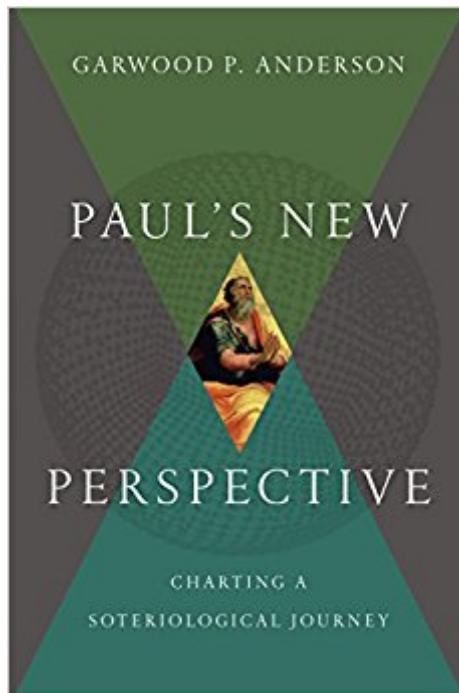




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# **Paul's New Perspective: Charting A Soteriological Journey**



## Synopsis

The debate between proponents of the old and new perspectives on Paul has been followed closely over the years, consolidating allegiances on either side. But the debate has now reached a stalemate, with defectors turning to apocalyptic and other solutions. Garwood Anderson recounts the issues and 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 deadlock. But in a field crowded with opinions, could anything new emerge? Anderson's interaction with Paul and his interpreters is at the highest level, and his penetrating and energetic analysis captures attention. What if Paul's own theological perspective was contextually formed and coherently developed over time? Have we asked justification to carry a burden it was never meant to bear? Would fresh eyes and a proper sequencing of Paul's letters reveal Paul's own new perspective? Might we turn a corner and find a bold and invigorating panorama of Pauline soteriology? This is a Pauline study worthy of its great theme, and one that will infuse new energy into the quest for understanding Paul's mind and letters.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Garwood Anderson has mastered the literature produced by the traditional, new, and post-new perspectives on Paul. Rightly casting his lot with recent proponents of a both-and rather than an either-or approach, Anderson offers a via media with a developmental twist: an evolving soteriology as the thirteen letters were penned. Readers of this perceptive critique and set of creative

proposals, presented with rhetorical dexterity, will be enlightened and challenged to rethink a range of topics in Pauline soteriology." (Michael J. Gorman, Raymond E. Brown Chair in Biblical Studies and Theology, St. Mary's Seminary & University, Baltimore)"In the labyrinth of interminable discussions about Paul and his views on the interrelated matters of salvation, the law, covenant, grace, faith, Judaism, and early Christianity, we finally, finally have a fair and balanced guide through the new and old perspective maze. 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, Amos Professor of New Testament for Doctoral Studies, Asbury Theological Seminary, Scotland, author of *The Paul Quest and New Testament Theology and Ethics*)"Casting scholarly timidity to the wind, Garwood Anderson's engaging book takes up the question of the 'center' of Paul's theologyâ and whether Paul discovered and articulated it from the beginning of his ministry or developed it over the course of many years and letters. It is normal to find books that discuss Pauline chronology, the literary and theological shape of particular passages or the texts' theological 'afterlife' in the history of the church. It is rare to find books that do all these things at onceâ and do them with such verve and sophistication that one is reminded yet again why wrestling with Paul is so invigorating." (Wesley Hill, assistant professor of biblical studies, Trinity School for Ministry, author of *Paul and the Trinity*)"Garwood Anderson's study of Paul's soteriology charts a bold course over the troubled seas of Pauline debate and among darkened clouds of theological dispute. He successfully shows that there is a way forward in the disputes about 'justification' and 'ethnicity'â a way beyond the entrenched dogmatism and intractable polarities that have emerged. Anderson brings us to a peaceful oasis where the treasures of the old and the freshness of the new come together. Among his insights are the multidimensional nature of union with Christ and the overlooked significance of Paul's sacramental realism for informing this discussion. This book is not the final word in the debate, but it is a good wordâ one that hopefully moves the discussion about Paul, justification and the New Perspectives along." (Michael F. Bird, lecturer in theology, Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia)

Garwood P. Anderson (PhD, Marquette University) is professor of New Testament and Greek at Nashotah House Theological Seminary. He formerly taught at Asbury Theological Seminary, and was area and division director for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA in Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. He has also taught as a visiting professor at Bethel Theological Seminary,

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Reformed Theological Seminary, and the West African Theological Seminary in Lagos, Nigeria.

An incisive look at Paul combined with an expectation of further discovery about one of the most ardent advocates of Christianity.

