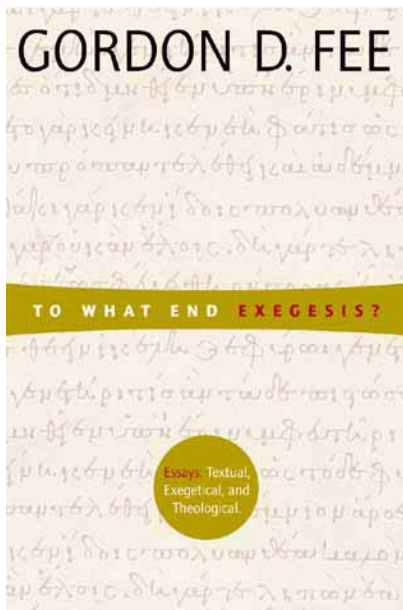


RBL 05/2004



Fee, Gordon D.

*To What End Exegesis? Essays Textual, Exegetical, and Theological*

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. Pp. x + 378. Paper.  
\$26.00. ISBN 0802849253.

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This book gathers twenty-one of Gordon Fee's previously published essays into one convenient volume. Fee doubts that many will ever read through the entire collection (vii), but I found the task pleasurable. The book lives up to its back-cover billing that it "will provide teachers, pastors, and serious students of the Bible with a robust banquet of New Testament scholarship." Even a much more lengthy review could hardly do justice to such a large number of excellent essays, so I will only briefly state the title and thesis of most, interacting critically with only a few.

The "Textual Studies" section is especially impressive. In "'One Thing is Needful' (Luke 10:42)," Fee convincingly challenges the UBSGNT committee's decision to go with the shorter "traditional" reading ("But [δέ] one thing is needed. And [δέ] Mary . . ." p<sup>45</sup>, p<sup>75</sup>, A, et al.), arguing instead for the long reading of p<sup>3</sup>, **Σ**, B, et al., which he translates together with 10:41b as "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about *many* things. However (δέ), few things are really needed, or, if you will (ἢ), only *one*. For [γάρ] that is indeed what Mary has chosen, the good portion" (14, italics original). "On the Inauthenticity of John 5:3b-4," responds to an article by Z. Hodges that had defended this usually rejected passage. Fee upholds its rejection, offering the first "full-scale discussion of the reasons for rejecting the passage as spurious" (18). Challenging recent

trends, Fee's purpose in "On the Text and Meaning of John 20:30–31" is "(1) to suggest that the textual question of 20:31 can be resolved with a much greater degree of certainty than is often allowed; and (2) to propose grounds for believing that the original text (πιστεύητε, present subjunctive) is grammatically meaningful for John" (30). In "Textual-Exegetical Observations on 1 Corinthians 1:2, 2:1, and 2:10," Fee's overriding purpose is to illustrate "that textual criticism is not an end in itself, but must ultimately be brought to bear on the meaning and message of the New Testament" (43). I would add that his arguments concerning variants in each of these passages also illustrate something else: master text critics are also master exegetes. In this and several other essays, the failure of some text critics to choose the most likely original reading can partly be traced to a failure to consider fully the possibilities of Paul's grammar, syntax, and thought in both the immediate and wider contexts. Properly considered, a feature that at first appears to be an infelicitous error sometimes turns out to be a subtle and meaningful creation of Paul himself. The final essay in this section is "On Text and Commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians." Its burden is that of "a text critic who happens also to write commentaries: that contemporary English-language commentaries evidence general impoverishment regarding textual questions—except for the most notable issues—thus leaving their users with an inadequate awareness of this dimension of the exegetical task" (57). To illustrate the problem, Fee departs from his frequent practice of writing papers about disagreements with UBSGNT committee in order to defend several of their decisions in 1 and 2 Thessalonians against the majority of English commentaries. Firm believers in the indispensability of competent text criticism for good commentary writing can only hope that this essay is widely read and taken to heart.

