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The Justification of the Gentiles: Paul's Letters to the Galatians and Romans

Hendrikus Boers

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Utilizing the tools and resources of a text-linguistic, semiotic method, Emory University professor Hendrikus Boers seeks to open new windows for understanding the apostle Paul based not simply on what Paul says which on the surface appears conflicting of contradictory but on what Paul means. In other words, The primary question in the interpretation of Paul is not whether his statements are true, but what he means by them (from the preface). Boer's innovative approach allows the reader to construct a framework, or macro-structure, for understanding Paul in Romans and Galatians. Some rewards of this approach include finding a new center for reading these works. Thus their central concern is not justification by faith, which through this method is shown not to deserve pride of place in Pauline theology, but the deep significance of the Christ event that secures the promise and blessing of Abraham for Jew and Gentile alike.Hendrikus Boers' work makes an essential contribution to the critical study of Romans and Galatians by elucidating a significant dimension of these epistles which is totally ignored by biblical scholarship. His detailed study of the macrostructures of these epistles and of the semantic deep structures of Paul's thought convincingly shows that Paul does not resolve the tension between the existential and the social, between justification by faith and justification through works of the law; Paul keeps them in tension rather than views them as opposed to each other, in order to reject all the more strongly any claim of religious privilege . . . by the Jews. This anti-Jewish message is conveyed by Paul's letters. When it is ignored, as it traditionally is, this message nevertheless haunts readers and feeds anti-Semitism. When this message is brought to the surface, as Boers does in his remarkable study, it becomes clear that, in the present situation, it is directed against us European-American Christians for our own claims of religious privilege. Daniel Patte, Vanderbilt Universit

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