

## CRITICAL BOOK REVIEWS

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*Navigating Paul: An Introduction to Key Theological Concepts*, by Jouette M. Bassler. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007. Pp. xii + 139. ISBN 0664227414; 9780664227418. Softcover. \$19.95.

*Navigating Paul* is a small book with big responses. Reviews of the book have been done by different scholars including one by Paul J. Achtemeier (*Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 no 4 (O 2007): 809-810) whose work in Pauline theology was also cited by Jouette M. Bassler.

Jouette M. Bassler is Professor of New Testament at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas. She has written a number of journal articles on Pauline theology including, "Grace: Probing Its Limits" *Interpretation* 57.1 (2003): 24-32, that eventually became the first chapter of her book.

Bassler selected and discussed seven comprehensive essays on Pauline theology. She acknowledged that "the essays will not provide a full roadmap to Paul's letters, much less to his theology, but they will provide navigational guides to the more difficult currents on his thought" (p. 10). Although she chose only seven theological concepts of Paul, the chaptering of the book, whether she realizes it or not, is arranged in a certain sequence that begins with *grace* (chap 1), the initial step of one's salvation, and ends with the eschatological *parousia* (chap 7).

In chap. 1, "Grace: Probing Its Limits," Bassler concurs with E. P. Sanders that while "obedience to the law was of undeniable importance, obedience was framed, defined, and sustained by initiatives of divine grace" (p. 1). This opinion goes against the concept that associates Judaism merely with legalism. Bassler argues that grace was not a new theme for Paul. Having a Jewish background, Paul understood what God's grace is. However, his concept of grace was later changed because of at least three factors: (1) his encounter with Jesus Christ; (2) his understanding of

human suffering; and (3) his mission to the non-Jewish people (pp. 3-8). Bassler challenges her readers to follow Paul in probing further the limits of grace (p. 9).

In chap. 2, Bassler elaborates "Paul and the Jewish Law." She picks up three topics of discussion in relation to Jewish Law: Paul's attitude toward circumcision (p. 13), Paul's understanding on "works of the law" (pp. 13-17), and the function of the Jewish law (pp. 17-21). Bassler brings into discussion two perspectives in regards to the "works of the law": First, the old perspective held by Protestant scholarship arguing that "works of the law" refer to "good works done in order to gain or achieve righteousness before God" (p. 14); second, the "new perspective" arguing that "the works of the law" are not a means to earn God's favor, but are "identity markers" of God's privileged people to distinguish them from the surrounding nations (p. 15). Bassler then comes up with a reconciling proposal: for Paul, the use of the term "works of the law" is flexible, meaning, it does not exclusively fit with one theological framework. Paul begins his argument by directly introducing God's solution for the Gentiles' salvation and then "from that perspective worked his way back to the plight" (p. 17). In this perspective, Bassler believes that "works are contravened by grace (Gal 3:21; Rom 4:2-5) yet obedience is enabled by the Spirit (Rom 8:2-4)" (p. 17). Bassler has entered the current discussions on the function of the law in a concise and effective manner while at the same time introducing another perspective. However, what I would like to see more on this section is a representative study on the word *nomos*.

Chapter 3, "Faith," logically follows chap. 2. Bassler specifically raises the discussions on the meaning of the word *pistis/pisteuein* (pp. 23-27). She emphasizes a simple yet profound statement that "*pistis* is related to Christ" (p. 27). Then in pp. 27-32 she continues with the two main arguments on how *pistis* is related to Christ based on the genitive phrase *pistis Christou* (Rom 3:22, 26; Gal 2:16, 20; 3:22; Phil 3:9; Eph 3:12): 1) "faith in Christ," and 2) "faith of Christ." Although she does not give an explicit preference from these two options, she seems to conclude that *pistis Christou*, for Paul, includes "Christ's own faith" (p. 32). She connects faith with law: "Faith can be manifested through obedience to the law (Rom 8:4)" (p. 33). However, she could have made a stronger connection between faith and love that is prescribed in Gal 5:6, a reference that occurs only once in her book (p. 13).

