

BOOK REVIEWS

The Hungry Inherit: Winning the Wealth of the World to Come. Third Edition. By Zane C. Hodges. Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1997. 135 pp. Paper, \$8.95.

The hungry inherit. What does that mean? Hodges starts with examples of the gift that God offers to all in the illustration of “living water” and our thirst for the gift of eternal life. He proceeds to discuss the importance of living faithfully so that one will be heirs of an inheritance in the kingdom of God to come. In other words, eternal life as a free gift as stated in Eph 2:8, 9 does not depend at all on our works, but depends solely on His faithfulness to His promise to the believer. However, sanctification or discipleship depends on our faithfulness as stated in Eph 2:10. One lacking a clear understanding of rewards for believers is in danger of denying the assurance concerning the message of life. As a poor substitute for Christ’s guarantee, he will add works either as *evidence* for or *validation* of eternal life.

The Hungry Inherit was published first in 1972 by Moody Press. It was published again in a second edition by Multnomah Press in 1980. The current 3rd edition was published by Redención Viva in 1997. It is worth reading and re-reading each year to remind us that the gift of everlasting life is free and that believers ought to walk by faith and have a hunger which leads to an inheritance/reward. Hodges gives refreshing insights on the Biblical teachings concerning eternal life, discipleship, and rewards. Nearly half of the ten chapters deal with the message of life as presented in John’s Gospel as Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman demonstrating that the living water that He was offering was water that one only needed to drink once to have the promised everlasting life. Continuous lifelong drinking is not required. The moment she drank the water He offered, she would never thirst again.

Ryrie correctly states in the foreword, “When one finishes this book, there can be no mistaking the fact that the free gift of the water of life and the call to discipleship are clearly distinguished

in the New Testament.” Although this is masterfully accomplished in an easy to read format, it is Hodges engaging narrative style that draws the reader in: “We don’t want to just tell you about the drama. We want you to be a part of it. We want you to meet its actors, and to hear their voices. Above all, we want you to think their thoughts and feel their feelings” (p. 9)

Dr. Earl Radmacher is well known for this statement on discipleship today and rewards to follow at the Bema Seat of Jesus Christ: “You are becoming today what you will be in the life to come through what you are doing with what you have today.” He may have been influenced by Hodges wrote something similar when he said this about the woman at the well in Samaria: “Her thirst had led her to eternal life, and her hunger would lead her to eternal heirship. That is the appropriate experience for everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus. For after all, the thirsty live, but the hungry inherit!” (p. 135). What a challenge for every believer. This is a must read for any and all believers.

Stephen R. Lewis

President, Rocky Mtn Bible Col and Sem
Denver, CO

Did Paul Preach Eternal Life? Should We? By Zane C. Hodges. Mesquite, TX: Kerugma, Inc, 2007. 32 pp. Paper, \$3.95.

In the movie *Quigley Down Under*, Quigley (played by Tom Selleck) was a long-distance rifle marksman who moved to Australia. At one point, he was challenged to a pistol competition. He replied that he did not have much use for handguns. His antagonist surmised from this that Quigley could not hit a target with a pistol. In the pistol duel at film’s end, the antagonist and his ruffians found the assumption to be a costly mistake.

Those familiar with Zane would know that he focused on John’s Gospel for defining the message that one must believe. They would also know that he emphasized using John for introducing unbelievers to that message.

Interestingly, some have made an incorrect inference from Zane's decided preference for John's Gospel for defining and presenting the message of life. Some viewed the focus on John's Gospel as an admission that Zane could not find this emphasis elsewhere in the New Testament.

What Zane does in this booklet is to show that one can hit this same target from Paul. In other words, Zane argued that the core of Paul's message to unbelievers was that one believe Jesus as his Guarantor of everlasting life. In other words, the arsenal is not limited to John's Gospel, but John is the one and only book designed by God for the unbeliever. The booklet shows that Paul and John, or Paul and Jesus, are in harmony. John quotes Jesus extensively telling unbelievers to believe Him as the guarantor of everlasting life to them. Paul agrees with Jesus and John, but emphasized other themes in his epistles to believers.

