That's of course, what made him *persona non grata* among what would have been his Jewish compatriots—this was not going to fly well in many places. Paul, the Jew, believes that it's no longer important to be Jew or Gentile. It's a whole new humanity has been created in Christ, and his mission is to create these communities that are trying to live into this new humanity, this new creation. Then you asked about how does he start churches...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 49:24

One of the things that we can tell—and this is probably fairly accurate in Acts—in Acts, it has Paul traveling all around different areas around the Mediterranean, visiting synagogues first and there sharing the good news, both with Jews and with those—sometimes Tony calls them “synagogue groupies”—who hang around the synagogues, who have come to know the Jewish God, the God of the Old Testament, have belief in this God, support the synagogues, but aren't full participants. It really looks as though Paul is going to people who already have had some exposure to his God. After that, it looks as though once Gentile Christians get it, then it starts to move a lot quicker. He's kind of the one who's bringing this translation from very Jewish Christian standpoint, to helping...initially, they're called “God fearers”—people who are aware of God and believe in God, but who can't fully become Jewish. He helps bridge for them then, into this new way of being in relationship with God in Christ, that doesn't require them to become Jewish, to be circumcised, to follow the food laws, to keep Sabbath in a particular way. It's very freeing and amazing. You can imagine for people who had come to know the God of the Jews, but who couldn't take those other steps, and now here was an “equal opportunity God” for them, and Christ was the way to have that interaction.

Tony Chvala-Smith 51:53

You can tell from the people that Paul names in his letters, that some of them were really, really, really Gentile. For example, one of his co-workers he speaks quite glowingly of in Philippians, is Epaphroditus. You probably can already guess what the name...where the name comes from. You recognize the name Aphrodite? Epaphroditus in Greek means “to dedicate to” or towards. This is not a name you would give a Jewish child, dedicated to Aphrodite. Actually, I like to say that if you really want to translate that in a fun way, it basically means “love child.” There's plenty of evidence that Paul really

takes his own message seriously, and is quite comfortable with people of a completely Gentile pagan background who have heard his message and have joined in.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 53:01

His message is about what God has done, is about God's grace coming to us, our knowing God's love and acceptance of us, and Christ being both the messenger of that and the visual reminder of a gift of that. But Paul's goal is breaking down the barriers between people: between Jews and Gentiles, between men and women, between the outsider and the insider. You'll find that language throughout—that breaking down the barriers between the rich and the poor, between those who are well educated and those who aren't. He addresses it in Corinthians when people are comparing their gifts: “mine's better than yours,” or “mine's bigger than yours.” (laughter) Well, it's true.

Tony Chvala-Smith 54:12

It is true. It's like, “My spiritual gift is bigger than yours,” of course. You see that in First Corinthians and Paul really pushes back hard on that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 54:21

He's bringing a kind of equality before God. That's his goal. There's his message and there's his goal—what he feels called to do.

Tony Chvala-Smith 54:35

Further on this “How did he start churches?” We have to be careful because when I say “start a church,” what comes to mind?

Carla Long 54:48

A building.

Tony Chvala-Smith 54:49

...yeah, exactly.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 54:50

And an organization, a real strong organization.

Tony Chvala-Smith 54:53

Right. What he's starting in these communities is...he uses the word *koinonia*, which is the Greek word—it's traditionally translated as “fellowship.” It's better, I think, for us to translate it “community.” The word *koinos* in Greek means “common”...“having something in common.” He's starting these little communities that are sort of...to use some language...Becker uses this language, but he gets the language from a mid-20th-century Swiss scholar named Oscar Cullman—“the beachhead.” These communities are supposed to be beachheads of the dawning kingdom of God. Here's where I think Paul's really relevant to us today: the church is called to be a...to give a little glimpse of the new creation, and typically what churches end up giving a glimpse of is of the old creation—of gender inequality and heterosexism and horrible power differentials. We have a hard time wanting to live out a vision of the coming age of the reign of God. We're much more at home in the age that we're in, and so

we put a lot of Christian window dressing on that and call it good. That was not Paul's vision. It was a very hard vision to live out—that's why he's got all these problems in his communities. The Galatians, in trying to live out this message, decide, "Oh, what we really need is a whole bunch of rules." And Paul's like, "You're kidding me!" Then the Corinthians saying, "Oh we love this new vision, so...I know, why don't we party like it's 1999 and let's go..."

