BOOK REVIEW

WALKING IN THE WAY OF LOVE

Reviewed by Rev. Andrew Lanning


With this second volume, covering 1 Corinthians 10–16, Rev. Nathan J. Langerak has completed his commentary on 1 Corinthians. As did the first volume, the second volume expounds almost every verse of Paul’s epistle. Those verses that are not expounded at length are at least mentioned and their thoughts summarized. The result is a comprehensive commentary on 1 Corinthians that will greatly aid the believer who desires to study and understand the Spirit’s message in this epistle.

The highlight of the commentary is its emphasis on true, biblical love. We live in an age that speaks much of love, but that is ignorant of true love and is in reality hateful in its practice of love. Godless men speak of love even as they hate and put away their wives. Society speaks of love even as it shamefully redefines marriage to cater to sodomite lust. Churches speak of love even as they compromise and discard the truth in pursuit of their unholy alliances. The antidote to this ignorant, wicked, and false love is the true love revealed in 1 Corinthians. “Briefly, the theme of the epistle is walking in the way of love. That way of love as the believer is called to confess it and walk in it in his whole life is antithetical to man’s supposed love and his call to other men to walk in the way of false love. So the epistle calls the believer to reject man’s corruption of love, to refuse his call to walk in the way of his corrupt love, and to confess the Spirit’s word about love and heed his admonitions to walk in that way” (ix).

Volume 2 is notable regarding the theme of love because it explains Paul’s doctrine of love from 1 Corinthians 13. Although all of the apostle’s instruction in 1 Corinthians has love at its heart, the apostle treats his theme specifically and at length in 1 Corinthians 13. The commentary captures the apostle’s mind in this chapter not only in the title of the commentary—Walking in the Way of Love—but also in four chapters of the commentary on the excellence, practice, permanence, and greatness of love. “The apostle does not introduce love here as a principle in contrast to what he has written previously, but love is the main subject of the whole epistle. If the church follows the apostle’s instruction regarding all the different subjects addressed in the epistle, the church walks in the excellent way of love. If the church ignores the apostle’s instruction, the church departs from the excellent way of love” (230).

In the course of explaining this theme of love, the commentary gives a powerful and even moving definition of love. If the church of Jesus Christ desires to live in love, let her take this definition of love to heart, which is drawn from the apostle’s instruction in his epistle. “First, love is a virtue of the will. It is a spiritual determination to do good and not evil to the beloved. This determination to do good is the result of the great esteem and affection that one has for the beloved. Second, love is the power to hold the beloved as precious, dear, and valuable, a point of no insignificance, especially if the object of that love is by itself undesirable. Third, this love, which holds the beloved as precious and dear and determines to do good to that beloved one, seeks to establish fellowship and friendship with the beloved. Lovers desire to be together. Love and fellowship are related as cause and effect. They belong together as hand and glove” (232).

Several features of this commentary will make it especially appealing to the Reformed believer. First and foremost, the commentary is faithful to Paul’s epistle. It expounds the apostle’s thought, giving careful attention to the words and phrases of each text. Where appropriate, the original language of the text is noted and explained. One of the chapter titles is even in Greek, using a word that features prominently in that particular text (457). This careful and deliberate exposition of the actual text, including the original language, does not make the commentary inaccessible to the Reformed man, woman, or young person. Quite the contrary. The believer who reads
Walking in the Way of Love will find himself confronted at every turn with the Spirit’s clear, understandable, and even exciting message.

This method of dealing with God’s word makes Walking in the Way of Love doubly profitable for God’s people. Not only is the content of the commentary edifying, but the commentary’s approach to scripture is edifying. The commentary models the truest humility of subjecting all of one’s thinking and understanding to the word of God, letting the word of God speak for itself through its words and phrases, without arrogantly imposing one’s own thinking on the scriptures. The believer who desires to learn how to study the Bible will profit from this commentary’s approach, which is the only appropriate approach for the Reformed child of God.

Second, the commentary is thoroughly doctrinal. It not only uses the language of Reformed theology, such as election, reprobation, resurrection, and the like, but it soundly explains and develops these doctrines in harmony with the Reformed faith. The reason that a commentary on scripture can explain Reformed doctrine is that Reformed doctrine arises from and stands squarely upon the word of God. Walking in the Way of Love demonstrates this. The Reformed believer will find that his theology and his confessions, which are regularly cited in the commentary, have their foundation in God’s own instruction in 1 Corinthians.

Third, the commentary is thoroughly practical. The doctrine of Walking in the Way of Love is not dry. How could it be, since it is the doctrine of God’s word? On the contrary, the doctrine is refreshing and soul-stirring. Apparently, it was a special goal of the author to write a commentary that is practical, as evidenced by the subtitle: A Practical Commentary on 1 Corinthians for the Believer.

Fourth, the commentary is bold. The author does not shy away from topics that may be considered controversial in the Reformed church world. At appropriate times and in harmony with the text under consideration, the commentary exposes error in the service of maintaining the truth. For example, Walking in the Way of Love sharply criticizes the ecumenical movement known as NAPARC, the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council. The commentary identifies NAPARC as part of the “almost continual effort to destroy the truth through unholy alliances that are built in the name of truth and unity but are undertaken at the expense of the truth.” As the reader will see, the boldness of the commentary on such issues is fresh and clarifying. The applications arise from and are in harmony with the instruction of the text being exegeted. Such boldness in the truth, which is humility to the word of God, is good for the church.

The Reformed Free Publishing Association is to be commended for publishing this second volume of Walking in the Way of Love. Even the book’s appearance is attractive, and its layout is pleasing. The publisher has provided God’s people with a commentary that is useful for dipping into occasionally as they prepare for Bible studies, but that is also profitable and edifying to read cover to cover. I highly recommend it to God’s people, who will find as they begin reading it that the commentary recommends itself.

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