The Introduction (p. 9) quotes Gal 1:11-12: "But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it*, but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ" (NKJV). The source of Paul's message for unbelievers was the same One who taught the Apostle John for 3½ years. Is it really plausible to assume that Jesus Christ revealed twelve divergent messages (a distinct one for each of the eleven plus a twelfth for Paul)? Such a scenario would legitimize (with regard to the message for unbelievers), saying: "I am of Peter," "I am of John," "I am of Andrew," "I am of Paul," etc.

Two criteria characterize the passages expounded in this booklet. The passages all were either written (in his epistles) or spoken by Paul (as quoted by Luke in Acts), and they all either quote what he actually said to unbelievers, or how Paul characterized his message to unbelievers.

Passages receiving attention include: Acts 13; Acts 16; Romans 1; Romans 5; 1 Tim 1:15-16; and Titus 3:4-7. Paul devoted much space to describing what Christ needed to do in order to grant someone everlasting life. He gave much less space to characterizing what the unbeliever must believe in order to receive everlasting life. By contrast, John's book addressing unbelievers frequently quotes Jesus giving the content that must be believed.

One can hit the target with either John or with passages where Paul states what his message was to unbelievers. The

booklet demonstrates this. The book does not examine the issue of how one would use passages in Paul that touch upon pertinent issues, but that Paul addressed to believers. Ephesians 2:8-9 is a case in point. It says, "You were saved by grace through faith..." However, it does not specify the exact content of that faith. If this passage comes up in a discussion with an unbeliever, the content of faith would need to be stated. Zane has given an eloquent answer from both John and Paul: The unbeliever is to believe Jesus Christ as his Guarantor of everlasting life.

This booklet offers some excellent insight for staying on target in Paul. Both John and Paul learned the message of life from Jesus Christ. Both were faithful to that message. It is the same message in both men's writings, although the target audience and the target audience in John's Gospel is unique. John cited Jesus seeking for people to believe Him in regard to His irrevocable promise of life everlasting to believers.

John Niemelä

*Researcher, Message of Life Ministries
Teaching Elder, Grace Chapel of Orange County
Orange, CA*

Six Secrets of the Christian Life: The Miracle of Walking with God By Zane C. Hodges. Dallas, TX: Rendencion Viva, 2004. 80 pp. Paper, \$4.95.

Summarizing years of insight distilled from decades of exegetical refinement and experience of truth in the lab of life, Zane Hodges left us with a wonderfully practical book on how to live the Christian life. The book respectfully discards the strewn wreckage of so many well intentioned band-aids and bromides for spiritual living. ("...working hard at it... firmly making up [one's] mind to do it... persevering in spite of all difficulties," p. 9).

Hodges acknowledges elements of truth in these over-simplifications, but none of them single-handedly captures Christian living as both a Person and a process. None of them integrates

the six distinguishable components he presents to us in *Six Secrets* as the dynamic process that girds the reality and movement of Christ in us, our earnest expectation of glory.

For a person who has believed in Jesus Christ concerning God's gift of eternal life, living a personally satisfying life that also pleases God is far from automatic. The wise professor Hodges created and crafted for us a beautiful tapestry and useful primer of spiritual living that itself displays a measure of the wisdom, pleasure, and glory of the Person of God as intimately known by this book's author.

Hodges' choice of the word *secrets*, though initially perceived by this reviewer as bromidic, is actually in the spirit of Paul's use of the word *mystery*, a collective truth previously hidden or veiled but emerging and then revealed through the progress of revelation in Scripture to the one pursuing it like treasure.

The six components presented in *Six Secrets* are joined to reveal a unified, orderly, and dynamic process. The six components itemized below, readable as one sentence, correspond to the six chapters of the book under review.

1. The resurrection life of Jesus Christ who is in us who have believed,
2. transforms our minds (=hearts) by means of His Spirit,
3. so that God's life in us is displayed (=glorified) through us in our daily decisions and directions,
4. resulting from an honest heart (=mind) deliberately facing the light of the truth of God's Messiah revealed in His written Word,
5. that we speak to God about in reference to our experience,
6. whose glory we are invited to regularly pursue as a process with an intentional focus (*mindset*) on all we can discover in and about God's Son alive in us.

