

McKnight, Scot. *Galatians*. NIV Application Commentary Series. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995. 352 pp. \$21.99.

This commentary on Galatians by Scot McKnight represents another contribution to the laudable endeavor that is the NIV Application Commentary series. The expressed intention of this series is to bring content and method together as a means of encouraging the reader toward an ongoing, principled engagement with Scripture. In the parlance of the editors, this is not a "one-way ticket to the past" series (7).

McKnight's volume certainly has much that contributes to this aim, even as he steps outside his area of expertise, Jesus and the Gospels. His style is lucid and readable. He works carefully from the text to life, all the while keeping the reader posted concerning the important processual issues under consideration. Thus, the reader can benefit from the hermeneutical model as much as from the particular applications; note, e.g., McKnight's delightful treatment of "mutual accountability" (288-296). In fact, the hermeneutical modeling will undoubtedly be the lasting contribution of this series as the applications eventually date themselves.

My concerns with McKnight's volume, however, also focus on this method/content mix, in particular, the role of historical backgrounds in exegesis. My problem is not with the movement from meaning to life, but from historical context to text. McKnight makes no bones about the fact that his own approach has been shaped by the main lines of E. P. Sanders' study of first-century Judaism (as confirmed by McKnight's own personal study) and the interface of Sanders' work with Paul's letters by J. Dunn (14). Armed with the Judaism as "covenantal nomism" of Sanders and the "works of the law" as "identity markers" of Dunn, he heartily condemns the traditional approach to the issues in Galatia brought most prominently to expression by the reformers, using Käsemann as a representative (?) example of the latter, and engages in a new reading of Galatians through the spectacles provided by Sanders and Dunn. Thus, the whole of his introductory section, "Legalism then and now," is focused on the impact of this (re)new(ed) perspective on the study of Galatians. Moreover, in exegeting crucial passages (e.g. Gal 3:10 [154]), this Sanders/Dunn construct functions as *the* "assured result" and thus constrains exegetical options.

When read against this new backdrop, McKnight contends that Paul's vitriol is directed against a "cultural imperialism" that has in effect produced ("becomes . . . ends up") another gospel (28). To be sure, this is not a gospel that sees the law as a means to gain acceptance with God but as the means to reach the "climax of one's relationship with Christ" (29). This displacement of the sufficiency of Christ's work for salvation and of the Spirit as guide for living will not do. Paul, McKnight states, argues that it must be "Christ alone" (28). Consequently, the issue at stake in Galatians is *not* "grace righteousness versus works righteousness, *but* the relationship of Christianity to Judaism" (28, italics mine).

Now there is no doubt that Sanders' work alone and as it is mediated through Dunn's studies in Paul has stimulated and enhanced Pauline Studies. However, it is far from conclusive that either view has won the day in its respective arena, particularly to the extent that the views could serve as the controlling paradigm

into which the evidence should be constrained and in the face of which a centuries-old consensus should be abandoned. Although this is not the place to review the work of Sanders and Dunn, it must be noted that serious concerns have been raised about Sanders' treatment of the relevant data in Jewish sources, about the ability of his general religious construct to account for all the evidence, and about Dunn's narrow definition of "works of the law," to mention just a few. In short, Sanders and Dunn have not been wholly dismissed, for their particular emphases amount to highlighting aspects already familiar to Jewish and Pauline scholars. However, a growing chorus of voices has questioned what appears to be an unwarranted reductive treatment of the evidence from first-century Judaism which has produced an ill-fitting *a priori* straightjacket for relevant NT texts. Even granting McKnight's own study, one can only marvel at his wholehearted, without-a-doubt acceptance of the Sanders/Dunn construct.

As one would expect, McKnight's work engages in this historical reductionism as well. McKnight equates Sanders' consensus with what must be the case when encountering any of the various expressions of Judaism in the time of Paul. Even though he mentions Ezra, "an unusual Jewish pseudepigraph" (28, n. 11), only to dismiss its relevance for Galatians, its very existence demonstrates the simple truth that the Judaism of the time of Paul was not a theological monolith. Moreover, when this is coupled with passages such as Sir 3:3, 30 and the statements of Jesus in Luke 18:9 and John 9:41, it becomes evident that there were strains within Judaism which did not, for whatever reason, reflect the official views.