In chap. 4, Bassler discusses what "In Christ" means according to Paul. She begins with presenting various understandings suggested by scholars on the phrase "in Christ" (pp. 35-37): 1) "In Christ" refers to a mystical union with Christ (Albert Schweitzer, Adolf Deissmann), 2) "In Christ" is

an ecclesiological formula meaning an integration into the church by baptism, salvation through Christ (Rudolf Bultmann, Hans Conzelmann), 3) "In Christ" means a new relationship to God and Christ (Jürgen Becker), 4) "In Christ" means salvation through participation with Christ in which Christ shares all our experience (Michael Boutierr). Bassler continues by elaborating the idea that "in Christ" is a language of participation (pp. 37-41) focusing on the various interpretations of Rom 6:3 and Gal 3:27. She does not try to reconcile the various opinions, but goes in line with the understanding of "in Christ" as referring to "a union with Christ that is best described as mystical" (p. 46). Bassler could have enriched her introduction to this section by elaborating different Greek prepositions (e.g. *en* and *eis*) employed to introduce the idea of "in Christ."

Chapter 5, "The Righteousness of God," presents a thorough study on the word *dikaiosynē* "righteousness" modified by the noun *theos*, "God." Bassler acknowledges that without the book of Romans the importance of this theme is not obvious. Therefore, she begins with a general review on the use of the phrase *dikaiosynē theou* in Romans (pp. 49-50). Then she traces back to the Old Testament and the Qumran the corresponding Hebrew word for righteousness, namely *zēdāqā* "righteousness" (pp. 51-55). Her rationale is that since Paul does not explain the meaning of the concept of righteousness in his letter to the Romans, he must have assumed that his audience already had some understanding of the meaning from scripture (p. 55). After doing a literary analysis particularly on Rom 3:21-4:25 and Rom 10:1-4, she concludes that "Paul is convinced that God's righteousness is revealed in God's constancy, consistency, dependability, trustworthiness, and faithfulness", both in revealing His righteous justice, in fulfilling His promises, and in His faithfulness to Israel (p. 65). In addition to her discussion, she also provides an excursus on justification (pp. 66-69). In this chapter, Bassler thoroughly covers a sizable theme with few pages. This may serve as a significant introduction to the theme of justification for those who are interested.

After focusing so much on Romans and Galatians in her previous chapters, in chap. 6, Bassler brings up all Pauline passages on "The Future of 'Israel'": 1 Thess 2:14-16; Phil 3:2-3; 1 Cor 10; 2 Cor 3; Gal 4:21-31; 6:16; Rom 9:9-11. By reserving Romans 9-11 as the last passage to discuss, Bassler seems to put heavy emphasis on some issues in the passage, especially on chapter 11, "where the question of Israel's identity and future comes to a head" (p. 79). The focus is narrowed down to the identification of "all Israel" (Rom 11:25, 26). She presents three possible identities of "all Israel": 1) the elect of Israel, 2) the "spiritual Israel" that consists of the elect remnant plus the Gentile believers, and 3) all of Israel, the elect gen-

tiles and the rest combined (pp. 81-82). Bassler seems to prefer the first option that defines "Israel" by "faith" as the common denominator. With this definition, Gentiles who have faith may be considered as part of this Israel, and the rest of Israel who do not have faith are excluded. However, she still leaves the decision to her readers: "Many options: how does one decide?" (p. 84). She follows Charles Cosgrove's conclusion that a text like Rom 9-11 should be examined not based on Paul's view of the future of Israel but on one's presupposition about the future (p. 85).

In the last chapter, "Then Comes the End . . .," Bassler emphasizes the issue concerning the final state of the resurrected ones at the Parousia. She selects four main discussions: 1) the resurrection at the Parousia (1 Thess and 1 Cor), 2) the naked soul? (2 Cor 4:16-5:10), 3) to depart and be (immediately) with Christ (Phil 1:21-24), and 4) the cosmos and the Parousia (Rom 8:18-25). She considers Paul, while projecting the end-time events that he presented within the framework of first-century Jewish thought. The result of Paul's approach, according to Bassler, is "a rich complexity that stimulates reflection" (p. 96). Bassler concludes that for Paul, resurrection is certain but how God will do it remains mysterious (p. 96).

This book is small in size but with great insights. Its content is well represented in the title. It not only introduces main Pauline theological themes but also stimulates the curiosity of careful readers to dig deeper. Bassler's art of asking questions has navigated her readers to follow her discussion from one step to the next. This book is highly recommended for New Testament students as a starting point for further study in Pauline theology.

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Skip MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained? What the Old and New Covenants Reveal about the Gospel, the Law, and the Sabbath* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 2007), xv + 344. ISBN 978-1-883925-57-4. Softcover. \$19.99

Skip MacCarty's book is an attempt to find an answer to the question of the relationship between the Old and New Covenants, especially between the Sinai covenant and New Covenant. As the author explains, his book is written as a protest against the point of view that the Sinai covenant, and the Ten Commandments as part of this covenant, were given only to the Israelites and Jesus abolished both of them (xii).