This is eternal living of the eternal life given to us by Christ who lives in us. He is eternal life. This hope of Glory can continue through us to the world around us. But now this reviewer begins to build beyond the foundation expounded upon in Zane Hodges clearly and efficiently (75 pages plus 4 page index) written *Six Secrets of the Christian Life*. We are indebted to him for it. But he would want us to proceed on and not merely reminisce.

When writing in this form of summation literature, compared to his refined textual exegesis and exposition as displayed in his *The Epistles of John*, Hodges carefully crafted and freighted this

book with frequent but contextually relevant references. The book is free of endnote debate.

This book is for the common reader but is delightful to others as well, as was Lewis Sperry Chafer's *He That is Spiritual* (1918). Let the reader recognize Hodges' target audience or he will degrade his appreciation for this consummate exegete's skill, when called for, to summarize clearly and concisely for the many.

Noticeable in scanning through the text of the book are frequent references to key passages from the Bible weighing in on the message. A review of the helpful Scripture index at the end points the reader to 1 John at least twenty-eight times, Romans at least twenty-seven times, (primarily Romans 6-8), James 1 at least ten times and 2 Corinthians 3-4 at least nine times.

This pupil of Zane Hodges imagines a day when professor and pastor Hodges will receive Christ's stamp of approval for humbly rendered worship throughout life in word and deed. Hodges would never claim to be a receptor of Christ's final approval. He knew he would be with Him. He knew that his Master called him, with all of us, to behold Messiah Jesus now in the mirror of God's Word. Hodges cultivated in life the process that humbly honors the person of Christ and His revealed pathway of spiritual growth. But in all things He let God be God.

The thought of potentially receiving the reward of Christ's approval was a major, though not exclusive, motivator of Hodges. He likewise delighted in the completed work of Christ, the satisfactory payment for all sin, a theme evident in his book, *The Atonement* (2007).

Noticeable in his first book, *The Hungry Inherit* (1972), and for as long as this admittedly admiring reviewer recalls knowing him—from seminary years in the early 1970's to Hodges' death in 2008—he was a champion's champion of the freeness of the gift of eternal life in Christ and corresponding assurance of knowing Him with certainty.

In *The Hungry Inherit* he called our attention to *living water*, spoken of by Jesus to the Samaritan woman, the message of the gift of eternal life (John 4:10-14). Taking his cues from Jesus, Hodges likewise complemented this teaching, as evident in *Six Secrets*, with reference to the discipleship message of *meat to eat that ye know not of* (John 4:31-34). And so flowed the motivation of this mentor of mentors.

This man grounded his students in the gift, which, once given, can never be lost. At the right time, Hodges would then invite God's children to enjoy the process of abundant living as he did—but only in honor of the One who rewards those who diligently seek Him. Likewise he compiled from Scripture and honed by his own joy of Christ living in him, the readable and delightfully ponderable *Six Secrets of the Christian Life*.

It wasn't that he pursued the reward directly. Zane Clark Hodges looked forward to the revealing of the King Himself in His kingdom, the King Who has called us to celebrate with Him as His honored companions in the millennial bliss. That bliss awaits His children who diligently seek intimacy with the Person Who alone rewards or withholds the reward of intimate privilege at His side in the joyous administration of His reign yet to begin on planet earth.

Bob Kenagy

Chaplain

Metropolitan State Hospital

Norwalk, CA

Jesus, God's Prophet: His Teaching about the Coming Surprise. By Zane C. Hodges. Mesquite, TX: Kerugma, Inc., 2006. 64 pp. Paper, \$4.95.

Though short in length, this book makes a profound point. Zane's point is that the prophetic teaching we find in the NT epistles does not come via the Spirit revealing new truths to the apostles. Rather, it comes from the apostles proclaiming what the Lord Jesus Christ taught. Jesus is God's prophet. Many give lip service to this. Hodges proclaims it.

But this book implies an even more profound claim: All of the teachings found in the NT epistles find their source in the teachings of the Lord Jesus, including soteriology, eschatology, ecclesiology, pneumatology, Christology, and theology proper.

The Olivet Discourse is analyzed in this work. Zane focuses on the discourse as it is recorded in Matthew 24-25. He makes the

point that this discourse “is the longest uninterrupted prophetic discussion found anywhere in the New Testament outside the book of Revelation” (p. 15).

