

Review of Garlington, Don B. *An Exposition of Galatians: A Reading from the New Perspective*. 3rd ed. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007. i-xii, 1-440 pages. ISBN #1-59752-779-3. pbk. \$50.00.

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This “third and final” edition of Don Garlington’s Galatians commentary (1st edn.: 2003; 2nd edn.: 2004) is a must buy for pastors, missionaries and serious students of Paul who would like to see the New Perspective in exegetical action and in harmony with Reformation mottoes like *sola fide*. The volume is neither a “popular” commentary (thin and largely devoid of interpretive details) nor an academic “technical” one (bulky and full of details seemingly irrelevant to ministry practitioners). Rather, its aim is to make the many advances in understanding Paul in the past several decades available to practitioners. In doing so, Garlington hopes to demonstrate that one can be both a faithful heir of the Protestant Reformation and a critical proponent of the New Perspective. To this reviewer’s mind, Garlington has succeeded in this aim, and in doing something too often left undone—making the best of modern NT studies accessible to ministry practitioners. [For those less familiar with academic developments in the study of Paul, the New Perspective builds on the work of E. P. Sanders (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 1977) in redefining early Judaism, has led to significant revisions in understanding Paul’s theology, and is forcefully re-presented in the commentary’s introduction.] The third edition has been updated, expanded (about 90 pages longer than the 2nd edition), and cleared of nearly all minor editorial errors. [I found only three: missing “of” (292, n. 3); font size (363); missing apostrophe (380).]

The commentary's non-technical nature can be felt in phrases like "cut to the chase," and "get down to 'brass tacks'," and Paul can "cut loose with both barrels." But this certainly does not equate with "lightweight." Readers are ably guided through difficult scholarly debates, such as Anatolian folk belief (ideas of a mountain Mother Goddess may echo in the two mountains of 4:21-31) and Paul and empire ("Christ is Lord [1:3] - Caesar isn't!"). Old truths are heard afresh: "for freedom Christ has set us free" (5:1) is paraphrased "freedom is the very design of the work of Christ—this and none other!" (294). New emphases gain a voice: (on communal versus individualizing interpretation) "Paul's concern [in 5:13 - 6:10] . . . is . . . with the Christian life in community, not with the interior life of the individual Christian. . . . This is not to brush the individual aside, but it is to recognize that individuals are saved in order to be members of a body" (319-20). And controversial points gain a balanced hearing: "[not trying to please men" (1:10) may call into question the involvement of Peter and James with Judaizing factions in Jerusalem (73). The volume is a model of respectful and balanced interaction with others' opinions, and could function well as a study guide in a course on Galatians.

The commentary follows a paragraph-by-paragraph format. Each section opens with a summary preview of the paragraph; then comes the verse-by-verse exposition; "section notes" with more technical discussions conclude the treatment of the paragraph. This works well, although readers looking for exposition of a particular verse will have to search a bit; the volume would profit from a more detailed Table of Contents or page headers giving the verse under consideration. If I may quibble briefly . . . Though not the author's doing, \$50 for a paperback (\$40 online) still stuns some of us. With the

publication of the TNIV, I also found it odd that the NIV remains the basic translation, and this with no discussion of gender translation issues. (The author appears more sensitive than his translation; “human beings” for “man” at 1:11-12, p. 77.) Aside from comments in the more practical sections of the letter (chaps. 5-6), the modern-day relevance for ministry or spirituality could be beefed-up. This may be due to the “decidedly theological” aim of the commentary, but more attention would strengthen a volume aimed at helping practitioners.

These minor negatives, however, do not really detract from a commentary which challenges and illumines at every turn. Missionaries, pastors and seminary students looking for an in-depth and up-to-date commentary on Galatians need look no further than Don Garlington’s latest edition of *An Exposition of Galatians*.