

James D. G. Dunn. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Grand Rapids: Michigan/Cambridge, U. K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998. xxxvi + 808 pp. \$45.00.

James Dunn needs no introduction, for his prolific scholarship ensures that he is one of the most well known New Testament scholars in the world. He has now produced a detailed and fascinating work on Paul's theology, one that is the fruit of his many years of research. No one who is interested in Pauline theology can afford to bypass this major and provocative work. The length may seem daunting, but, as always, Dunn writes in an inviting and interesting way. His freshness and clarity make the work a joy to read.

Dunn uses Romans as a rough sketch for his work on Paul, apologizing for not interacting with all Pauline themes more extensively! No scheme works perfectly in articulating Paul's thought, and using Romans as a template is useful and helpful. Themes that are not examined in Romans are included, so nothing of significance is omitted. It should be noted, however, that the Pastoral Letters and Ephesians are not mined for Pauline theology since Dunn believes they are post-Pauline. He departs from the standard critical view in accepting the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians, while maintaining that Timothy likely wrote Colossians before Paul's death. At some points Colossians is integrated into Paul's theology. The judgments on authenticity are not defended but assumed. A different portrait of Paul would emerge in some respects if all the letters were assessed as authentic, especially in terms of Paul's understanding of the church. We can learn much about Paul's theology from the nine letters Dunn investigates, but I shall also note some places where different conclusions would be drawn if a wider corpus were accepted.

The author charts out his methodology carefully, refusing to adopt a single center since such would be too confining and inflexible. Paul's theology must be teased out of a dialogue between him and his readers, and between Paul and us. It would be much more difficult to write a Pauline theology if his theology developed over the years as he wrote his letters. Dunn does not see any compelling evidence for development in Paul. In the final analysis he believes in Pauline *theology* and does not merely adopt a history of religions approach. He describes his approach as a dialogue with Paul, and it is evident in reading the work that Dunn listens carefully to Paul. In fact, he gives every impression that he considers Paul's theology to be authoritative. Dunn does not confine his dialogue to Paul but interacts substantially with other scholars as well. The book is packed with footnotes and contains helpful bibliographies at the head of each chapter. We are not surprised to learn that the author thinks a lengthy Pauline theology is warranted given the "new perspective" on Paul which was precipitated by the work of E. P. Sanders, for probably the most fruitful and stimulating work based on the new perspective comes from Dunn himself.

I have already noted that Romans is the "template" for the organization of the book. The chapters of the book are as follows: 1) Prologue; 2) God and Humankind; 3) Humankind under Indictment; 4) The Gospel of Jesus Christ; 5) The Beginning of Salvation; 6) The Process of Salvation; 7) The Church; 8) How Should Believers Live?; and 9) Epilogue. The influence of Romans is obvious in this outline. It is interesting to observe that the chapter headings are not remarkably different from some of the typical *loci* in a systematic theology. This is not to say that an alien systematic approach is imposed onto Paul, for Dunn's work is clearly biblical theology. The topics covered

remind us that many systematic theologies implicitly work from Paul when formulating their outlines.

Dunn conducts his dialogue with Paul on three levels: 1) his inherited convictions; 2) his conversion and faith on the Damascus road; and 3) the letters themselves. Obviously the letters are primary in formulating Paul's theology. But Dunn's approach reminds us that the letters do not contain "all" of Paul's theology. The letters were addressed to specific situations and none of them was intended to be an exhaustive theological treatise. It is valid, then, to reflect upon his inherited convictions and his conversion in construing his theology. Paul's understanding of his convictions and conversion, however, must be assessed in light of his letters, and Dunn accomplishes this task well. Even so, we must remember that we do not possess the whole of Paul's theology. All of us work with a partial map—quite a full map—but still partial.

Since there is not space to engage with all that Dunn has written, I will interact with him on some of his controversial conclusions. Before doing so, I must say that again and again I found his exposition on various topics to be insightful and helpful, but I will focus a bit more on conclusions which I find questionable. Dunn rightly emphasizes that Paul believed his theology fulfilled the OT. The monotheism of the OT is not abandoned but cherished. In my view, however, the redrawing of monotheism in terms of Christ is not sufficiently appreciated by Dunn. He rightly says that Paul continued to be a monotheist, that Christ's life and ministry brought glory to the Father, and that there was a sense in which the Father is primary. And yet Dunn continues to insist that no theology of pre-existence can be read out of Paul. I still find his explanations of Col. 1:15-20 and Phil. 2:6-11 to be unsatisfying, though he rightly detects both Adam and

wisdom christology in these texts. He insists that the wisdom terminology demonstrates that Christ is no more pre-existent than wisdom was in the OT. But such a reading is faulty, for it reads the text backwards by superimposing the wisdom categories of the OT onto Jesus Christ. When Paul says that Christ is the agent of creation, real pre-existence—not just ideal pre-existence—is in his mind. Wisdom is personified in the OT, but Christ is a person, and thus I cannot see how Paul could conceive of him being the agent of creation without the idea of real pre-existence. Dunn fails to see that the fulfillment in Christ transcends wisdom, and he straitjackets what Paul says by letting the metaphor of wisdom control his christology. A similar problem emerges in Rom. 9:5, for syntactically the most natural way of reading the text is to see an ascription to Christ as God. Dunn denies the most natural reading of the text, and thus he backs away from the idea that Christ is worshiped equally with God by introducing the idea that Christ was venerated but only God was worshiped. The evidence that Paul himself indulged in such a technical distinction is lacking.

