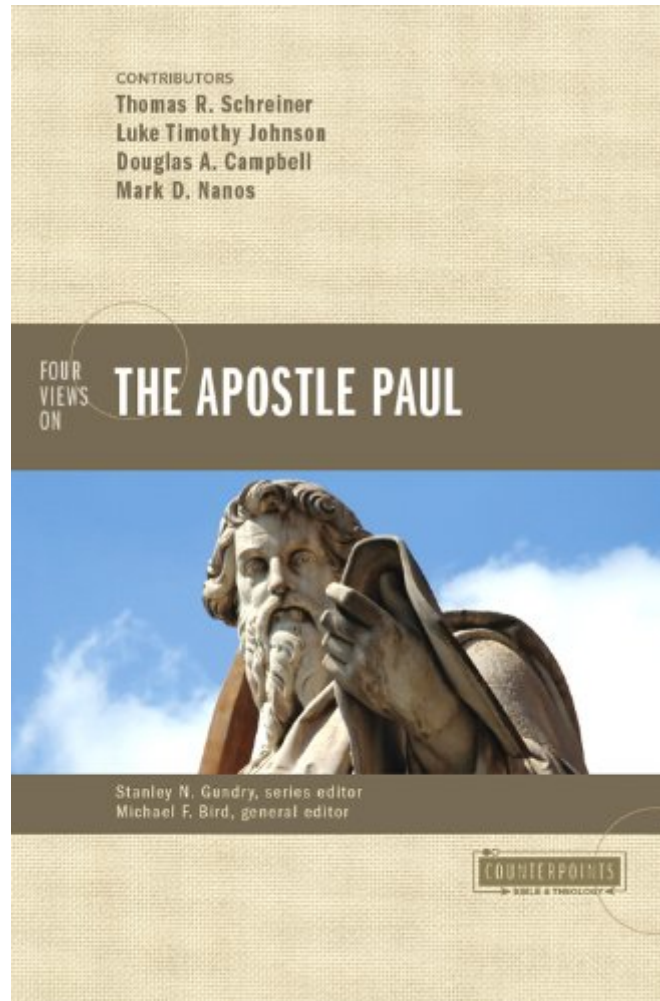


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Four Views On The Apostle Paul (Counterpoints: Bible And Theology)



Synopsis

The apostle Paul was a vital force in the development of Christianity. Paul's historical and religious context affects the theological interpretation of Paul's writings, no small issue in the whole of Christian theology. Recent years have seen much controversy about the apostle Paul, his religious and social context, and its effects on his theology. In the helpful Counterpoints format, four leading scholars present their views on the best framework for describing Paul's theological perspective, including his view of salvation, the significance of Christ, and his vision for the churches. Contributors and views include: Reformed View: Thomas R. Schreiner Catholic View: Luke Timothy Johnson Post-New Perspective View: Douglas Campbell Jewish View: Mark D. Nanos Like other titles in the Counterpoints: Bible and Theology collection, *Four Views on the Apostle Paul* gives theology students the tools they need to draw informed conclusions on debated issues. General editor and New Testament scholar Michael F. Bird covers foundational issues and provides helpful summaries in his introduction and conclusion. New Testament scholars, pastors, and students of Christian history and theology will find *Four Views on the Apostle Paul* an indispensable introduction to ongoing debates on the apostle Paul's life and teaching.

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Customer Reviews

The book follows the pattern of the "Counterpoints" series, whereby each view receives responses from the sparring partners. The Reformed view on Paul is presented by Thomas R. Schreiner. Schreiner summarises Paul's framework of thought in this way: "the apostle teaches that the new exodus, the new covenant, and the new creation have arrived in Christ. But a crucial proviso must immediately be introduced. Even though the new age has been inaugurated in Jesus Christ, it has not been consummated." Also "One of Paul's fundamental frameworks, then, is the already but not yet character of his eschatology." The substitutionary death of Christ on the cross is appropriated by faith in Christ (objective genitive) and repentance. Thus forensic justification plays a key role in salvation. Schreiner surprisingly affirms salvation as a process that awaits consummation in future. Although justification does not mean moral transformation of a Christian and is not based on good works, "the good works constitute necessary evidence that one is justified" (a point very similar to that of J. Dunn and N. T. Wright). Schreiner's supersessionism is evident in his understanding of the church in Paul as the "assembly of God" in the OT and in spiritual circumcision as initiation in Christ's community: "Such appropriation suggests that it is fitting to say that the church of Jesus Christ is the 'true' Israel for Paul." Also "Indeed, ethnic Jews who fail to believe in Jesus are not saved (9:30-10:21, esp. 10:1) and hence do not belong to God's people." The second position is that of a Roman Catholic, Timothy Luke Johnson. He gave a very broad survey of Paul's theology with plenty of textual references.

I really enjoyed this four views. It's the first of the series I've read but it won't be the last. I wasn't sure at first glance if it was a book on the historical Paul or his theology. It ended up about the latter which was a perfect fit because I had already been reading in that area of theology. The four contributors were Thomas R. Schreiner, Luke Timothy Johnson, Douglas A. Campbell, & Mark D. Nanos. Each was commissioned to answer four main questions: What did Paul think about salvation? What was Paul's view of the significance of Christ? What is the best framework for describing Paul's theological perspective? What was Paul's vision for the churches? Schreiner approached these questions from a reformed Baptist perspective, Luke Timothy Johnson from a Roman Catholic perspective, Douglas A. Campbell from a post new perspective, & Nanos from a

Jewish perspective (a simplification of positions but it gives you an idea). I sympathized most with Schreiner's position but also found much to be commended in Nanos's chapter as well. We have lost some of the Jewishness of Paul. Ironically, Nanos rejects the NPP. It seems the NPP supporters have stepped out the hot pile with one foot and into the steaming leftovers with the other (moving the historical focus from legalism to a tacit racism). Nanos also strongly rejects Schreiner's position because of some of the historical anti-seminism found in its proponents. While sympathetic to that point, I would have liked a softer blow. If Paul had actually been against Judaism, it doesn't follow that against necessarily implies racist or hate.

The multiple views books that Christian publishing houses are putting out lately, are very helpful to the church. They show how disagreeing believers (and an unbeliever in this book) can amicably discuss their differences, while affirming what they keep in common. This new book from Zondervan, *Four views on the Apostle Paul*, edited by Michael Bird, includes a Reformed Baptist, a Catholic, a post-new-perspective theologian, and a Jewish theologian. I came to this topic fairly naive, so it was good that the Baptist, Thomas Schreiner, wrote the opening essay, because I was familiar with this baseline. I even own his commentary on Romans (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament). The responses from the other authors tantalized me to read their own essays. The second essay by Luke Timothy Johnson, a Catholic, was also very good. I'm becoming a "both/and" guy as I age and mellow out, so I didn't see anything that Johnson's Catholic perspective threatened me. Johnson is also a "both/and" guy, and says this is a Roman Catholic perspective, so he sees Schreiner's tree, but points to the rest of the forest of metaphors that Paul uses to describe God's plan for humanity. The change that God effects in the world is a reality greater than any single discourse can capture ... In diplomatic language, the condition of distance from God is expressed in terms of alienation ... In economic language, the condition of distance from God is expressed in terms of slavery ... In forensic language, God is the righteous judge ... In cultic language, the human condition of separation from God is expressed by sin ...

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