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Review: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus

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Jesus” is the title of the exposition of 9:18–34. The fifth sermon “The Compassion of Jesus”, expounds 9:35–10:15. Finally, 10:16–42 is handled as “The Divisiveness of Jesus”. Each of these six chapters follows the same format: the text, introduction, thesis or propositional statement, main body developing the thesis, and conclusion. The style is lucid and the material is liberally sprinkled with quotations from hymns and contemporary literature. There is a balance between solid biblical and theological content, homiletical format, and illustrative material. Carson does not hesitate to address contemporary concerns such as John Wimber’s signs and wonders movement (pp. 119–123).

This volume is highly recommended. It is commonly true that pastors are uncomfortable in preaching from narrative portions of the Bible. Their seminary training often better equips them to exegete the NT epistles than to preach 1 Samuel or Matthew. Here is a book which illustrates a solid sermonic approach to biblical narrative, one which goes beyond the realm of pious, but powerless, platitudes into solid biblical theology for the contemporary Church. It is refreshing that a scholar of Carson’s caliber devotes his time, skills, and energies to pulpit ministries. This ought to encourage evangelical pastors to be more concerned with scholarship and evangelical scholars to be more concerned with preaching. Certainly this would redound for the good of the Church and the glory of God.

Baker Book House is also to be commended for publishing Carson’s expositions. Much that passes for sermonizing today is only marginally biblical. Carson’s expositions tend to remind one of those of D. M. Lloyd Jones. While they may be a bit heavy for the average American congregation, this is probably due to the weakness of the pastoral ministry in which the congregation has become accustomed.

A careful and prayerful reading of this book would edify both pastor and congregation alike.

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1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, by Luke Timothy Johnson. Atlanta: John Knox, 1987. Pp. 139. \$10.95 paper.

This compact volume by Johnson, Associate Professor of New Testament at Indiana University, is a contribution to the Knox Preaching Guides series. Because the aims of the series are primarily homiletical, this work is minimally concerned (but not *unconcerned*) with the Greek text, or even the well-known background questions concerning the Pastoral Epistles.

Johnson’s treatment of the pastorals is at once fascinating *and* troubling for evangelicals. This is especially true for those in pulpit ministry who would be seeking help from a “preaching guide” in order to preach faithfully, and with freshness, God’s inspired Word to their flocks.

Perhaps a few examples of this intriguing “mixed bag” are in order (initially from a perspective more hospitable to evangelical expositors):

1) Johnson's discussion of the "possibilities" for relevant preaching from the pastorals (pp. 1-3); 2) his challenge to bypass the quasi-scholarly "old debates" about these books and take them "seriously" as "Scripture" (p. 4); 3) the helpful balance between seeing these letters with "all their similarities" and yet their "important differences" (p. 7); 4) the laudably realistic perspective that "Good preaching . . . does not derive simply from information but from the struggle to bring the text of Scripture and the text of our shared lives into direct and sometimes frightening dialogue" (pp. 9-10), which *sounds* much like Stott's outlook in *Between Two Worlds* or Pitt-Watson's "Two Stories, His and Ours" in *A Primer for Preachers*; and 5) the "rhythm" of the book homiletically, in which it concludes each section of running commentary with a section of implications/themes for preaching.

So far, so good. But, there are also the "red flags": 1) for no better reason than to shock the reader into approaching the letters as "strange" and distinctive (p. 9), Johnson places 2 Timothy first in the book, before 1 Timothy and Titus; 2) in several places he creates false tensions (which amount to half-truths) in Paul's, *and* our, thinking. A classic example is his contention that Paul "would not recognize a 'Christianity' which defined itself exclusively in terms of a confessional 'faith in Christ' rather than an 'obediential faith in God'" (p. 23). Even the most cursory reading of Paul, however, is sufficient to make clear that he never sets up an "either-or" choice between doctrine and practice. It's always "both-and"; 3) Johnson opts for a substantially random and *ad hoc* understanding of the directives of 1 Timothy (pp. 51-52). He does wrestle with the unacceptable outcome of such a perspective, i.e. that the passages "have no further applicability today" (p. 53). However, for all his good intentions, he cannot live by his desire that "we continue to be shaped by these normative texts" (p. 54), if he insists on the *ad hoc* understanding. "The proof is in the pudding," and 4) in Johnson's discussion of 1 Tim 2:1-15 it is seen that it is modern culture that gains the upper hand in the "then and now" interaction. In viewing that passage as "Paul's time-conditioned and occasional words" (p. 74), Johnson concludes "Nothing in Paul's text or its canonical status prevents us from having women teaching in church, being ministers, or holding positions of authority over men . . ." (p. 73). While neither the *ad hoc* hypothesis nor the above conclusion is rare today, even in evangelical circles (e.g. G. Fee), it is notably subjective to hear Johnson assert, "Our experience and growth in awareness . . . no longer allows the perception of women as subordinate to men . . ." (p. 73). Is this really taking Scripture seriously, as Johnson had urged his readers to do early on (p. 4)?

The best advice that can be given in utilizing this little volume is *caution*. It is worth using (for its notable strengths) . . . but *with great discernment* (because of its subtly problematic perspectives in certain stated areas).

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