One of Paul's inherited convictions was that the Torah was from God. As a Christian he does not abandon this view, but he now emphasizes that the power of sin co-opts the law and uses it for nefarious purposes. More controversial is the emphasis on the social function of the law. One of Paul's major complaints about the law was that it confined the people of God to the Jews, and so the "boundary markers" of the law, viz., circumcision, food laws, and sabbath are jettisoned. Dunn rightly perceives the salvation historical character of Paul's thought here, emphasizing that the promise of Abraham is being fulfilled for all peoples. What he says about the social function of the law is not wrong, but it is overstated and other themes are thereby muted. For instance, under

Sanders' influence any polemic against legalism in Paul is denied, and all of the relevant texts (Rom. 3:27-4:8; 9:30-10:8; Gal. 2:16-21; 3:10-14; Phil. 3:2-11) are read in terms of exclusivism and inclusivism. Certainly scholars in the past have exaggerated the polemic against legalism in Paul, but Dunn goes to the other extreme in seeing no polemic against legalism at all. He forces all the texts into a procrustean bed, so that even when Paul speaks of "works" in general and not "works of law" (cf. Rom. 9:30-10:8), he still detects an attack against the boundary markers of the law.

Dunn maintains that Paul's polemic against "works of law" counters the ethnic exclusivity of Judaism, an exclusivity centered on food laws and circumcision. The texts that criticize boasting are directed against the ethnic restrictiveness of the Jews, not their legalism (Rom. 3:27-30). I would not deny that the controversy over "works of law" was probably precipitated by disputes over boundary markers such as circumcision and food laws (cf. Gal. 2:11-21). Nonetheless, Paul's fundamental complaint with the Jews is not that they exclude Gentiles, but that they do not keep the law themselves (Rom. 2:1-29; 3:9-20; Gal. 3:10). Nor is it likely that the term "works of law" focuses on the boundary markers of the law, for the debate over circumcision and food laws led to a discussion of the law as a whole. He is right in saying that the Jews were exclusivistic, thinking that they were better than Gentiles. Why did they think they were better? Only because they were Jews? It is difficult for me to believe that ethnic superiority was not linked to a notion of moral superiority, especially for those who possessed Torah. Dunn engages in "either-or" thinking in his analysis of Rom. 3:27-30 when he confines the critique to a criticism of Jewish nationalism. Instead, Paul indicts *legalism and exclusivism*. On the other hand, Dunn nicely captures the theme that those who live by faith and by the Spirit

will keep the law, for the keeping of the law fulfills the promise of the new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34).

I was surprised by Dunn's admission that Eph. 2:8-9 (post-Pauline in his view) contains a polemic against works-righteousness. Such an admission casts doubt upon Dunn's thesis, for if the letter is post-Pauline, we likely have the reflections of a Pauline disciple on Paul's theology. One of the earliest Pauline interpreters, then, reframed Paul's argument against "works of law" as an attack against "works" in general. In this instance, Ephesians would represent one of the earliest interpretations of Paul, an interpretation which differs dramatically from Dunn's own understanding. If Ephesians is Pauline (I think it is), then we have his own theology here, showing clearly a polemic against human achievement. Despite his excesses Dunn reminds us to be cautious about seeing legalism everywhere in Paul, and he rightly discerns that the "boundary markers" were central to the debate over the Torah.

The new look on the law leads inevitably to a reassessment of justification, for the idea that Paul responded to any legalism in Judaism is rejected by Dunn. He understands God's righteousness to be his faithfulness to his people, his covenantal loyalty. God's righteousness is both his saving activity and his gift to his people. Similarly, the old debate as to whether God's righteousness is declarative or transformative should be transcended, for both are involved. Once again we are faced with an issue that can hardly be adjudicated in a brief review. I believe Dunn is correct in saying that God's righteousness is both a gift and a saving activity, both forensic and transformative, although he could explain how this works out more precisely. I have tried to demonstrate in my own commentary on Romans how this does not threaten the fundamental insights

of the Reformation. To define righteousness as covenantal faithfulness is less convincing. It is one thing to say that God's righteousness fulfills his covenant promises, but it is quite another *to define* the righteousness of God as his covenantal faithfulness. Mark Seifrid in a forthcoming work on justification rightly calls into question defining righteousness as covenantal faithfulness.

