

6-2009

Book Review: Galatians

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Recommended Citation

Bruno, Christopher R., "Book Review: Galatians" (2009). *Biblical and Theological Studies Faculty Publications*. 312.
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contrary to texts such as 1 Tim 5:17 where Paul states that elders rule and have the duty of preaching and teaching. To claim that those elders who rule and teach or preach are also given the title of overseer raises another question: why did Paul not simply use the term overseer (“Overseers who rule well are worthy of double honor”)? It was also noticeable that Clarke failed to consult scholarly works written by Americans and/or evangelicals. Finally, at \$130 this book is overpriced and limits the readership considerably. This is a book about church leadership that will never be read by many church leaders.

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Galatians. By Gordon D. Fee. Pentecostal Commentary Series. Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2007, ix + 262 pp., \$34.95 paper.

Gordon Fee’s commentary on Paul’s letter to the Galatians is the third volume in the Pentecostal Commentary Series. According to Fee’s preface, this series is written by Pentecostals, primarily for Pentecostals, specifically, Pentecostal pastors. As Fee points out, when he finished his Ph.D. in 1966, he was only the second Pentecostal to complete such a task. While many others from this tradition subsequently have followed his path, Fee remains one of the leading, if not *the* leading Pentecostal NT scholar. Therefore, he is uniquely qualified for the task of writing this commentary. However, Fee is also quick to point out that, since he is committed to the text above his own tradition, his aim is to approach Galatians “on its own terms” (p. viii).

Fee’s introduction to the book establishes more clearly his method and approach to the commentary. In his discussion of some of the standard issues in the study of Galatians, Fee’s method is refreshingly straightforward. He argues that many of the scholarly discussions regarding the audience and date of Galatians are unduly influenced by the Acts narrative. However, since neither Galatians nor Acts provide a complete picture of the events in Paul’s life and their causes, Fee is content to rely on the data in Galatians to answer these questions. Therefore, although he slightly favors the southern Galatia hypothesis, Fee argues that we cannot determine from the letter itself precisely who the Galatians were and whether they lived in the northern or southern part of Asia Minor. Therefore, the audience question is, in some sense, irresolvable. He also favors using almost exclusively internal evidence to date the letter. Fee dates Galatians in the mid-50s because of its stylistic similarity to Romans and the Corinthian letters. Neither the audience nor the date, however, is determinative for interpreting the letter, argues Fee. Rather, the more important issues are the purpose of the letter and the nature of Paul’s opponents, since these can be determined more clearly, if not precisely, from the letter itself. In short, Fee argues that the “agitators” claimed that Torah-observance was necessary to “complete” the gift of the Spirit (p. 5).

In the commentary proper, Fee devotes most of the space to his exegesis and comments on the text itself, rarely straying too far afield. He generally rejects the “rhetorical approach” to the text favored by Hans Dieter Betz and others, noting that Paul was writing a letter, not an oratory piece. Furthermore, he notes that those who favor the rhetorical approach rarely agree about how the sections of the letter correspond to standard rhetorical categories.

In his exegetical footnotes, Fee rarely interacts substantively with other works and mostly focuses on clarifying his argument and interacting with text and translation issues. This is not to say, however, that he avoids controversy altogether, since, when

necessary, Fee summarizes important scholarly discussions and provides his own perspective on the issue at hand. For example, while avoiding becoming bogged down in justification and the New Perspective on Paul, Fee summarizes the major options for the meanings of "justify," "works of the law," and "faith of Christ" in about six and a half pages. He also frequently points to other works that discuss controversial issues beyond the scope of this commentary.

After each section of the text as he has divided it, Fee includes his "reflection and response." Although the exegetical sections will certainly be of great benefit to his readers, Fee's pastoral reflections may be the most helpful part of the commentary for the intended audience of Pentecostal pastors. In these sections, Fee often reflects both on instances where his tradition has succeeded in properly applying Paul's injunctions in Galatians and where it has failed to do the same. While I do not come from a Pentecostal tradition, many of Fee's comments were helpful and sobering to me. My guess is that they may be doubly so for those within the tradition. Regardless, Fee's reflections on the text represent years of careful and mature thinking about Galatians and will benefit anyone who is serious about understanding and applying the letter.

A review of this length is obviously not the place to enter into serious debate on either the method or exegesis in this commentary. However, there were a few places where Fee's argument in this book seemed to be somewhat lacking. First, while Fee's insistence on discussing the recipients of the letter in light of the evidence in Galatians itself is indeed refreshing, his similar rationale for dating the book late is less convincing. Betz and others have demonstrated that one need not commit to the southern Galatia hypothesis in order to argue for an early date of composition (see Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979] 5, 12). While Fee mentions that Paul's famine relief visit to Jerusalem described in Acts 11 can be reconciled with an early date for Galatians, he seems to ignore its relevance for his later dating of the book. While it is one thing to deal primarily with the evidence of Galatians itself, it is quite another to overlook other relevant evidence. However, as Fee points out, the audience and dating of the book are somewhat irrelevant to the interpretation of Galatians itself. These phenomena are much more relevant when attempting to establish a chronology of Paul's life.

Another place that raised a question in my mind was Fee's discussion of Gal 3:28. As I mentioned above, this review is no place to enter into substantial discussion of Fee's detailed exegesis. However, given Fee's well-known position as a theological egalitarian, coupled with the importance of this verse for some egalitarian arguments, it was surprising that only half of a paragraph was devoted to the role of women in Fee's discussion of Gal 3:28. For pastors who may be seriously wrestling with this issue, this seems to be an insufficient amount of discussion. However, as Fee points out, the egalitarian position is often the default position in the Pentecostal tradition; therefore, given the intended audience of this volume, he was perhaps justified in his minimal discussion of this issue.

Apart from the questions raised above, which may be excusable given the intended audience and aims of this commentary, and perhaps a few other minor exegetical points, I found this commentary just what one would expect from a mature and thoughtful scholar such as Gordon Fee. As he states in his preface, this work is essentially the product of his many years of teaching Galatians. Fee's masterful summaries of complex issues and clear explanations of his favored positions are obviously the fruit of his years of labor in the book. While this commentary may be of most benefit to the Pentecostal pastor, students of the Bible from all traditions will richly benefit from Fee's clear explanations and thoughtful reflections on Paul's letter to the Galatians.

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