Book Reviews


Mark Seifrid is Mildred and Ernest Hogan Professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme and Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Justification.

Seifrid begins the commentary with a discussion of the interaction between the Apostle Paul and the church at Corinth. He traced this interaction from Paul’s first visit to Corinth during his second missionary journey to his third visit to Corinth during which he wrote his letter to the church of Rome.

He briefly discussed the identity of Paul’s opponents in Corinth, a “vexing conundrum.” Seifrid objected to the mirror-reading that often sidetracks interpreters. He would later describe this approach as “necessary, albeit precarious,” sometimes based “on mere supposition and guesswork,” and “likely to reveal more about the interpreter than about Paul or his opponents.” He urged that readers observe Paul’s actual descriptions of his opponents. Consequently, he rejected the notion that the opponents were Judaizers. They had Jewish credentials but “there is no indication that they appeal to Moses or the Law as a means to spiritual power” (xxix). Seifrid concluded that Paul’s statements do not reveal a developed theology of the opponents. Instead, Paul combats a practical theology that “legitimates apostolic mission (and thus Christian living) on the basis of the open display of rhetorical skill, deeds of power, and ecstatic visions” (xxix).

Seifrid rejected the theories that view 2 Corinthians as a composite letter. Such views were possible and not to be rejected a priori. However, the evidence for them is rather weak. Apparent disruptions were a product of Paul’s stormy relationship with the Corinthians rather than cutting and pasting by a later editor. Seifrid concluded: “At the end of the day, a coherent rhetoric may be discerned rather easily throughout Second Corinthians. The apparent disruptions make sense in context” (xxx).
Seifrid argued that the fundamental issue in 1 Corinthians remains the focal issue in 2 Corinthians, the identifying marks of a true apostle. Although, in the opponents’ view, ability as a communicator, miraculous activities, and visionary experiences were the marks of an apostle, Paul insisted that hallmark of the apostle is the message of the cross. But the message of the cross is not only proclaimed verbally by the apostle. He embodies the message by bearing “the deadness of Jesus” in order that the resurrected life of Jesus might be displayed through him. God’s grace is displayed by the exercise of Christ’s power in Paul’s weakness. Seifrid’s discussion of this theme throughout the commentary led to an insightful critique of contemporary trends in the church. The pastoral concerns that he raises desperately need to be heard and heeded for the sake of the health of the church.

The body of the commentary is different from what one has come to expect in a number of ways. First, many modern commentaries devote much space to enumerating various interpretive options, detailing the strengths and weaknesses of each view, and defending the commentator’s personal view. This can result in a work that is more a commentary on other commentaries than a commentary on the biblical text. Even a passing glance at Seifrid’s commentary shows that he has chosen a very different approach. The commentary details his own rich theological interpretation of 2 Corinthians based on his analysis of the Greek text. He occasionally interacts with other views, particularly on some of the more controversial texts in the letter, but he obviously does not feel constrained to do so. The reader will be struck by the observation that the majority of pages do not contain footnotes referring to secondary literature. Most pages refer only to primary sources, especially other biblical texts.

This does not mean that Seifrid is unaware of recent literature on 2 Corinthians. He is obviously well informed of current trends in scholarship. But he refuses to be enslaved to these trends or to grant too much authority to the academic guild of Pauline studies and frequently blazes his own trail in exegesis. Those familiar with the major commentaries on 2 Corinthians will probably find this to be refreshing. Sometimes a reader finds so much similarity among the evangelical commentaries on a Pauline letter, he wonders if the purchase of another commentary was worth the investment. However, one need not worry that this volume merely repackages the views of other commentators.
The avoidance of interaction with secondary literature will leave some readers dissatisfied. When the reader is unconvinced by an interpretation espoused by Seifrid, he will naturally ask whether other scholars support his view and will wish to evaluate arguments for and against the position. Readers who want exposure to a wider variety of interpretations will need to supplement Seifrid’s commentary with one of the other major evangelical options such as Murray Harris’ volume in the *New International Greek Testament Commentary*. Although it has become increasingly common for one scholar promoting the work of another scholar to exclaim, “If you can purchase only one commentary, this should be it,” Seifrid’s commentary was not intended to serve as the sole resource for understanding 2 Corinthians.

