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BOOK REVIEW

Charles R. Swindoll. *Insights on Revelation*. Swindoll's New Testament Insights. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011. 304 pp. Hbk. ISBN-13: 978-0310284345.

The book of Revelation opens with the pronouncement of blessing upon those who read, hear, and heed the contents of the book (Rev 1:3). Despite this promise of blessing, the prominence of apocalyptic imagery within the book leads many readers to confusion and more questions than answers, causing some to avoid its contents altogether. Charles R. Swindoll, pastor of Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas and chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary, provides his understanding of the texts that have caused Christians throughout the ages much consternation in their study of the New Testament. His *Insights on Revelation*—part of his Swindoll's New Testament Insights series—guides the reader through every chapter of Revelation, aiming to show how these passages apply to life today.

Swindoll appeals to Rev 1:19 for what he refers to as an “inspired outline” of the book. He renders the text to present the idea that John is told to “write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.” Recognizing the divisions of the outline to focus on the past, present, and future, he chronologically divides the work noting the first chapter of the book records the past, the second and third chapters depict the present, and the remaining chapters present the future. Interestingly, Swindoll bases his idea of a three-fold inspired outline on a text that could be rendered as “write the things which you have seen, both the things which are and the things which will take place after these things,” thus eliminating any idea of the text revealing any past events for John's original audience. Though he notes this outline as

“inspired,” he presents the commentary in a different manner. Swindoll divides Revelation into six “acts.” Section one discusses the “Messages of the Majestic Savior” (Rev 1–3). The second section presents “Worship of the Worthy Lamb” (Rev 4–7). Section three notes the “Judgments of the Righteous Redeemer” (Rev 8–10). The fourth section discusses “Rivals of the Sovereign Lord” (Rev 11–13). Section five notes “Real Faith Produces Genuine Humility” (Rev 14–19:10), while the sixth and final section explains that “Real Faith Produces Genuine Patience” (Rev 19:11–22:11).

Recognizing the work as the “revelation of Jesus Christ,” he explains that the six acts into which he divides the book focus on the person of Christ. Though the sections themselves have different titles, he notes they depict Christ as: (1) Majestic Messenger, (2) Worthy Lamb, (3) Righteous Judge, (4) Sovereign Lord, (5) Great Shepherd, and (6) Coming King. The commentary’s emphasis on the person and work of Jesus Christ coincides with the christocentric presentation of the text. Swindoll provides his readers with what he sees as key terms of each major section, giving the Greek term, its transliteration, Strong’s number, and meaning. Along with this information, he includes a short discussion concerning each term.

Despite Revelation’s use of vivid imagery—a significant feature of the apocalyptic genre—Swindoll encourages readers to restrict their use of imagination, preferring to err due to restraint rather than excess. Though he encourages restraint of the imagination, Swindoll himself identifies symbols without substantiating his ideas. An example is when he discusses the woman and the dragon in Revelation 12. Though he identifies the woman as the righteous remnant of Israel, Swindoll overlooks the ancient mythology—which provides helpful information in interpreting the passage—from which John borrows the imagery. Swindoll then proceeds to identify the remainder of the woman’s offspring not as the church but as the tribulation saints. He justifies this approach by explaining that “the emphasis in Revelation is not on what happens to the church during the present age, but what will happen to Israel and Gentile believers during the future tribulation” (p. 172). The lack of justification

for his identification of this image suggests that he might not always follow his own advice.

Swindoll's focus on Israel and the tribulation saints leads to an intriguing feature of his commentary, where he presents three separate resurrections in history. First, he notes the resurrection of the Christians, which, he asserts, will occur at the Rapture. Then he notes that both Old Testament and Tribulation believers will experience their resurrection at the second coming of Christ. He then proceeds to explain that a third resurrection—that of unbelievers—will take place at the end of the millennium, which he views as a literal thousand-year period. In order to expound upon his view of resurrection events, he describes “the first resurrection” (Rev 20:5) as a “multiphase program of resurrection, which began with Christ, will include the church, and . . . will culminate in the resurrection of all the saints” (p. 261). This unique approach to the resurrection combines three temporally distinct resurrection events into what Swindoll presents as one. This presentation demands further explanation, which seems to be lacking from the commentary.

Overall, I found this commentary disappointing. The lack of interaction with scholarly sources led to the presentation of the author's theological position and a lack of acknowledgement of alternative views (except in the case of the millennium). Though each chapter of the commentary contains endnotes, the sources were generally used to support points not pertinent to interpreting the text. The realization that the text of the present volume serves as the consolidation of years of material used in developing sermons on the book of Revelation explains the aforementioned concerns. Though Swindoll is a well-respected and accomplished minister of the gospel, his commentary is only beneficial for those seeking materials that support their already established beliefs.

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