



Comfort, Philip W. and Wendell C. Hawley.

Opening John's Gospel and Epistles

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

I had the privilege of teaching Bible study at my church about a week-and-a-half ago and I opened up by saying that I felt a bit like I was cheating since all I had really planned to do was read a couple of passages and simply let the Biblical author, in this case Paul, speak for himself. There was no search for a deeper meaning or hidden revelation somewhere beneath the text or behind the scenes. There was only the recognition that these texts were originally intended to communicate a message and that to be faithful to this intention we simply had to listen to that message.

I offer this anecdote because it accurately describes the manner in which Philip W. Comfort and Wendell C. Hawley approach John's Gospel and Epistles in their commentary on these writings. Comfort and Hawley haven't tried to reinvent the wheel with this volume, in fact it's pretty standard in terms of format, but they've provided readers with a faithful, informative, and orthodox reading of the Johannine corpus. Each book begins with an introductory section covering issues of authorship (John the son of Zebedee), date (end of first century), place of writing (Ephesus), the book's concern, etc. but they differ slightly in other areas. The introduction to John's Gospel has a setting on the writing and publication of the Gospel as well some "maps to opening John" which are a few word studies and brief section on the narrative structure of the Gospel. The introductions to the Epistles have thematic outlines and issues of the textual history and canonicity of 2 & 3 John are discussed in their introduction.

The commentary follows a pretty basic format of Exposition → Key Words and Phrases → Notes. The expositional portion is a basic summary of the passage under review while the key words and phrases are exactly what they sound like they'd be. The notes are the commentary proper as they take the (NLTse) Johannine text (always italicized and emboldened) and offer verse-by-verse explanations of what John was saying. Comfort and Hawley offer traditional readings but they do so in a way that shows just why these readings came to be traditional in the first place, i.e., they allow John to speak for himself. So it comes as no surprise that the deity of Christ is affirmed (see e.g., the sections on John 1:1 [18]; 20:28 [255]; 1John 5:20 [344]) or the necessity of belief in Christ for salvation is highlighted throughout.

With two appendices, one on the woman caught in the act of adultery (268-70) and another on ancient Greek manuscripts (379-81), as well as bibliographies following each major section (one after the Gospel another after the Epistles), this book is nearly complete. The only thing it lacks is a subject index but the detailed table of contents *nearly* (but not quite) makes up for this. Comfort and Hawley have produced a helpful commentary that takes a straightforward approach and for this they should be commended. While I couldn't in good conscience recommend this as your *only* reference for the study of John's writings (it doesn't delve into the more historical matters with the depth that many students would prefer) I can recommend it as one worth adding to whatever you already have or as being a book to get you started on the subject. *Opening John's Gospel and Epistles* is well worth a look.