

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's Most Famous Letter*, by Richard N. Longenecker. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011. 490 pp. \$40.00.

Seasoned New Testament scholar Richard Longenecker is now working on a commentary on “Paul’s most famous letter,” the epistle to the Romans. *Introducing Romans* is the prelude to that forthcoming commentary. At 450 pages, it is an exhaustive treatment of the critical issues in the contemporary study of Romans.

Longenecker begins with a discussion of “important matters largely uncontested today”—the author, integrity, occasion, and date of the letter. He argues that the author of Romans was Paul, that Romans 16 (including the doxology) was original to the letter, and that Romans was written from “greater Corinth” in the winter of A.D. 57–58 before Paul set out for Jerusalem. Longenecker next addresses “two pivotal issues”—the addressees and purpose of the letter, issues which I will discuss below. The final three sections of the book deal respectively with rhetorical conventions and Jewish and Christian themes, textual criticism and major issues of interpretation (e.g., the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate), and the structure and argument of the letter. Some highlights: Longenecker argues that the letter should be categorized rhetorically as a type of λόγος προτρεπτικός (“word of exhortation”), but that it was also shaped by, among other things, the Hebrew Bible and early Christian confessions. He argues that the genitive construction πίστις Χριστοῦ in Romans 3:22 and 26 should be read as a subjective genitive (“the faithfulness of Christ”), rather than an objective genitive (“faith in Christ”). And he sees merit in E. P. Sanders’s view that Second Temple Judaism was a religion of grace (the foundation of the New Perspective on Paul), although he tempers this conclusion by noting that some Jewish texts do evidence legalism.

Much of this book simply treats at length the same issues that can be found in the introduction of any major commentary on Romans. But Longenecker makes two distinct contributions. First, he argues that the addressees of the letter to the Romans were Gentile and Jewish believers in Jesus who “considered themselves closely tied to the Jerusalem church” and “thought and expressed themselves in ways congenial to Jewish Christianity” (83). In arguing this, Longenecker seeks to move the discussion beyond the question of merely the ethnic identity of the Roman Christians (Jews, Gentiles, or both?), and to the question of the theological outlook of the Roman Christians. This theological outlook cannot be determined by mirror-reading the letter, for the letter is neither polemic nor apologetic. Instead, it must be determined by external data. Specifically, Longenecker highlights the fourth-century

commentator Ambrosiaster, who tells us that Christianity came to Rome through Jews who believed in Jesus, and the second-century Roman historian Tacitus, who connects Christianity in Rome to Judea. Therefore, Longenecker concludes, the addressees of this letter were Christians with strong ties to the Jerusalem church.

Longenecker's second distinct contribution builds upon the first. Observing that Romans 1:18–4:25 utilizes Jewish and Christian assumptions which Paul's addressees would have held in common with Paul, Longenecker argues that the focus of the letter is actually Romans 5–8: "My proposal, then, is that the materials of 5–8 should be viewed as expressing the focus of what Paul writes in Romans, and particularly the section that contains the 'spiritual gift' that he says he wants to give the Christians at Rome in 1:11 and that he speaks about as being 'my gospel' in 2:16 and 16:25" (373). Romans 5–8 is the essence of the gospel Paul proclaimed in his Gentile mission. In fact, according to Longenecker, explaining this distinct gospel is one of the primary purposes Paul wrote his letter to the Romans. In lieu of being able to visit them, he wrote to give them a "spiritual gift" (Rom 1:11), "which he thought of as something uniquely his (cf. his reference to 'my gospel' in 16:25; also see 2:16)" (158).

In my view, these two theses put too much weight on the brief comments of Ambrosiaster and Tacitus, and Paul's two references to "my gospel" (16:25 and 2:16—should we think of the idea that God will judge the secrets of people through Christ as distinctly Pauline?). But it will be interesting to see how Longenecker develops and defends them further in his forthcoming commentary.

In conclusion, who should read this book? Busy pastors may find that its detail makes it unhelpful to their sermon preparation. Why would they need to know every scholar who has ever disputed the Pauline authorship of Romans, a position which is surely untenable? However, those looking for a one-stop-shop for everything Pauline scholars have said about the introductory issues in Romans will find this book to be an invaluable resource.

Kevin W. McFadden

*You Mean I Don't Have to Tithe? A Deconstruction of Tithing and a Reconstruction of Post-Tithe Giving*, by David A. Croteau. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010. xvi + 380 pp. \$44.00.

The last several years has seen a surge in materials detailing discontinuities between the Old Testament and New Testament peoples of God. David VanDrunen, Michael Horton, Darryl Hart, and until his recent defection, Joshua Stelman have led the way in explaining how the Christian relates differently to the two kingdoms than did his OT Israelite counterpart, resulting in an ethic sharply different from the prevailing