The second major section, "Exegetical Studies," begins with a brief essay titled "Once More—John 7:37–39," which argues that "the most natural meaning of the third person pronoun αὐτοῦ is the believer, rather than the Messiah" (85). The second essay, "1 Corinthians 7:1 in the NIV," is among the finest. Fee demonstrates philologically and exegetically the folly of the translation, "It is good for a man not to marry." The next essay, "ΧΑΡΙΣ in 2 Corinthians 1:15: Apostolic Parousia and Paul-Corinth Chronology," argues that "χάρις here is active from the perspective of the Corinthians. What Paul is saying is not that they will receive χάρις twice because of his presence, but that they will experience it twice *as they help him along the way*" (100, italics original).

The next two selections, "Ἐιδωλόθυτα Once Again: An Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8–10" and "2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 and Food Offered to Idols," are intertwined. The first attempts to prove, among other things, that Paul unequivocally prohibits believers from eating in pagan temple precincts. The second attempts to prove that 2 Cor 6:14–7:1 is authentic, in the correct location, and to be understood in the context of the idol-meat issues of 1 Cor 8–10. While both essays contain several thought-provoking insights, I

found them among the weakest in the volume. In the former, Fee makes a strong case that eating meat in pagan temples is already the main issue in 1 Cor 8:1–13, but I was not convinced that this strengthened the position that 10:14–22 entirely prohibits strong believers from eating in temple precincts. One senses that the author knows he really has not made his case when near the end of the essay he poses the question, “If εἰδωλόθυτα in 8:1–13 refers to temple meals, why does Paul not simply forbid it from the beginning. . . ?” Fee tries to base his answer to this question on his response to another: “If prohibition is what is ultimately to be the answer, how does one escape the charge that we have thus turned gospel into Law and thereby made Paul self-contradictory?” (126). Fee answers this question by appeal to the indicative/imperative logic of Paul’s ethic. Paul’s habit is not to lay down the law in his churches but first to remind them of the gospel, the foundation of every Christian ethical response. That answers why he reasons with them first rather than simply issuing a prohibition. But since ultimately Fee concludes that he issues a prohibition, this argument sounds somewhat circular to me. The second of the two essays is even more problematic, and again Fee brings up an obvious problem near the end: “in all candor, it is admitted that the one real difficulty with this interpretation is that ‘food offered to idols’ is not specifically mentioned either in this passage or its immediate context” (153). This is a “difficulty” to say the least, and it is not sufficient to suggest that it is offset by the number of other linguistic and conceptual affinities between this passage and 1 Cor 3:16–17 and 10:14–22. It points toward an even more fundamental problem: the immediate context of 2 Cor 6:14–7:1 is 2 Corinthians, no matter how one slices it, and therefore the amount of effort expended here to fit the passage into the context of 1 Corinthians seems quite an exegetical stretch.

The last two essays in the section are “Freedom and the Life of Obedience (Galatians 5:1–6:18)” and “Philippians 2:1–11: Hymn or Exalted Pauline Prose?” The former reads much like a fine commentary on the passage. A major and welcome emphasis is that this passage is integral to the argument of the letter and functions as its conclusion (154). The latter essay calls into question “the whole matter of the passage as a hymn, which . . . it almost certainly is not,” and “to show that one can best understand its role in the context by a structural analysis of the kind one would do with any piece of Pauline prose” (174).

“Theological Studies” is the longest section. Fee’s concern in “Toward a Theology of 1 Corinthians” is “to reflect on the various strands of Paul’s understanding of the gospel as saving event, including both its theological basis and its necessary ethical response, which alone brings the experience of the gospel to proper fruition” (198). The contention of “Christology and Pneumatology in Romans 8:9–11—and Elsewhere: Some Reflection on Paul as a Trinitarian,” is that “the idea . . . that Paul blurred the relationship of the Risen Lord with the Spirit with a kind of ‘Spirit christology’ is in fact the invention of scholarship.” (218–19). “‘Another Gospel Which You Did Not Embrace’: 2 Corinthians

