



# **The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles (Eerdman's Socio-rhetorical Series of Commentaries on the New Testament)**

*Ben Witherington III*

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This volume completes Ben Witherington's contributions to the set of Eerdmans socio-rhetorical commentaries on the New Testament.

In addition to the usual features of these commentaries, Witherington offers an innovative way of looking at Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon as interrelated documents written at different levels of moral discourse. Colossians is first-order moral discourse (the opening gambit), Ephesians is second-order moral discourse (what one says after the opening salvo to the same audience), and Philemon is third-order moral discourse (what one says to a personal friend or intimate). Witherington successfully analyzes these documents as examples of Asiatic rhetoric, explaining the differences in style from earlier Pauline documents. He further shows that Paul is deliberately engaging in the transformation of existing social institutions.

As always, Witherington's work is scholarly and engaging. With detailed "Closer Look" sections, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians* is perfect for the libraries of clergy, biblical scholars, and seminaries.

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## **From Reader Review The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles (Eerdman's Socio-rhetorical Series of Commentaries on the New Testament) for online ebook**

### **Jimmy Reagan says**

Ben Witherington III is easily one of the most prolific commentators of our day. It's hard to believe that he has written major scholarly commentaries on as many books of the New Testament as he has done. As with all his commentaries, he provides what he calls a socio-rhetorical commentary. Here he tackles Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians. When he says he commentates on the Captivity Epistles, you may notice that Philippians is missing. He explains in the Introduction that that omission is only because he had written a commentary on Philippians earlier. If you are familiar with any of his other commentaries, you will be comfortable in this one. As always, he writes well, he loves scholarly interaction, and he's not afraid to chart his own course.

The Introduction runs at less than 40 pages and is an Introduction to the three letters together. This serves to highlight well the commonalities between the three. You won't get far into this book before you see that his conclusion that these letters use an "Asiatic rhetoric" affects all his conclusions. While I find that hard to swallow, I did appreciate several of his conservative conclusions. He crushes the argument that the vocabulary of Ephesians denies it's the possibility of a Pauline authorship. The other major component of the Introduction is the social settings of Paul and his audiences. In that section, he will cover Paul, his imprisonment, some of his companions, the effect of slavery in the Roman world and the philosophies at play in these regions. He provides a nice bibliography as well.

After one long paragraph of Introduction to Philemon he dives into the commentary. It is quite helpful. Colossians gets its own introduction before the commentary as does Ephesians. You won't doubt that he has surveyed most all scholarship in his reading to prepare this commentary. He takes an egalitarian position in his commentary in the requisite passages in Colossians and Ephesians. (In Ephesians, he battled Peter O'Brien in his scholarly interaction and in my opinion lost badly). Still, this commentary is a major contribution.

Witherington's works are a great second commentary to refer to. This one has the quality and sparkle of all his other commentaries that I have seen.

I received this book free from the publisher. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.

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### **Nicholas Quiet says**

A helpful survey of the of the "prison epistles." BW3 maintains Pauline authorship of the disputed epistles and argues for a more egalitarian perspective on the "household" codes. Overall, insightful if a bit short.

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## **Ethan says**

An excellent commentary on Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians, focusing primarily on their social setting and rhetorical devices.

The author convincingly argues and demonstrates how the rhetorical "peculiarities" of these three letters have much to do with the accepted conventions of Asiatic rhetoric; to this end Paul, or perhaps Timothy, writes in good Asiatic rhetoric to persuade the Asians toward faithfulness in Christ. The author provides many great references to classical writers (especially Quintillian) to explain the nature of the rhetoric use and the reasons for it.

To this end the commentary proves extremely useful in understanding how and why Paul/Timothy wrote and communicated as they did. The author is committed to a high view of the inspiration and standing of Scripture. His handling of the household code, especially in Colossians, is excellent, demonstrating with parallel Greco-Roman evidence how the exhortation is not culturally dependent. The handling of discussions regarding slavery in both Philemon and Colossians is also compelling.

Highly recommended for study in these letters.

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## **Matt Crawford says**

The title says it all this is not necessarily a normal commentary but a commentary on the rhetoric and speech style used in these books.

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