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Philip's "Paul and common meal: re-socialization of the Christian community" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Philip, G. (2017). *Paul and common meal: re-socialization of the Christian community*. New Delhi: Christian World Imprints. 236 pp. \$6.25. ISBN 9789351482413

In his book, *Paul and common meal*, author George Philip exegetes five passages of Pauline writings in light of Greco-Roman and Jewish social background and meal tradition, focusing specifically on the social dynamics of the different early church communities. The author points out the boundary-creating social norms of Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures as opposed to the boundary-breaking practices of Jesus and Paul in the New Testament. This book is scholarly, drawing on ideas and thoughts from previous works on meal tradition, but it is also accessible. Thoroughly researched and fleshed out, the ample footnotes provide opportunity for the reader to delve deeper.

In his discussion of the Hebraic meal tradition, Philip looks at the Old Testament commands regarding kosher laws, hospitality, and worship – all designed to keep the Israelites separate from the surrounding nations. He also examines apocryphal and other intertestamental texts that provide a more immediate backdrop to the issues found in the New Testament. The author notes that in the Greco-Roman world, the distribution of food served as a power index and meals delineated ethnic, class, and sectarian boundaries.

As the book hashes out Paul's writings to the churches at Corinth and Galatia – which have wildly different demographics – the author highlights Paul's use of common meal to combat factionalism and ethnic separation. Philip continues, taking the time to examine Jesus' practice and teaching regarding food. In all his parables and teachings, Jesus presents a reversal of values in the Kingdom, where the outcasts are brought in and welcomed. Both Jesus and Paul teach the early believers to “keep constant social contact with outsiders so as to bring the gospel of Christ to them” (122).

This book is a comprehensive introduction to ancient meal tradition as well as a systematic study of Paul's writings to the churches of Corinth and Galatia.

Reviewer

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