This book is amazing. It begins with an introduction and summary of the main 'New Perspective on Paul' (NPP) theses and counter-theses (emerging from those maintaining the "Traditional" (Reformed) perspective on Paul "TPP") that apprises the non-specialist of what has been happening "in-house" in Paul studies over the past 40 years. Anderson's clarity of expression and sensitivity to narrative will be as enlightening to the non-NT-specialist as it will be useful to the specialist. Anderson then offers a most intriguing argument, that rescues the present stale-mate between NPP and TPP schools (e.g. Wright vs. Piper) -- that the NPP better accounts for the earlier claims of Paul (Galatians, Romans), but the TPP better accounts for the later writings (Ephesians, the Pastorals). And that this makes sense if we understand Paul's thought as \*developing\*, from practical exigency to wider theology. That what he first is led to claim about "works of the law" (in Romans), is widened to include all "works" (so, Ephesians). He builds this argument on a robust defense of a 12 letter Pauline corpus (rather than the customary "critical" 7), and with it slices the Gordian knot of the past several decades. It's a masterful work, and will hopefully become the touchstone for all Paul discussions from here on out. It also happens to be incredibly gripping to read, full of both academic charm and a pastoral sensitivity toward students of the Word of God. Biblical criticism at it's BEST.

In recent years, a growing number of Pauline scholars have sought to push beyond the bitter debates that have taken place over the last few decades between proponents of the so-called old and new perspectives on Paul. In *Paul's New Perspective*, Garwood P. Anderson makes a substantial contribution to this quest for a more nuanced view by introducing a relatively unexplored proposal to the conversation: an ambitious developmental approach to Paul's soteriology. In Anderson's eyes, Paul's letters show evidence of both a contextually determined diversity and also a coherent development through time (p.7). This conviction enables him to say that "both camps are right, but not all the time" (p.5). He begins *Paul's New Perspective* with a survey of the sprawling landscape of recent books on Paul. Anderson's impressive familiarity with the relevant works of well-known "new perspective on Paul" (NPP) luminaries like Sanders, Dunn,

and Wright is evident. He also introduces readers to the more recent contributions of other scholars like Bird, Gorman, and Barclay. To call Anderson "well-read" seems like a real understatement, and his nuanced engagement with an intimidatingly large pile of Pauline literature is both helpful and at times illuminating. Bridging Perspectives on Paul Anderson highlights a number of themes raised by the NPP that he thinks constitute real, genuine advancements in our understanding of Paul, and he has no problem praising the NPP for these accomplishments. Nevertheless, Anderson also subjects the movement to more skeptical questions and qualifications. For example, he praises the NPP for rightly emphasizing how Paul "leveraged justification toward the reconciliation of peoples into one Abrahamic family," but he also criticizes NPP theologians for (at times) paying insufficient attention to the vertical dimension of justification (pp.382-383). I think Anderson should be applauded for his willingness to embrace and work with the strengths of the NPP, especially since he positions himself as one of its admiring critics. Anderson's overarching thesis, broadly speaking, is that while the NPP gives a compelling reading of the early Pauline epistles (especially Galatians), its interpretation of Paul becomes progressively less persuasive in the Apostle's later letters (p.384). Meanwhile, the "traditional Protestant perspective" (TPP) "his term for what many call the 'old perspective'" fails to be consistently persuasive in its readings of the early epistles, but displays a more satisfactory understanding of Paul's soteriology in his later letters. Consequently, Anderson believes the "besetting fault" of NPP scholars to be their tendency to read Romans through the lens of their interpretation of Galatians, while he thinks TPP adherents typically err by reading Romans according to their understanding of Ephesians (p.84). In terms of the authorship and dating of the thirteen letters traditionally attributed to Paul, Anderson is persuaded by the South Galatians hypothesis, which causes him to see Galatians as the Apostle's earliest extant letter, written around AD 49. He sides with more conventional scholarship in dating Romans to AD 56-58 (p.164). Less conventionally, Anderson accepts authentic Pauline scholarship for all of the "disputed epistles." It should be noted that this is something of a minority position in some of the more critical quarters of Pauline scholarship, especially with the pastoral epistles. Based on these methodological conclusions, Anderson develops his argument regarding the maturing trajectory of Paul's soteriology, working with a thirteen-letter Pauline corpus that dates "from AD 49 to the mid-60s" (p.166). A Soteriological Journey To flesh out the defining characteristics of his proposal, Anderson delves into a few "markers of the itinerary," which for him demonstrate a traceable pattern of development in Paul's soteriology over the course of his letters. First, he looks at the topic