While most NT scholars do not believe the Rapture is found in the Olivet Discourse, Zane argues persuasively that it is. The Lord’s reference to His coming “as a thief in the night” is shown in this book to be the basis for the use of that expression by Peter (2 Pet 3:10) and Paul (1 Thess 5:4-8). And while there are signs that indicate that the Tribulation is underway (e.g., the abomination of desolation at the midpoint) and that it is ending (seeing the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, Matt 24:30), “the coming [parousia] of the Son of Man’ starts *without* a sign” (p. 25, italics his). While many prophetic teachers point to a myriad of things that they believe prove the Lord will return in our generation, if not in the next year or two, Zane was clear to point out that the Lord made the opposite claim. His coming would start when “when uninterrupted human life is continuing as usual, just as it was before the flood” (p. 24). This is an especially remarkable break from tradition since Zane thought it quite likely, in light of the events surrounding Israel, that the Lord would return in his lifetime. Yet Zane distinguished between what was likely and what was certain due to signs.

Another unique teaching in this book is that the Second Coming takes place over the course of seven years. Many Bible teachers see the Rapture and His setting foot on the Mount of Olives to defeat the armies arrayed against Israel essentially as two Second Comings. Zane sees those as two parts of the same coming: “The term for coming [parousia] does not simply refer to an *arrival*. It clearly covers a *span of time*” (p. 25, italics his).

As those of us familiar with his writings have become accustomed, Zane’s discussion of the Parable of the Just and Unjust Servant (Matt 24:45-51) and of the ten virgins (Matt 25:1-13) leaves no important observation left unstated. His discussion is masterful. It is exceeding practical in terms of our daily living until Jesus returns. The notion that Free Grace theology promotes spiritual indolence is laughable for anyone who reads this book (and the other books by Zane Hodges as well).

After challenging the reader to reader to believe in Jesus for everlasting life (p. 63), Hodges writes, “And if you *have* believed, then stay awake and be fully alert. Don’t allow sinful conduct

or spiritual neglect rob you of your readiness to meet Him face to face. You have a splendid promotion ahead of you if you are faithful” (p. 63, italics his).

I highly recommend this book.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Denton, TX

The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing. By Zane C. Hodges. Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994. 128 pp. Paper, \$6.00.

A few years after Jesus’ crucifixion, James wrote his short epistle. In the centuries that have followed, scholar after scholar has commented on that book. In any well-stocked seminary library, there will be dozens and dozens of commentaries on James, taking up several shelves of space. As time passes, the size of the average volume about James increases. Why?

Each new scholarly commentator must prove that he has read all of the scholarly literature. The normal way this is done is by discussing what all of one’s highly-regarded predecessors have said about James. The result is that most of the space in scholarly commentaries is devoted to commenting on what others have said about James. Only a relatively small portion actually wrestles with the text of the epistle.

In his main text, Zane focused upon exposition of the epistle, not upon critiquing other commentators. His endnotes are succinct, demonstrating familiarity with a huge body of secondary literature. Don’t let the size fool you. Good things come in small packages.

What (besides the lack of empty filler) is unique about this volume? For starters, Zane demonstrates that the book has an outline. He shows convincingly that the epistle is not a mere string of pearls (contrary to the opinion of many). James 1:19, he demonstrates, delineates the three sections of the body of James:

Let every man be swift to hear (1:21-2:26), slow to speak (3:1-18), slow to wrath (4:1-5:6). He shows, for example, that in turn the first section has three subsections: *Being swift to hear* involves more than mere hearing (1:21-27); *being swift to hear* involves more than mere morality (2:1-13); *being swift to hear* involves more than mere passive faith (2:14-26).

Why is it important to recognize that James had an outline? It helps us identify interpretations that are contrary to James' point. Zane shows that all three of these subsections urge believers to apply the truth they have believed. Most would agree with him on the first, but errantly disagree on the third. However, the unity of the outline verifies that Zane understands James. Unfortunately, many misconstrue James.

A review of Zane's exposition of one key verse in each of the three subsections will demonstrate his point.

A key verse in the first subpoint is James 1:22: *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*. James challenges these believers to apply Scripture, not just hear it.

A key verse in the second unit is James 2:1: *My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality*. As brethren, these are believers. James does not doubt that they have faith concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, but they are showing inappropriate partiality. Thus, he challenges them to apply Scripture.