Seifrid’s commentary is also deeply theological and rich with pastoral insights. Because he refrains from extensive discussion of the secondary literature, Seifrid is able to devote more space to explaining how individual statements in the letter fit with the message and purpose of the letter as a whole and integrate with the theology of the entire Pauline corpus. Although he does not isolate application from interpretation, he often encapsulates the meaning of a particular text in memorable and moving expressions. Sometimes these summaries are quotes from others, such as Luther’s comment: “A theologian is made by living, or rather by dying and being damned, not by thinking, reading, or speculating” (206). Sometimes these summaries are Seifrid’s own comments. When describing the affliction from Satan that following the heavenly apparition, he quips: “The visit to heaven is accompanied by visits from hell” (444). Although some may regard such quotations and quips as an unnecessary distraction, they are likely to be appreciated by those who proclaim 2 Corinthians and are certain to make their way into many sermons.

Seifrid’s commentary also appears to be heavily influenced by the thought of the reformer Martin Luther. This impression can be quickly confirmed by an analysis of the “Authors Index”; Seifrid cites Luther more than any other author. In fact, he cites Luther more frequently than several modern commentators (Belleville, Furnish, and Harris) combined. In the process, he demonstrates that Luther has often been as misinterpreted as Paul has and challenges many modern conceptions of the theology of the reformer.

Although I was not convinced by every exegetical detail in the commentary, the commentary has clearly captured the essence of Paul’s thought in
2 Corinthians:

The lesson of Second Corinthians is that the Gospel may be lost not merely by bad doctrine but by bad living, and not merely by the ‘bad living’ of immorality—which was certainly present in Corinth—but by the decision to measure the work of the Gospel and the presence of Christ by the standards of power, success, and popularity. According to Paul, this practical judgment, which above all else values charisma, wealth, and numbers, is heresy (107).

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The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social and Historical Contexts.

Written to provide concise summaries on the various background issues of the New Testament, The World of the New Testament certainly fulfills its purpose. Editors Joel Green and Lee Martin McDonald, both highly respected in the field of New Testament studies, have assembled a reputable who’s who of scholars for this volume. The list of thirty-four contributors includes: Michael Bird, James H. Charelsworth, Bruce Chilton, David A. deSilva, James D. G. Dunn, Nicholas Perrin, Ben Witherington III, and many others. The entire volume includes forty-four articles on New Testament backgrounds.

The volume began as project of the Institute of Biblical Research, an evangelical research group that exists to foster the development of New Testament studies within a broadly orthodox and evangelical tradition. The editors underscore the necessity of this volume when they describe the distance between the modern reader and the world of the New Testament. “We forget that the reading of the pages of the New Testament for everyone in the twenty-first century is a cross-cultural experience” (3). Thus, to avoid overlaying a modern grid (or even a wrong-headed ancient grid) of cultural values, symbols and preferences onto the New Testament world, the reader of the Scriptures must, as much as possible, interpret the New Testament
with a proper appreciation of the cultural world of the New Testament text.

The structure of the volume comprises five inter-related parts: 1. Setting the Context: Exile and the Jewish Heritage (5 essays), 2. Setting the Context: Roman Hellenism (8 essays), 3. The Jewish People in the Context of Roman Hellenism (12 essays), 4. The Literary Context of Early Christianity (8 essays), and 5. The Geographical Context of the New Testament (9 essays). The sections are usually straightforward. Occasionally, there is overlap between the essays but not in a tautological sense. For example, there are essays on both “Pseudonymous Writings and the New Testament” and “Early Non-canonical Christian Writings.” Yet, only the former article discusses pseudonymity in the New Testament world and the latter article comments briefly on the issue.

