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Dunn's "The Theology of Paul the Apostle" - Book Review

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Dunn, James D.G. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Grand Rapids/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1998.

In this major new treatment of Paul's theology, James Dunn of Durham University makes an impressive contribution to Pauline studies and New Testament theology. This is certainly a text to be included in all New Testament collections, and it will be of interest to all students of Paul's writings. Especially significant is the book's rare combination of clarity, incisiveness, and scope. Dunn writes clearly enough for a mature college student to grasp, and yet he engages the giants in the field productively, contributing effectively on their level. In twenty-five sections Dunn covers seven major themes (including chapters on God and Humankind, Humankind under Indictment, The Gospel of Jesus Christ, The Beginning of Salvation, The Process of Salvation, The Church, and How Should Believers Live?) introduced and followed by a helpful prologue and epilogue. Exhaustive bibliogra-

phies introduce each chapter, and the work is marked by fitting thematic progressions and appropriate topical excursions along the way.

Having discussed thoughtfully the question of whether a theology of Paul can be written, Dunn's approach begins with Romans, arguably the greatest theological work of the greatest Christian theologian. From thence, Dunn develops a model of theology as a dialogue or sets of dialogues—not simply an abstract set of ideas—wherein Paul's theological views and frameworks were forged. After all, what we have to work with is the letters of Paul, and these were produced as epistolary responses to specific issues within particular contextual settings. Nevertheless, Romans offers the most fitting template from which to construct one's presentation of Paul's theological work, as it is here that Paul's explorations are most comprehensive and far reaching.

This move leads Dunn to a fit ordering of his own explorations, beginning with Paul's treatment of God. Highlighting the provenance of Jewish monotheism, combined with Paul's personally transformative experience, Dunn moves from Paul's lively theism to a thoughtful discussion of the dialectics of human experience. Here the realities of human fallenness lead to discussions of "sin and death" and their effects. The law, of course, serves to define sin and convict humanity of it, but sin turns law into *gramma*, changing it from a gift of God to an instrument of death. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, however, proclaims the new era of the "eschatological 'now'" in which transformation is indeed possible. Normed by the ministry of Jesus, effected by his death and resurrection, worshipped as the preexistent one, and anticipated as the eternal Lord, christology is the pivotal center of Paul's theological platform.

In chapters 5 and 6, Dunn poses what may be one of his most creative treatments of Paul's thought: "The Beginning of Salvation" followed by "The Process of Salvation." This juxtaposition allows Dunn to develop meaningful discussions of such topics as justification by faith, participation in Christ, the gift of the Spirit, baptism, and other topics in chapter 5, while such topics as eschatological tension and Israel are reserved for chapter 6. This sort of division allows the full treatment of the "already" accompanied with the "not-yet" character of Paul's theology. It also brings works and transformation into the discussion meaningfully without compromising the importance of salvation by faith. Dunn then goes on to discuss matters related to the church and ministry, and then ethics, in chapters 7 and 8.

The great strength of Dunn's outline and approach is that it allows him comprehensive treatments of major issues in Pauline theology, and in doing so, he is able to sketch helpful connections between the relevant themes. While particular scholars will take issue with Dunn on one matter or another, this book is well worth considering on the whole, and on specific matters as well. In his postlegomena, Dunn comments on the importance of taking into account at least three levels of dialogue within Paul's theology—the reflective dialogue within himself, his dialogue with his Jewish tradition and convictions, and his many sets of dialogues with members of his communities of faith. Keeping these levels of engagement in mind helps later interpreters appreciate more fully the dynamic character of Paul's epistolary theologizing—a worthy interest indeed—as is this book!

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