Moreover, and this is the crucial point, the inadequacy of the Sanders/Dunn construct emerges as McKnight makes much of throwing the old perspective out, only to be forced *by the text* to reintroduce it through the back door. McKnight seems to differentiate his position from the traditional by arguing that Paul is confronting an "addition" to the gospel which serves to pervert it. The perversion consists in adding obedience to the law as the "climax" of one's Christian commitment, thus creating another gospel—a whole system opposed to the centrality of Christ and the Spirit. This is where the confusion arises as to just how this Sanders/Dunn perspective is fundamentally different from traditional treatments. Presumably, the distinction is to be made with reference to the relationship of this addition to salvation. McKnight seems to suggest that it was a "staying in" problem that is being addressed as opposed to a "getting in" problem. In other words, the legalism, as he defines it, is wrong only in the sense that it emphasizes or adds an element to a Christian's life which results in the displacement of who should be center stage in the ongoing drama of salvation history—Christ and the Spirit. It is a problem of emphasis, not a problem of two conflicting systems. As McKnight states, "it was the alteration of the gospel that Paul opposed, not the addition of legal elements" (29). As a matter of fact, the law, as perceived and practiced by the contemporary Jewish community and, by extension, the Jewish Christians opposing Paul in Galatia, functioned within their religious system in much the same way as "works" functioned in the teaching of Paul and Jesus (29).

However, by McKnight's arguing that this view of what is needed to "stay-in" becomes "another gospel," a "total system that ends up nullifying the grace of God in Christ and the power of God in the Spirit" (28), he seems to return to a view of the Judaizers which sounds very much like the traditional view. If the Judaizers

were claiming that the law must be obeyed in order to complete one's relationship with God in Christ so that their proposal was in some way a retreat from grace (Gal 5:3-4), does this not entail the implication that one cannot be saved apart from obedience to the law? Does it not follow then that salvation is due in part to human attainment? Even if the traditional works righteousness/ grace righteousness antithesis could not be addressing the explicit views of his Judaizing opponents, it certainly was striking at the unstated premise of their views.

Thus, if the Sanders/Dunn construct has indeed clarified the nature of first-century Judaism so as to more accurately inform our study, McKnight's use of Sanders' work ends up offering strikingly little that is new to our understanding of Galatians and the opponents envisioned, and very likely a lot less. It turns out that, despite the prevailing character of Judaism at the time of Paul, the particular Jewish Christians Paul was facing in Galatians were propounding a "works-righteousness" approach to the law antithetical to the gospel of the grace of God.

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Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995. xxii + 824 pp. \$42.00.

Leon Morris's *NICNT* commentary on the Fourth Gospel has become one of the standard Bible commentaries on the Gospel of John. Morris, a conservative evangelical scholar, retired as principal of Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia, in 1979. He has written more than forty books, including the *Epistle to the Romans* and *The Gospel According to Matthew*, both now part of the *Pillar New Testament Commentary* series.

This is one of the largest commentaries written in the *NICNT* series. Much of its size is due to the huge amount of information provided in the footnotes. In contrast to many commentaries on John's Gospel, that of Morris dedicates only 57 pages to an introduction. The reason for this is because the author had already dealt extensively with introductory questions in an earlier book, *Studies in the Fourth Gospel*, 1969. Morris's commentary, like those of F. F. Bruce on Acts and Hebrews, and of Gordon Fee on Philippians and 1 Corinthians, is notable for its awareness of critical NT scholarship.

Morris argues, on both internal and external grounds, that the author of the gospel is John the Apostle. The place of origin is unknown; the date is uncertain but could well be before A.D. 70. The evangelist writes quite independently of the Synoptics. He may have used sources, but it is impossible to recover them. The gospel is a unified and coherent composition, including chapter 21. John's background is in no way Gnostic but is fundamentally that of the early church itself, with considerable influence from the OT and contemporary Judaism. However, Morris's assessment of John's Gospel is unacceptable to many scholars. For instance, George Macrame points out that the prologue is not a hymn and had no existence apart from the Gospel; the temple cleansing is not the same one described in the Synoptics; Jn 6:51-59 does not refer to the Eucharist, and it is uncertain who wrote the gospel. More recently M. M. Thompson, in her article in the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, observes that "A common understanding