

Book Review

Scot McKnight and B. J. Oropeza, eds.

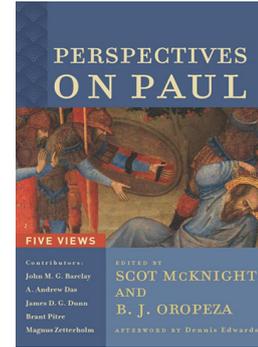
Perspectives on Paul: Five Views.

Contributors: John M. G. Barclay, A. Andrew Das,
James D. G. Dunn, Brant Pitre, and Magnus Zetterholm.

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2020.

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In their new book, *Perspectives on Paul: Five views*, Scot McKnight and B. J. Oropeza bring their scholarly expertise to the Pauline discussion in an essay/response format through five theological experts' contributions. Scot McKnight currently holds the Julius R. Mantey Chair of New Testament at Northern Seminary. He is a well-established authority on the New Testament, the historicity of Jesus, and early Christianity. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Nottingham. B. J. Oropeza is currently a professor of Biblical Studies at Azusa Pacific University. He is an internationally published author, including contributions in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation* and *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Theology*. Oropeza received his Ph.D. from Durham University.

The book begins with a summarization of E. P. Sanders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Fortress Press, June 1977) and *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Fortress Press, June 1983), featuring his six central "tenets" crucial to maintaining "New Testament scholarship" (3-6). Followed by James D. G. Dunn and N. T. Wright's perspectives noted in their respective publications regarding NPP (New Perspective

on Paul) (6-11). The chapter closes with a brief discourse covering "[r]esponses to the New Perspective" and a few "Post-New Perspectives" revealing a continual academic interest in Pauline scholarship (12-22).

McKnight and Oropeza have included a well-laid out abbreviations list (xi), separate indexes for author (267), scripture (273), and subject (279) referencing, as well as extensive footnotes. The short preface (ix) gives the reader insight into the author's Pauline background and the "decisive impetus" for the subsequent perspectives included in each of the following chapters (ix).¹ The authors state, "The book sought to demolish the typical stereotype of Judaism at work in much scholarship, but at the same time, and only in tentative ways, it opened the door to fresh analysis of Paul in light of Sanders's reconstruction of Judaism" (ix). Hence, the authors seek to bring to the reader's remembrance the theological and historical importance of Paul's epistles (x).

Each of the ensuing five chapters begins with a compelling essay from one of the contributors in their expert perspective, followed by responses from the remaining four contributors. Brant Pitre's expertise is the Roman Catholic perspective in Chapter One (25). A. Andrew

1 McKnight and Oropeza "decisive impetus" stems from E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977).

Das follows with the traditional Protestant view on Paul in Chapter Two (83). James D. G. Dunn begins Chapter Three with the New Perspective (133). In Chapter Four, Magnus Zetterholm shares his perspective of Judaism and Paul (171). The final chapter (five), written by John M. Barclay, discusses, “[t]he gift perspective” (219). Although each chapter engages in its trajectory that is befitting for that writer’s perspective, the main issues can be cautiously summarized as justification, salvation, and grace. The chapter closes with a final reply from the original presenter.

Brant Pitre has the distinction of being the first to offer his perspective on Paul and justification through the lens of Catholicism. Pitre states that his essay will “show that Sanders’s interpretation of Paul is in fact very close to Catholic soteriology on several key points” (26). He admits his essay is not exhaustive due to space. Yet, he attempts to shed light on Catholic soteriology with three objectives: (1) focusing on scriptures that are crucial for “Catholic exegesis” (26); (2) synopsis of how those scriptures would have been “interpreted in the Catholic tradition” (26); (3) how Paul and E. P. Sanders complement one another (27). Pitre covers a lot of doctrinal and historical ground in his short essay, which is an excellent springboard for the rest of the book.

The remainder of the book covers traditional (Protestant) perspectives; therefore, having been armed with Catholic soteriology from the outset, the reader will glean more effectively through the inherent side-by-side comparison. For example, the reader can summarize that the Catholic perspective stresses justification through “the remission of sins and a real participation” in Christ’s work (27), but the traditional Protestant would state that “righteousness is apart from human activity

or efforts” (106). Comparatively, the New Perspective shows the reader that justification is a mix of faith and the Holy Spirit’s gift (144). The book does not offer a definitive soteriological answer or new advancement in the discussion of Pauline theology. Instead, the book presents a mixture of theological opinions and responses based on a forty-year-old publication by E. P. Sanders.

Barclay’s essay, “The Gift Perspective on Paul,” takes the reader on an exegetical journey “tracing the ways in which Paul’s language of gift and the incongruity of the Christ-gift shape Paul’s soteriology, his scriptural hermeneutics, his ecclesiology, his ethics, and much else besides” (219). His insight into the apostle Paul’s gift of grace theology and the various “vocabularies” that constitute the work of Christ help to delineate ambiguities in Christian terminology (220). Barclay traces the meanings, usages, and historical importance of grace as a “multifaceted concept, capable of perfection in a variety of ways” in the crux of how Paul and the Jews understood grace (225). Barclay effectively shows the importance of studying Christian soteriological grammar in a way that leaves the reader with essential study themes to further glean from Paul’s theology of grace.

Dennis Edwards writes an exceptional “Afterword” (259-266). He points to the fact that he will not speak into the aforementioned essays; rather, he aims to “urge pastors, teachers, and all thoughtful Christians—and especially leaders—to continue exploring academic discussions concerning the apostle Paul’s theology” (259). Edward continues his discourse by showing that “Pauline theology” is more than a few simple issues and rightfully suggests an excellent benefit for pastors and church leaders in further excogitating the apostle Paul’s writing (259). Edwards includes a section, “Doing Our

Best with Paul,” discussing the biblical principle of “doing our best” to understand and practice the “ideas” found in Paul’s writings (262-264). His insight is a beautiful reminder of the importance of studying God’s word.

Academically the book is pertinent to theology students, especially those specializing in New Testament studies or Pauline literature. The title can be moderately misleading as a potential reader may presuppose that the book will offer new insight into the apostle Paul. Yet, the book is a response to E. P. Sanders, which McKnight and Oropeza state in the text. Some readers may find it advantageous to read Sanders’s publications, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion and Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, prior to delving into this book. The excessive amount of footnotes may be daunting, but the reader can glean from the text without investigating each footnote. *Perspectives on Paul: Five Views* is worth the read, especially for the life-long student of Pauline literature.