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 56:54

We're all free—we're free...

Tony Chvala-Smith 56:56

Yes, "Paul says we're free, so I think I'm going to go visit the Aphrodite temple—I know a priestess there."

Carla Long 57:01

What happens in Corinth stays in Corinth, right? Like it was the party place.

Tony Chvala-Smith 57:07

Paul's saying to the Galatians, "Don't...you guys, you don't need rules: you're free in Christ." To the Corinthians he's saying, "Okay, maybe I better make a few rules here—you guys are misreading the idea of freedom in a sort of self-oriented way." It's a radical vision of what the church is to be, and most of us never experienced it because church life is often highly culturally domesticated. Paul's really *avant-garde* in that respect.

Carla Long 57:43

He's talking to two very different groups. You said he's speaking to Gentiles as well as Jews: Gentiles who had no rules to follow; Jews who had over 600 rules to follow. It makes perfect sense that his letters to these different groups would be very different. Again, since we're looking into something that we're not necessarily supposed to be looking into. That makes a lot of sense, and especially when he's talking about grace and unity. Would these have been just completely foreign ideas to both the Jews and the Gentiles?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 58:17

I would say it wouldn't be foreign to the Jews. I think, as in all religions—organized faiths—that survive by having structure, I think that sometimes the loving nature of God may have been overshadowed a bit by those who either kept the rules very rigorously, or those who suggested others do that. But the sense of God's enduring love is all throughout the Old Testament, and so it's there. For Jews, in some ways becoming a Jewish Christian—that's what the earliest church was: Jews who believed the Messiah had come and were now living out their Jewishness with a belief in and a following of Christ—it was not a big step for some Jews because that image of God as a loving God was already there. This was a deepening of that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 59:39

I think for Gentiles, this was a whole new thing. Roman society was highly...sociologists would call "stratified." Where you were on the food chain, up to down, was determined by birth, or by enforced

status, like if you'd been made a slave. You could move down on the food chain, but rarely could you move up. So the idea that we have this little community of people where the person who is otherwise a household slave and the person who is otherwise free, are actually equal in this little community—that would have been extraordinary.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:00:30

Philemon is the place to see how radical Paul is being to the social structures of his day.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:00:37

Absolutely—Philemon's a cool little letter for that. These communities where the highly patriarchal views of men and women in the Greco-Roman world were not followed, and where women were an equal part of the community, this would have been extraordinary for lots of people. I think that's part of the power and the appeal of Christianity in the first century. Yes, there were Greek mystery religions that had something analogous to this, but we don't actually know that much about those mystery religions, and we don't know how they how they functioned for people in other parts of their life. I would say that this form of Christian community that Paul was trying to birth and to nurture, was really quite remarkable.

Carla Long 1:01:31

It sounds like it really was remarkable. I do want to...we're coming to the close of our hour and I really want to ask you some questions about some of the more problematic texts that we might view today—like in Romans, where it sounds like Paul is anti-LGBT, which is a really hot button issue for churches today—and some other texts. Could you talk about those texts that could be seen as problematic?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:02:03

Sure. First of all, we need to remember, as I said earlier, that Paul was a first-century person with a first-century person's view of a lot of things, including sexuality to some extent. But even there, when we can look a little bit more closely at some of the texts—the one in Romans that you're referencing and then also in First Corinthians—when we start to look at the language that's there, we can see...I take pretty clearly that what he's talking about is not what we're talking about when we talk about homosexual relationships today, as far as them being mutual, consensual, mature relationships of love. What he's mostly referring to in both of those places, and in reference to some other New Testament places that sometimes get addressed, is relationships of force, of power, and not about mutual relationship.

