

*Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary for Biblical Preaching and Teaching* (Kerux Commentaries). Adam Copenhaver and Jeffrey D. Arthurs. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Ministry, 2022. 335 pp., \$30.99, hardcover.

The Kerux Commentaries series by Kregel reimagines the once popular commentary concept (cf. *Preacher's Homiletic Commentary*, *Pulpit Commentary*, *Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, et al) of combining exegesis and homiletics with the goal of accurately and faithfully communicating the sacred text. Their website (<https://www.keruxcommentaries.com>) states, "Just as a *kerux* heralded the king, this commentary series will equip you to accurately and authoritatively communicate the message of the divine King." The authors of this Colossians and Philemon volume are Adam Copenhaver and Jeffrey D. Arthurs. A prolific author, Copenhaver (PhD, University of Aberdeen) pastors in Mabton WA, and specializes on the book of Colossians, his most recent contribution *Reconstructing the Historical Background of Paul's Rhetoric in the Letter to the Colossians* (T&T Clark, 2018). Jeffrey D. Arthurs (PhD, Purdue University) is Robinson Chair of Preaching and Communication and Dean at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, S. Hamilton MA. A leading evangelical homiletician, Arthurs has penned such books as *Preaching with Variety* (Kregel, 2007) and most recently *How to Preach Narrative* (Fontes Press, 2022). This commentary set is based on the popular text-driven Big Idea preaching model, and Kerux Commentaries uniquely combine the insights of those trained in biblical interpretation (exegetes) and those trained in preaching (homileticians) allowing the reader to deliver a message that is biblical, cohesive, and dynamic (p. 7, back cover).

The *Preface* contains some general obligatory items, an overview of all preaching passages, and a brief but robust *Introduction to Colossians and Philemon* (pp. 33-49). The authors divide Colossians into thirteen sections and Philemon into three. Each section begins with a general overview of the pericope—*Exegetical Idea*, *Theological Focus*, *Preaching Idea*, and *Preaching Pointers* (it would seem better to place any homiletics after Copenhaver's exegesis and theological synthesis—one would not want to read any sermonic ideas into the exegesis, the sermon should flow from the exegesis not vice-versa, albeit this is a matter of personal preference). Following this is Copenhaver's exegesis and exposition. Each section begins with a *Literary Structure and Theme(s)*, and detailed section outline. The Greek is not transliterated in the exegetical section but is sometimes explained along with syntax in a *Sidebar*. These sidebars are a helpful source for word studies and background, as well as theological, homiletical and applicational insights. Peppered throughout this volume are numerous charts and diagrams that prove beneficial. Finally, this section concludes with the *Theological Focus* of each pericope. Arthurs follows the exegesis with homiletic insight based on Haddon Robinson's Big Idea motif. He provides *Preaching and Teaching Strategies* which include *Exegetical and Theological Synthesis*, *Preaching Idea*, *Contemporary Connections*, and *Creativity in Presentation*. In the *Contemporary Connections* section he asks, *What does it mean? Is it true? and Now what?* Finally, each unit concludes with several thoughtful *Discussion Questions*.

This commentary offers several positives, first it follows conservative evangelical scholarship in affirming Paul as the author of Colossians and Philemon (pp. 33-36). Next, the thematic intersection of Colossians and Philemon touch on peace through Christ and the reconciliation He brings, walking together in Christ, and instructions for both slave and master (pp. 45-49). They convincingly suggest that Philemon is a letter that applies the theology of Colossians (pp. 45, 48). Third, very beneficial are the well-over twenty sidebars providing insight into ancient slavery (cf. pp. 224-238). Fourth, while some might prefer more "real-life"

application, it must be remembered that sound exegesis leading to sound doctrine is at its best “real-life” application which this commentary provides in spades. The final plus is its 4-step methodology. Using Colossians 1:1-8 “Greetings and Thanksgiving” as an example it goes as follows: 1) Copenhaver the exegete explains the essential message for the original listeners or readers (*Exegetical Idea* – Paul thanked God for the Colossians because they had heard and received the gospel message from Epaphras and because the gospel was now actively reaching more people and bearing fruit, even as their hope was producing faith toward Christ and love toward the saints). 2) he unpacks the timeless truth of that message (*Theological Focus* – When people hear and receive the gospel, their lives are transformed as they grow in their faith in Christ, love for one another, and hope for eternity). 3) Arthurs, the homiletician, states that truth in a contemporary way (*Preaching Idea* – Let’s thank God for the good news that changes us). 4) he provides communication insights for conveying the biblical concept (*Preaching Pointers* – everything from finding what good news means, to finding if it truly changes us, and because it does—how does it and what does it look like, and then some creative ways to present the message).

Just a couple concerns. First, some preachers may look at Arthurs’ creativity at times with suspicion (i.e., change clothes like an actor to illustrate Colossians 3:9 (p. 199) or offer film clips for sermons *ad nauseum*). Can the Word of God stand on its own or must it be propped up with “worldly wisdom”? Jim Shaddix asserts that Paul was not like the other preachers in Corinth, “His claims in 1 Corinthians 2:1-2 are a beckon call for pastoral preachers to make the Word of God primary in preaching content as opposed to the wisdom and ways of man” (pp. 9-10, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, Broadman & Holman 2003). Second, an egalitarian viewpoint surfaces in the *Preface* stating, “Then the *preacher* can cross the bridge of relevance to ask how the text can be contextualized in *his* or *her* particular milieu” (italics added p. 9). Then, steering in a complementarian course the author states:

Quite frankly, God has ordered his creation with a hierarchy that require multiple layers of submission from all of his creatures. Neither wives in particular, nor women in general, are unique in this regard. Nevertheless, Paul instructs wives to submit to their husbands “as is fitting in the Lord” ... For Paul this submission to some degree reflects the ordered nature and hierarchical structure of creation (1 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim 2:11-15) (pp. 224).

Then it is argued (unconvincingly) that the command of Colossians 3:18 for, “wives to submit to their husbands does not require actual submission” (p. 224). Still, these minor limitations do not affect the book’s rich content in any way.

Copenhaver and Arthurs blend strong conservative scholarship, through meticulous exegesis, and helpful sermonic materials. This is indeed a set for preachers and teachers—not so technical that one must make themselves use it, yet not so devotional that the conscientious preacher is ashamed that he did. Seldom is a commentary all things to all preachers, but this is a point in the right direction—Copenhaver’s exegesis alone is worth the price of the book, Arthurs’ material is just icing on the cake. While it is unique in that it employs both an expert exegete and an expert homiletician, it is comparable to the *Teach the Text Commentary Series* (Baker) which uses a solitary author for each volume. This work will ably serve the Sunday School class, pulpit or the academy. As we diligently study and preach, Copenhaver and Arthurs help us along the way knowing that “He is also the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.” (Col 1:18).

Tony A. Rogers  
Southside Baptist Church, Bowie, Texas