

PREFACE

Solomon's comment that "of making many books there is no end" (Ecc. 12:12) certainly applies to the writing of Bible commentaries. So, in view of Solomon's remark, how does one justify adding another volume to the raging historical stream of commentaries on Galatians? In reply it might tritely be said that this commentary is unique. *Galatians: Exposition, Commentary, Application* is uniquely conservative, evangelical, traditional, and, most of all, uniquely biblical.

The Bible is herein accepted as the Holy Bible, the Scripture, the word of God—completely accurate in every respect, including historical matters. It is also the final authority in all matters of faith and practice. It is further assumed that a knowledge of the Bible is the highest knowledge worth pursuing, and that the Bible is not only relevant, but applicable to today. But contrary to most commentaries—which needlessly fill up space with conjectures about the correct reading of a particular Greek or English text—no space will be wasted with endless word studies, grammatical analyses and insights, textual variants, and theories about redactions and interpolations. Neither will there be found any references to the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, the Septuagint, Rabbinic literature, or the Dead Sea Scrolls. Not only is the Scripture its own best interpreter, nothing in *any* of these writings has *any* bearing on the interpretation of *any* of the Pauline Epistles. Furthermore, the various opinions of the commentators (whether right or wrong) will not be officially presented and discussed. This is a commentary on the Bible, not other commentaries, and is meant to be perused with an open Bible. This does not mean that various arguments for and against a particular interpretation will not be considered. It does

mean, however, that space will not be wasted on the mention of obscure theories, “counting heads” to support a particular interpretation, or endless footnotes to sources out of reach to the average reader.

Aside from its high view of Scripture, this commentary is written with some other presuppositions in mind as well. This is also true of any other individual commentary or series—it is just not usually so forthrightly expressed. First, the genuineness of not only Galatians, but all of the Pauline Epistles, is accepted without reservation. Second, the historical accuracy of the Book of Acts and its concord with the Pauline Epistles is also unequivocally recognized. Third, the primacy of Paul and his epistles is maintained. This does not mean that the Pauline Epistles are any more inspired than the rest of the Scripture. It does, however, mean that since the Pauline Epistles were specifically written to New Testament Christians and their churches that the emphasis will be primarily on what Paul says, and secondarily on what the rest of the Bible has to add about any particular subject. The fourth presupposition concerns the nature and significance of the New Testament church. When Paul made converts on his missionary journeys he established churches—independent churches of baptized disciples. Many of the same problems that existed in the churches of the first century can be found in churches today. Therefore, this commentary will have an emphasis on the local church that is missing in most commentaries.

There are, on the other hand, some things commonly found in many commentaries that will not be found in this one. First, since the Bible itself uses neither, no gender-inclusive or other politically-correct language will be used. Second, the text will not be cluttered with Greek words. All references to Greek words, grammar, and textual criticism will be relegated to footnotes. Third, no generalities that circle but never land will be employed to soften the truth of the Scripture. This means that no application to historical or contemporary men or movements will be withheld or glossed over. And fourth, the use of theological jargon, so increasingly prevalent in scholarly writings, will be kept to a minimum. Thus, one will not find any references to motif, genre, milieu, pericope, kerygma, haplography, hapax legomenon, etc.

Although not discounting the traditional historical-grammatical method of interpretation for exegesis, emphasis will also be placed

on the threefold method of interpreting each text historically, doctrinally, and spiritually. This means that ample application will be made to contemporary trends, cults, heresies, “isms,” traditions, and misinterpretations without sacrificing the emphasis on sound doctrine that is sorely needed today. Although traditional interpretations will not quickly be abandoned, this commentary will not be bound by tradition. As a consequence, some interpretations might be considered novel. Yet, no claim for originality is herein maintained. Any work, consciously or unconsciously, builds upon the work of others, and this work is no exception.

The approach to the Scripture taken in this work is one of caution. Undue speculation where the Scripture is seemingly not clear will be avoided. Some questions will have to remain unanswered, for, as even the Apostle Peter said of Paul’s epistles, they contain “some things hard to be understood” (2 Pet. 3:16). The difference in the approach of this commentary to the word of God can plainly be seen by a contrast. At the end of a review of Hans Dieter Betz’s groundbreaking commentary on Galatians, the reviewer remarks that “there is nothing like grammar, lexicography, and a fearless pursuit of all the historical questions there are for digging theology out of the New Testament.”¹ But while not dismissing outright any of these things, the approach of this commentary is that there is nothing like reading (Mat. 21:42), studying (2 Tim. 2:15), searching (Acts 17:11), receiving (1 The. 2:13), and trembling at (Isa. 66:2) the word of God for digging the truth of Scripture out of the New Testament.

¹C. K. Barrett, “Galatians as an ‘Apologetic Letter,’” review of *A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, by Hans Dieter Betz, *Interpretation* 34 (1980), 414-417.