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Book Report on *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus*

D. A. Carson **structured** his book, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus*, by providing an exposition of several contiguous passages from the Gospel of John 14-17. **Ten chapters** comprise the book, summarized as follows: The Prologue recapitulates *John 13* and sets the stage for the rest of Carson's book by describing the atmosphere in the upper room before Jesus gave his farewell discourse and final prayer; An exposition of *John 14:1-14* reveals several truths that help establish triumphant faith; *John 14:15-24* reveals the coming of the Spirit of Truth between the time of Jesus' departure and ultimate return; *John 14:25-31* reveals three clarifications that Jesus made to his disciples; *John 15:1-16* reveals the spiritual intimacy between Jesus Christ and the believer; *John 15:17-16:4* enunciates counting the cost to be a follower of Christ; *John 16:5-16* reveals two special ministries of the Spirit: convicting the world and completing the revelation of God in Jesus Christ; *John 16:16-33* reveals that Jesus must first go to the cross before the disciples can be strengthened by the Holy Spirit; *John 17:1-19* reveals Jesus praying for himself and for his followers; The last chapter gives an exposition of *John 17:20-26* and reveals Jesus praying for all believers and for the world. **In addition** to discussing these passages in the Gospel of John, the author focuses on "the significance of Jesus' *going away* to his Father via the cross" (19), the rough price to pay to follow Jesus and the special Help provided (115), "the believer's relationship to Christ and the person and work of the Holy Spirit" (Neuman, 4), and the theme of unity in Jesus' prayer (190). Although Carson's work is academically stimulating, his **overall approach** to the Gospel of John is a "popular" devotional that is addressed to the "church at large" (9).

Carson clearly states that he **wrote** *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus* to "encourage many to return again and again to the Scriptures themselves" and to spiritually benefit those who read the short studies (10). Carson's **style** for this book is to refrain from addressing "historical-critical questions" and to focus on a clear exposition of the gospel text (10). Not only does the author refrain from defending the position that the historical Jesus was responsible for the teachings recorded in John 14-17, but he also assumes without defense that the "disciple whom Jesus loved" in John 13:23 is John (10, 13). As a professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Carson writes from a scholarly, well researched, evangelical **theological perspective** while concentrating more on the devotional aspects of Jesus' teaching and final prayer.

Carson specifically views Jesus statements as a reference to deity in John 14:1 when he "exhorts others to trust in him in the same way that they should trust in God" (18). Jesus is rightly described as both God and man (35), possessing the attributes of deity (34), the incarnate Word, the lamb of God who took away the sin of the world (28), the *exclusive* way, truth, and life (31), God's agent in creation (23), good teacher (67), guiltless of sin (83), the mediatorial king, the high priest (24), "the eternal Son [who], for the purposes of the incarnation, abandoned some substantial measure of independence in the use of his divine prerogatives" (37). Carson believes that Jesus will return a second time "to fetch his own" in order to bring them to his Father's house--"evocative of the presence of God" (21,25). Until that time, the Paraclete (or Holy Spirit) enables the triune God to indwell man (51,55). God is a Trinity, revealing Himself as "one substance, but eternally existing in

three persons" (63,65). Carson believes our ultimate goal in life is "pure worship in the unrestricted presence of God ... not the transformation of society" (22). The devil is "the prince of this world" (83), and sin makes us enemies of God, others, and ourselves (76). Carson is of the persuasion that a true believer cannot lose his salvation (96-99) and disciples of Christ are "predestined" to be God's children (184). Although the author believes in the miraculous, he seems to approach miracles in this modern generation skeptically (or maybe wisely) by insisting that "it is always extremely dangerous to identify every manifestation of the supernatural with the divine" (40). Although he believes that God can heal, the author is not convinced that it is God's will to heal all people (110). Success and wealth are not "the inevitable result of victorious Christian living" (118). In reference to Jesus washing his disciples' feet on the night he instituted the Lord's Supper, Carson sees a two-fold purpose: "a moral example (13:15) [and] also a sign of the redemption and purification he was about to accomplish on their behalf (13:10f)" (16).

Overall, I feel that *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus* is an excellent book and has many **strengths**. The book's strongest attribute is that it truly gives the reader a better understanding of the passages of Scripture discussed. In addition to giving clear meaning to obscure verses, the author leads the reader into the necessary background that helps the reader ascertain the true intent behind the words of Scripture. For example, in order to comprehend Jesus' bold statement in John 14:10 concerning his relationship with the Father, the author provides a detailed theological analysis of Jesus' deity and humanity as background information (33-38).

Not only does the author expound on Scripture, but he also exhorts Christians in a practical manner from his reservoir of experience and knowledge. For instance, "we would do well to be less concerned with *how* people come to deep faith, and more concerned *that the faith be true*--true both subjectively (that there be genuine trust and commitment) and objectively (that the object of the faith be true)" (41). Too often there is a tendency to think that everyone has to come to faith in Christ the same way that we did, whether it be through a Christian witness, the Scriptures, a miracle, or some other avenue. With appropriate balance, Carson admonishes Christians to refrain from two extremes regarding Bible study (151). One extreme depreciates the study of the Bible and over emphasizes jubilant praise and worship. The other extreme emphasizes intellectual study and comprehension of the Bible but dismisses joyous praise and worship as pure emotionalism.

