



Book Reviews

Burridge, Richard A. *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing: 2007. Pp. xxi + 490. Paper, \$35.00.

Richard Burridge's groundbreaking and important work on the Gospels as examples of Greco-Roman biographies continues to yield valuable insight into the interpretation and application of gospel texts. In *Imitating Jesus* Burridge seeks to address what he sees as a deficiency in the area of New Testament ethics and in particular the lack in most ethical treatments of any significant content or application of ethics to current contexts. Burridge takes up these issues by insisting on a Christological focus that stems from the genre of the Gospels themselves. Specifically, any discussion of the ethics of Jesus must begin with the biographical presentations of Jesus as found in the canonical Gospels. Invariably, the presentation of Jesus via biography is in fact a call, on the part of the evangelists, to imitate Jesus.

In chapter 2, Burridge seeks to offer a holistic approach to the person and work of Jesus by suggesting that Jesus should be understood in terms of his deeds and words/activities and preaching. This two-fold approach of "deeds and words" conforms to the generic interests of Greco-Roman biographies. In considering both the deeds (actions) and words (teachings/preaching) of Jesus, a complete picture emerges. Jesus preaches about the "Kingdom of God" and a particular "eschatological reality." His deeds demonstrate him to be a "friend of sinners" who ac-

cepts them prior to their repentance and calls them to imitation of him. Perhaps one of the weaknesses of Burridge's presentation is his treatment of the historical Jesus (pp. 34–39). However, Burridge admits that there is not enough space to devote to this topic and he provides ample references on the state of the discussion.

Chapter 3 follows Burridge's pattern of "excavating" or unearthing the ethics of Jesus by moving from the historical Jesus to the teachings and interpretations of Jesus on the part of Paul. Burridge concedes that Paul's treatment of ethical issues is distinct from that of Jesus as presented in the Gospels. This again highlights the importance of genre as integral to scriptural interpretation. Epistles are not biographies, and so the content and treatment of ethical issues in epistles may in fact be different from ethical presentations in biographies, etc. Burridge poses the question as to the extent to which Paul is a follower of Jesus or a founder of a distinct religious/ethical tradition. Ultimately, Burridge sees Paul following the ethical example set by Jesus by placing a strong emphasis on the centrality of Christology for theology and ethics, as well as Paul's accent on Christ's call to love ("the love command") and his emphasis on the imitation of Christ.

In chapters 4 through 7, Burridge examines the portraits of Jesus as found in the canonical Gospels. For each Gospel, he follows the evangelists' treatment of the following issues as they relate to Jesus: (1) Jesus' treatment of the law and love; (2) the ethical issues present in each Gospel; and (3) imitation of Jesus. The topics of

Christology and eschatology, both being central to the portraits of Jesus presented in the Gospels, are also discussed. Burridge is able to conclude that despite the differences, the four Gospels all conform to the thesis of the Gospels as biographical narratives where Jesus and Christology are central. All four Gospels take up the issue of Jesus' command to love within an inclusive community made up of those who are in the process of accepting the call of Christ while reaching out to others. The emphasis, again, is on the imitation of the person and work and words and deeds of Jesus.

One of the most important aspects of Burridge's presentation is his use of apartheid in South Africa as a test-case for current New Testament ethical approaches as well as his own. Burridge may or may not be completely effective in applying his thesis to that particular historical situation; yet he does explore and recognize the inadequacies and issues with other approaches to such ethical difficulties, as well as his own. Ultimately, Burridge continues to push the discussion forward as to the importance and effectiveness of reading the Gospels as biographies. This emphasis again moves the discussion of Jesus and the Gospels in the direction of Jesus. For Burridge, the Gospels are intended to say something about Jesus and moreover, the imitation of his life (deeds and words) should form the basis for any discussion of Christian ethics.

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The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and