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BOOK REVIEW

John Piper. *Love Your Enemies: Jesus' Love Command in the Synoptic Gospels and the Early Church Paraenesis*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012. xiv + 273 pp. Pbk. ISBN: 9781433534751.

John Piper is best known as an influential pastor and preacher in Reformed Evangelical circles. What is often forgotten, however, is that he is also a recognized scholar and earned a doctorate from a prestigious German school. Before becoming a pastor, Piper was a professional scholar who wrote and published academic articles and books in the field of biblical studies. *Love Your Enemies* was Piper's doctoral dissertation at the University of Munich. The work is focused on Jesus' command for enemy love in the Synoptic Gospels. It deals with the parallels or allusions in the Epistles of the New Testament, and examines the origin and role of the command in the early Christian paraenesis (or, put another way, the early Christian ethic).

Love Your Enemies was first published in 1979 by Cambridge University Press (SNTSMS 38). It was again published in 1991 by Baker. Although it had already been published twice, Crossway Books decided in 2012 that a third publication was needed. I say "third publication" and not "third edition" on purpose. The third publication, arriving over thirty years after the first, offers little new material. Although the back cover of the book claims that the new publication features a "new, extensive introduction," such is really not the case. The "extensive" introduction is six pages long and does not engage any new scholarship or recent academic works on the topic. Nevertheless, the introduction is interesting in that Piper shares his personal journey and experience at the University of Munich.

The book is divided into five sections. Section 1 proposes that there are commonalities between the love command in the

Synoptics and the ethical imperatives found in 1 Thess 5:15, Rom 12:17, and 1 Pet 3:9. Section 2 investigates the origin of the command for enemy love in the New Testament. Here, Piper interacts with primary literature from both Jewish and Hellenistic sources. The third section is an evaluation of the love command within the context of Jesus' ministry and offers some valuable methodological arguments in favor of the validity of systematizing a teaching like this (pp. 66–68). Sections 4 and 5 examine the meaning of the command in the Epistles and Synoptics respectively. The final portion is a succinct conclusion. Three indexes are also provided and offer the reader details about the passages cited, the subject matter considered, and modern authors.

What proves puzzling is the purpose of a third publication. Let us think through the potential audiences. I do not think scholars, for example, would be eager to purchase this book. The quality and technicality of Piper's research is not the issue—he is thorough, but the work itself is nearly forty years old. Dozens, if not hundreds of commentaries, monographs, and journal articles have been written on this topic and related subject matter in the past forty years. The book contributes little to the current conversation in Synoptic studies. Considering the advances in biblical studies within Qumran scholarship, or the Christology of the New Testament, one wonders what subtle or significant differences would arise in retrospect.

What about lay people interested in New Testament studies? Perhaps that is the intended target audience? Again, this is implausible. Piper's book is a doctoral dissertation. As such, it supposes a certain level of mastery of both primary and secondary literature related to Synoptic studies. Furthermore, the work also supposes a workable knowledge of Greek, Hebrew, and German. For example, in the Conclusion the author drives home a significant point by including an eight line quotation in German that is left untranslated (p. 172). Language issues aside, the level of competence required to follow Piper's work is significant. Aspects of New Testament interpretation such as form and source criticism are presupposed as well as the history of interpretation of the Synoptics within scholarly circles. This

book would likely prove difficult for someone to work through without rather extensive training in New Testament interpretation at a graduate level. It is not devotional (although Piper does manage to offer glimpses of his passion for the gospel), and it is not even primarily exegetical; it is critical, and uses a significant portion of space considering methodological questions and issues.

A few aspects of the book are noteworthy. It is interesting to see Piper navigate a field that is driven by a predominantly critical view of Scripture and questions regarding the veracity of the Gospel accounts. At most points he allows for the critical view, but he also offers a conservative and logical alternative that deals with the evidence well. For example, when dealing with the origin of the command for enemy love, Piper avoids the error of assuming that similarities necessarily stem from a common source and are thus undoubtedly literarily dependant. Instead, when dealing with Hellenistic sources and traditions, Piper notes the surprising dissimilarities in approaches to enemy love between them and the New Testament. Piper argues that the early Christian ethical teaching of enemy love must stem from the oral tradition of Jesus' command and that it could not be the sole product of Jewish and Hellenistic influence (p. 64).

Lest my review seem to disparage the author himself, I should note that I in no way fault Piper. Taken for what it is, a nearly forty-year-old doctoral dissertation, the work should be recognized as a solid piece of biblical scholarship. What seems odd, however, is the rationale behind another republishing of this work. This is more a question for the publisher than the author. In all, I fail to see the need for—or the value of—a third publication.

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