A key verse in the third unit is James 2:14: *What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save (deliver) him?* The previous two examples (coming from the first and second subsections of *Be Swift to Hear*) were challenges to believers that they need to apply Scripture.

Believing a Christian-walk truth of Scripture does not deliver one from sin's deadliness. If one believes that stealing is wrong, but holds up a bank anyway, faith did not deliver him from that sin and its consequences. James 2:14 means that believers will only be delivered from the deadliness of personal sin as they apply the truth that they have believed. Such an interpretation perceives each of the three subsections of the *Be Swift to Hear* section as an exhortation to apply the truth that these Christians have believed.

Unfortunately, as Zane shows, too many have wreaked havoc with the argument of James. Most commentaries try to advocate

fruit inspection, as if an absence of works constituted proof that someone had a spurious faith. James would be shocked that people misconstrue his words in this way. Zane's commentary is a breath of fresh air.

If you have only one commentary on James, this should be the one. If you have fifty other commentaries on James, but lack this one; your James section is still incomplete.

John Niemelä

*Researcher, Message of Life Ministries
Teaching Elder, Grace Chapel of Orange County
Orange, CA*

Power to Make War. By Zane C. Hodges. Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1995. 135 pp. Paper, \$8.95.

Those who have read the writings of Zane Hodges have come to expect certain things. One of those things is that Hodges will carefully look at the Scriptures, often pointing out things that the reader may not have noticed before. Another expected aspect of Hodges' writings is that he will present the gospel from a free grace perspective. In *Power to Make War* Hodges does not disappoint on either count.

Power to Make War deals with the coming world ruler that the Bible calls the man of sin. Not surprisingly, Hodges comes from a premillennial and pretribulational perspective. However, his study of the texts that deal with this coming world leader have led him to certain conclusions that most premillennialists do not hold. Hodges takes the view that the King of the North in Daniel 11 is the man of sin Paul refers to in 2 Thessalonians 2. As a result, the man of sin will be from the Middle East, and not Europe.

Another commonly held position that Hodges disagrees with concerns the "prince who is to come" in Daniel 9:26. Many identify this prince with the man of sin. Hodges, however, suggests it refers to Titus who destroyed the Temple in AD 70. He concludes from this that the treaty in the Tribulation will not be between

the man of sin and Israel, but between nations that were part of the Roman Empire (modern Europe) and Israel. These European nations are the “people” of the prince to come.

Hodges also suggests that Rev 17:11-18 gives us certain information about the man of sin. When he receives his mortal wound (Rev 13:3) he is revived by the spirit of a dead ancient Roman emperor. This is similar to demon possession. This turns the man of sin into the Beast with supernatural powers.

In chapter six of the book, Hodges points out that evangelicals use the wrong word to identify the man of sin. Most call him by the title *Antichrist*. In 1 John 2:18 and 4:1, John identifies the “many antichrists” with the “many false prophets.” As a result, Hodges says the Antichrist is not the coming world leader, but the false prophet that serves as the man of sin’s right hand man. He points out that the Bible never calls the coming world leader the Antichrist, but does call him the man of sin and the Beast.

Not only does Hodges cause us to look at the Scriptures more closely in these and other areas, He also presents a very clear gospel. He points out that the eternal security of the believer will also be a reality during the Tribulation period. Revelation 14:9-11 does not mean that believers who take the mark of the Beast will lose their salvation. Believers will not be able to take the mark during the Tribulation because they are eternally secure and God will give them grace to refuse it in every situation. Even during the Tribulation faith in Christ saves.

I also liked how he suggested ways in which the man of sin will be able to deceive the world, such as claiming that God is only the God of the skies, but Satan and the man of sin can defeat Him on the earth at Armageddon. The enemies of Israel made a similar claim in 2 Kings 20:27-28. With this and other examples, Hodges gives the reader vivid pictures of how things might occur during the Tribulation.

Hodges closes the book with a clear free grace presentation of the saving message. He addresses the reader of the book and says that eternal life is offered to all who will believe in Christ for that free gift. He adds that this gift can never be lost.