We have to remember that the idea of orientation is a very modern, and very new, view. They wouldn't have had the idea in that time period of there being sexual orientations. Where Paul is mostly speaking out is in criticism of Roman culture, that tended to have slaves who were used for sexual purposes. Whether the person was...we don't know whether they would have identified as heterosexual or homosexual or something else, but it was common for people who were married and had children, to also then have a slave—if they had the means and the status—as a sexual toy. It was not a relationship of mutuality. So when we look at some of the words that are used, we can see that it's far more likely that Paul is speaking of those kinds of relationships—those that are about power, that are about force...

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:05:50

Domination.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:05:51

...domination, that's the word I was looking for.

In preparation for the church's...Community of Christ's discussion about homosexuality leading up to 2013, there were a series of videos that were done. I can't remember which one we did—3 or 4? 4 or 5? anyhow, it was one of them...we can maybe give you the YouTube link—which really goes into the six or seven scriptures that are commonly used, both Old and the New Testament, to give a little bit more background on what is their historical setting. What is it that is being spoken against, and why, a little bit. That might be a way to...because to do it justice takes a lot more time that we don't have right now.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:05:59

In some ways, asserting that Paul is anti-LGBTQ is like asserting that he is anti-Internet. It's completely anachronistic. No, he has no concept of that. The two places in the undisputed letters where he refers to same-gender sexual contact—1 Corinthians 6, and then Romans 1—in both places you have to pay attention to what his argument is about, and as Charmaine says, you have to pay attention to what the words meant and what they pointed to in the Greco-Roman world...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:06:47

The rhetorical device of lists—vice lists.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:06:51

Yeah, for example, in Romans when Paul gives this long list of behaviors to avoid, we know what these are called—these are called “vice lists.” Ancient Greco-Roman moral philosophers used vice lists as ways to teach their students. “All right, here's what a good person is; here's what a non-virtuous...a bad person is.” They're devices. And as lots of scholars have pointed out, the vice list that Paul gives in Romans 1—pretty much all of us can find ourselves in the vice list. Basically have to read the text in its particular rhetorical context there. Another issue that the problem...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:07:37

Can I just say one more thing...with that link to the YouTube videos, I would also put in a little bit of a promotion here for watching the very first one, which is Steve Veazey. He's talking about scripture, and about how scripture fits into our goal as a church of discerning God's will. That though scripture is important, we have other lenses that are equally important as we consider how we will respond to God's call as a church. That's a really...it's an excellent little piece there to get a good sense of, I think, some of the best ways of using *Understanding Scripture in Community of Christ*, and Steve talks about six lenses that help us to, as a church, discern God's will. I would suggest taking a few minutes to watch that too.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:08:40

I suppose the other area, Carla, that is problematic, is what Paul is supposed to have said about women. Very quickly—I'll just say here you need to separate what a later Pauline writer in 1 Timothy might have said about women, from what Paul himself says. Then within Paul's undisputed letters, you have to pay very close attention to context, and also to the fact that at least one of those texts—the one in 1 Corinthians 14 I'm looking at here—where it says...this is 1 Corinthians 14:33b..."As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent," ...blah, blah, blah. You'll notice in the NRSV that that's put in brackets, and that is because in terms of the manuscript tradition, most scholars nowadays say "We don't think that actually was original to First Corinthians." When the Pauline letters were being collected together in the early second century, they were probably edited some, and it's very...a lot of scholars think that a later scribe or editor probably...that particular verse...probably wrote that in the margin of a manuscript and then it found its way into the text eventually. You see, the language of it does not match the language of the undisputed letters. And secondly, if you look at it closely, you'll see that it completely breaks up the literary context in 1 Corinthians 14.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:10:11

Which means if you took that little segment out, what comes before and after it flows absolutely naturally, and it makes more sense than with that in the middle of it.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:10:26

In other words, most Pauline scholars considered that text in 1 Corinthians 14 to be an interpolation. It's been stuck into the text—not by Paul. The other one that leaves us, is 1 Corinthians 11. First Corinthians 11 about head coverings and so on. There I think I'd want to say...there's a lot of cultural background that needs to be understood with that one, plus the very convoluted situation in Corinth. What's going on in Corinth? What is happening in the church community there? What's Paul trying to do? How successful is his argument there? Actually he realizes at the end of that section of 1 Corinthians 11 that his argument's not very compelling—and he basically just says, "Oh well, just do what I say." It's vaguely...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:11:19

"Even the Gentiles don't do that..."