This volume is a helpful contribution to students and scholars of the New Testament, but I have a few quibbles. First, the lack of articles on the Jewish Heritage (part 1) compared to the rest of the volume is slightly misleading because of its close relationship and overlap with part three (“The Jewish People in the Context of Roman Hellenism”). Second, an alphabetical index of essays would make this volume more user-friendly. Third, the essays in the volume switch between in text and footnote annotation. This switch is distracting at times. Fourth, some articles are too dense. For example, in the essay about non-canonical Jewish Writings, the author gives short descriptions of the Apocrypha, but opts to detail only a few books of the Pseudepigrapha (Jubilees, Letter of Aristeas, 1 Enoch and 4 Ezra).

These quibbles aside, this book makes a helpful contribution to the field of New Testament backgrounds. The annotated bibliographies at the end of every chapter alone are reason enough to purchase the book.

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Doing several things well at the same time is a difficult task, especially when it involves discourse analysis, exposition, hermeneutics, and practical theology. L. Scott Kellum, however, has done the difficult with the Farewell Discourse of the Fourth Gospel.

Kellum teaches New Testament and Greek at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He received his Bachelor’s Degree from the University of Mississippi in Classical Civilizations with an emphasis in Greek Language. His Masters of Divinity came from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and his Doctor of Philosophy from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. His dissertation was subsequently published entitled *The Unity of the Farewell Discourse: The Literary Integrity of John 13:31-16:33*. This extensive study of the Farewell Discourse is evident in the current work and much of the content of *Preaching the Farewell Discourse* arose from spiritual insights gained during his dissertation studies. Kellum has also co-authored *The Cradle, The Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* with Andreas Köstenberger and Charles Quarles.

Kellum’s academic and pastoral experience has convinced him there is an unfortunate disconnect between hermeneutics and homiletics. He acknowledges there is a need for separate monographs in both fields but asserts that both types of books should incorporate the subject matter of the other better than they do. This work is intended to begin to bridge that gap by modeling how to examine, interpret, and make application from a large section of Scripture. It serves as “a place to begin and a procedure to follow, adapt, and perfect ... to take [a person] through the hermeneutical process to the shaping of an outline and an expository sermon” (2).

Kellum arranges his book into seven chapters followed by two appendices. In the first chapter, the author describes the four major aspects of studying a passage and preparing to preach it: Examine Literary Context, Identify Historical Context, Identify Canonical Context, and Proclamation. Each major aspect is further delineated into minor steps, with a very brief but helpful explanation and supporting examples for each. These explanations are concise because this process is repeatedly modeled through the entire
Farewell Discourse in chapters 3-7. Kellum’s discussion on transitioning from hermeneutics to homiletics is particularly beneficial, especially his comments on identifying the main idea of the text (MIT) and converting that into the main idea of the message (MIM). His instructions regarding the rules for using illustrations are equally valuable.

Chapter 2, “Analyzing Literary Structure and Flow of Thought,” details Kellum’s process for identifying the macro- and microstructure of the text. He bases his semantic and structural analysis (SSA) of a text on Beekman and Callow’s *The Semantic Structure of Written Communication* and on the more recent *Meaning-Based Translation* by Mildred Larson. Even if the reader isn’t familiar with these works, Kellum’s explanation of the “major communication relations used in hortatory discourse like the Farewell Discourse” (57) which ends chapter 2 is sufficient to allow the reader to take advantage of the author’s structural analysis of John 13-17.

Chapter 3 serves as an introduction to the Farewell Discourse in which Kellum gives evidence for why he divides the passage as he does and then discusses the literary and historical context of the entire discourse. As such, these contexts are discussed only as necessary when the individual pericopes are examined in chapters 4-7. Chapter 3 concludes with an examination of John 13:31-38 as the introduction to the Farewell Discourse proper.

Each of chapters 4-7 examines one of the four major units in Jesus’ Farewell Discourse: Commands that Comfort (14:1-31), Commands that Unite (15:1-16:4c), Advantages of Jesus’ Departure (16:4d-33), and The Final Prayer (17:1-26). These chapters are the heart of Kellum’s work and what one expects from the title, *Preaching the Farewell Discourse*. They are, as the subtitle expresses, *An Expository Walk-Through of John 13:31-17:26*. That is, the reader walks alongside the author as he considers each sermon-sized passage sequentially.