There is something for everybody in this book. For those who have studied eschatology, it will cause them to look at certain aspects more carefully. The book is written in an easy to read style, so it is also very appropriate for those who are new students

of the subject. With the immense popularity of the *Left Behind* series, I often give *Power to Make War* to unbelievers who are interested in what the Bible says about eschatology because it clearly presents the gospel. There is something for everybody in *Power to Make War*. I highly recommend it.

Lt. Col. (Ret) Ken Yates
Honey Grove, TX

Grace in Eclipse: A Study on Eternal Rewards. Third Edition. By Zane C. Hodges. Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2007. 140 pp. Paper, \$8.95.

Many, this writer included, consider this to be one of the best books written on eternal rewards. This is surely one of Zane's best books in terms of content, style, and readability.

The opening chapters on faith, works, and false professors are truly ground breaking. The Free Grace movement advanced greatly as a result of this discussion.

Most Evangelicals lack a way of understanding the teaching of the Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Chapter 3 covers the sermon clearly and succinctly.

Many stumble over the idea of saving and losing one's psyche, life or soul, by denying oneself, taking up his cross, and following Jesus. Hodges takes the confusion away from this concept in Chapter 4.

Other chapters discuss crux passages like the rich young ruler, being judged "each according to his works," the salvation of Zaccheus (Luke 19:9-10), the Parable of the Minas (Luke 19:11-27), reigning with Christ if we endure (2 Tim 2:11-13), the Biblical concept of meritorious inheritance, the outer darkness in Matthew, and the call to be an overcomer.

This book is a tour de force. Anyone could benefit from reading it: unbelievers, new believers, mature believers, and seasoned saints. This book explains how eternal life can be an absolutely free gift that is conditioned solely on faith in Jesus and yet how God can and will judge everyone according to their works and

will them recompense them accordingly. Entering the kingdom is for all who simply believing in Jesus. Ruling in that kingdom will be reserved for those who endure to the end of their Christian lives.

I first learned these concepts when I took my first course from Zane in the spring of 1980. I felt the Bible come alive for me that semester. If you absorb what he has written in this book, your understanding of the Word of God will likewise take a giant leap forward. But more than that, your love for and desire to please the Lord Jesus Christ will advance greatly.

I recommend this book so highly that I'd say failure to read it and to do so carefully and prayerfully would be a foolish decision. Incorporating the truths of this book into your life will pay eternal dividends.

Bob Wilkin

Editor

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Denton, TX

The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God's Love.

By Zane C. Hodges. Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999. 312 pp. Cloth, \$17.95.

Those familiar with the writings of Zane Hodges have come to expect excellent scholarship combined with unusual insight and practical relevance. Readers of this commentary on the letters of John will find these expectations fully met and more. In this his most recent work, Hodges demonstrates seasoned skill in exegesis and a pastoral heart to apply it. Despite the handling of the technical literature and Greek syntactical/grammatical refinements, the work is reader-friendly for the average Christian. Scripture and subject indexes complement the book. Selective footnotes separate the technical material from the commentary per se, as is the pattern in the GES commentary series. The author has also penned the commentary on James (paper, 128

pp.) in the same series, but the added length of *The Epistles of John* has allowed for a more comprehensive treatment.

The interpretation of the Johannine epistles reflects the author's previous work on the same books in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. While only one or two interpretive changes have been made, the present commentary is much enlarged, allowing the author to interact more with alternative interpretations and especially with issues regarding grace, assurance, and erroneous evangelical perspectives of sanctification.

No one will be surprised that the Hodges/Farstad Greek text (*The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, Thomas Nelson) is followed for exegesis. Since the author has worked extensively on the theories of textual criticism, interaction with these issues appears at pertinent places. Adhering to the majority text theory, Hodges argues for genealogical reconstruction where possible, a point misunderstood by many that oppose a majority text theory. Where genealogical reconstruction is not possible, any reading supported by numerous manuscripts is to be favored over a minority reading. In light of these principles, the originality of 1 John 5:7b-8a (unless otherwise noted, references concern First John) in the Textus Receptus is rejected, even though the New King James Version (the text of choice for the GES series) is used throughout for exposition. If the careful student of this commentary will read the footnotes thoroughly, significant wisdom on textual criticism theory can be gained.