Because of space limitations I want to comment quickly on a number of issues. Many of Dunn's discussions are invaluable, e.g., his discussion of the body and the flesh in Paul. His suggestion (pp. 109-110) that Paul may not have believed in the reality of heavenly powers but referred to them to relate to his contemporaries is, however, a modern imposition upon Paul. I suspect Dunn's own enlightenment or post-enlightenment view shines through here rather than the real Paul, for there is scarcely a suggestion *in Paul* that the heavenly powers are perhaps mythical. On the other hand, he resists the tide of the times in saying that Paul views homosexuality as contrary to nature. And he moves in a different orbit from Bultmann in saying that Paul was concerned with and alluded to the Jesus tradition. The historical Jesus was not a cipher for Paul. And yet Dunn makes a mistake that he often avoids elsewhere by arguing for an either-or in the definition of *hilastērion* (Rom. 3:25, pp. 213-215). There is no need to say that *either* propitiation or expiation is in view, for both are involved. Sin is both wiped away and God's wrath is appeased in the death of Jesus. Dunn's brief comments hardly turn back the detailed scholarship of Leon Morris (*The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*) on this matter. Dunn attempts to play down substitution in his exposition of the cross. As a result his own explanation of the atonement is vague and imprecise, precisely because he backs away from the substitution theme in Paul (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13). For the length

of the book his discussion of redemption and reconciliation are disappointingly brief. On the other hand, the chapter on "Participation in Christ" is one of the best brief expositions on this theme in the literature.

Dunn's previous work on baptism whets the reader's interest for what he will say in a Pauline theology. He rightly notes that some scholars are predisposed to see baptismal allusions virtually everywhere. He supports the general consensus that Paul was not influenced by the mystery religions with regard to either baptism or the Lord's supper. Dunn is also correct when he says that baptism is subordinated to the gospel in 1 Cor. 1:17, a strike against overly sacramental notions of baptism. And yet Dunn goes too far in trying to segregate neatly water and Spirit baptism. I find it hard to believe that the metaphor of washing did not naturally bring to mind actual water baptism in Paul's day. To see washing as merely the cleansing of the heart (it certainly involved that as well) seems strained. Dunn rightly notes that baptism does not replace circumcision in Paul. Even in Col. 2:11-12 the parallel is between spiritual circumcision and baptism. Dunn argues that baptism was by immersion and reserved for those who exercised faith. I think he is right on both counts, but his brief discussion will probably only persuade those already convinced on other grounds. According to Dunn, particular and local assemblies are the church of God in Paul, and any idea of the universal church is absent. But Dunn underemphasizes the universal element in Gal. 1:13, 1 Cor. 12:28 and 10:32. His argument can only succeed if Colossians and Ephesians are not authentically Pauline. Dunn also helpfully shows that Paul applies the language of cult, priests, and sacrifices to the new reality inaugurated by Christ. When it comes to the organization of the church, Dunn does not rigidly polarize the charismatic and the institutional. Nonetheless, he

underplays the presence of offices, partially because of his view on the authenticity of the Pastoral Epistles. I also question whether he is right in insisting that Paul's apostleship did not extend over the church universal and applied only to some local churches. The discussion on the women in ministry is balanced. He notes the ministries in which they were involved, but admits that Paul seems to uphold some form of female subordination in 1 Cor. 11:2-16 and 14:33b-36, a judgment which would only be strengthened if 1 Tim. 2:8-15 is authentically Pauline.

Dunn's discussion of "the already but not yet" element in Paul is helpful. He rightly regards it as an important part of Paul's theology. Thus Dunn's understanding of the Christian life is undergirded by this eschatological tension. Believers do not graduate to a higher level by means of a second blessing. Tension and struggle are a constituent part of Christian experience. Paul's understanding of "the already but not yet" also informs his ethics where we see a similar tension in terms of the indicative and the imperative. Dunn takes Paul's warnings seriously, so seriously that he believes some may commit apostasy. Such a position is understandable, but it downplays texts such as Rom. 5:9-10; 8:28-39; 1 Cor. 1:8-9; and Phil. 1:6, which promise that God will complete the good work he has started in believers. Better explanations exist to explain the tension between assurance and perseverance in Paul. In fact, 1 Cor. 11:19 and 2 Tim. 2:19-26 suggest that those who depart from the community were never truly believers. Their failure to persevere demonstrates their inauthenticity. Finally, Dunn understands Romans 9-11 to offer a hope of final salvation for ethnic Israel. He is surely right here, over against those who want to say that in Rom 11:26 the term "Israel" refers to the church

which is comprised of both Jews and Gentiles. Dunn's attempt to downplay individual predestination, however, is less convincing.

It is simply impossible in this review to convey the depth of Dunn's work and the many fascinating exegetical and theological insights contained in it. I found myself agreeing with Dunn more often than I expected, but in the review I concentrated on some significant matters where we differ. The reader should know that I think this is an excellent Pauline theology. I learned much from it. It will have a long history, precisely because Dunn takes Paul seriously as an apostle, a theologian, a missionary, and a pastor.

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