

James. By Dan G. McCartney. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009, xxi + 335 pp., \$39.99.

Dan G. McCartney, professor of New Testament interpretation at Redeemer Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas, was previously professor of New

Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary for over 25 years. The thesis of this latest addition to the BECNT series is that the book of James is “about true faith as opposed to a false one” (2; cf. xi, 1, 56–57, 63, 267–71). Contra Peter H. Davids, the book’s controlling theme is not the problem of suffering (56–57). “James is interested primarily in practical Christianity. He assumes the content and saving power of the Christian gospel ... but his interest is on how that is worked out in life, and he denounces a kind of faith that does not act accordingly” (3).

James focuses on works, argues McCartney, because faith is so important. The most well known section of the letter, James 2:14–26 (esp. v. 24), superficially appears to contradict Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith alone in passages like Rom 3:28 (154–75; 272–79). But Paul and James use “justification” in different ways because they have “different concerns, different backgrounds, and different audiences with different problems” (154). Paul means “to declare righteous” in a forensic sense, and James refers “either to the eschatological confirmation of righteousness at the last judgment (as in Matt 12:37; Rom 2:13) or to the effectual proving of righteousness.” Douglas J. Moo argues that James means the former, while McCartney argues for the latter, though noting, “It also may be that James implicitly includes both meanings.” For James, to justify means to *vindicate* in the same way that Jesus uses the verb in Luke 7:35: “wisdom is justified by all her children” (276–77). Nevertheless, the main point of James 2:14–26 is clear: “that which distinguishes living faith from dead faith is works of faith” (172).

McCartney’s main conversation partners include commentators Joseph B. Mayor (1897 commentary), James Hardy Ropes (1916, ICC), Martin Dibelius (1975, Hermeneia), Peter H. Davids (1982, NICNT), Luke Timothy Johnson (1995, Anchor Bible), Richard Bauckham (1999), Douglas J. Moo (2000, Pillar NT Commentary), and Patrick J. Hartin (2003, Sacra Pagina). The

format is like other BECNT volumes. James is not conducive to a linear outline, but since it has many logically organized units, the shaded-box-feature—my favorite distinctive of the BECNT series—at the beginning of each passage of Scripture could be extraordinarily useful. The shaded boxes in this volume, however, are disappointing because they do not trace the argument logically and grammatically with the care that other BECNT volumes do (e.g., Thomas R. Schreiner on Romans). McCartney concludes the book with four valuable excurses: “Faith as the Central Concern of James”; “Faith, Works, and Justification in James and Paul”; “James and Wisdom”; and “James and Suffering” (267–300).

McCartney evidences a firm handling of the text as well as the secondary literature, and he writes clearly and thoughtfully. His book joins Moo, Bauckham, George H. Guthrie (2006, revised EBC), and Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell (2008, ZECNT) as one of the volumes that preachers, teachers, and students will consult first and with most profit when studying the book of James.

—Andrew David Naselli
Doctor of Philosophy Candidate
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School