of *works* and *works of the law*. Anderson disagrees with the conventional interpretations of both the NPP and TPP because they both consider the two terms to be interchangeable, while he is convinced they are not. NPP scholars generally read *works* as a shorthand for *works of the law*, by which they primarily mean practices related to Judaism's social boundaries (p.381). TPP proponents, on the other hand, see *works of the law* as a phrase that functions as a synecdoche for *works* in general, understood as *esoteriologically deficient human effort* (p.381). Distancing himself with both of these positions, Anderson maintains that *works*, used absolutely, marks an abstracting and generalizing development in Paul's soteriology, from a remonstrance against Jewish particularity to a more settled antithesis between works and grace (pp.381-382). This settled antithesis leads to a similar kind of argument regarding the development of *grace* in Paul's letters. In this area, he does well to engage extensively (and mostly appreciatively) with John Barclay's excellent recent work, *Paul and the Gift*. Anderson suggests that this incongruous grace of God takes its very particular shape as the antithesis of human accomplishment increasingly throughout the Pauline corpus specifically in Romans and patently thereafter (p.382).

**Justification in the Context of Pauline Soteriology**

The final marker of the itinerary that Anderson examines is "Paul's evolving language for describing salvation itself" which was actually the most interesting and thought-provoking for me. Looking at the Pauline corpus as a whole, Anderson notes that justification language is found most often in the context of discussions related to the common membership of Jews and Gentiles in the one family of God, especially in Galatians and Romans (pp.382-384). However, in the later letters, Anderson argues that other soteriological idioms like salvation and reconciliation come to predominate. Hence, he thinks these later letters give evidence of a Pauline soteriology that becomes progressively more abstract and expansive. He asserts that this mature version of Paul's soteriology focuses: "[N]ot merely on the drawing of Jew and Gentile into the family of Abraham but the reconciliation of humanity to God and the cosmos to its Creator" and not only the reconciliation of humanity to God but the transformation in Christ of the Adamic race into bearers once again of the divine glory. (p.14)

In general, Anderson believes that some scholars seek to make justification do too much heavy lifting, forgetting that Paul's soteriology reaches extensively and intensively well beyond the bounds of justification (p.384). This is not to say that Anderson sides with people like Albert Schweitzer, who once described justification as being a mere *subsidiary*

crater in Pauline theology (p.10). Rather, he's emphasizing the need for justification to be seen as part of a larger, more complex vision of reconciliation and salvation (pp.388-391). In regards to this part of his thesis, I'm in agreement, but I do wonder how much this conclusion can be described as being similar to the TPP's reading of Paul. This may be an area where Anderson's approach to Paul is relatively unique. Interestingly, Anderson believes both that participatory union with Christ is the core thread of Pauline soteriology and that justification itself should nevertheless be regarded as broadly "if not strictly forensic in nature (p.391). Hence, he calls justification the forensic dimension of Pauline soteriology. It's interesting to place this dimension of Anderson's work in conversation with the writings of Michael Gorman, another Pauline scholar who highlights the theme of participation in Christ. Though they both regard union with Christ as a central thread, Anderson parts from Gorman by understanding reconciliation to be a fruit of justification rather than a part of it (p.327). Gorman, on the other hand, writes that, "The terms justification and reconciliation are essentially synonymous for Paul" (Inhabiting the Cruciform God, p.56). It seems to me that Gorman bases this conclusion on a differing reading of Romans 5 and by placing more emphasis on the covenantal dimension of justification, among other things. The important result of this analysis, for our purposes, is that both agree that reconciliation is a relational metaphor, but differ on how that impacts the nature of justification. By viewing reconciliation as part of justification, it is obviously easier for Gorman to conclude that justification itself possesses a significant participatory dimension. On my part, I'm still more sympathetic to Gorman's arguments, but Anderson's work gives thoughtful readers of Paul much to ponder. I do think it's worth mentioning that Anderson at one point does describe the forensic dimension of salvation, justification itself as being incomprehensible apart from the believer's participation in Christ (p.138). So in the end, maybe Anderson and I aren't actually so far apart. Finally, he elegantly articulates something important about the centrality of union with Christ near the book's end: The constant in Pauline soteriology, transcending the undisputed and disputed letters, the apologetic and constructive, the exigent and the measured, is that salvation "acquittal and vindication, incorporation and transformation" is wrought in the union of humankind with the crucified and resurrected Christ by faith, effected in sacrament, whereby his atonement and victory are made ours. For Paul, salvation is through Christ, because it is in Christ. (pp.391-392) Regardless of disagreements I may have about other aspects of Anderson's proposal, I think this statement hits the nail on the head.

