



Garwood P. Anderson, author of *Paul's New Perspective: Charting a Soteriological Journey*

"Garwood Anderson's *Paul's New Perspective* should be on the top of everyone's reading list. It is clear, fair, and sees the merits of both sides of the argument. It does not caricature anyone's views and it comes to sane, sober, and convincing conclusions time after time. Highly recommended."

— Ben Witherington III,
Asbury Theological Seminary,
author of *The Paul Quest* and
New Testament Theology and Ethics

Did Paul's Theology Change Over Time?

Paul's New Perspective is a penetrating and energetic analysis of Pauline soteriology. In this book, Garwood P. Anderson forges a new path between the "old" and "new" perspectives on Paul by arguing for a theory that demonstrates development in Paul's theology. After recounting the issues of the opposing "old" and "new" perspectives, Anderson concludes that "both 'camps' are right, but not all the time." And with that teaser, he rolls up his exegetical sleeves and proceeds to unfold a new proposal for overcoming the impasse in this debate.

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

Garwood P. 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.

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 of 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.

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.

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?

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

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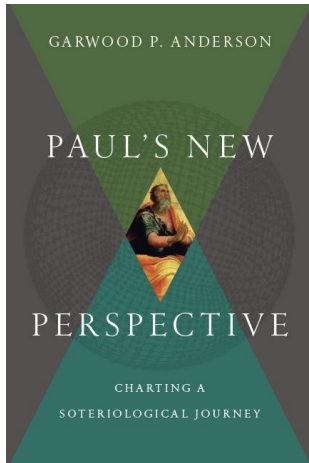


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some kind of averaging of theological antinomies or keeping everyone *sort of* happy. More than a *via media*, the book proposes a *via*. That's why we've called this a "soteriological journey." As I say, everyone is "right," just not at the same time. Therefore, certain interpretive paradigms are succeeding here and failing there. Since none of the paradigms — Lutheran, NPP, apocalyptic, or whatever — are 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.

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.

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.

What would you like readers in either the NPP or TPP 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.