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Wright's "Galatians. Commentaries for Christian formation" (book review)

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Book Review



Wright, N.T. (2021). *Galatians*. Commentaries for Christian Formation. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 419 pp. \$39.99. ISBN 9780802825605

As one of the most important and prolific New Testament scholars of this generation, one might think that N.T. Wright would have written numerous academic commentaries, yet this is not the case. Though he wrote an excellent commentary on the Book of Romans for the New Interpreter's Bible Commentary series, this new work on the Book of Galatians is his first one providing a thorough and scholarly examination of a biblical book. It is appropriate and helpful that this commentary is on the Book of Galatians, because it is one of Paul's most important works and is rich in theological content.

This book represents the first work published in the Commentaries for Christian Formation series, and that is significant as well. This commentary series seeks to provide a unique perspective not found in other ones, in that it ties exegetical analysis on the biblical text with theological insights derived from it, where most other commentaries focus either on the one or on the other. Additionally, the series stresses how the biblical book can contribute to the reader's personal faith and be relevant to the contemporary church.

Wright is a representative of a movement known as the New Perspectives on Paul, which began in 1977 and has been highly influential in reshaping scholarly understanding both of Paul and his thought as found in his letters. This movement is based largely on new insights about Palestinian Judaism of the first century, and it has led scholars to read Paul's letters in light of this Jewish background. In so doing, they have come to believe that Luther and others of the Reformation period, while having great insight into Paul's thought, also misread it in significant ways. In particular, they believe Luther read his situation and the key religious issues of his time (Catholicism, corruption, indulgences, 95 theses, etc.) back into the biblical text.

N.T. Wright approaches the Book of Galatians from this perspective, arguing that Luther's interpretation of the book, understanding the key issue being that of justification by faith versus justification by works, based partly on his conflict with the Catholic Church, was somewhat off-target. Luther's insights into Galatians were still highly significant and important, but Wright sees the primary issue addressed in the Book of Galatians as being who is to be included in the new people of God. This

is significant in terms both of this book as well as to theology as a whole—the focus is on salvation in a corporate context and not primarily salvation in an individual one, though that is very important as well.

Those reading this commentary may well not agree with some of Wright's ideas, but they probably will still learn many new things because of his unique perspective. Also, he has something of an evangelical bent, even though his denominational background is that of the Church of England, so much of what he writes will seem familiar and appropriate. Additionally, his careful examination of the text, as well as his ideas about their relevance to the present time, will be seen as helpful. Academic libraries at faith-based institutions likely will want not only to include this volume in their collection but also future ones from this series.

Reviewer

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