

# CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

IVP Academic editorial director Dan Reid sits down with Garwood P. Anderson to talk about his new book, *Paul's New Perspective: Charting A Soteriological Journey*.



**AUTHOR**  
GARWOOD P.  
ANDERSON



**IVP EDITOR**  
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**How would you describe the present state of debate between the traditional Protestant perspective and the new perspective on Paul?**

**ANDERSON:** We could speak of three broad tendencies. Notoriously, there is a settled antipathy, more or less to the contentment of each “side.” (Think, for example, of the Piper-Wright kerfuffle of a few years ago.) Even if there are better versions of that exchange, it has more or less run its course. More promisingly, there are abundant signs of dialogue, moderation, self-correction, and gestures toward rapprochement. I think of Michael Bird’s deliberate efforts in this direction, or the way Francis Watson evolved on these questions, or even the way James Dunn has tweaked his articulations since 1982, to name but a few. Meanwhile, the “apocalyptic school” and now, in his own way, John Barclay are hosting a different conversation, helpfully reminding us that this new-/old-perspective binary is not the only game in town.

**You make the interesting claim that the “new” and “old” perspectives are both right and wrong in certain ways. Is this more than an Anglican impulse to find a *via media*?**

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—GARWOOD P. ANDERSON

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**ANDERSON:** Leave it to us Anglicans to make politeness a theological method! Of course, it is always a proper intuition to eschew false dichotomies, but my argument is not really about some kind of averaging of theological antinomies or keeping everyone *sort of* happy. More than a *via media*, the book proposes a *via*. That’s why we’ve called this a “Soteriological Journey.” As I say, “everyone is ‘right,’ just not at the same time.” Therefore, certain interpretive paradigms are succeeding here and failing there. Since none of the paradigms—“Lutheran,” NPP, “apocalyptic,” or whatever—is able to comprehend the whole of Paul’s soteriological trajectory, each paradigm is left with a bin of uncooperative bits. The book tries to reckon with those leftovers by means of a different paradigm.

**Much hinges on an apostrophe in your book’s title: *Paul’s New Perspective*. Tell us a bit about that apostrophe.**

**ANDERSON:** Well, that’s right. Not only is the title an obvious (mischievous?) play on the more familiar phrase, the apostrophe is something like the thesis of the book. I’m suggesting that *Paul’s* “new” perspective is actually his later soteriological synthesis that,

in my view, the “new perspective on Paul”—for all its other merits—accounts for insufficiently.

**In maintaining that Paul’s soteriological thinking underwent development, you must argue for a certain chronological order of his letters. Do you feel vulnerable here?**

**ANDERSON:** I’ll be the first to admit that the sort of argument advanced in *Paul’s New Perspective* has certain inherent vulnerabilities. But I’m not arguing for an earth-shattering chronology proposal; I’m arguing from a plausible set of

critical judgments. I can hope that readers unpersuaded by this or that critical judgment—that’s inevitable—will exercise a willing suspension of disbelief long enough to see if the thought experiment yields incidental corroboration. In other words, if there is something to the development proposal, maybe that’ll prove sufficient grounds to reopen a historical-critical “cold case.”

**Some readers will suck in their breath at the idea of detecting development in Paul’s thought. Can you give us an elevator pitch for the notion of development?**

**ANDERSON:** First, it’s impossible that Paul’s thinking did not develop. Every intellectually curious person develops—all the more Paul, whose “flexibility” was his calling card! Even if we are rightly skeptical reconstructing alleged development, our wariness should only make us more circumspect, not “development deniers.” And then I concur with E. P. Sanders, who notes that development does not necessarily imply *retraction*. So, as I depict it, rather than an ad hoc and erratic opportunism, Paul’s development is the coherent flowering of his core convictions, planted in the soil of mission exigence.

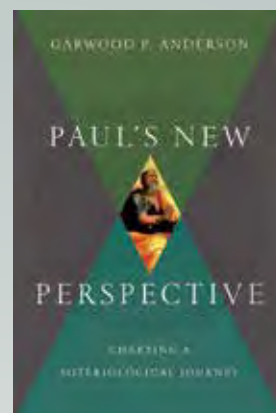
**One feature of your argument is that you put some space between Galatians and Romans. Why is that important?**

**ANDERSON:** That’s right. On the one hand, I join ranks with those persuaded by an early Galatians (the “South Galatian” hypothesis, as we’ve come to call it), which puts a seven- to nine-year space between the two letters. But more important than the passage of time is the palpable difference in the rhetorical occasion and the theological rhetoric of the two letters (otherwise having so much in common). While Galatians fends off an impulse to “Judaize,” Romans censures nearly the opposite: a Gentile indifference to their covenantal roots (e.g., Romans 11). Thus, Galatians is arguing for justification apart from works of the law while Romans is arguing from the justification of the “ungodly” apart from works toward the reintegration of a divided community.

**You maintain that justification has been asked to bear more weight than Paul intended. Can you comment on that?**

**ANDERSON:** I don’t imagine that justification would be the storm-center it is in Pauline studies were it not for the weight the “doctrine” of the same name came to bear in Christian theology. Witness the debate as to whether justification is the “center” of Paul’s theology. That’s a proxy for a related but different theological debate. But to put the question that

way consigns us to unhelpful alternatives: either a hyperbolic “yes” or an overcorrecting “no.” If instead we inquire of the purpose of the justification metaphor for Paul’s developing pastoral concerns, we see its utility as a description of the believer’s proleptic acquittal by participation in the Messiah’s vindication. It shows Jew and Gentile to be one with each other (Galatians) and alienated and reconciled to God on the same terms (Romans). But the temptation to equate justification with “salvation” without remainder must be resisted.



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**Your book reminds me that grappling with Paul never seems to grow old. Was there a particular corner you turned in this investigation that gave you an Aha! moment?**

**ANDERSON:** I was working up a lecture for a seminar on Pauline soteriology when it seemed to me I was finding patterns and distinctions in Paul’s soteriological vocabulary and in the shape of his arguments that were consequential. Are “works of the law” and “works” interchangeable expressions, or is there a distinction? Why is “justification” concentrated almost exclusively in

Galatians and Romans? When and why does “reconciliation” emerge as a theme? What about “grace”? And so on. Then it seemed to me that not only were each of these observations individually interesting, I *thought* I saw correlating patterns. I ran the lecture up the flagpole, and one of my (obviously brighter!) students told me that everything finally made sense and he thought it should be a book. Naturally he earned an “A.”

**Finally, for readers deeply entrenched in either the NPP or TPP, what would you like them to take away from your book?**

**ANDERSON:** I love this question, because those readers (“some of my best friends . . .”) have been in my mind since the beginning. For starters, it would be very satisfying if the book helped enthusiasts for one view or the other read the alternative in a sympathetic way. Even better if they were to perceive that their preferred way of engaging Paul succeeds only by highlighting certain dynamics and minimizing others. Then, of course, if they were convinced of my thesis and “abolished the dividing wall of hostility” as a result . . . well, a guy can dream.