



Fee, Gordon D.

Revelation

New Covenant Commentary Series.

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

Over the past couple of years I've grown to love Gordon Fee's style of scholarship. It's both rigorous and accessible. Not only does he put in the work in interpreting the text but he puts in the added effort to make it plain to non-scholars. I'd also add that he has a heart for God's people and his work is always in service of the church. If the academy benefits from it too, then great, but I'm sure that Fee wouldn't mind if the only folks to get something out of his efforts were the people of God.

His commentary on Revelation in the New Covenant Commentary Series is no exception. He tells us in the preface that the "purpose of this present book is therefore singular: the offer one New Testament scholar's exegetical reading of the text, with very little concern for anything except to help people hear the word of God that it is." (ix) To that I say, "Amen!" Fee recognizes that the text is supposed to lead us to worship so we read that "descriptions of God that do not lead to the worship of God might be intellectually useful, but they are unrelated to biblical reality; and biblical reality is what John wants his reader to see and hear." (x)

The introductory chapter addresses the "what, why, who, and when" of Revelation. Revelation is apocalypse, prophecy, and letter (= the what). Its message is one of both warning and encouragement (= the why). It was written by John the Apostle (= the who) near the end of the first century or beginning of the second (= the when). Fee closes out with a few words about interpretation where he warns the reader to be "careful about using the concept of 'the analogy of

Scripture' (= Scripture should be interpreted in light of other Scripture)" because while this is a "valid principle" in the case of Revelation "the other Scripture is almost always other eschatological passages, which themselves are often interpreted poorly." (xxi)

The commentary proper is a proper commentary. What do I mean? Well, in short, Fee comments on the text and that alone. Most larger commentaries are so large because they spend a great deal of space interacting with the current state of scholarship or addressing the reception history of a book or passage or documenting parallels in non-biblical literature, etc. Not Fee; not here. You'll be hard pressed to find a footnote that refers to another commentary or monograph on the book of Revelation. It's obviously not that he's not aware of the existence of such works, after all, there's a selected bibliography at the end of the volume. But as he stated in the preface, he's offering "one New Testament scholar's exegetical reading of the text" and little else.

Passages of Scripture are generally italicized, key terms and phrases are emboldened, and the commentary follows the outline detailed on pp. vi-viii. I fully admit to not having read the entire commentary; it's really not something I generally do; but I might make an exception for this one. Why? Well, because I read things like this with regard to Revelation 5:7-13 and the scene in which God and the Lamb are worshiped:

Finally, one should note how nearly impossible it would be even to imagine that all of this is not aimed especially at the readers in the seven churches, who are undoubtedly expected by John, with the reception and reading of this letter, to join now in the worship that here is seen as belonging eternally to their own future existence "in heaven." It would seem equally to miss John's point and concern if later readers are not moved to do the same. Indeed, what is left for us at the least is to burst forth with our own "Amen!" to the eternal glory here described as belonging to the Lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ. (89)

Let that sink in for a moment. As readers we often approach the text with nothing in mind other than decoding it. In doing so we lose sight of what it calls us to do. As Fee says elsewhere, "theology should lead to doxology." (x)

As a Pentecostal Fee might be expected to be a dispensationalist, but he's not, at least not if his commentary is any indication; there's no mention of the Rapture (pre-trib, mid-trib, post-trib, or otherwise) and the Millennium hardly gets mentioned at all and when the subject is broached it's to say that "John is not at this point [Rev. 20:1-6] interested in a time period as such, known as 'the millennium,' even though the term 'a thousand years' appears a total of four times in these few sentences" (280), and to comment on how "unfortunate" it is "that so many would take this one number, in a book of so many other symbolic numbers of a variety of kinds, and build an actual temporal millennium on it." (282) While Fee acknowledges that the thousand years is not

to be taken lightly he ultimately concludes that it does not depict a “literal thousand-year reign on earth for a special group, but an intentional reminder to all of God's people that even though they may expect it to get far worse before it ever gets better, God has not forgotten his own, even though for some it may seem to be so. Rather, whatever else may be true, and as the old children's chorus has it, all ‘are precious in his sight.’” (284)

For my own interests I was very pleased to see the recognition and repeated reference to John's "especially" (10, 19), "very" (41, 240, 311), "extremely" (88), and "exceptionally" (61) high Christology being "assumed" (10, 41, 51) or "reflected" (19) throughout Revelation. I'm very anxious to dig deeper into this volume and see how Fee unpacks his thoughts in reference to the book as a whole.

I'll admit it, I'm a dispensationalist, so there are times when I disagree with Fee's interpretation of the text and wish he'd offer a bit more in support of his position (e.g., with reference to the millennium mentioned above) but I can understand not wanting to devote a lot of space to lengthy debates over interpretations one finds untenable; best to just note the disagreement and move on. Who knows though, maybe he'll convert me by the time I've looked through the whole thing. Even if he doesn't I'll still use this commentary with profit, if for no other reason than the fact that it's readable. Fee writes well to begin with but the limited footnotes and immersion in the text as opposed to secondary literature makes this thing a genuine pleasure to read. The price (\$39) is a bit steep at the time of my writing (Dec. 2010) but sometimes you really do get what you pay for. This commentary would be equally at home in the seminary classroom or an adult Bible study. So if you're a scholar or a layman who is interested in Revelation then I can recommend this without hesitation.