11:4 and the Theology of 1 and 2 Corinthians” argues that “the gospel has consistent and definable *theological* content . . . and that 2 Cor 11:4 holds the key to the basic issues raised in the second (canonical) letter” (241, italics original). “Some Exegetical and Theological Reflections on Ephesians 4:30 and Pauline Pneumatology” makes the point that “Pauline theology simply cannot be adequately done without taking seriously the central role of the Spirit. And one does not grasp Paul’s understanding of the Spirit without comprehending that we are here dealing with God’s empowering presence” (275). “To What End Exegesis? Reflections on Exegesis and Spirituality in Philippians 4:19–20” is the somewhat autobiographical piece from which the collection’s title derives. Fee’s purpose is “to urge that the ultimate aim of exegesis is the Spiritual one—to produce in our lives and the lives of others true Spirituality, in which God’s people live in faithful fellowship both with one another and with the living God, and thus in keeping with God’s purposes in the world. . . . exegesis of the biblical texts belongs primarily in the context of the believing community who are the true heirs of these texts” (276). In “Pneuma and Eschatology in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–2: A Proposal about ‘Testing the Prophets’ and the Purpose of 2 Thessalonians,” Fee looks closely at ὡς δι’ ἡμῶν in 2:2, arguing that misreading of the phrase creates many of our difficulties with 2 Thessalonians and this passage and that “what Paul says later in 2:15 offers us both a key for unlocking 2:2 and the earliest clue regarding his own perspective on the ‘testing’ of prophetic utterances” (291). “Toward a Theology of 2 Timothy—From a Pauline Perspective” is an analysis of the theology of the letter on the assumption that Paul wrote it. The theology of 2 Timothy turns out to be largely Pauline. Fee ends by asserting that 1 Timothy and Titus would sound much more authentic if read in light of 2 Timothy. “Paul and the Trinity: The Experience of Christ and the Spirit for Paul’s Understanding of God,” is a defense of Fee’s insistence that it is proper to speak of Paul as a Trinitarian. Finally, “Wisdom Christology in Paul: A Dissenting View” challenges the popular idea that Paul has such a Christology by offering “another reading of the texts involved (the Wisdom literature and Paul’s letters) with a suggestion that such a reading of these texts—independently of each other and on their own terms—does not support the many assertions being made about the influence of Jewish Wisdom on Paul’s christology” (352).

Two recurrent themes in the “Theological Studies” section are the importance of Spirit language in Paul and Paul’s Trinitarianism. Fee’s contributions to New Testament theology concerning the former subject are immense and much appreciated, but his position on Paul and the Trinity faces resistance. Perhaps that is why the 1999 essay, “Paul and the Trinity,” has a rather apologetic tone. Near the beginning, Fee wonders what the real issue is and asks:

Is it the word Trinity itself, because it implies speculative ontological questions of a later time? Or does it have to do with what the Pauline affirmations are actually

saying about Christ and the Spirit? Here is where the pigeon comes home to roost, for the denial of trinitarian language seems very often to preface denials about the *deity* of Christ and/or the Spirit as well, not to mention denials of the *personal nature* of the Spirit. (331)

It is not fair to pose the issue this way. The first question must be allowed an answer apart from the second, for many would indeed affirm the deity of Christ and the Spirit in Paul but still object to calling him a “Trinitarian” precisely because this is language invented about a century after Paul by thinkers who were far more apt to formulate their faith in philosophical categories. Anyone with a basic acquaintance with later Trinitarian debates knows they were conducted with terms and concepts that are mostly foreign to Paul. Therefore it is quite possible to agree with everything Fee presents in this essay concerning the deity of Christ and the personal nature of Spirit and still find his unqualified use of “Trinity” and “Trinitarian” profoundly anachronistic. One suspects that if he would be content to use descriptions such as “triadic statements” and “latent trinitarianism” (332), he would face less resistance. But in this essay he adds fuel to the fire by claiming that it is proper to speak of Paul not only as a functional or economic trinitarian but also as an “ontological trinitarian” (349).

Clearly, not everyone will agree with all of Fee’s exegeses, but in conclusion I can only affirm that this volume offers a delectable exegetical feast. It will remind readers why Fee is rightly regarded as one of today’s finest New Testament text critics and interpreters of Paul.