

Instructor's Name

Colossians and Philemon

August 26th, 2020

Evaluation of "Philippians, Colossians, & Philemon"

This paper is an evaluation of the Philemon commentary done by Anthony L. Ash. The author approaches this on a verse by verse basis. The author groups verses together as per the outline on page 233, but the author rarely gives an over-all summary (from pages 246 to the end, no summaries are done at all). There are a few occasions where the author will provide a general summary, but even then, it tends to be small (see page 237). In many cases, the author breaks verses down into parts and takes them one part at a time (pages 237 – 239 is one example). This approach is good at getting at details, but it hurts the presentation. Presenting the information one group at a time instead of a verse at a time gives the author more freedom of presentation leading to a better presentation. One minor issue, on page 233, the outline does have a mistake, part II should read verses 8-20 but instead reads verses 18-20.

One of the issues with the book is, at times, the author does not go into enough detail. Below are two examples of when more detail would be good to establish what the author was getting at. In the two cases below, what the author was trying to say was not clear, and more detail would have helped.

1. On page 239, the author says, "it is generally assumed that a church met in Philemon's home." I am not sure here what the other options are? If we are assuming the inerrancy of scripture, is the author saying the church referred to met in one of the other people's homes who were listed?

2. Similarly, on page 246 (verse 11), the author states that Paul might have been hinting that he would like Philemon to return Onesimus to him to help him. I am not sure what is meant by “hinting” here it seems like this is the purpose of this book.

In each of the following two cases, the argument made was not conclusive, and giving more detail would help the reader understand better what the author was arguing.

1. One example of this is the author mentions that due to Col 4:9, 17 the letter to the Colossians was delivered at the same time as the letter to Philemon. This doesn’t appear to necessarily be the case, based solely on Col 4:9, 17.
2. The author implies, on page 238, that Philemon must have known Timothy personally since Paul mentions him at the start of the letter. But what happens with Onesimus would also affect Timothy so Timothy could have put his name on the letter to add more persuasiveness to the argument. If this was the case, Philemon might just have known of Timothy’s reputation and respected it.

The author did do several things well. He did a good job of comparing Paul’s writing in Philemon with other scripture. Some examples of this are on pages 239 – 240 and then also on page 240 (in the summary of version 4 – 7). On pages 243 - 246, the author gave excellent questions to ask. This is a sign of a good teacher, asking the right question to get people thinking more in-depth or spiritually. Some of the questions the author asked here were, “If Philemon had refused, would Paul then have resorted to an apostolic demand?”, and “Paul’s appeal was to show love, but for whom?”. Other examples of this are on page 253 when discussing verse 21. The author gives good insights into the scriptures. One example is on page 237, the author mentions Paul didn’t stress his apostleship in this letter because he didn’t want Philemon to feel he was being ordered to let Onesimus return to him.

To summarize, the author brings insights but lacks in giving details. He generally does a verse by verse commentary throughout the book, which is not my preferred format, but does provide the advantage of getting into a lot of detail about each verse. Unfortunately, this leaves you missing the forest while looking at the trees. As I just mentioned, one of the issues is detail. He has plenty of detail on a verse by verse basis but needs more details when talking about higher level issues (seeing the whole forest).