Unlike some scholars, Hodges works with the supposition that First John has a clearly defined literary scheme. An orderly arrangement of an epistle, which was intended from its origin to be read in public, is in line with what is currently known of Greek rhetorical style. Hodges applies this knowledge in analyzing the structure of First John. The epistle opens with a short preface (1:1-4) in which the apostle declares his theme of fellowship with God (1:3). A two-fold introduction follows, describing the fundamental principles of experiencing this fellowship (1:5-2:2) and the primary result—intimacy with (or abiding in) Christ (2:3-11). The 2:12-27 unit reveals the author's specific concerns in writing: the readers need to appreciate their spiritual advancements (2:12-14) while being fully aware of the dangers of the world and the teachings of the antichrists (2:15-27) or

Revisionists (Hodges's label for these false teachers). The main body of the epistle runs from 2:28-4:19 and is marked out by an *inclusio* (the use of the same word[s] at the beginning and end of a unit). The Greek word for "boldness" (*parrēsia*, 2:28 and 4:17) becomes the key mark of the *inclusio*. At the beginning of the body (2:28), John gives a thematic statement for the book: the "abiding" relationship alone is capable of preparing the believer to stand in full confidence ("boldness") and without shame before the Judgment Seat of Christ. In the conclusion of the epistle (4:20-5:17) and its epilogue (5:18-20), the writer offers practical advice regarding an obedient life.

What did the Revisionists teach? Effort is made by some commentators to uncover heretical assertions behind John's instructions in 1:5-2:11. But as Hodges astutely observes, the Revisionists are not directly introduced until 2:18. Indeed, John has not even revealed the occasion for his writing until 2:12ff. Christians who are out of harmony with God can make all of the false statements that occur in 1:5-2:11. (One should not conclude from this that no hints of the antichrists' teachings are to be found in 1:5-2:11). The false teaching, while not a developed form of Gnosticism, could have incorporated Proto-Gnostic beliefs. The clearest heresy of the Revisionists was their denial that Jesus was the Christ who had come in the flesh. Cerinthus, who according to early Christian literature was an heretical leader from Asia Minor and arch-enemy of the apostle John, held that the divine Christ descended on the human Jesus at His baptism, and left just prior to his crucifixion. In Hodges's view, such an historical background nicely fits the mysterious reference in 5:6 to Jesus coming both by water (baptism) and blood (death).

The audience is not only Christian, but is commended for their high spiritual maturity as is substantiated by 2:12-14. Hodges defends the interpretation that all three designations there ("little children," "fathers," "young men") describe the *entire* audience rather than a two-fold or three-fold division of his readership. This conviction is supported by the fact that the two different words translated "little children" in 2:12 (*teknia*) and in 2:13 (*paidia*) are both used unequivocally in the rest of the epistle for all John's readers. Hodges concludes that the readers may well have been the spiritual leaders (i.e., the elders) at the church(es) to which the letter was originally sent.

Expositors and commentators often handle the Johannine letters as if they unfold a series of tests designed to help one ascertain his/her eternal relationship with Christ, i.e., gain assurance of or discover the lack of salvation. In Hodges's opinion, this defective perspective can be traced back to the 1914 publication of Robert Law's study of the epistles. But in stark contrast to the "tests of life" view, the letters are to be understood as tests that determine our intimacy with Christ, i.e. tests of fellowship and abiding in Christ. These epistles, especially First and Second John, must be interpreted in light of the principles Jesus laid down in the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17) written earlier by the same apostle in his Gospel (dated by Hodges, ca. A.D. 48-52).

Under the premise proposed by Law and others, numerous verses have been misread. Hodges counteracts these views time and again, showing that a straightforward reading of the text contradicts any form of assurance by works or sanctification. The well-known section of 2:3-6 has repeatedly been twisted to portray such an idea. First, Hodges justifiably criticizes the theological construct that one can believe in Christ without really knowing that he or she has true faith until fruit is produced. Second, he argues that the concept of knowing God or Christ is quite flexible, being used both of saving knowledge and of experiential knowledge. Finally, drawing from John's own Upper Room Discourse, Hodges shows that Jesus spoke of all the disciples apart from Judas as being born again (John 13:10-11) yet failing to "know" Him (John 14:7-9). This establishes John's intention to present in First John a test to establish our intimacy with Christ by our obedience to His commandments rather than a test to evaluate our salvation.