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:11:23

Yeah—It's vaguely reminiscent of one's parents saying, "I'm not going to argue with you about this; just do what I tell you to do."

Carla Long 1:11:31

Yeah, that's what it sounds like.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:11:34

And we know that that seldom happened to you, Carla.

Carla Long 1:11:36

Oh, no, my parents always knew exactly what they were saying to me.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:11:39

I think what I want to say here is that we're not really in any way trying to let Paul off the hook. We're trying to understand what's in the letters, and trying to understand him fairly. Understanding him fairly means we have to cut through a lot of the assertions and innuendo and accusations made against him, so that we understand the real Paul. In the end, he's still a first-century person—Charmaine said that very well. We're not always going to find ourselves aligning with him on lots of stuff. But in the same vein, he's got a very revolutionary understanding of the Christian life, so he's much, much, much worth listening to.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:12:19

One of the things we haven't covered in this, and there's really not time—but what about those other letters that have Paul's name on it. The short version is that they have evidence of being...they're often called Pauline...or Deuterocanonical..., sorry, Deuteropauline...letters, because all the evidence points to them being later than Paul's own lifetime. This was not an uncommon thing, to write in the name of someone that you honored, someone that was a teacher of yours. People in that time receiving these other letters would have...most would have known that Paul was dead and that these were written from those of his followers who were trying to use his thoughts in new circumstances. And so First, Second Timothy and Titus—definitely not from Paul. The language is completely different and the theology is completely different. It's obvious that they're dealing with different issues in probably a much later time, as much as 50 or 60 years later after Paul. The church is more structured and they're trying to figure out how to survive in a Roman culture now that Christianity is its own thing, rather than under Judaism. Again, in any of those books that Tony mentioned—Fant, Harris, Brown—they will all give you some really good background on some of the statistical things like language and word usage and theological message, that show that these are not from Paul, but they're a part of a community that follow...existed after his time that was writing in his manner and style to congregations. That's the short answer there.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:14:36

Finally, maybe just Pauline spirituality—what is that about? Pauline spirituality is great spirituality to encounter during Lent and Holy Week. Central to Paul's vision of the spiritual life is the crucifixion of Christ. His wonderful statement in Galatians 2, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh...meaning my everyday historical life...the life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me.” What an amazing text to take with us into Lent up to Holy Week. As I look at...certainly at American culture, we could do with some self-renunciation at this point, couldn't we?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:15:42

Actually, the passage I would point to, as far as spiritual formation, comes from Philippians 2, starting at about 4, where it's about following Christ by being willing to empty ourselves of our status, and to take on the role of servant. Where he says, “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. But the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness, and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” I think that's a wonderful place to

go too. It's quite possible that this and the few verses that follow are not Paul's own creation, but this was a hymn that pre-existed his involvement in the Christian movement, that described who Christ was and what it was he did.

We're over our time, we know...

Carla Long 1:17:16

No, you're fine. This has been really helpful, and I am so grateful. Thank you guys for discussing your favorite topic—wait a second, you should be thanking me for giving you an hour plus to talk about your very favorite thing to talk about, Tony and Charmaine!

Thanks, Carla, for giving us that much.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:17:33

I started by giving Tony a hard time about loving Paul and being able to go on, but I'm afraid I may have done that as well this time.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:17:42

I didn't have a chance to go grab a second cup of coffee even.

Carla Long 1:17:45

Oh gosh, well, gentle listener, I hope that you had time to finish your tea. And I hope that you can, if you have questions, please feel free to go into ProjectZionPodcast.org to ask those questions—we might have a chance to answer them. We'll try and get some YouTube links posted for some of the things that Tony and Charmaine mentioned during this podcast. Guys, thanks so much for your knowledge and your willingness to share that and I just think you're pretty great.

Josh Mangelson 1:18:27

The views expressed in this episode are of those speaking and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Latter-day Seekers team, or of Community of Christ. The music has been provided by Ben Howington. You can find his music at MormonGuitar.com.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:19:01

Carla, like I say, you have a very low bar...