



Fee, Gordon D.

The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians

New International Commentary on the New Testament

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

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For nearly three decades Gordon Fee has been the general editor of the New International Commentary on the New Testament series and during his time as editor he has authored two extremely helpful volumes for the series: *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1987) and *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (1995). *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* is his third offering, replacing Leon Morris' original volume in the series, and it is no less helpful as a source of fruitful study. Fee is a different kind of commentator; he begins with the text, and then writes the commentary, and only then does he consult secondary literature and make changes as necessary (see x). What this ensures is a full-orbed engagement with the text and Fee's unique interpretation.

Both letters receive their own brief introductions (3-8 & 237-42 respectively) where Fee treats the matters of date (1 Thes. – 49/50 CE; 2 Thes. – 50 CE) & authorship (Paul wrote them both; 2 Thes. is *not* a forgery) and the occasion for writing. In the introduction to 1 Thessalonians he has a section that provides some background info about Thessalonica and the people that most likely made up the community that Paul was writing to. This section obviously applies to the second letter negating the need to rehearse the information in the second introduction.

The commentary proper is very much in line with Fee's other NICNT volumes. He begins with his translation (usually in keeping with the TNIV) of the text under examination and then moves

onto his exposition. The bulk of the commentary is a direct engagement with the text, whether that means breaking down the structure of a sentence or paragraph, elucidating some important religious or sociological background issue, pointing out and elaborating on Paul's use of OT source material, or situating Paul's point in the larger context of the Pauline corpus. In all of this, Fee writes with clarity so that the specialist and non-specialist alike can benefit from his exposition.

Fee's engagement with other commentators and Pauline scholars is relegated to the footnotes, as are the majority of his comments concerning the Greek text and matters of textual criticism. This is one of the things that makes the NICNT series as a whole desirable for students at all levels, the more technical information is there if you need it, but the commentary can be used with profit even if the footnotes are passed over. The reader who consults the notes will soon discover (if they were unaware) that Fee is a master exegete, a world class textual critic, and a scholar who is conversant with what's going on in the field of NT studies in general and Pauline studies in particular. He's also not afraid to make use of and engage the scholarship of yesteryear as can be seen in his many references to the works of commentators (James E. Frame, J. B. Lightfoot, John Eadie, George Milligan, et al) from the turn of the 20th century.

If there's one thing that becomes painfully apparent as one reads through this commentary, it's that Fee doesn't neglect the eschatological material in these letters, but he eschews dispensational understandings of said material. This is fine, so far as it goes, but this is one area in which Fee seems to have purposely ignored a strain of scholarship (he's well aware that it exists [see x]). One might assume that Fee doesn't consider dispensational readings worthy of serious attention and engagement, but given the pivotal role that these letters play in dispensational theology and all that dispensational theologians have written about them, this is rather unfortunate. Instead, Fee would rather mock a fictional book/movie series (see his comments on 182) rather than consider the merits of the theological foundation that this fictionalized series is based on. Sadly, this is the tenor of most anti-dispensational scholarship (i.e., mock the "Left Behind" series and move on without any serious interaction).

When Fee comments on the Christology of these letters he draws heavily from his *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007) and directs readers to his book for a fuller treatment of the material. He does well to highlight the significance of *Kyrios* as Paul's preferred designation for Jesus since it carries with it the significance that the title had in the LXX. Fee's treatment of the prayer-wishes (1 Thes. 3:11-13; 5:23; 2 Thes. 2:16-17; 3:5, 16) was enlightening for me personally; I had previously skimmed past

this material with little to no thought given to its Christological import. But Fee has shown clearly, in agreement with many commentators before him, that Jesus (sometimes with and sometimes without the Father) was the recipient of prayer in one of the earliest Christian communities.

The front (detailed table of contents, bibliography, abbreviations) and back (modern author, subject, and ancient source indices) matter in this volume is welcomed and helpful; exactly what we'd expect in a work such as this. Students of Paul's letters to the Thessalonians will definitely want to add this commentary to their shelves, for even when one disagrees with Fee, he remains worthy of engagement and consultation. I can't imagine how anyone could pick up this volume and not have their understanding of the Thessalonian correspondence sharpened in some way.