Traditional treatments of 2:9 ("He who...hates his brother is in darkness") argue that John wished to expose the false Christians in his audience. But this viewpoint evidences a similar error. Hodges comments, "The word *his* is completely unnecessary, and even misleading, if a non-Christian is hating a Christian." Later he reasons, "Once we have looked closely at verses [2:]12-14, it will seem absurd that John could be thought to regard his readers as possible 'false professors' of the Christian faith." At each and every verse where "tests of life" presumably exist, Hodges offers a far superior alternative.

First John 2:19 has been consistently summoned as a proof text for the teaching that defection from the faith (“they went out from us”) renders faith illegitimate (“but they were not of us”). The commentary vitiates this argument. The repeated warnings of the epistle confirm that the Revisionists had definitely *not* departed from the church to which John was writing. Furthermore, the pronouns in First John invariably contrast the antichrists (“they”) over against the apostles (“we/us”) and the Christian readers (“you”). Verse 19 teaches that the Revisionists had left the apostles and the “mother church” at Jerusalem (“they [the antichrists] went out from us [the apostles]”), proving their false doctrines were not derived from the foundational and orthodox apostolic circle (“but they were not of us [apostles]”).

Another case in point is 3:6 and 9 where the present tense is frequently misconstrued as teaching that no true Christian can habitually sin. Hodges insists that this perspective is indefensible. Grammatically, the present tense can have a progressive nuance, but *by itself* cannot be manipulated to suggest habitual activity. Contextually, verses 6 and 9 are clearly absolute in light of such statements as in verse 5, “in Him [Christ] there is no sin.” In keeping with the epistle’s strong polarity between darkness and light, sin and righteousness, verses 6 and 9 detail the absolute inner sinlessness of the person born from God. While all Christians do continue to sin (even according to statements found elsewhere in the epistle; cf. 1:8). The innermost self of every regenerate person cannot and does not sin. The principle is simple: “like begets like.” Sin in any and all forms must find its source in something other than the new, divinely regenerate self.

Hodges sometimes breaks with other popular evangelical interpretations. Like most others who have been influenced by the commentary tradition, I must admit that I generally resist his interpretations at first. But his intractable logic and clear, precise handling of the text eventually convince me that his understanding is correct. His view of the antichrist serves as an illustration. Since the antichrists (2:18) are obviously embodied in the many false prophets (4:1-3), the antichrist himself is best understood as the False Prophet of Revelation (13:9-14), rather than the beast of Revelation 13:1-8, i.e., the “man of sin” (2 Thess 2:3-4).

One area of interpretation I am still processing. In 2:23, John says, “whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either” (i.e., “*does not have the Father or the Son,*” italics added). Hodges takes the reference to apply equally well to a saved or an unsaved person. In his understanding, the concept of “not having the Son [or Father]” here and in 2 John 9 means the absence of divine involvement or cooperation, but not necessarily the absence of eternal life. On the other hand, he takes the similar phrase in 5:12, “he who *does not have the Son* of God does not have the life” (italics added), to compose a formula that equals the absence of eternal life. Hodges may be perfectly right when he argues that the verb “have” is flexible. While some questions still remain for me, I am convinced that Hodges’s explanation is the best option among other alternatives.

The blend of the erudite with the down-to-earth makes this work enjoyable for all levels of readers. For the scholar, there are discussions (in footnotes) on technical matters (e.g., the role of anapohora and cataphora in First John). On the other hand, one can find penetrating wisdom into human nature: “It is a natural response, when people feel their guilt, to attempt to soften the extent of their failure by defining the responsibility away” (p. 212). Sensitivity to the struggling Christian is apparent as well: “Whatever we try to do in love, a sensitive conscience often condemns us for having done too little, or for not making up for past failures, or for any number of things. Our instincts, in our sinful flesh, are so selfish that we may even in the midst of acting in Christian love suspect ourselves of impure or unworthy motives” (p. 164).

It would be a flagrant disservice to merely recommend this commentary. No finer exposition on the Epistles of John can be found in print. If one aspires to a masterful understanding of these challenging NT letters, a choice regale awaits the reader of this volume.

John F. Hart
Professor of Bible
Moody Bible Institute