

Bible study 1

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How do we experience the Medicine of the Person of Paul Tournier today?

What should we do, what can we do?

Paul says in Romans 12:2 ff.: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

The Gospel has never been contemporary or culturally conformist, but always a thorn in the side, a contradiction, a correction, and a promise.

Around 1967, during my studies, I was to be expelled because I had refused to learn how to shoot in compulsory pre-military training. To everyone's amazement, there were 12 of us who were conscientious objectors. That was too much for the party ideologues, so thankfully their decision was reversed. What is our worldview?

Are we not trapped in the here and now? That is, happiness at any price, life is short, therefore boundaries and suffering are undesirable.

Transhumanism wants to improve our bodies through artificial intelligence, tell us that the soul does not exist, that emotions are just chemical processes, that intelligence can be improved by implanting appropriate sensors. Y. Noah Harari, the leading proponent in this field, believes we will create "Homo deus." Does that mean perfection in order to dominate others? How will it divide society, increase individualization and loneliness?

My friend Erika, a well-known critic of the system in the GDR, was imprisoned several times for her views and was dying in 2011. She had many visitors every day. I also looked after her as a doctor. She expressed a wish that was shocking to me but also binding: "Don't leave me alone!" I visited her every day. It was more important than all the medical and technical options that were being discussed.

Technical progress is questionable if it is not accompanied by moral advancement. Today's moralists no longer believe in guilt, so forgiveness is no longer necessary. But the survival of just societies is linked to moral education, in which people learn how to use their freedom.

Today, freedom is often identified with a lack of commitment, and anything that removes commitments is seen as progress. People have no sense of moderation because they see it as a threat to their freedom. That is why they do not want to commit themselves, because it makes them dependent (as confirmed in the latest survey of 18-27-year-olds in Germany). But those who do not love people will manipulate them and be manipulated themselves.

In practice, I often spoke with young people about their personal future, including relationships. Boys in particular, proudly reported that they had been with their girlfriend for a long time, i.e., four

weeks. They then had to listen to my “old-fashioned attitude.” I wonder if it helped them. In any case, they continued to come to the counseling sessions.

Christ says yes to bonds, to love, because only they, precisely with their risk of suffering and the risk of losing oneself, lead people to themselves, make them what they are meant to be, God's image.

But society demands autonomy, free self-determination. But this concept leads to a tiered value system.

There is no life that is unworthy of human beings, but there are living conditions and treatment that are unworthy of human beings. It is not equality that is needed, but uniformity. And how quickly autonomy comes to an end:

A friend of ours fell down the stairs. The result was a brain hemorrhage, and he was in a coma for several weeks. His family visited him every day despite the long journey. We also visited him. When he was responsive again, he told me that “Without the encouragement of my family, I would not have made it. I am so grateful.”

Freedom thrives on rules that teach us how to live together and in rightful opposition to one another, how to be independent of external success and arbitrary events, so that we can truly be free. Freedom is based on truth. If there is no truth, everything is just random chance. Jesus Christ says that only the truth will set you free.

So people need guidance for their decisions. But to whom are they accountable?

For us, it is the first commandment: “I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me!”

For we need a perspective to shape the future. We need strength from prayer and fellowship to overcome persistence and despair. We do not speak neutrally about values, but about the Person from whose Word we receive values that we are to implement.

To do this, people continue to need empathy, attention, fellowship, love, and zest for life.

Where does this come from, and how do we communicate it?

I would like to read you a story by Goethe. He describes a celebration in a church after the Napoleonic era, a time of major wars, which we are familiar with again today.

“The joy was reflected on the faces of all the visitors, except for the young people. They walked by unmoved, indifferent, bored. Born in evil times, these young people had nothing good to remember and therefore nothing to hope for. Only those who can remember can also hope. Those who have never experienced goodness and kindness are simply unaware of their existence.”

History tells us how trust has been destroyed time and again. It is our concern to prevent this from happening.

Perhaps joy is rarer today, burdened more by moral and ideological baggage? Can I still allow myself to rejoice in a world of war, misery, and injustice?

The loss of joy does not make the world a better place, nor does it lessen the suffering of those who suffer. What is needed is the courage to do good. Joy asks to be shared; it creates solidarity. We need this basic trust that comes from faith, i.e., God is there, God is good, so it is good to live and to be human.

We should hold fast to the belief that human beings consist of body, soul, and spirit, which together are one.

Romans 15:7 tells us: “Accept one another, then, just as Christ has accepted you.”