summarize, Anderson proposes a developmental thesis in Paul's New Perspective. He sets out an argument that seeks to demonstrate that the new perspective on Paul is Paul's oldest perspective and the old perspective describes what would become (more or less) Paul's settled new perspective (p.379). By development, he means traceable change that happens over time, resulting in a trajectory (p.157). I'm not the only one to make this observation, but one of the vulnerabilities of Anderson's ambitious proposal is that it depends (maybe more than he would like to admit) on a set of presuppositions regarding the dating and authenticity of Paul's letters. If one doesn't share his views on these methodological issues, his thesis becomes less plausible. To give one example of this, if the South Galatian hypothesis was demonstrated conclusively to be wrong, resulting in a noticeably later dating of Galatians, then that would make his developmental hypothesis at least somewhat less likely. I don't think this is necessarily a fatal flaw in Anderson's proposal, but it's obviously worth keeping in mind. I also can't resist adding that one notices an absence of serious engagement with the apocalyptic school of Pauline interpretation, though that may be beyond the scope of this work. Anderson believes that the TPP gives a better reading of Paul's later letters, and describes himself as almost but not quite convinced by the NPP (p.56). I feel the same way about his overall proposal. It's very thorough, ambitious, and theologically rich, and I appreciate his emphasis on union with Christ as a central category for Pauline soteriology. I also am impressed with his evenhandedness and charity in how he engages with differing perspectives. Nevertheless, I remain somewhat more persuaded by the NPP than he is, for whatever it's worth. Paul's New Perspective truly is a fresh proposal for getting beyond the debates between the NPP and TPP, and it hopefully will at the very least cause other scholars to look afresh at the possibility for development in Paul's theology, even if they hesitate follow all the details of Anderson's proposal. This is definitely a book well-worth reading with much to appreciate, regardless of which Pauline camp you ultimately favor.\*Disclosure: I received this book free from IVP Academic for review purposes. The opinions I have expressed are my own, and I was not required to write a positive review.

Those who walk down the middle of the road, it is said, are likely to get run over by both sides. That is where Garwood Anderson has chosen to daringly place himself in his Paul's New Perspective. In the current debate on justification between those who hold to the Traditional Protestant Perspective (TPP) and the New Perspective on Paul (NPP), Anderson charts a third way. Generally adherents of



the TPP see justification as the essence of Paul's theology concerning how humans get right with or are reconciled to God ("get saved"). It becomes the central, driving metaphor regarding God's work in Christ around which all other terms orbit. For many interpreters, "Justification is like a person with three full-time jobs surrounded on every side by the underemployed" (384). The NPP offers a helpful corrective to, on the one hand, unnecessarily narrowing justification to individualistic concerns. They see justification as covenantal membership. On the other hand, the NPP views the Christ event as being even more expansive than justification, while including that. Paul's much larger vision is that God's purpose is to bring all of creation, both seen and unseen, together in Christ. What does Anderson think of all this? That both perspectives are right--just not at the same time. Both see true aspects of Paul's thinking, but Paul emphasized them at different times as his own thinking developed. Both the TPP and the NPP tend to see all of Paul's letters (or at least the undisputed ones) as having been written in a very short span. Therefore, they are often studied as virtually a single work. Anderson contends that the letters were written over a longer span and show development in Paul's thinking, though without changing his mind. Paul began with a specific idea that Torah obedience ("works of the law") is not able to reconcile us to God and later expanded this idea to cover any kind of merit. As Anderson argues, "Justification is the language of choice when at stake is the place of Gentiles in the covenant or the relationship of Jews and Gentiles to each other" (284). When his concern broadens, so does his vocabulary. In Paul's later writings, for example, he uses salvation to describe ultimate deliverance from wrath to come and a restoration that is also forthcoming. Salvation, the larger term, includes justification (308). In addition, Anderson contends, Galatians is not a brief summary of Romans, despite having certain features in common. It was written significantly earlier with Romans showing important developments in his thinking. To summarize: "The thesis of this study is that the [NPP] is Paul's oldest perspective and that the 'old' perspective [TPP] describes what would become (more or less) Paul's settled 'new' perspective (p. 379). One of the values of the book is the very clear summary of the TPP/NPP debate which has been going on in academic circles for at least fifty years, some aspects of which have recently reached into the congregational level. Anderson then gets to his own constructive proposal in the second half of the book. For students and others ready to go deeper, here is a worthwhile resource. Another virtue is Anderson's attention to style, making the book a pleasure to read throughout. Even his footnotes benefit from this, as when he says: "I realize that I risk diving into deeper hermeneutical water here than my swimming ability justifies" (385). Speaking of risk, is Anderson's project worth the threat of getting hit by traffic going both ways? I think it is.

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