

Although many critical scholars would be uncomfortable with some of the positions taken in *Gospel of Life*, the book fills a need for a basic but serious study of the Fourth Gospel's theology that is thoroughly grounded in the text. The book offers, therefore, a solid foundation for deeper and broader study into the overwhelming mass of scholarly literature on the Fourth Gospel.

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Boice, James Montgomery. *Romans 1-4*. Romans. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991. 512 pp. \$29.95.

The author of this volume, James Montgomery Boice, has been senior pastor of the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia for almost a quarter of a century. He is known as an innovative and pioneering church pastor, radio speaker, and editor. In this expositional commentary on Romans 1-4, which is the first in a four-volume series on the entire book of Romans, Boice the preacher stands out.

The preface suggests that Boice is awed by the book of Romans and is impressed with the astonishing changes that it has wrought in the lives of people. He admits that his study has "instructed, moved, and even deeply stirred" him. He sees Christians as having the responsibility of sharing the gospel with others so they too can be transformed by it. He presents the comments of others who have themselves been impressed by Romans. Two such are Samuel Coleridge, who views Romans as "the profoundest book in existence," and Godet, who suggests that "every great spiritual revival in the church" is connected in some way with the book of Romans.

Boice's study also revealed to him how shallow study of Romans and the gospel has been. While most Christians would claim that they have mastered Romans 1-4, Boice thinks study has not yet begun. He perceives obsession with "man-centered, need-oriented teaching" which results in what could be labelled spiritual anemia. Against this background, one can perhaps understand why he has produced on four chapters a commentary that exceeds 500 pages.

His aim in this volume seems to be to help people rediscover Romans, underlining his pastoral and evangelistic concerns. Furthermore, a reading of the preface affirms that his book is made up of sermons and radio talks.

This volume, then, is an exposition of the gospel as it is presented by Paul in the first four chapters of Romans. It is a verse-by-verse exposition in sermon-like manner and units. Twenty-two chapters are devoted to Romans 1, twenty to Romans 3, eight to Romans 2, and nine to chapter 4. These fifty-nine chapters are divided into five parts. The first is introductory and among other issues explores Paul's obsession with Jesus

and identifies the gospel. Boice suggests that in the first seven verses there are at least eight references to Jesus, whether by name, title, or pronoun. He correctly identifies the gospel with Jesus and is certainly right in his statement that without Christ Christianity stands dismembered and empty, since he is its center.

The second part deals with the theme of the book—Romans 1:16-17, its implications and Martin Luther's use of it. While I agree with Boice that it appears extraordinary for Paul to say he is not ashamed of the gospel, I am not sure that questions such as why one should be ashamed of it lack depth and honesty. It is true that people today, as then, are as ashamed of the gospel for the same and other reasons. Perhaps we need to ask such questions precisely to help others move beyond what seems objectionable about the gospel so they can experience its potent force, transforming power, and beauty.

The third part of the book looks at the ruin of the entire human race and its helplessness in the face of sin. It shows the ineffectiveness of a works orientation and man's silence and guilt before God. Part four shows Christ as God's remedy for sin. Finally, the fifth part shows how the gospel is upheld in Scripture.

Operating from the conviction that "Christianity has been the most powerful, transforming force in human history and that the book of Romans is the most basic and most comprehensive statement of true Christianity," Boice explores Paul's basic teaching and its relevance today. Because he sees Romans as treating how God deals with estranged humanity, Boice concludes that it is still relevant, for we still have people of every race, culture, and nationality who are estranged from him. Christianity, too, is viewed as still relevant as long as it redeems people for God, produces holiness, explains the meaning of life, and changes history.

Among the things I would take issue with are a few surprising omissions. First, in the listing of the commentaries on Romans no mention is made of Nygren's work, regarded as a classic by many. Second, in the treatment of Paul and his background, van Unnick's interpretation of Acts 22:3 is omitted. Van Unnick finds three significant participles in the verse which should be viewed in triadic pattern, thus suggesting that Paul was born in Tarsus but may have had his early training and education in Jerusalem. Boice's point that Paul reflects knowledge of Greek education is well taken. However, I would have liked to see him respond to van Unnick.

While his treatment of the law and its functions is admirable, Boice's failure to alert his readers to the diverse ways in which Paul uses the word "law" is not. Given his audience, inclusion of such data would have served to strengthen the work.

Finally, the work reflects thoroughness, thought, and research. I would recommend it for pastors and expositors of the Word, as well as college and seminary students in preaching classes.