

Galatians (Commentaries for Christian Formation) by N. T. Wright.
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. xix + 419 pp., cloth, \$39.99.

Nicholas Thomas (N. T.) Wright, former bishop of Durham and research professor of New Testament and early Christianity at the University of St. Andrews, and now senior research fellow at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, needs no introduction. The author of over seventy books, to say that Wright is a prolific author would be an understatement. Although he has written many popular New Testament commentaries, his inaugural volume on Galatians in the *Commentaries for Christian Formation* series is his first more traditional Bible commentary.

The new *Commentaries for Christian Formation* series integrates a focus on exegesis, preaching, teaching, and application to serve “the church by showing how sound theological exegesis can underwrite preaching and teaching, which in turn forms believers in the faith” (p. xi). The volumes in this series “interpret Scripture in ways aimed at ordering readers’ lives and worship in imitation of Christ, informing their understanding of God, and animating their participation in the church’s global mission with a deepened sense of calling” (p. xii).

The organization of the book is better than its content. After an introduction to the series, the book contains a brief preface, a much longer introduction, the commentary, a bibliography, and then three indexes: subjects, authors, and Scripture and other ancient sources. The first half of the introduction mainly concerns Galatians and Christian formation and the second half mainly concerns Galatians proper. Contra Hans Dieter Betz on Galatians and those who have followed him, Wright said: “I do not think that we can first determine a ‘rhetorical genre’ for the letter and only then decide what Paul was saying within his use of that genre” (p. 32). Wright divides Galatians into nine main sections, which form the book’s chapters. These are then divided into two sections (but three in the first and fourth sections and four in the fifth section), and then sometimes divided again into subsections. Each chapter contains Wright’s translation and an introduction followed by commentary and a conclusion. What is helpful is that in each section the left page header contains the chapter and verse numbers of Galatians covered in the chapter while the right page header contains the verses covered in the section or subsection. The largest entry in the index of authors is N. T. Wright and the author with the most entries in the bibliography is again N. T. Wright.

As expected, the “Wright Perspective on Paul” is presented in Galatians chapters one and two. Wright is clearly confused with regard to the gospel and justification. In Galatians 1, the gospel was “first and foremost

the Isaianic 'good news,' and that was the message that *Israel's God was coming back at last, in person, to judge the pagan world and to rescue his people*" (p. 64, emphasis original). The gospel "was the royal announcement about Jesus, enclosing within it the rescuing announcement about the return of God" (p. 64). The "truth of the gospel" in chapter 2 was the promise that "God would bless the nations in Abraham" (p. 192). The "famous doctrine" of justification, "stated here in Galatians 2 for the first time, was from its inception about *the visible definition of God's multiethnic people*" (p. 128, emphasis original); its focus is on "ecclesiology" (p. 128). Wright sees "church unity" as Paul's theme in Galatians, "as indeed it is in every letter he wrote" (p. 245). To be "declared righteous," is "primarily a term of *social status*" (p. 133, emphasis original). Throughout the commentary, Wright downplayed "conversion" and "salvation."

One would think that the expressions "gave himself for our sins" (Gal 1:4) and "gave himself for me" (2:20) would prompt Wright to expound upon the substitutionary atonement of Christ but such is not the case. Likewise, Wright's comments on Galatians 1:22 (in Christ), 3:27 (baptized into Christ), 5:4 (fallen from grace), 5:11 (offence of the cross), 5:21 (not inherit the kingdom), 6:11 (how large a letter), and 6:16 (Israel of God) are disappointing. Not surprising, in his conclusion, Wright rejected "a dispensationalist reading in which the Jewish people retain a special role in God's providential plan for history" (p. 382).

Wright's work is not a scholarly commentary, nor does it claim to be. Footnotes, Greek words, textual criticism, and interaction with other commentators are adequate, but kept to a minimum (and this is a good thing). The church has an abundance of scholarly commentaries on Galatians (Moo, Fung, Bruce, Schreiner, Longenecker, Betz, Martyn, deSilva, and, most recently, Keener). Perhaps there is a need for a mid-level commentary on Galatians that is not overly technical. Wright's commentary, however, would have more value if it were not written from his perspective on Paul, the gospel, justification, and salvation. Wright's commentary cannot be recommended to anyone who is not already firmly grounded in the faith and familiar with him and his "new perspective." To those who are, the only value in the book is if one is doing some serious study in Galatians and wants to see Wright's perspective on things.

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