Kellum organizes the study of each of the smaller passages in three steps: analyzing the text, interpreting the text, and preaching the text. In the first step, the overall structure of the text is summarized using the SSA explained in chapter 2. This includes the head statements and the significant structural relationships in the passage. A detailed SSA of every clause of the Farewell Discourse is made available to the reader via a PDF download (66 n. 31). The structure of the text forms the basis for the interpretation of the text. In the interpretation section, Kellum explores the lower-level structural relationship.
between clauses not addressed in his previous discussion of the overall structure. Here he uses footnotes judiciously to present various positions on debated theological issues pertaining to the passage and to support his own opinions of semantic and theological topics. In addition, this section considers textual and grammatical issues. It reveals for the reader the thought process of the author as he models which questions should be asked of the text and how one should proceed to answer those questions—the “spade-work of hermeneutics” (3). The final section on each passage considers how that section of Scripture could be preached. Kellum gives his one-sentence summary of the MIT and his suggestion for the MIM based on the purpose of the text then and now. In his “Sermon Sketch,” he summarizes a suggested sermon introduction and conclusion and outlines a sermon that could be preached on the passage. The main points of the sermon usually come from the main movements of the passage. In the book’s introduction, the author argues the sermon must be text-driven. That is, the main idea, purpose, and major movements of the text should normally be the main idea, purpose, and major movements of the sermon. He expounds each main point with subheadings “Text” and “Today,” explaining the passage as “Text” and then applying the passage to “Today.”

A brief conclusion follows chapter 7 in which Kellum overviews the Farewell Discourse in light of the closing chapters of the Fourth Gospel. The greatest benefit of this section is the author’s insights into the connection between the Farewell Discourse and the reinstatement of Peter. He also includes an admonition to develop one’s ability to do accurate discourse analysis, employing one’s knowledge of the original languages.

As noted, two appendices are included. The first briefly (10 pages) discusses the types of research tools a fully-equipped expositor should have on his bookshelf and suggests standard works for each type. The second appendix is an expansion of the sermon sketches presented in chapters 4-7. Each sermon sketch is broadened, including a more detailed introduction and conclusion and added illustrations for most of the main points. These outlines are not like those found in copy-and-paste sermon booklets but, rather, are intended to provide pastors and students with an idea of what a biblically-based, culturally-relevant sermon could look like. Finally, a bibliography and name, subject, and Scripture indexes conclude the work.
Preaching the Farewell Discourse succeeds in providing the reader with a clear and competent example of how to analyze, interpret, and preach John 13-17. Two additional strengths warrant mentioning. First, Kellum’s insights into the structure, theology, and themes of the Farewell Discourse discussed in the interpretation sections of chapters 3-7 are remarkably astute and will serve the reader over and over as he returns to this resource in preparing to preach or teach this section of John’s Gospel. Second, this work is accessible to all students of Scripture, even those without competency in the biblical languages. While structural analysis is perhaps best done in the original languages, those armed with only an accurate, formally-equivalent translation can still take advantage of the vast majority of benefits gained from some type of structural analysis. Kellum demonstrates this superbly.

If there is a weakness to Kellum’s work, perhaps he attempted to do too many things. His comments at the end of his conclusion urge his readers to practice discourse analysis regularly and to maintain (or recover, as the case may be) their use of the original languages. After such a thorough and careful treatment of his subject, these comments seem cursory and detached. Similarly, Appendix 1, “Preparing Your Study,” is too brief to be of significant value. The work would have been more unified had these elements been omitted.

In conclusion, this work is profitable for pastors as well as students. Both will benefit by the model of competent, conservative biblical exposition. In particular, pastors have a resource to which they can turn when preaching the Farewell Discourse that is faithful to John’s purpose, cognizant of his flow of thought, and focused on the present audience.

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