Another **positive** aspect about the book is that major themes are well supported by examples and Scripture references. For example, Carson states that the Holy Spirit would come to explain things to the disciples that they did not understand when Jesus first uttered them (72). To support his statement, Carson makes reference to the passage in John chapter 2 where Jesus is misunderstood when he says "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." Carson then quotes John 2:22 to show that after the resurrection the disciples finally came to believe and understand what Jesus was talking about. Although this is a good example, Carson leaves the reader to deduce for himself that it was the Holy Spirit that enabled the disciples to comprehend Jesus words, as was promised.

Another positive example of Carson explaining a topic with balance and Scriptural cross references is when he discusses what John 15:16 means (108-109). Many people take this verse out of context to imply that we can ask the Father anything and receive it if we attach the phrase "in Jesus name" at the end of it. The author is not so quick to accept this extreme teaching. Instead, he mentions that prayer in Jesus name means more: He uses John 15:8 to emphasize that this type of prayer must seek God's glory and uses the cross reference of 1 John 5:14 to emphasize that we have assurance of our requests if we pray "according to his will."

Carson positively provides good support for **some** of his views while preceding it with

differing views. On page 158, Carson briefly explains three different interpretations of John 16:16:

16:16 refers to Jesus' absence during the period from the ascension to the parousia (compare the language in 14:19, 28). Others hold that 16:16 refers to Jesus' personal "going away" bodily and his return by means of the promised Counselor (compare 14:23). Still others hold that the language is purposely ambiguous, and that Jesus' departure is phrased in this unclear fashion in order to suggest that the one departure/return is a type of all of them.

Carson then presents four strong reasons why this verse refers to "Jesus' departure by the death of the cross and his return by resurrection."

However, I feel that the major **weakness** of the book lies in the many important views that are introduced without fairly presenting contrary views nor thoroughly defending the view furnished. In reference to the verb *convicts* in John 16:8, the author admits that "many of the factors on which a proper understanding of this text turns are complex and technical; and this is not the place to go into them" (139). I feel that Carson should have briefly explained some of the main contrary views and then the major rationale for his view that he seems to have documented thoroughly in another book. A second example lies with the poor response to the essential question "can true believers lose their salvation, or not?" (96). The author only mentions one Scripture that possibly supports the view that believers can lose their salvation (though he turns it the other way) while several other Scriptures are used to support the author's contrary view (96-99). Considering that more than half of all Christians believe that they can lose their salvation, I feel that Carson could have been more sensitive in dealing with this controversial topic.

The major **negative** comment that I have about the book is that it has said very little of the practical supernatural affects of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people today. For instance, on pages 71-75, there is an over-emphasis on what the Holy Spirit will accomplish for Jesus' disciples and not for believers in every age. Nothing is mentioned about the supernatural ability of the Holy Spirit to "teach" and "guide" any believer; nor is there any reference to the Spirit's activity that includes illumination or prophecy, and yet a major part of these Scriptures emphasize the role of the coming Holy Spirit. On page 40, the author does not make a positive statement about miracles wrought by the Holy Spirit but only states factually that there are false manifestations in this generation.

I am **impressed** with many things in the book. Foremost, I am impressed by the author's humility in regards to his approach to the book of John. The Gospel of John has been known as a book that a child may read and understand and, at the same time, intrigue and tax the mental prowess of the well-learned or an "elephant." Even though there is probably no doubt in any evangelical's mind that Carson is an "elephant" when it comes to the Gospel of John, Carson humbly views himself as "not an elephant" and has become aware of many places in the Gospel where he is beyond his depth (9). Furthermore, he states that he is "one of Jesus' slowest learners" (32). His humble attitude has **helped me** by providing for me a model and an example to guide me in shaping my attitude as I continue to learn and "master" subjects of the Bible. With humility, the author aptly portrays Jesus' humility in washing his disciples' feet as a model and an example (12,13). I have also been enlightened and humbled by grasping the true intent of the Father and Son in the drama of redemption: "The Son's will is to please his Father, not just to save us; and the Father's will is to have all men honor the Son, not just to forgive us" (85). Too often we over-emphasize that Jesus died because he loved us, and we neglect the fact that he died also because he loved the Father and desired to do his will.

I am also impressed and comforted by the author's strong assurance that the Holy Spirit helps us in our witness (74). As a fellow evangelical whose heart's desire is to win the lost as I share the

gospel and my life-style, I am comforted to know that Matt. 10:19 implies that "the Spirit of God is perfectly able to help [me] remember what [I] need to know" when I am witnessing. As Carson has stressed, this does not mean that we are to neglect growing in the knowledge of the Bible: The Holy Spirit will "remind" us of the things that we have learned. However, I also believe that the Spirit can and will impart supernatural knowledge, wisdom, and understanding to a person who is seeking Him in a time of need.

I strongly **disagree** with the author's view of eternal security. Although Carson admits that there are passages in Scripture that seem to support both sides of the question "can a true believer lose their salvation?", he only presents the Scriptures that seem to support his view that "true faith holds fast to the end" (96-99). After quoting three Scriptures that seem to support his view, the author then mentions that the passage in John 15 seems to indicate the opposite but he then proceeds to show how it "actually" supports his view. I disagree with Carson's interpretation that a branch that is connected to the vine that does not bear fruit is symbolic of a person who appeared to make a decision for Christ but was never "a true believer in the first place" (99). I believe that the word "abide" in John 15:4 implies that the believer is **already in Christ** and that the word connotes a continuation of staying in Christ. Therefore, John 15:6 shows the reality of a believer, who does not continue to abide in Christ, being cut off from his relationship with Jesus. Furthermore, Carson never attempts to discuss the other verses of Scripture that provide a basis for the belief that a believer can lose his salvation, such as Luke 13:14; Col. 1:29; 2 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 6:4-6; and 1 Pet. 1:10.